

Struggles on Two Indivisible Fronts

Godard, Dziga Vertov Group and the Ethical Predicaments of Post-1968 French Maoism

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Abstract

With reference to the historical trajectory of modern French cinema, the Mao-leaning period (1967-1972) of Jean-Luc Godard under the collective spell of the Groupe Dziga Vertov (Dziga Vertov group, or DVG in short) was often a controversial and divisive subject among his critics and commentators following the political watershed of French May '68. This essay will take two of the most provocative and representative features made during the DVG period, *Vent d'est* (*Wind from the East*, 1969) and *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*, 1972), as the major point of departure to critically re-examine how Godard and his major film collaborator, Jean-Pierre Gorin, endeavored to revolutionize the bourgeois traditions of Western narrative cinema with the radical introduction of Maoist discourses and dialectics shortly after the wake of May 1968. Also, by re-orienting some lingering epistemological and ethical questions of post-68 French Maoism back into the predominant symbolic fabric of contemporary neoliberal consensus, the aim of this paper is to re-examine the profound dialectical nexus between Western political cinema and the legacies of global 1968 to illuminate the current predicaments of leftist utopianism in our midst.

Introduction

With reference to the historical trajectory of modern French cinema, the Mao-leaning period (1967–1972) of Jean-Luc Godard, under the collective spell of the Groupe Dziga Vertov (Dziga Vertov Group, or DVG), was often a controversial and divisive subject among his critics and commentators following the political watershed of French May '68. On the one hand, this overtly politicized period of Godard that emerged during the heyday of 1968 forcefully advanced what renowned critic Peter Wollen called 'counter-cinema',¹ a highly subversive art

¹ Peter Wollen, in his highly influential essay on Godardian 'counter-cinema', argued that the overt visual plainness of *Vent d'est* offered the best illustration of how the reigning discursive construct of Western capitalism, which was traditionally assumed to be a universal, mystic background that imperceptibly sutured together and manoeuvred all the onset characters, could be radically foregrounded as a founding myth or illusion to help maintain the existing social status quo. With

practice that sought to demythicize both the aesthetic elitism of the bourgeoisies as well as the consumerist implications of Western narrative cinema. But on the other hand, Godard's Maoist fascination between the late 1960s and the early 1970s was also met with extensive criticism from various liberal-humanitarian circles. Many of his critics found that the pervasive Maoist rhetoric appropriated in Godard's political films, especially his cinematic discourses on the use and legitimacy of revolutionary violence against the reigning bourgeois ideology, were often greatly problematic, dogmatic, and at times self-defeating. However, without properly historicizing this radical epoch of Godard in relation to the multifarious meanings and ambivalent legacies of the Maoist currents in post-68 French intelligentsia, these conflicting comments might help perpetuate an impressionistic, partial reading of his political works, and consequently failed to truly address their latent dialectical novelties and egalitarian potentialities.

This essay will take two of the most provocative and representative features made during the DVG period, *Vent d'est* (*Wind from the East*, 1969) and *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*, 1972), as the major point of departure to critically re-examine how Godard and his major film collaborator, Jean-Pierre Gorin, endeavoured to revolutionize the bourgeois traditions of Western narrative cinema with the radical introduction of Maoist discourses and dialectics shortly after the wake of May 1968. Although Godard's idiosyncratic cinematic experiment eventually failed to help synthesize a concrete and coherent countercultural strategy against the ruling ideology of the time, I will argue that the very emancipatory potential pertaining to the post-68 French Maoism movement was perhaps far from fully exhausted. By re-orienting some lingering epistemological and ethical questions of post-68 French Maoism back into the predominant symbolic fabric of contemporary neoliberal consensus, which always causally naturalizes and rationalizes the very impossibility of proletarian struggles in global capitalist settings, the aim of this paper is to re-examine the profound dialectical nexus between Western political cinema and the legacies of global 1968 to illuminate the current predicaments of leftist utopianism in our midst.

reference to the peculiar film structure of *Vent d'est* that profoundly demythicized the ruling capitalist ideology as a sort of generic background or empty screen, Wollen thereby proposed seven characteristics (also known as the 'seven cardinal sins and virtues') — 'narrative transitivity-intransitivity', 'identification-estrangement', 'transparency-foregrounding', 'single diegesis-multiple diegesis', 'closure-aperture', 'pleasure-unpleasure', and 'fiction-reality' — that sharply differentiated classical narrative cinema from subversive counter-cinema. See Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'est*', in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 2, ed. by Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 500–509. In the same vein, Colin MacCabe even argued that Godard-Gorin's *Vent d'est* was not only 'the most experimental of the series of Maoist film', but was also 'the most coherent in its application of Althusserian politics'. See Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), p. 225.

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Vent d'est and Its Inherent Contradictions with Maoism

In the wake of the lessons of May 1968, Jean-Luc Godard, arguably the most distinguishable icon of modern French cinema, realized that the proper direction in political filmmaking was not simply to 'make political films' but to 'make films politically' as a militant collective.² In the winter of 1968, Godard, Gorin, and an ensemble of young French Maoists established the Mao-leaning Groupe Dziga Vertov to experiment with a new form of film production through the dialectical juxtapositions of Maoist politics and collective authorship. Named after the Soviet pioneer documentarian Dziga Vertov, the founding members of the DVG believed that Vertov's film aesthetics had succeeded in his proletarian 'struggles on two fronts' — the Soviet cinematic tradition set forth by Sergei Eisenstein, who they called a 'revisionist filmmaker', and the seductive paradigm of Hollywood's commercial narratives. Between 1968 and 1972, the DVG made eight collective features, namely, *Vent d'est*, *British Sounds* (1969), *Pravda*, *Lotte in Italia* (*Struggle in Italy*, 1969); *Jusqu'à la victoire* (*Until Victory*, 1970); *Vladimir et Rosa* (*Vladimir and Rosa*, 1971); *Tout va bien*; and *Letter to Jane* (1972), during the Maoist heyday in Western Europe. The DVG's membership fluctuated over the course of their films and included French and Italian Maoist revolutionaries, but its nucleus was mainly established by Godard and Gorin, both of whom were highly dedicated to exploring the possibility of radical Marxist filmmaking in the post-68 context.

On the film set of *Vent d'est*, the crew members, who originated from different ideological backgrounds, aligned themselves as a 'general assembly' that enjoyed a good share of creative autonomy. They decided to work together as a non-hierarchical, egalitarian group throughout the course of production, which was based on continuous political discussions and collective arguments beyond the epistemological confines of bourgeois elitism and auteur aesthetics that heavily characterized the pre-68 cinematic era.³ The members of the DVG were increasingly aware of how traditional storytelling methods pertaining to both European art cinema and American commercial cinema could be easily

² According to Godard, '[t]he notion of an author, of independent imagination, is just a fake. But this bourgeois idea [of cinematic authorship] has not yet been replaced [by collective filmmaking]. A first step might be to simply gather people. At least then you can have a free discussion. But if you don't go on and organize on a political basis, you have nothing more than a free discussion. Then collective creation is really no more than collective eating in a restaurant'. See Kent E. Carroll, 'Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group', in *Focus on Godard*, ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 50–64 (p. 51).

³ More recently, Godard recounted how the first filming experience with the French Maoists, including May '68 icon Daniel Cohn-Bendit, came out in 1969. He said: 'When we met for the first time, in Nanterre, we had nothing in common, but we lived in communal situations. We haven't moved away from one another, but there's a fraternal side, despite the fact that we're poles apart'. See Vincent Remy, 'Jean-Luc Godard à Daniel Cohn-Bendit: "Qu'est-ce qui t'intéresse dans mon film?"', *Telerama.fr*, 15 May 2010, <<http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/jean-luc-godard-a-daniel-cohn-bendit-qu-est-ce-qui-t-interesse-dans-mon-film,55846.php>> [accessed 7 March 2017].

hijacked as a counterrevolutionary weapon to help promote the predominant capitalist discourse and revisionist ideology *par excellence*. In particular, Godard and his colleagues, who were passionately inspired by the reigning Maoist ideas of 'The East Wind Prevails Over the West Wind' and 'Imperialism and All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers' following the Bandung Conference in 1955, saw the Hollywood industry as a cultural extension of American imperialism as well as a powerful ideological force that silently regulated and conditioned mass subjectivity through the routine implementation of categorized cinematic codes and narratives. As such, Godard and Gorin were convinced that they must create a new aesthetic language that could not be readily translated or re-appropriated by Western imperialist modalities.

Also deeply influenced by the Brechtian redefinition of the 'epic theatre', one of the major objectives of the DVG films was to transform the bourgeois and passive traditions of Western cinematic practices into a realm of living revolutionary aspirations and critical empowerments.⁴ Unlike his auteur works made prior to 1968, which put a major emphasis on visual innovations over audio experiments, there was a noticeable epistemological shift in the use of voice-overs, dialogues, and film sound during Godard's DVG period, which articulated and erected various sets of revolutionary discourses, especially the Maoist teachings, against the conservative appropriation of image and sound in mainstream cinematic productions. During the post-68 period of collective filmmaking, there was a perpetual tension between Godard's manoeuvring of images and sounds, the objective of which was to radically de-familiarize and estrange the established viewing experiences of the bourgeois critics and audiences alike.

Reducing its storyline to a minimal level, *Vent d'est* is loosely divided into seven chapters that partly overlap in terms of their film form and content. These chapters address political issues like the various conflicts and debates experienced in May '68, the post-1968 Maoist currents in France, Lenin's commentary on left-wing infantilism, socialist experiments of self-management in Tito's Yugoslavia during the 1960s, egalitarian medical welfare in Maoist China, the latent contradictions between revolutionary terror and bourgeois-humanitarianism, and the ambivalent relationship between Western political cinema and Third Cinema. Although *Vent d'est* touches upon a wide array of political issues and intellectual discussions, the two filmmakers put a particular emphasis on the radical disagreements between workers, students, and trade unions during May '68; the Sino-Soviet debates among the different leftist groups in Western Europe after 1968; and the rationale of and justification for the use of revolutionary violence in post-war capitalist societies. At the formal level, the two directors incorporated extensive voice-overs, especially female commentaries, to present and develop a dense political discourse on May '68 and its Maoist

⁴ Serge Daney, 'Le t(h)errorisé (pédagogie godardienne)', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 262–263 (January 1976), 33–39 (pp. 34–35).

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trajectories in *Vent d'est*.⁵ Yet they required their audiences to actively engage in the own critical interpretation and evaluation of the philosophical messages and dialectical subtleties of this film from time to time.

However, according to a prominent Marxist critic, *Vent d'est* was highly incoherent and tedious in terms of its political argumentations and intellectual delineations, in which it exemplified nothing more than an Olympian pseudo-rigor.⁶ In fact, what seemed to be highly irritating to the audiences of this film was that the two filmmakers constantly kept obliging their viewers to identify with and even acknowledge a full-fledged Marxist teleology and utopianism. The audiences of *Vent d'est* were frequently presented with, if not bombarded by, a set of stereotypical voice injunctions and moral imperatives that in turn dictated their cinematic reading; for example, the female voice-over continually repeats the same political instructions — 'Think. Manufacture. Simplify. Reflect. Learn'. The tone of these voice-overs is highly ritualistic, didactic, and repetitive, while their speed is so fast that it hardly allows any time and space for the audiences' judgments and apprehensions. Whereas Godard and Gorin endeavoured to critically engage audiences beyond the long-standing epistemological narrowness of artistic elitism in *Vent d'est*, this very first Mao-leaning film of the DVG eventually served a handful of highly sophisticated spectators and hardline Marxist supporters. Film critic Andrew Britton once harshly commented that *Vent d'est* was arguably 'one of the most repressive films ever made',⁷ in that it 'precisely forbids analysis, or, rather the analysis has been made, and the only positions left are those of unbeliever or proselytizer'.⁸

Even so, this Godard-Gorin work may have somewhat rationalized and idiosyncratically mythicized the use of revolutionary violence in post-68 capitalist societies. With regard to the rationale and legitimacy of revolutionary terror in capitalist societies, the first female voice-over, which represents the bourgeois-humanitarian position in *Vent d'est*, blasts the terrorists' utmost cruelty and inhumanity towards the innocents. In her eyes, terrorism is never morally justified under any circumstances: 'It's disgusting. A bomb has been thrown in a supermarket. A lot of people have been injured. What have you got out of it? [...] Fanatics are sent to do the killings, gangsters whose only aim is to kill and destroy, even though no advantage can be gained from it'. Shortly afterwards, the second female voice-over immediately argues against the convenient moral

⁵ According to Serge Daney, the master-discourse of Godardian cinema after 1968 was virtually embodied by women's voices. The female voice in Godard's political films was responsible for 'theorizing' the revolutionary strategies as well as 'terrorizing' the counterrevolutionaries in equal measure. See Daney, p. 36.

⁶ Richard Porton, *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 141.

⁷ See Andrew Britton, 'Living Historically: Two Films by Jean-Luc Godard', *Framework*, 2.1 (1976), 4–15 (p. 9).

⁸ Ibidem.

gesture of the first female's commentary by revealing the obscene underside of her bourgeois-humanitarianism:

That's what bourgeois-humanitarianism says when the oppressed get the means of grasping the exploiter by the throat. When bourgeois-humanitarianism talks about innocent victims, unnecessary violence, what is it hiding? [...] The daily reality of bourgeois terror, the reality of the struggle.

Shortly afterwards, the second female voice-over in *Vent d'est*, which casually borrows Mao's political disseminations of 'principal contradiction' and 'non-principal contradiction'⁹ during the height of the Anti-Rightist Campaign erected in the early 1960s, goes on to criticize that in May '68 the bourgeoisies and the established powers falsely rendered the 'secondary contradiction' (i.e., the division between labour and sex) of post-war French society as a 'primary issue' (i.e., the civil war between labour and capital) to cover up the true primordial antagonism pertaining to the reigning capitalist system. To such an extent, the second female voice argues that it is precisely this overt emphasis on the 'secondary contradiction' over the 'primary contradiction' that sets up the very condition for armed resistance among the oppressed. The radical concealment of the 'primary contradiction' in French social life as such provides the moral justification for the initiation of militant proletarian struggles against the latent discursive violence of the ruling power, which seeks to keep social order intact and stable by all means. The second female voice-over then assertively raises the core question of the film:

What is to be done? You've made a film, you've criticized it. You've made mistakes, you corrected some of them. Because of this you know a little more about making images and sounds. Perhaps now you know better how this production can be transformed. For whom and against whom? Perhaps you have learned something very simple.

Eventually, the second female voice-over receives a didactic conclusion from her Marxist listeners: 'Marxism, which is composed of multiple principles, can be summed up as "it's right to rebel"'.

Paradoxically, although this second female voice-over seems to stand antithetically to the first female commentary, it may have actually recuperated the same kind of reductive logic in the very 'theorization' of revolutionary resistance

⁹ In his famous speech 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among People', Mao differentiated two types of social contradictions — 'principal contradiction' and 'non-principal contradiction' — that constantly emerge in a given society. For the 'principal contradiction' between the capitalist 'enemy' and the proletarian 'people', their contradictions are so vast that they are, by and large, irresolvable without an initiation of class struggles and civil warfare. But for the 'non-principal contradiction' among 'the people', say the workers and the peasants, their contradictions can be solved and reconciled by meaningful dialogues and active persuasion. According to this Maoist view, 'dictatorship' is applied to the ideological 'enemy' while 'democracy' is only designated for the proletariats.

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in post-68 France. In particular, the film scholar Joan Mellen was also highly dismissive and critical of the hazy political discussion and the casual justification for the employment of revolutionary terror in *Vent d'est*. Mellen accused Godard of being as 'impatient as a child with the long process of convincing a majority and building a revolutionary organization', where his radical prescription of bomb-throwing was 'the most attractive action for the adolescent revolutionary who spends most of his time picnicking on the grass'.¹⁰ She added, '[T]he end of *Wind from the East* is a call for terrorism — which for serious revolutionaries should mark a lack of confidence in the ability to win through persuasion the great majority of a people'.¹¹ In fact, the very revolutionary justification that the second female voice-over previously presented somewhat falls short of the necessary contextualization and critical appropriation.

Historically speaking, the aforementioned Maoist theory of contradictions advanced during the heyday of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, which saw the political persecution of over half a million people in Mao's China, was widely seen by many commentators as certain brutal ideological foreclosures of the political excesses left behind by the preceding One Hundred Flowers Campaign, which contrarily promoted the expressive freedom of the Chinese people against all odds. The true irony here is that the two consecutive movements — first the One Hundred Flowers Campaign and then the Anti-Rightist Campaign — were by and large two sides of the same coin, as both of these political campaigns were virtually initiated by the Maoist government to help establish some sort of 'controlled democracy' in Chinese communist society. Yet this important historical detail pertaining to Mao's theory of contradictions was relatively overlooked by Godard and Gorin in this film. Consequently, their casual recuperation of the Maoist doctrines of 'principal contradictions' and 'non-principal contradictions' in *Vent d'est* failed to cement the revolutionary insurrections of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and French May '68. Instead, this radical gesture alienated itself further from the epistemological trajectory of Chinese Maoism at large, which constantly emphasized the dialectical importance and necessity of a critical, historicized adaptation of Marxist theories to certain concrete political situations and changing social realities.

In short, according to Mellen, the radical political ideas in *Vent d'est* could not be taken seriously, insofar as the so-called 'Eastern Wind' or 'Maoist vision' was never actually rendered visible or intelligible at the textual level of the film.¹² In fact, Godard and Gorin's cinematic representation of revolutionary violence in *Vent d'est* was often extremely tacky and trivial. While the two filmmakers included a 'terroristic' scene about the process of making a 'home-made bomb' in this work, the essential tools for making the bomb were simply composed of a set of toy tanks and a handful of domestic explosives. Meanwhile, they also made

¹⁰ See Joan Mellen, 'Wind from the East: A Review', *Film Comment*, 7.3 (1971), 65–67 (p. 67).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Ivi, p. 66.

use of several revolutionary writings of Mao and books of matches to convey the meaning of the great explosive chemistry between radical political theory and leftist terror. As the matches ignite, the filmmakers cut to a shot of a ruined factory, with the noise of an explosion on the soundtrack. In this respect, no actual explosion was filmed as the explosion was envisioned only in terms of injunctive voice-overs and tacky visual metaphors. In his critical review of *Vent d'est*, Britton remarked that the radical lack of an 'accurate' and 'convincing' image of revolutionary terror symptomatically revealed the latent political tediousness and intellectual emptiness of the film as a whole. As Britton critically pointed out,

[t]he image of the books of matches, plus the sound of explosion, is supposed to show us revolutionary action: in fact, the impoverishment of image, its trite obviousness and banality, are a sufficient measure of the sloppiness of thought and paucity of feeling which can even suggest it as being inadequate.¹³

In a dialogue between Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki with regard to Godard's *La Gai savoir* (*Joy of Learning*, 1968) produced shortly before *Vent d'est*, the two intellectuals agreed that compared with Stalin's dictatorship in the Communist Party, the Maoist Cultural Revolution seemed to offer a more authentic revolutionary model to young French intellectuals during the 1960s, as long as 'Mao actually provides a much easier access than classical Marxism to a position of untroubled knowledge'.¹⁴ In *La Gai savoir*, the 'libidinal' and 'anti-authoritarian' appeal of Chinese Maoism was perhaps the most revealing to French left-wing intelligentsia during the heyday of the 1960s; as Silverman carefully noted, there was a scene where the camera focused on a poster with the words 'Mao sait tout [Mao knows everything]'.¹⁵ Farocki further responded that

[i]ronically, Mao's simplifications have a primarily poetic appeal. They interpellate us into politics through their artistic radicality. You don't have to become a Protestant just because you love Bach, but May '68 activists began by admiring Mao's prose and ended up by becoming Maoists. This shows that Maoism finally appealed less to conscious knowledge than unconscious desire.¹⁶

¹³ Britton, p. 10.

¹⁴ Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 121–122.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 122.

¹⁶ Ibidem. In his book *The Wind from the East*, Richard Wolin summed up how this empirical ignorance about Mao's China paradoxically helped survive certain grandiose French revolutionary traditions: 'None spoke Chinese, and reliable information about contemporary China was nearly impossible to come by, since Mao had basically forbidden access to outsiders, little matter. The less these *normaliens* knew about contemporary China, the better it suited their purposes. Cultural Revolutionary China became a projection screen, a Rorschach test, for their innermost radical political hopes and fantasies, which in de Gaulle's France had been deprived of a real-world outlet'. See Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 3.

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In other words, the pronounced Maoist yearning of Godard and Gorin after 1968 was always more prone to a lyrical expression than a rational activity. In almost all of the films produced by the two filmmakers between 1968 and 1972, there was an obvious discrepancy between what have been constantly announced as the radical revolutionary actions against the oppressors and what they simply manifested as political struggles in their concrete visual format.

From Political Antagonism to Tout va bien ... and Back

What is really at stake here is that this radical mismatch between the revolutionary urges and manifestations pertaining to the DVG films was never simply an isolated instance in the French political scene after May 1968. Although some of these features may have lacked certain intellectual substances or rigor in their revolutionary prescriptions, they were not entirely meaningless if one were able to dialectically reconnect the historical affinity between the political works by the DVG and the various Maoist currents emerged in post-68 France. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, many French Maoists, like Godard and Gorin, fervently took up the radical Maoist notion of ‘on a raison de se révolter [it is right to rebel]’ during the Chinese Cultural Revolution to resist against the dominant political institutions and established order.¹⁷ In fact, Gorin also admitted that in films like *Vent d’est* and *Lotte in Italia*, ‘they are the perfect image of what was militancy at that time, that incredible drive of madness which was inside it. They are affected by history, not on a theoretical level, but in the flesh and blood of the films’.¹⁸

Yet this overt radicalization of politics in the French leftist scene was not entirely unjustifiable and inconceivable if read as the last defensive outcry towards the increasingly oppressive bourgeois regimes following the political watershed of 1968.¹⁹ According to Christophe Bourseiller, ‘the situation in France in 1969 was [somewhat] comparable to the Nazi Occupation’.²⁰ After the traumatic failure in

¹⁷ In a book which records a series of conversations among Jean-Paul Sartre and two French Maoist leaders during the early 1970s, it unambiguously states that: ‘In 1969-1970, when a worker wanted a short break and so sabotaged production we would say “well done”. When a guy had reached the end of this tether and thumped his foreman we would say “well done”. And we would add that it’s better done in small groups and done discreetly otherwise you’re bounded to be sacked but we said “well done”. In short our thinking could be summed up as: it is right to rebel’. See *On a raison de se révolter, discussions*, ed. by Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Victor (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 154.

¹⁸ Christian Braad Thomsen, ‘Jean-Pierre Gorin Interviewed: Filmmaking and History’, *Jump Cut*, 3 (1974), <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC03folder/GorinIntThomson.html>> [accessed 7 May 2017].

¹⁹ See Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), p. 59.

²⁰ Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon, 1996), pp. 114–115. Peter Dews added that after 1968 ‘the French state was undergoing a process

May '68, political disagreements among different leftist groups in France became even more pronounced. In particular, these leftist camps failed to come up with a formal consensus over the tactics of revolutionary insurrections against the post-68 French government. Out of this massive political rupture, the largest Maoist group in France, Gauche prolétarienne (Proletarian Left, or GP), was established in the fall of 1968 and radically differentiated itself from the traditional leftists of the Communist Party and official leftist organs. Recognized by many critics as a 'non-hierarchical' and 'anti-Stalinist' Maoist group, Gauche prolétarienne was best known for its highly spontaneous use and renewal of Marxist-Leninist doctrines. Although it was a new Maoist group formed in the aftermath of May 1968, the founders of the GP initially originated from the former Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (Union of Young Marxist-Leninist Communists, or UJCML), a highly intellectual and sophisticated Maoist Althusserian circle based at the École normale supérieure on the rue d'Ulm during the mid-1960s, as well as a large faction from the anarcho-libertarian current of the March 22nd Movement that catalysed the May '68 barricades in Paris.

In the fall of 1968, the leading figures of the UJCML underwent a severe self-criticism over their misjudgement of many pivotal moments during May '68.²¹ Referring to Vladimir Lenin's teachings in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) and his dismissive comments on left-wing infantilism, a small 'liquidationist faction' of the UJCML, including Althusserian intellectual Robert Linhart, argued that the sheer misfire of French '68 was attributed to the lack of a revolutionary vanguard party that could organize and mobilize the workers and students strategically and effectively. However, for the rest of the 'non-liquidationist' members such as Benny Lévy and André Glucksmann, they were convinced that the inflexible allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy as well as the overt emphasis on the revolutionary primacy of the working class somewhat trivialized and constrained the latent subversive potentialities that had been openly manifested by the young

of internal fascisization "from above", against which the GP attempted to reactivate the mythology of the French Resistance. Trade union delegates and foreman were labelled "collaborators", the GP proclaimed itself the kernel of the "New Partisans". See Peter Dews, 'The *Nouvelle Philosophie* and Foucault', in *Towards a Critique of Foucault*, ed. by Mike Gane (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 81-106 (p. 65).

²¹ The UJCML argued that the student revolt culminated in pitched battles with the police on 10 May 1968, the Night of the Barricades, as a manifestation of the students' petty bourgeois ideology. A. Belden Fields wrote: 'It interpreted that a true revolution must be made by the workers and that confrontations without them were meaningless. It urged students to go out to the factories and the working-class neighbourhoods rather than mounting the barricades in the Latin Quarter. Members of the organization did not participate in the battle that night'. See A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1988), p. 93. See also Julian Bourg, 'The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s', *History of European Ideas*, 31.4 (2005), 472-490; Camille Robcis, 'China in Our Heads: Althusser, Maoism, and Structuralism', *Social Text*, 30.1 (2012), 51-69.

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bourgeois students in May '68.²² For Lévy and Glucksmann, it was the political teaching of Mao, instead of the writing of Lenin, that had been largely misread or overlooked by many leftist intellectuals in May '68. After the fusion between the former 'non-liquidationist' UJCML members and the anarcho-libertarian movements led by Alain Geismar in 1969, the GP thereby realigned themselves more seamlessly with the Maoist principle of 'mass-line' to break down the long-standing division between intellectuals and workers, and to allow students 'to learn from the masses' and 'to serve the people'.²³ In the eyes of the GP, the Chinese Cultural Revolution was first and foremost anti-bureaucratic and anti-authoritarian. In the words of Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, it was a 'return to one of the forgotten origins of Marxism, that of the texts on the Paris Commune taken up by Lenin during the époque of the Soviets: the libertarian source'.²⁴

After the resignation of Charles de Gaulle in 1969, police repression in France became even more severe than ever. Jean-Paul Sartre, the chief editor of the banned Maoist newspaper *La Cause du peuple* (The Cause of the People), offered a vivid example of the sheer repressiveness of the new Pompidou government: after '68, when young people were found carrying only two copies of the same issue of *La Cause du peuple*, they were sent directly to prison without the possibility of suspended sentences.²⁵ Beginning in 1969, the GP managed to attract widespread public sympathy, from prominent intellectuals to left-leaning journalists and celebrities, including Michel Foucault, Maurice Clavel, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Ranciere, and the famous French actor Yves Montand. Within the single year of 1969, the number of GP members multiplied

²² One of the most eloquent Maoist leaders, Benny Lévy, argued that since the 'liquidationists' always read Mao through the lens of Lenin's 'What Is to Be Done?', they did not really grasp the true novelty and singularity of Maoist dialectics as such. See Benny Lévy [pseudonym Pierre Victor], 'Investigation into the Maoists in France: Interview with Benny Lévy', trans. by Mitchell Abidor, *Communist Archives*, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/levy-benny/1971/investigation.htm>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

²³ 'Mass-line' is an internal people's critique of bureaucracy and the division of labour in revolutionary society. It was founded on the conviction that the eyes of the peasants always see more justly than those of the bureaucrats and technicians. A. Belden Fields also added that in the first two years after its formation, the GP attempted to close the gap between what it called the 'anti-authoritarian youth revolt' and the proletarian revolution by sending its members into the Renault automobile plant at Flins, a plant which had erupted in 1968. See A. Belden Fields, 'French Maoism', in *The 60s without Apology*, ed. by Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 148–177 (p. 156).

²⁴ Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, *Les dangers du soleil* (Paris: Les Presses d'Aujourd'hui, 1978), p. 94.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, trans. by Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 165. However, although Sartre approved of the GP's direct militant actions, its radicalism, and its rejection of bourgeois reality, he never claimed himself to be a legitimate 'Maoist'. According to David Drake, Sartre was rather sceptical of the uncritical Chinese fascination among the GP Maoists, as he 'was dismissive of "Mao Zedong Thought" and rejected the parallels the *maos* drew between France in 1970s and the Occupation (bosses = fascists, PCF = collaborators, Maoists = resistance)'. See David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Postwar France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 141.

from a few hundred to a few thousand, celebrating the popular cause of the proletariats. Calling themselves the Nouvelle résistance populaire (the New Popular Resistance), the GP orchestrated a series of direct and voluntary actions, such as stealing and distributing free subway tickets to protest a rise in fares and pillaging a luxury food store in Paris and handing the booty to immigrant workers living in shantytowns, as a way to radically expand or widen the capacity and the scope of proletarian struggles.²⁶ Jean-Luc Godard was one of the pronounced sympathizers of the GP. As Godard personally recounted, he joined Sartre several times to distribute free copies of *La Cause du peuple*, which was founded by the GP, in railway stations and other public areas.²⁷ Godard also wrote five articles for the aligned Maoist journal *J'accuse* and helped create another Mao-leaning newspaper, *Libération*.²⁸ According to Alain Badiou, 'French Maoism was the only innovative political tendency in France in the aftermath of May 1968'.²⁹

However, the radical period of post-68 French Maoism proved to be rather elusive as well.³⁰ Beginning in the early 1970s, some of the most eloquent

²⁶ See Donald Reid, 'Établissement: Working in the Factory to Make Revolution in France', *Radical History Review*, 88 (Winter 2004), 83–111 (p. 90). In the meantime, due to the enhanced state repression, many university protests and occupation movements gradually retreated from Paris to suburban France. In particular, many French Maoists collectively set up revolutionary bases and stunts at the University of Vincennes, which was newly established by the post-Gaullist government in the suburban district of Saint-Denis to help neutralize the social discontent of the young students and 68ers. Within the worldview of the GP, 'revolution was like theatre, a show that depicted the war to come'. See *Terrorisme et démocratie*, ed. by François Furet, Antoine Liniers, and Philippe Raynaud (Paris: Fayard, 1985), p. 181. See also Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 558; Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération vol. 2: Les années de* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), p. 180. One of the most representative and controversial GP leader, André Glucksmann, who was hired to teach Marxism at Vincennes, regularly organized 'class occupations' and 'ideological hijackings' of the 'bourgeois, aristocratic and revisionist teachers' on the school campus. See Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), pp. 266–267. See also François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, vol. 2, The Sign Sets, 1967–Present*, trans. by Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 149.

²⁷ See Jean-Luc Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. by Alain Bergala (Paris: Éditions de l'Etoile, 1985), p. 374.

²⁸ For an account of Godard's involvement with the GP and other French leftist press during his DVG period, see, for example, Michael Witt, 'Godard dans la presse d'extrême-gauche', in *Jean-Luc Godard Documents*, ed. by Nicole Brenez (Paris: Édition du Centre Pompidou, 2006), pp. 165–177.

²⁹ Alain Badiou, 'One Divides into Two', in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. by Sebastian Budgen, Eustache Kouvélakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 7–17 (p. 12).

³⁰ Historically speaking, the 1970s saw a chronicle of left-wing violence spreading across Western Europe. However, French leftist radicalism, most notably La Gauche prolétarienne, compared with the adjacent German Red Army Faction and the Italian Red Brigades, seemed to have evaded the reign of true terrorist activities. As David Drake wrote, the very 'non-violence' of French Maoism had more to do with the young intellectual's faith in symbolic terror than actual bloodshed. Instead, the terrorist attacks in Munich prompted the French Maoist group to rethink the moral future of struggles for an egalitarian society. Caught in an irreconcilable impasse and political disagreement,

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members of the GP, such as André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy, subsequently realigned themselves as a group widely known as Les nouveaux philosophes (The New Philosophers), who pronouncedly broke with French Maoism and harshly denounced the underlying 'totalitarian' implications of May '68 and Marxist philosophy under the doctrinal rubric of bourgeois-humanitarianism in many commercial channels.³¹ Glucksmann, in particular, even lent his open support to the former rightist French president Nicholas Sarkozy, who notoriously urged the 'liquidation of May 1968' during his reign. With reference to these obscure, confusing aftermaths of May '68, Godard and Gorin thereby offered a radical (self-)critique of the dominant revolutionary imaginations and tactics of many French Maoists during the heyday of the 1960s in their final DVG feature, *Tout va bien*. After several years of Maoist exile, the two filmmakers gradually realized the latent epistemological deadlock and ethical predicaments pertaining to Western political cinema itself, as they felt an increasing urge to move out of the narrow 'gauchiste ghetto' and reach out to a wider spectrum of film audiences.³²

Contrary to their early Maoist works such as *Vent d'est*, which conspicuously dismissed the predominant issues of film marketing and other economic aspects of political filmmaking, Godard-Gorin's *Tout va bien* was mainly financed by Gaumont, the largest commercial film company in France, and recruited two prominent global film stars — Jane Fonda and Yves Montand — to draw a wider spectatorship. However, that did not necessarily mean that the two filmmakers fully forsook their previous leftist engagements for a commercial film market. Rather, they endeavoured to creatively transform their previous leftist errors into a new social inquiry in *Tout va bien*, which explored the very contradictions of making a commercial Marxist feature. According to Gillian Klein, '[Godard-Gorin's] films are part of a process of change, of a dialectic, where the contradictions of one stage are worked out in the next'.³³ Klein added:

the GP eventually disbanded in the fall of 1973, only to find that their initial Maoist fascination had been more or less turned back to their various domestic moral concerns on various occasions. See David Drake, 'On a raison de se révolter: The Response of La Gauche Prolétarienne to the Events of May–June 1968', in *Violence and Conflict in the Politics and Society of Modern France*, ed. by Jan Windebank and Renate Günther (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1995), p. 72.

³¹ To their most severe critics such as Gilles Deleuze, the nouveaux philosophes in France could be at best understood as a kind of impressionistic journalism and a quasi-moral philosophy that bred nothing but 'philosophical marketing'. See Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 18. According to Deleuze, the nouveaux philosophes seemed to have invented a highly idiosyncratic 'witness function' towards the imaginary victims and corpses in totalitarian countries that simply defied proof and records. These intellectuals were simply 'writing a martyrology' on behalf of 'the Gulag and the victims of history', acting as if they were either the sufferers of the Left or the eyes of the righteousness. See Deleuze, p. 18.

³² Gillian Klein, 'Review: *Tout va bien* by Jean-Luc Godard', *Film Quarterly*, 26.4 (Summer 1973), 35–41(p. 35).

³³ Ibidem.

[I]n *Tout va bien* [Godard and Gorin] moved another step, beyond what Mao called critically the poster and slogan method. Here they are neither attacking nor ignoring the wider audience. Seen as a process the “political” films show a progression from a detached satirist’s attack on the decadence of society, to political commitment, followed by an application of that commitment to the social situation.³⁴

Tout va bien’s announced purpose was to ‘consider the class struggle in France four years on from 1968’; as Godard confessed in a TV interview, one of the major objectives of *Tout va bien* was to critically re-examine the ambivalent role of Western leftist intellectuals during the course of global revolutionary insurrections.³⁵ As a highly self-reflexive work of their own Maoist yearning between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Godard-Gorin’s *Tout va bien* was a critical diagnosis of the changing class relations and new social contradictions among the three major forces in post-68 French society: the reigning bourgeoisies, the working class, and the leftist intellectuals. At a formal and aesthetic level, *Tout va bien* was radically simplified and blatantly diagrammatic. The key set of the film consisted of a cross-sectioned occupied factory, which allowed the camera to move back and forth from room to room, theoretically through the walls. The film begins with a self-examination of filmmaking itself, with a unique opening sequence that shows a chequebook being subsequently signed for different departments and employees. The off-screen voice-over ironically pinpoints that ‘if you use stars, people will give you money’. The profound innovation of *Tout va bien* is that it brilliantly captured the oft-overlooked dialectics between Marxism and capitalism in the post-68 context, insofar as one inevitably encountered the logic of economic capital when attempting to give Marxism a new voice.

Narratively, the film orbits around a spontaneous workers’ sequestration against senior management that occurs at a rural sausage factory during the early 1970s. This wildcat strike, which echoed an actual historical incident that happened in early 1972,³⁶ is witnessed by an American feminist reporter,

³⁴ Ibidem. Another renowned film critic, Jonathan Rosenbaum, echoed this view: ‘In films like *Un film comme les autres*, *Wind from the East*, and *Vladimir and Rosa*, one felt that Godard was trying to divest himself of all that was superfluous to his political evolution. At their most painful, these works resembled desperate acts of self-mutilation. In *Tout va bien*, one observes a new sense of calm and assurance, a consolidation of the previous experiments, and the apparent beginning of a new cycle’. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, ‘Journals: Paris’, *Film Comment*, 8.3 (September–October 1972), 76–77.

³⁵ Jean-Luc Godard, ‘1972 Video Interview Excerpt with Jean-Luc Godard’, *Tout va bien*, DVD special feature, The Criterion Collection, 2005.

³⁶ On 26 February 1972, a group of young GP Maoists distributed polemical tracts outside the Renault automobile factory in Boulogne-Billancourt that called for a demonstration against racism after the assassination of a young Arab worker in the Goutte d’Or neighbourhood in Paris. In the midst of a fight between the Maoists and the plant managers, a 24-year-old Maoist worker named Pierre Overney was killed by one of the factory security guards. The police came to the scene the next day and demanded that the factory owner fire all possible witnesses. In response, about 200,000 people attended Overney’s funeral and participated in the subsequent commemorations. Historians believe that this episode was highly significant and symbolic because it was literally the

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Suzanne (Jane Fonda), and her French husband, Jacques (Yves Montand), who went to the factory to conduct interviews. Fonda's character, an American journalist living in France and working for the American Broadcasting Company, meets her future husband during the general strike in May '68, while Montand's character, once a left-leaning Nouvelle Vague filmmaker, undergoes a period of self-questioning after 1968, then returns to shooting TV commercials in the entertainment industry (he later claims that making commercials is even 'more honest' than indulging in leftist cinema). The political situation in the sausage factory is that of disarray. The workers who are engaged in the wildcat strike capture their Italian factory manager, yet the major trade union does not lend their support to the strike and openly criticizes the radical actions of the workers as naïve 'betrayal' of the proletarian cause.

Despite this increasingly heightened political atmosphere, the two main characters, who had scheduled an interview with the Italian manager to discuss modern capitalist management, are immediately thrown into the turmoil of the strike and the workers lock them up with the factory boss. The two protagonists confront the manager, who is forced to justify the social achievements and economic importance of the reigning capitalist system. He claims that Marxism has gradually lost its significance and charm due to the enhanced standard of living for all Western people following the Second World War. The Italian manager eventually argues for a modern collaborative society where different classes and individuals peacefully cooperate instead of causing 'unnecessary' and 'wasteful' conflicts against each other.

Similar to the tragic aftermath of May '68, the factory strike is eventually called off by an extended 'negotiation' and 'consensus' among the various stakeholders. The workers on strike are forced to apologize and release the factory manager and other innocent captives. After Suzanne and Jacques are released from the factory occupation, they go back to work as usual, yet they encounter new difficulties (which have perhaps already existed) in their marriage, which is radically shaken by what they witnessed and learned during the unexpected turbulence in the occupied factory. Suzanne begins to reflect on the precarious position of women in patriarchal setting, as well as the latent fragility of her marital relations with Jacques. On one occasion, the heroine even elevates a picture of an erect male genitalia when quarrelling with the hero to demonstrate her growing discontent

last large-scale mass gathering among the French militants to show comradeship and solidarity after May '68. As a quick response to Overney's death, Sartre and Maoist journalist Maurice Clavel immediately wrote a plea in a newspaper that called for a popular trial to investigate this highly unjust and suspicious murder. However, the GP militants, who were even more impatient than Sartre, kidnapped the factory's head of personnel, Robert Nogrette, as a quick manifestation of the people's resistance. After forty-eight hours, when the GP members finally decided that it had defied the authorities long enough and had gotten sufficient publicity and media coverage of the kidnapping, the group simply released Nogrette without receiving anything in return. See Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), p. 62.

over Jacques' indifference and distant feelings towards many daily sentiments and the subtle changes that gradually occur in their relationship following the demise of May '68.

In response to her marital turmoil, Suzanne, who has just quit her broadcasting job after a dispute with the producers over the issue of political censorship, decides to engage in individual research and empirical study on a highly modern yet alienated supermarket (i.e., Carrefour); in this scene, a remarkable ten-minute-long tracking shot shows people buying groceries, symbolizing the gradual transformation of political voices, leadership and directions in the post-68 capitalist system. In this defining long take, the audience sees the customers calmly piling up their groceries at the check-out counters in the foreground. Beyond the cashiers, Suzanne is seen taking notes on the shoppers and wandering in the aisles in line with the movements of the tracking camera. As this is taking place, a male delegate sent from the Parti communiste français (French Communist Party, or PCF) appears, trying to promote his new communist book *Change Course* to people near a food stand. Here the Party representative is portrayed as just another commodity to be bought and sold on the marketplace, a structural component of the same capitalist system that bears little difference from the groceries which the consumers are purchasing. In the meantime, there is no obvious connection between these different social individuals inside the supermarket. The moving camera remains radically 'neutral', without highlighting the primacy and importance of any of these social agents. According to Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'in the lengthy supermarket sequence in *Tout va bien*, groceries remain only groceries — neutral objects to be recorded like the rest'.³⁷

A couple of leftist students pop up and begin to question the PCF delegate, pointing out some latent contradictions and inconsistencies in his political line. A crowd of young radical leftists suddenly rushes in and provokes a physical confrontation with the Party representative as well as his supporters in the distant background. Initially, the shoppers, located in the foreground, are oblivious of this conflict and continue to pile up their purchases at the check-out counters. In this scene, the two filmmakers were trying to present the very spatial connections, or the lack of connections, between all these social groups in clear visual terms. While the official leftist organ is presented as part of the capitalist structure of a modern market-driven society, the key leftist intellectual, Suzanne, who is in line with the hidden tracking camera, moves back and forth without clear direction, while the young leftists simply bump into the scene out of nowhere, attempting to assert themselves as the 'new voice' or 'new agent' of this advanced capitalist society following the tragic demise of May 1968. But when the young radicals idiosyncratically incite the lay consumers by leading a sort of mass theft of groceries (shouting 'everything

³⁷ Rosenbaum, p. 76.

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is free of charge!'), the scenario becomes increasingly uncontrollable and chaotic, and the mini-riot is soon violently suppressed by the incoming police sent from the cinematic off-screen.

The various social predicaments that were left largely unanswered throughout the film *Tout va bien* — the lack of concrete direction of the working-class militancy, the gradual fading of revolutionary momentum in post-68 French society, and the new contradictions faced by the left-leaning intellectuals pertaining to the predominant capitalist system — culminate in the key supermarket sequence. This relatively pessimistic implication was further underlined by Godard-Gorin's intercutting of several footages containing the loose, disorganized insurrections of the younger generation during the early 1970s, which reminds the audience of the insurmountable failure of both the old and the new political agency in the post-68 capitalist world. The audience is placed outside the scene with a camera that is situated behind the check-out counters, which moves inexorably left and right in a single long take. The overarching sense of political impasse presented by this prolonged, contemplative camera movement belongs to the two filmmakers, as much as to the audiences and the social critics.

While the above is true, it is also true that the two directors sought to ingrain their revolutionary optimism in a radically alternative way. One minor stroke that has often eluded critics and audiences is the very cinematic position of Godard and Gorin in *Tout va bien* with regard to the revolutionary impossibility of proletarian struggles in post-68 capitalist system. Although many commentators have consensually applauded the 'distanciated', 'minimalist', and 'non-didactic' approach to the representations of revolutionary insurrections in this final DVG work, I argue that the two filmmakers sought to radically showcase their unrepentant leftist conviction and sympathy in this mesmerizing long take. Upon closer inspection, one can see that Godard and Gorin did not simply retain a contemplative, distant, or non-engaging perspective throughout this protracted sequence. Instead, there is actually a nuanced *adjustment in the speed* of their camera movement pertaining to its own oscillation in the same tracking shot: the movement of the camera here subtly accelerates when showcasing the spontaneous mini-riot led by the radical youth in the shop throughout the entire sequence. Godard and Gorin's camera work remains minimally 'intrusive' in the scene, effectively echoing the imposing political gestures of the post-68 young leftists in the supermarket. This tiny visual trace inherent in the camera tracking thus profoundly helps render the ideological position of the two directors formally intelligible and comprehensible to the audience in the post-68 context. In essence, Godard and Gorin radically integrated their political manifestations in the tracking shot, as well as engaged their critical views within the new social contradictions that the film sought to 'objectively' present in the first place.

This irreducible failure to conceal its own epistemological limit or intrusiveness could, far from simply undermining Godard-Gorin's critical dissemination of post-1968 French society as a whole, have radically helped them manifest, or more precisely reassert, their unchanging Marxist-Leninist position a few years

after May 1968 — a somewhat utopian vision that began to wane in the French leftist intelligentsia following the early 1970s. Undoubtedly, the two filmmakers started to critically reflect on their previous Maoist engagement in the post-68 years, yet this does not necessarily mean that their revolutionary yearning was entirely withdrawn from the predominant leftist scene in the global 1960s. But on the other hand, this very subtle way of political manifestation in *Tout va bien* also resists casually lapsing into a convenient leftist dogma and binary political side-taking insofar as the film was primarily made by Godard and Gorin to help critically reflect on the various epistemological questions and ethical predicaments of post-68 French Maoism at large. Compared with the rather didactic implications of *Vent d'est*, the two filmmakers might have even taken the Maoist teachings more literally, faithfully and creatively, since they succeeded in re-domesticating and applying existing Marxist theories in a radically novel social situation in *Tout va bien*, or in a brand-new epoch when the leftist and rightist ideologies became increasingly converged and intermingled under the same rubric of neoliberal capitalism itself.

What Has Been Left of Proletarian Struggles?

Interestingly, upon closer re-examination of Godard-Gorin's first DVG film *Vent d'est*, the aforementioned second female voice-over, which idiosyncratically favoured 'revolutionary terror' over 'bourgeois-humanitarianism' as the major resistance strategy against oppressive regimes, reminds the audience that the 'correct idea' of Marxism-Leninism was never designated as a simple summary or conclusion — 'it is right to rebel' — but instead, the proper analysis is 'Marxism which is composed of multiple principles, *in the final analysis*, can be summarized into "it is right to rebel".' If this is the case, then what is the main difference between these two sentences?

In his early work written during the height of the Red Years, Alain Badiou, who still proclaims himself a Maoist in today's neoliberal era, distinguished among the three deeply entangled rationales inherent in the Maoist idea of 'it is right to rebel against the reactionaries'³⁸ fervently elevated during the heyday of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and May '68. First, Badiou argued that the primary rebellion (*being* the reason) of the proletarian people was always justified in itself, insofar as revolt as such is precisely the very reason of its own existence, which does not wait for the symbolic mandate to justify its sheer legitimacy. That is to say, social revolt always spontaneously happens and does not simply need a legitimate or extrinsic reason to allow its happening. However, this kind rebellion was highly arbitrary and could not be self-sustained because of the radical lack of an antagonistic force, a symbolic mandate that paradoxically offered the

³⁸ See Alain Badiou, 'An Essential Philosophical Thesis: "It Is Right to Rebel against the Reactionaries"', *positions: asia critique*, 13.3 (Winter 2005), 669–677.

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‘reason’ for the refusal of that reason altogether. Therefore, Badiou argued that a rebellion that could be symbolically mapped onto the epistemological paradigm of existing Marxist theories to allow the proletarian revolt to take shape was also simultaneously needed. Therefore, this radically alternative form of the same rebellion (*having* the reason) *would have* its own justification right after the very initiation of actual revolutionary struggles.

Rebellion at this level is similar to a subjective wager, a revolutionary assumption of the devoted social activists in response to the ideological interpellation of Marxist discourses. Yet this kind of proletarian revolt is not totally unproblematic, as it may help rationalize and justify the initiation of rebellion against authority as a kind of moral duty and fixed obligation among the oppressed, thus ultimately contradicting its own primordial existence that radically resists against social stability in the first place. Interestingly, it is precisely through this inherent contradiction between the primary and secondary levels of proletarian struggles, which emerges *in the final analysis*, that may eventually reveal the true literal meaning of the Maoist notion ‘it is always right to rebel’ *par excellence*. Having said that, this excessive dialectical link, or the inherent impossibility of proletarian revolt as such that emerges in the final analysis, helps retroactively cement the primary and secondary forms of revolutionary struggles in an organic fashion without losing their initial antagonistic intensities. At this very level, according to Badiou, ‘the statement itself “it is right to rebel against the reactionaries” is both the development of kernels of knowledge internal to the rebellion itself and the return into rebellion of this development.’³⁹ Badiou continued by saying,

[r]ebellion — which is right, which has reason — finds in Marxism the means of developing this reason, of assuring its victorious reason. That which allows the legitimacy of rebellion (the first sense of the word “reason”) to become articulated with its victory (the second sense of the word “reason”) is a new type of fusion between rebellion as a practice that is always there and the developed form of its reason.⁴⁰

In retrospect, the two Maoist films *Tout va bien* and *Vent d'est* directed by Godard and Gorin are not mutually exclusive pieces with regard to their profound leftist orientation and radical aesthetic sensibility. Instead of simply gesturing to a wholesale departure from their first counter-cinematic work during the DVG period, Godard-Gorin’s *Tout va bien* continued to advance and (re-)assert a radically emancipatory vision that not only resisted classical narrative cinema but also helped problematize the reigning discursive construct of contemporary neoliberalism, which often ontologized various political ‘failures’ and tragic impasses of the global 1960s as something inevitable and insurmountable. Although many critical insights of *Tout va bien* on the structural ambivalence

³⁹ Badiou, ‘An Essential Philosophical Thesis’, p. 675.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

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between leftism and rightism pertaining to modern capitalist system emerged at the watershed moment when the major currents of French Maoism gradually dissipated from the Left Bank, this very 'belatedness' of Godard's cinematic self-criticism may retroactively compel his followers to dialectically revisit and reconstruct the highly nuanced and intimate nexus between revolutionary art and Marxist politics so as to keep struggling against the predominant consumerist narratives and depoliticizing ethos of our global neoliberalism nowadays, whereby their nebulous traces have already been vaguely recorded and observed in the capitalist West since the aftermath of May 1968.