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International Film Studies Journal

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vol. XVIII, no. 30, Spring 2018

CINÉMA&CIE

INTERNATIONAL FILM STUDIES JOURNAL

Reinventing Mao: Maoisms and National Cinemas

Edited by
Marco Dalla Gassa, Corrado Neri and Federico Zecca

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INTERNATIONAL

Cinéma & Cie is promoted by
Dipartimento di Lettere, Lingue, Arti. Italianistica e Culture Comparate, Università degli Studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro'; Dipartimento di Lettere, Filosofia, Comunicazione, Università degli Studi di Bergamo; Dipartimento delle Arti — Visive Performative Mediali, Università di Bologna — Alma Mater Studiorum; Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione e dello Spettacolo, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; Università degli Studi eCampus (Novedrate, Italy); Dipartimento di Comunicazione, arti e media "Giampaolo Fabris", Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM; Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, Università di Pisa; Università degli Studi Link Campus University, Roma; Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale, Università degli Studi di Udine.

International Ph.D. Program 'Studi Storico Artistici e Audiovisivi'/'Art History and Audiovisual Studies' (Università degli Studi di Udine, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle — Paris 3).

Subscription to *Cinéma & Cie* (2 issues)

Single issue: 16 € / 12 £ / 18 $
Double issue: 20 € / 15 £ / 22 $
Yearly subscription: 30 € / 22 £ / 34 $

No shipping cost for Italy
Shipping cost for each issue:
EU: 10 € / 8 £ / 11 $
Rest of the world: 18 € / 13 £ / 20 $

Send orders to
commerciale@mimesisedizioni.it

Journal website
www.cinemaetcie.net

© 2018 – Mimesis International (Milan – Udine)
www.mimesisinternational.com
e-mail: info@mimesisinternational.com

isbn 9788869771705
issn 2035-5270

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P.I. C.F. 02419370305

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Why Cinéma & Cie (again)

17 years have passed since the first *Cinéma & Cie* editorial appeared, penned by Leonardo Quaresima and Francesco Casetti. At that time, the journal aimed to provide answers in an increasingly challenging international dimension of academic research, and stepped forward as an open, intellectual space where methodologies and interests relating to different research traditions and from different countries could meet, dialogue, and mutually enhance the field.

The journal naturally stemmed from the scholarly network established by the Udine International Film Conference, one of the first Italian academic events that, from the 1990s, has encouraged innovative and international approaches to the development of research. Loosely inspired by a 'borrowed' title from a volume by French thinker Louis Delluc, the journal rejected rigid schemes in favour of a varied and mobile framework, or background; one that can define its specific identity in the discipline of film studies, while at the same time allowing research to expand its scope, to move in new directions, to become richer and more diversified still, without losing consistency.

The call for an international dimension to academic research, which appeared to be an emerging trend in 2001 Italy, is nowadays taken for granted: a necessary and almost natural requirement. *Cinéma & Cie* did not stop at this early intuition. If we look back to the first issue, the journal's editorial board included 17 members based in eight countries from two continents. Nowadays, the journal counts on an editorial board composed of 69 members from 21 countries and four continents. Of course, this is quite certainly not a matter of quantity. Today, when the international dimension of research is a given, *Cinéma & Cie* aims to continue to improve its global scope from a qualitative point of view in particular. This is about enhancing research as cultural plurality and networked activity. It is about enhancing local specificities and traditions while allowing them to change and innovate through contact with different contexts. And still, much work has to be done to facilitate the global circulation and exchange of research experiences and expertise and make them truly enriching and inspiring opportunities.

To date, *Cinéma & Cie* has benefited from the international network and the (thematically and methodologically) plural background from which it originated,

which moreover allowed the journal to evolve continuously according to the changes in its research fields. In an increasingly crowded arena, *Cinéma & Cie* grounds its specific identity and mission on the following points:

– its international scope, not so much as the 'juxtaposition' of many different countries, than as a research environment which enhances cultural plurality and networked activity, facilitating exchanges between global experiences and local expertise;

– a plural and open methodological framework that, without renouncing accuracy or consistency, represents the most suitable context to intercept innovative perspectives and grasp ongoing transformations in contemporary screen culture;

– special attention to the relationships between history and theory, as well as to groundbreaking methodological approaches; to the intersections between technological, industrial, and representational aspects; to the dialectic between local and global processes and the dimensions of reception and consumption; to the relevance of audiovisual heritage as well as of the links between early cinema and today's cinema; and to the multifaceted relations among different forms of audiovisual narrative, art and communication — especially when traditional boundaries blur and become problematic.

[v.r.]

Why Cinéma & Cie
No. 1, Fall 2001

This proposal stems from the idea of creating an instrument for the circulation and comparison of research as well as methodologies and work programs on an international basis. The science community is more and more acquiring an international dimension, but apart from that the occasions for meeting and for joint planning are still rather scant. In Universities, archives and other centers the work of younger scholars is generally suffering from serious isolation: this journal is aiming at offering its contribution in solving also these problems.

Cinéma & Cie is promoted by the Udine International Film Studies Conference and arises from the initiative of a group of centers which have been already working together for some time on the subjects of the conference. It is naturally open to any external contribution. We do not envisage any rigid schemes, program lines in the way of *Citizen Kane*, or "Dogma 95", but believe however, that there is a reference and guidance framework as background for the journal's work and orientation thus marking its peculiarity and its place in cinema studies.

The following are some of the points we have focused on:

A study of early cinema and in more general terms of silent cinema but, above all, the study of the relationship between early cinema, silent cinema and today's cinema. We are convinced that silent cinema can also be a reference point for contemporary cinema and that the theory of silent cinema can be an important term of comparison with the theory of today's cinema.

Linkage between the historical/philological and theoretical approach. Comparison between different methods in particular between narrative and iconography.

Study of the relationship between cinema and other forms of art.

Attention to research on cinema as a form of communication, to the history of reception and to the theory of cinema as an institution. Attention to the history of technology.

The journal will be published once a year and will be only partially monographic so to avoid any overlapping with the work of the Udine Conference and to keep more space open to new proposals. Furthermore it will publish studies carried out or recommended by its partners (New Studies). It will be an instrument for the diffusion of joint international research projects as well as for the results of

research carried out by young scholars, above all for their Ph.D. dissertations (Projects & Abstracts). English and
French will be the journal's main languages.

The title was stolen from Delluc. Perhaps something more…

[f.c./l.q.]

Reinventing Mao: Maoisms and National Cinemas

Maoisms, National Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives
An Introduction

Marco Dalla Gassa, Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Corrado Neri, Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3
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Le Joli Mao

The charismatic and controversial figure of Mao Zedong has not only left a deep mark on the history of twentieth-century China — looming still over the country's new capitalist developments, as a sort of ghost — but it has also spread remarkably beyond national borders and into completely different political and social contexts. In particular, after the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966) several groups inspired by Chinese Marxism-Leninism appeared worldwide. From the United States to India, from New Zealand to Peru, from Hong Kong to Japan, as well as within European countries, specific political ideals, revolutionary propositions, fantasies and images of purity have been projected onto the figure of Mao, to some extent giving way to a form of idolatry — so called *maolâtrie*. His benevolent face has become the symbol of what François Fejtő shortly after called 'a dream incarnate',[1] in particular for the generation who took part in the demonstrations in public squares during May 1968 and who, brandishing the book with *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (this is the real title of the *Little Red Book*), hoped to emulate the deeds of the Red Guards and overturn the *status quo*. In fact, in those very years, as well as during the following decades, Maoism represented, at a transnational level, an extraordinary label that aggregated different desires and intellectual-affective investments in relation to their cultural and geo-political contexts. Essentially, as a cultural phenomenon, Maoism turned into an ideal scenario in which everyone was able to invest whatever they wanted; each country developed and, so to speak, re-invented 'its own' Maoism with specific characteristics that were often completely different from the Chinese original.

Though there is a vast bibliography on Chinese as well as international Maoism that has continued only to grow during these last few months of celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of 1968 in France, much less exhaustive is the bibliography dedicated to the impact that the pro-China infatuation has had in the field of cinematography. There are several reasons for this. The main motive concerns the difficulty to distinguish the clear traits of Maoist doctrine in films, documentaries

[1] François Feitő, *Chine/URSS: De l'alliance au conflit* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 449.

and other media products. In China we can observe a significant reduction of film production and an increased ideological regimentation, especially after the uprisings that broke out in 1966. In Europe, on the other hand, the first films to deal with the impact of these events, such as Marco Bellocchio's *China Is Near* (*La Cina è vicina*, 1967) and Jean Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967), prefer to point out the actual difficulties that both directors and their film characters face when trying to render in artwork or political activity the slogans of what Alain Badiou calls 'the last revolution still attached to the motif of classes and of class struggle'.[2] After 1968, Maoist-oriented documentaries and fiction films were produced principally by a number of collectives, such as the Dziga Vertov, Foudre or Front Paysan groups in France or the militants of Servire il Popolo in Italy. However, these films have only rarely been distributed beyond the circles of radical militancy and they are not always easy to distinguish from the other politically committed works that followed the 1968 experience, which were inspired by other Marxist-oriented doctrines and actually stood in opposition to Maoism. In other words, the impact of the pro-Maoist films is far from comparable to that of the films inspired by the Soviet and (later) the Cuban revolutions.

And yet in those years film industry workers often declared, as did many intellectuals, their sympathies towards the uprising of the Red Guards. In addition to the aforementioned Godard and Bellocchio, personalities such as Joris Ivens, Marceline Loridan, Chris Marker, Agnes Varda, Marin Karmitz, the actors Lou Castel and Gian Maria Volonté also had their *années Mao*;[3] even Sergio Leone in his *Duck, You Sucker!* (*Giù la testa*, 1971) or Michelangelo Antonioni in *Chung-kuo Cina* (1972) partly sympathize with the People's Republic and its Great Helmsman. Militant criticism of course also played its part as well: the editorial staff of the *Cahiers du cinéma* (from 1969 to 1973), of the *Cinéthique* and the literary magazine *Tel Quel* can be considered Maoist-oriented, and we should not forget other periodicals such as *Ombre rosse* in Italy or *Screen* in the UK that published editorials and critiques inspired by the Cultural Revolution. From the 1960s to the 1970s film critics such us Jean-Louis Comolli, Serge Daney, Régis Bergeron, Goffredo Fofi, and many others, without mentioning personalities as Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Badiou, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, form a whole army of intellectuals and scholars that embrace the 'Chinese road' to communism.

It is in this gap between widespread fascination and the difficulty of its artistic-aesthetic rendering (the *Cahiers du cinéma* of that period are, perhaps not by chance, without illustrations) that we wish to insert the monographic issue that *Cinéma & Cie* dedicates to Maoism, with a specific focus on the impact of the Cultural Revolution on specific cinematic cultures fifty years after its apogee.

[2] Alain Badiou, 'The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?', *positions*, 13.3 (2005), 507.
[3] François Hourmant, *Les Années Mao en France: Avant, pendant et après mai 68* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2018).

In the title, however, we talk about Maoisms in plural form, since it is quite clear that, as Christophe Bourseiller puts it, this label has come to aggregate numerous '[intellectual and emotional] investments and just as many phantoms', all depending on their relative historical contexts. In fact, 'as a cultural phenomenon, it [has] been the ideal place in which everyone [has been able to] invest whatever he liked'.[4] We have chosen to focus on film experiences that are distant from one another in terms of historical period, geographical and cultural areas, and characters involved. More precisely, we have sought to bring back to light subjects and historical episodes that have been suppressed in public debates and in traditional film history books. From the beginning, we abandoned the idea of offering a complete description of the various 'adventures' influenced by Maoism, or of arranging them in a precise chronological order. We have, on the contrary, preferred to select studies that can pose questions across different contexts, cultures, and nations, with particular attention to the repression strategies, the ideological aporias, the cultural dynamics and the political struggles that characterized the relationship between Maoism and national cinemas, from the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution to the present day.

An Overview of the Special Issue

All the articles included in this special issue adopt a trans-historical and transcultural perspective, suggesting to some extent that the complexity of the process of translation and 'reinvention' of Maoism in different cultural and national contexts calls for a comparative approach, in order to highlight the specificities and distinctive features of each experience.

Our journey through transnational Maoisms begins in France, probably the European country in which the fascination for the Cultural Revolution has had the most relevant cultural impact, especially after May 1968. Man-tat Terence Leung's article considers two of the most 'inflammatory' works made by Jean-Luc Godard together with his long-time collaborator Jean-Pierre Gorin during their militancy in the Maoist collective Dziga Vertov Group, *Wind from the East* (*Vent d'est*, 1969) and *All's Well* (*Tout va bien*, 1972). Through an in-depth textual study, the author highlights the different ways in which the two films employ the Maoist ideology, its slogans and keywords, its political perspective. The 1969 film seems to interpret (enthusiastically and somewhat superficially) Maoism as mere revolutionary doctrine, therefore trying to 'brainwash' the viewer into violently revolt against the status quo through incessant Brechtian stimuli and coercive 'counter-cinema' aesthetic strategies. Conversely, with its more sophisticated (albeit relatively more conventional) narrative and aesthetics, *All's Well* sees Maoism as a subtle epistemological tool for understanding the predicaments of

[4] Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Points 2008), p. 438.

Western societies. In particular, Leung focuses his analysis on the renowned ten-minute tracking shot set in a supermarket: according to the author, this long take represents the (successful) attempt of the two directors to employ the Maoist 'theory of contradictions' in their investigation of 'the structural ambivalence between leftism and rightism pertaining to the modern capitalist system'. In his view, the 1972 film penetrates and denaturalizes the 'symbolic fabric of contemporary neoliberal consensus', thus revealing the (never fully expressed and partly still effective) 'emancipatory potential' of post-1968 French Maoism.

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier shifts the focus to two other European countries, analysing a pair of very different — differently embedded — documentary/ethnographic movies about the Khmer Rouge produced in Yugoslavia and Sweden. Her article first contextualizes the historical contingencies that made these two films possible, before dwelling secondly on a stylistic and formal analysis, that shows how different representational strategies inscribe Cambodian Maoism in the Yugoslavian and Swedish national cultures. At the end of the 1970s, arguably under the pressure of the Chinese communist party, the leaders of Democratic Kampuchea invited journalists from friendly countries and representatives from Western Maoist organizations. The aim of these visits was obviously to present a positive image of the country, but interestingly, the two documentaries tell very different stories and were received with opposing attitudes. The former was an implicit criticism of the totalitarian regime; the latter a complete endorsement of the Khmer Rouge. Hence, the violent rejection of the Yugoslavian film from the Cambodian government was not without its reasons: as Benzaquen-Gautier demonstrates, the Yugoslavian filmmaker Nikola Vitorović could not deliver an explicit critique of the regime, but via cinematic language (editing, juxtaposition, an ambiguous use of music) he managed to add a layer to the superficial propaganda discourse as an 'attempt, however limited, to deconstruct the scenery elaborated by the CPK leaders'. Benzaquen-Gautier shows how the national context — here, the Eastern bloc was still swamped in the cold war — reacts to the Cambodian declination of Maoism by creating a complex, challenging dialogue via allegoric cinematic expression. On the other hand, Swedish intellectual, journalist and filmmaker Jan Myrdal maintained his Maoist conviction and produced a documentary explicitly endorsing Khmer Rouge politics. Through a comparative approach, the article investigates the positioning of the filmmakers in a dialogue between 'us' and 'them' which demands a negotiation between 'solidarity, identification, and denunciation'.

Sanghita Sen's article brings us instead to India, where the Naxal movement — a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist armed revolutionary movement — emerged in May 1967. The author analyses selected films that deal with the Naxal/Maoist movements and unravel their socio-cultural impact. This journey is not only physical but temporal as well; the essay focuses in the first part on movies from the 1960s: agit-prop, militant works that engage directly with the spectatorship by soliciting a critical vision. These texts are therefore revolutionary both in

content and form, seeking an alternative to the escapist, commercial tradition. Sen nonetheless acutely analyses the complexities of this 'parallel cinema'; namely, in comparing the works by Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen — two directors both engaged in a 'Calcutta trilogy' — Sen shows how aesthetical and formal choices helped to link Indian parallel cinema to similar movements in the 'world cinema' context, but also that every director developed his own strategy to write a counter history and challenge mainstream cinema via the deconstruction of national (and nationalistic) narrative mode. The paper provides close analysis of Ray's and Sen's use of documentary footage, location shooting, jump cuts and montage that debunked 'pavlovian' Bollywood style. The article, also shifts its focus to Bollywood cinema from the 1990s, questioning the heritage of the Naxal movement on a more recent society and its arts. By paying close attention to historic movies that depicted the Maoist frenzy, some directors managed to stay in the system by delivering melodramatic movies and at the same time strived to deconstruct nationalistic stereotypes. These negotiations raise questions about Maoist movements in contemporary cinema: is it domestication or inception?

This question could not be more urgent than in China itself, and Wendy Xie's paper brings us back to where it the movement started. In her article, the author analyses the remake of a classic 'model opera' that legendary director Tsui Hark filmed in his flamboyant, hyperkinetic mode in 2014. This appropriation seems to condensate the contradictions of contemporary China itself: how can a Communist nation — where the portrait of Mao still lingers on Tiananmen square and (quite amusingly) on the much-coveted banknotes — integrate the high spectacle coming from Hong Kong's tradition of martial and fantastic movies (despite the fact that they were banned in Maoist China)? And more specifically, is Tsui's enterprise purely lip-service to Beijing, or did he include in his work a multi-layered discourse that can be interpreted as challenging Red nostalgia? Xie develops a stringent argument in favour of this second hypothesis. In the first part she shows how the novel that inspired the propaganda film is indebted to the chivalric tradition of vernacular novels that shaped the collective imaginary of the Chinese readers. Secondly, she focuses on the introduction and coda of the movie, where a young protagonist discovers (in New York) the long forgotten, classic revolutionary canon. By inscribing his action movie in the retrospective gaze of a millennial, and by erasing any clear political reference, Tsui Hark undercuts the reverential Communist ideology and offers to the attentive spectator an array of hypothesis concerning the place of Red nostalgia in contemporary China. Where does national construction and family history meet — or collide? Maoist nostalgia and contemporary propaganda apparently serve the same aim, but is that really so? Tsui's recreation of the wartime drama collapses all the formal devices of the original 'model opera', appropriating the story with a self-conscious positioning as representational rather than original. This simulacrum seems to be a symptom of an anxiety vis-à-vis contemporary China's value system, ideological drive and self-recognition. Zooming out, while Wendy Xie's article is aptly focused on the cradle of Maoism, her enquiry is

ultimately pertinent to many transnational realities that used, copied, quoted, translated, mocked, critiqued or discussed Maoist ethics and aesthetics.

Similar issues are explored by Kristian Feigelson, whose article adopts a comparative transnational and trans-historical perspective in order to make sense of how the Cultural Revolution has been represented and understood in two different cultural contexts: French auteur cinema of the 1960s and 1970s and Chinese cinema of the Sixth Generation. In the first part of his essay, Feigelson draws a comparison between *La Chinoise* and René Viénet's *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* (*La Dialectique peut-elle casser les briques?*, 1973). According to the author, Godard's 1967 film still presents many of the representational and ideological clichés of French Orientalism, in that it does not perceive the Cultural Revolution as a controversial historical event, but rather as an 'exotic' mythology to embrace a-critically and a-problematically. Contrarily to this, Viénet's situationist film uses the technique of *détournement* — re-dubbing and adding a new soundtrack to a pre-existing, average kung fu film — in order to distort and criticize the Maoist doctrine and its too enthusiastic reception within the French intelligentsia, at the same time polemically addressing the economic exploitation and social alienation inherent in Western capitalism. In the second part, the article shifts its attention to contemporary China, discussing the ways in which a few directors of the Sixth Generation have moved beyond the official conciliatory discourses on the Maoist period promoted by the Communist government today, in order to adopt a more controversial vision of the Cultural Revolution and its 'shadows'. In particular, the author analyses the independent movie *The Ditch* (*Jiabiangou*, Wang Bing, 2010), as a perfect example of this change of attitude: with its balance between modernism and digital minimalism, the movie narrates the sufferings of a group of (alleged) dissidents imprisoned in a labour camp right after the Hundred Flowers Campaign, thus shedding light on one of the darkest pages of Chinese history.

The last essay of the special issue somewhat inscribes some of the questions discussed in the previous articles in a wider framework, at the same time opening a new possible strand of research. Analysing Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* (2003) and Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, 1994), Yomi Braester proposes the category of 'post-Maoist cinema' to make sense of a series of works that have reconsidered the Maoist era through a strong historical, political and metalinguistic conscience from the 1990s onwards, expressing both a feeling of nostalgia for an idealistic period and a harsh criticism of past excesses. For the author, this post-Maoist cinema is fundamentally a transnational phenomenon, that reveals several common, defining traits regardless of the national context in which the films are produced. First of all, according to Braester, post-Maoist films conceive Maoism essentially as a set of performative acts, detached from any explicit militant or ideological reflection. In other words, the use of specific Maoist imageries, symbolisms, or keywords is not functional to the direct narration of what Maoism itself actually was; rather, they serve to create a vivid portrait of the tensions that characterized any given country

(France and China, in this case) during the Maoist period — that is, cultural, social, generational processes and so on. More precisely, the article is focused on the examination of two key characteristics of post-Maoist cinema: the depiction of sexuality and the representation of cinephilia, both intended as tools for an implicit 'critical reassessment' of Maoism. Indeed, on the one hand, Maoism is not considered as a body of doctrines for the social and economic revolution, but rather as a cultural climate thanks to which the characters succeed in breaking bourgeois taboos, a sort of 'subterfuge' for the expression of their individual selves, and especially of their sexuality. On the other, the representation of moviegoing or the intertextual references to other (Maoist) films to some extent project an air of unreality about Maoism, as though it were, after all, only a cinephiliac invention.

To conclude, the articles here presented highlight the theoretical productivity of the contamination between film studies and cultural history in order to make sense of a 'repressed' and concealed experience, such as the reinvention of Maoism in national cinemas. This specific line of film production, now almost forgotten, can on the contrary speak to (and of) our historical memory. As a transnational phenomenon, Maoism penetrated various national contexts in many different ways, each time being translated and transformed, depending on the characters of each country and film industry. In this sense, researching Maoist cinemas provides a stimulating (albeit certainly eccentric) point of view, not only for the study of the single films, authors, or 'movements', but also for the comprehension of the societies and cultures that have produced them. Although we are perfectly aware that this special issue barely scratches the surface of such a complex subject matter, it is precisely from within this perspective that we wish to invite further research.

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, Srauss, and Giroux, 2005), p. 225.

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).

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, irresoluble 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.

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.

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 prolétarianne (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 prolétarianne 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.

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 anneé 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: Editions 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: Edition 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 prolétarianne, 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,

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 Prolétarianne 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

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.

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.

'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.

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.

Ethnographies of the Khmer Rouge Revolution
Democratic Kampuchea in Movies (1975-1978)

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Abstract

By 1978, the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia engaged in a limited 'open door' policy under the pressure of its Chinese ally. The country had been carefully sealed off thus far, but in need of a more positive image abroad, the leaders of Democratic Kampuchea invited journalists from friendly countries and representatives from Western Maoist organisations. These visitors filmed their journey in Cambodia in order to show the international public what the Khmer Rouge had achieved economically and socially within a few years. The paper examines two of the resulting productions: *Kampučija 1978* (*Kampuchea 1978*, 1978) by Yugoslav film director Nikola Vitorović and *Democratic Kampuchea* (*Demokratiska Kampuchea*, 1978) by Swedish writer Jan Myrdal. Drawing on anthropologist Faye Ginsburg's application of the notion of 'parallax effect', it compares the two works with Khmer Rouge propaganda movies. It proposes to investigate through an ethnographic lens the articulation of 'us' and 'them' performed in these films, and the way ideology both shaped and challenged forms of solidarity and identification. It argues that the 'parallax effect' enables a more nuanced view of the filmic representation of Democratic Kampuchea in the years 1975-1978, far from the monolithic perception people may have of it today.

In April 1978, for the third anniversary of the 'liberation' of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge forces, Foreign Minister Ieng Sary invited foreign ambassadors to the projection of a new movie about Democratic Kampuchea (DK). As people were about to leave after the screening, the projectionists announced they had received the film made by Yugoslavian journalists in Cambodia a few weeks before. The guests sat back and watched the movie. Laurence Picq, a Frenchwoman married to a high-ranking Khmer Rouge cadre, recounts in her memoirs that it was a shock for the audience. Everyone could feel the terror pervading the sequences shot in the countryside, she writes. It spread to the spectators as they imagined the consequences of a diplomatic incident between

DK and Yugoslavia. The projectionists were immediately arrested and sent to prison.[1]

In contrast, the film made later that year by Swedish writer Jan Myrdal when he travelled to Cambodia as member of the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association must have satisfied the Khmer Rouge leaders. They invited Myrdal again in September 1979, although under radically changed circumstances since the DK regime had been overthrown by Vietnam in the meantime. These two movies held a mirror back to the Khmer Rouge. The latter looked at themselves being observed, 'us' filmed by 'them' from the West. Yet, in that period of anti-imperialist struggle and romanticisation of Third World revolutions, the divide between West and non-West was transcended by ideological solidarity. This makes objectification a fluctuating concept and therefore raises the questions of the possibility of an ethnographic gaze on DK and what it owes to the Khmer Rouge visual propaganda itself.

I propose to address this question through the notion of 'parallax effect', a scientific concept that anthropologist Faye Ginsburg applies to the 'related project of ethnographic film and aboriginal media'.[2]

> By juxtaposing these different but related kinds of cinematic perspective on culture, one can create a kind of parallax effect; if harnessed analytically, these 'slightly different angles of vision' can offer a fuller comprehension of the social phenomenon we call culture.[3]

Taking my cue from Ginsburg, I juxtapose Khmer Rouge propaganda footage, Nikola Vitorović's movie *Kampučija 1978* (*Kampuchea 1978*, 1978) and Jan Myrdal's *Democratic Kampuchea* (*Demokratiska Kampuchea*, 1978), and compare these works with a focus on the 'social relations constituted and reimagined in media', and the 'social process engaged in the mediation of culture'.[4] Bringing questions of ethnographic filmmaking to bear on the representation of DK and the role ideology played in it may contribute to shedding light on the way solidarity, identification, and criticism were articulated visually, and how this in turn reflected changing perceptions of the Khmer Rouge regime at a key period of its short-lived existence as a state.

Self-ethnography in the Land of Revolution

As the Four-Year Plan (1976) makes it clear, the Khmer Rouge leaders

[1] Laurence Picq, *Au-delà du ciel: Cinq ans chez les Khmers Rouges* (Paris: Barraud, 1984), p. 121.
[2] Faye Ginsburg, 'The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film', in *Visual Anthropology Review*, 11. 2 (1995), 64–76 (p. 65). The parallax effect is the effect created by the slightly different angles of vision of each eye.
[3] Ivi, p. 65.
[4] Ivi, p. 70.

favoured cinema as propaganda medium. They urged for the organisation of 'many groups to produce many films to show to the people in general'.[5] Film director Rithy Panh, a child at the time, remembers that he attended some screenings: 'Sometimes leaders gathered several villages and showed us a movie about how people fought with their bare hands the powerful colonisers'.[6] The Khmer Rouge were not the first Cambodian leaders to employ films in such a fashion. Indeed, they may have been inspired by Prince Norodom Sihanouk's use of cinema in the 1960s, as a means to communicate to 'little people' about his politics couched within familiar vernacular narratives.[7] Of course, the Khmer Rouge rejected Sihanouk's exoticism, and in that respect their cinematic 'oeuvre' may be construed as the systematic deconstruction of the Prince's worldview. Coached by the Chinese, they produced a filmic representation of DK that celebrated the advent of a changed society and operated as a teaching tool for the population, enforcing a vision of the body politic, the nation, and the collective — in short, the new 'we' with which Cambodians were required to identify.[8]

Yet, 'we' was first of all the small core of Khmer Rouge leadership, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). The long take opening the movie *Meeting at the Olympic Stadium* (1976) is a good illustration of the way they tried to picture themselves. It is a long shot of the red sun rising over a tree line and the Silver Pagoda. This obvious metaphor of a new dawn for Cambodia sent a clear message about the political identity of the masters of the country. The colour red functioned as a leitmotiv throughout the movie, reappearing in the flags, banners, and chairs in the meeting hall. In this film, as in others, the Khmer Rouge leadership was depicted as a collegial power: a group of men dressed in the same black uniform and endlessly clapping hands. Yet, *Pol Pot Visits a Rubber Plantation* (1978) suggests some shift in later movies. While it still described the CPK leadership as a group, it also included several medium shot sequences focusing on Prime Minister Pol Pot. The latter smiled, shook hands, hugged the workers. This was the body language of a charismatic leader close to his people. The image conjured up that of Sihanouk's walkabouts in the heydays of the Sangkum regime (1955-1970). In the context of growing tensions with Vietnam, Khmer Rouge propagandists possibly hoped that familiar

[5] Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 'Four-Year Plan', in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*, ed. by David P. Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), p. 114.

[6] *The Missing Picture* (2013), sequence: 1:17:15–1:18:32.

[7] On the subject of Sihanouk's cinema, see Eliza Romey, 'King, Politician, Artist: The Films of Norodom Sihanouk' (unpublished M.A thesis, La Trobe University, 1998); Joanna Wolfarth, 'Royal Portraiture in the Cambodian Politico-Cultural Complex: Norodom Sihanouk and the Place of Photography', in *UDAYA, Journal of Khmer Studies*, 12 (2014), 145–167.

[8] Recent testimonies of former Khmer Rouge photographers at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) confirm China's involvement in the visual production of the Khmer Rouge. On the subject of Chinese presence in DK, see Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014).

representations of leadership would help turn Pol Pot into a mobilizing figure, in the way the image of God-king Sihanouk had galvanized Cambodians into resistance and sacrifice during the civil war (1970-1975).

The most important 'we' was of course the Kampuchean people. Khmer Rouge movies portrayed it as an entity in the making, whose revolutionary fervour was capable to physically remodel Cambodia. They stressed the radical transformation of man's relation to nature, as people were no longer victims of droughts and floods but controlled them. The films usually had the same structure. Establishing shots showed the landscape to be reshaped. Then were medium shots of the population at work, harrowing paddy fields, transplanting rice, loading baskets filled with stones and earth. Close-ups showed the smiling faces of the workers and peasants. The movies usually conveyed a sense of energy and efficacy. For instance, in *Collective Work in the Paddy Fields* (1975) the workers digging the canals were shot from a low angle, which amplified the impression of the men's indomitable force. The representation of the people's triumph over nature could become almost poetic at times, as may be seen in *Production of Salt in the Khmer Rouge Regime* (1978). The film offered a remarkable composition of the black silhouettes of the female workers appearing against the white landscape of the salt flats and reflecting into the water pools. This 'sublimation' turned their daily tasks, such as the raking up of salt into triangular cones, into a sort of ballet celebrating the beauty of collective work in DK.

The Khmer Rouge created new heroes for Cambodia in line with the imagery they had promoted during the civil war. They portrayed people as subjects with agency. They gave them a voice, literally so as some movies showed farmers and workers speaking. For example, *The Agricultural Sector of Democratic Kampuchea* (1976) included a sequence about three peasants chatting and joking while weaving baskets. In the sound movie *Reparation of the Railway Tracks* (1975), a couple with two children was shot commenting on their new house at the cooperative. In a later sequence, the voice (or dubbing) of the community chief addressing villagers could even be heard. Films on the industry in DK proceeded differently. They rather emphasised the professional gestures of the workers, their efficacy matching that of the machines, as the proof of the successful appropriation of imperialist technology by the Kampuchean people. Yet, metaphors were never far. The whole process of tire fabrication described in *Khmer Rouge Industry* (1977) may be interpreted as a representation of Khmer Rouge nation-building, the shapeless material collected and moulded into a useful tool evoking the Cambodian people (minus 'traitors' and 'exploiters') re-formed thanks to the enlightened policies of the CPK.[9] Was such a vision of the new Kampuchea effective? According to Y Phandara, who had attended

[9] One may in hindsight have a more sinister interpretation of the movie and wonder to which extent it points to the idea of 'waste' (those who could not be 'cast'). In DK, let us not forget, 'we' was achieved at great human cost as a whole segment of the population, the 'new people' (the city residents), was discarded and eliminated.

several screenings in the Boeng Trabek reeducation camp, many of these films were not even shown in the countryside 'because they were so fake and untrue that they would have aroused the anger of the workers there'.[10] If Khmer Rouge propaganda did not work with the Cambodians themselves, could it work with an international audience? By the year 1978, this question became increasingly pressing and called for a different kind of answer, as will be seen in the next section.

Cambodia on Stage

The year 1978 was a period of image crisis for the DK regime faced with mounting accusation of human rights violations in the Western media and the escalating conflict with former ally Vietnam (diplomatic relationships were cut off in December 1977). In need of a more benevolent image, the Khmer Rouge leaders invited several foreign delegations to report about the situation in Cambodia. The visitors were mostly sympathisers from Maoist parties, pro-China organisations, and friendship associations in Western Europe and North America.[11] Unsurprisingly, the tour in DK was a fairly typical fellow traveller experience, fitting in the *delegacija* system described by Hans-Magnus Enzensberger and the 'techniques of hospitality' analysed by Paul Hollander.[12] Accompanied by a retinue of guides, drivers, and guards, the visitors were taken to model cooperatives, factories, hospitals, schools, and monuments. Their interaction with the population was limited, apart from meetings with well-coached people or Khmer Rouge officials passing off as workers and peasants.[13]

The delegations recorded their journey across DK, but these films are hardly available (their whereabouts are unknown or their authors do not wish to communicate on the subject). However, Vitorović's *Kampučija 1978* and Myrdal's *Democratic Kampuchea* are accessible. The first can be consulted at Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources in Phnom Penh and is also available on the website of the Institut National d'Audiovisuel (INA) in France. The second can be consulted at the Documentation Center of Cambodia in Phnom Penh. Obviously, none shows any image of starvation or repression, although purges

[10] Y Phandara, *Retour à Phnom Penh: Le Cambodge du génocide à la colonisation* (Paris: Editions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), p. 136.

[11] Toward the end of the year the Khmer Rouge extended the invitation to non-communist journalists Elizabeth Becker from the *Washington Post* and Richard Dudman from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

[12] Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, 'Tourists of the Revolution', in *Critical Essays*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 159–185; Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in the Search of Good Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009) (first publ. by Harper Colophon Books in 1981).

[13] See for instance Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge*, *1975–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 191–192.

were in full swing in DK at the time. Yet, although both films were made in the same locations and conditions, they produced a completely different image of the Khmer Rouge regime, as will be discussed now.

The Yugoslavian Case

The Yugoslavian delegation arrived in Cambodia in March 1978 for a two-week stay. It included journalist Dragoslav Rančić from the daily *Politika*, correspondent Slavko Stanić for the news agency Tanjug, and a team from Televizija Beograd led by film director Nikola Vitorović. Behind this invitation was, supposedly, Prime Minister Pol Pot's 'soft spot' for Tito's Republic, since the summer he had spent there as a student volunteering on the Belgrade-Zagreb highway in 1951.[14] The need for support in the non-aligned movement, then increasingly torn between China and the USSR, was certainly a more plausible explanation. However, the public relations operation did not produce the expected results. *Kampučija 1978*, the resulting movie, was presented with great caution in Western mainstream media and often followed by critical debates with opponents to the Khmer Rouge.[15] In France, the movie was broadcast in April 1978 on public channel A2. Interestingly, Vitorović participated in the post-screening discussion. His lacklustre performance, bespeaking his own doubts vis-à-vis DK, reinforced the negative impact of the movie. The public outrage demonstrated that the Yugoslavian film director had managed to strike a fine balance. While not being openly critical of the Pol Pot regime, his movie was a devastating account of life in Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

Kampučija 1978 started with a long tracking shot of Phnom Penh's Twilight Zone-like empty streets. Besides rendering powerfully the shock of the Yugoslavian journalists at their first encounter with DK, the sequence provided narrative continuity with the last events recorded by foreign journalists in Cambodia in April 1975, the forced evacuation of the cities. Cutaway shots of construction sites in the countryside crowded with workers soon clarified what had happened to the city inhabitants. 'The cities are empty but the countryside is full', the voice-over said. Phnom Penh appeared again later in the film with a similar montage that contrasted past and present, official discourse and reality. Shots of abandoned houses, closed cinemas, deserted pagodas, dead traffic lights, and white paint-covered street names alternated with footage images of a busy crossroads in Phnom Penh before 1975 and passages of the interview of

[14] Slavko Stanić, 'Pol Pot Meets with Yugoslav Journalists, Tells Life Story', ref. LD181031Y Belgrade TANJUG Domestic Service in Serbo-Croatian 0822 GMT 18 Mar 78 LD (archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia).

[15] See for instance A.C. 'Aperto Appoggio del PCI all'Aggressione al Kampuchea', in *Linea Proletaria*, 18 (May 1978). This article was published by a member of the Italy-Kampuchea Friendship Association in the Maoist newspaper *Linea Proletaria* after the movie aired on TV on 27 April 1978.

Pol Pot justifying the evacuation of the city. In that respect, *Kampučija 1978* was a precursor of the reportages made in Cambodia in 1979, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. All included long tracking shots of Phnom Penh's streets. Next to the skulls and starving children, the 'ghost city' became an iconic representation of Khmer Rouge terror and insanity, and undoubtedly Vitorović's movie played a role in that.

The sequences filmed in the countryside too exuded emptiness and sadness, such as the long shot of the coastal landscape of Kep void of any human presence. *Kampučija 1978* reflected the feelings of unease and alienation of the Yugoslavian journalists toward the 'unusual' aspects of life in DK (the term was used in the voice-over comment). 'The people do not go hungry, but they are not very happy either. There was no singing to be heard, nor did we see any folk dancing, except for a show put on by a state ensemble', Stanić wrote.[16] To the Yugoslavs, nothing looked like the socialism they knew.[17] In this context, 'them' and 'us' were clearly identified: on the one hand, a population that could not be approached; on the other hand, a small group of foreigners trying to understand the extent of Cambodia's physical and mental changes, for example the disappearance of the Buddhist clergy. The meeting with the Honourable Tran Tach Tai, a former high-ranking monk who had allegedly joined the Khmer Rouge forces during the civil war, illustrates how the television crew managed to render the highly monitored environment in which they had to report. The choice of indirect speech, the voice-over telling what the ex-monk had said (he repeated the regime's propaganda), effectively translated the Yugoslavs' perception of the many filters through which they were allowed to communicate with the locals.

Vitorović and his team tried to penetrate the daily lives of Cambodians in other ways. They used the body language of the workers as a means to unpack the population's actual life conditions. For instance, the sequence on the salt flats near Kampot had little to do with the Khmer Rouge depiction of the same site. There was no poetry there, but unbearable working conditions for women standing in the heat and salty water — 'nine hours a day, with three days of rest per month', the voice-over said as the camera lingered, medium shots, on the legs and feet of the workers. This continued in the sequence about the children on a fishing boat at the harbour of Kompong Som (ex-Sihanoukville). Full shots showed how much the workload exceeded their physical capacities, and close-ups on their faces revealed no smile at all. It was the same with the children working in a water pumps factory in the suburb of Phnom Penh. They are 'barely tall enough to operate these machines', the voice-over commented, while the

[16] Slavko Stanić, 'Kampuchea: Socialism without a Model', in *Socialist Thought and Practice*, 18.10 (October 1978), 67–84 (p. 67)

[17] On the subject, see Dragoslav Rančić, 'Kampuchea, Three Years Old', *Seven Days*, 9 May 1978 (repr. in Kampuchea Support Committee, *New War in Southeast Asia: Documents on Democratic Kampuchea and the Current Struggle for National Independence* (New York: Kampuchea Support Committee, 1979), pp. 9–10).

camera focused on the heavy machinery and the small seven or eight-year old 'workers', climbing on boxes to reach the commands or struggling with weighty contraptions, their faces frown in intense concentration rather than happiness.

At this point, a shift undeniably occurred in the definition of 'us' and 'them'. In this new configuration, 'us' was the Yugoslavs speaking on the behalf of the silent (or 'gagged') Cambodian population, in opposition to 'them', the Khmer Rouge apparatus. This may explain why Vitorović and his crew felt compelled to disclose Khmer Rouge propaganda, within the limitations of 'socialist brotherhood' of course. They could not be openly unsympathetic, but they could at least instill some critical distance, for instance through the soundtrack. Music brought a further level of affective commentary. 'Staged' scenes came with Khmer Rouge revolutionary songs, whereas the delegation's personal take on the same scenes came with an ominous music. The sequence at the opera (the state ensemble show mentioned by Stanić) provided the television crew with the perfect symbolic device. Not only did the artificial depiction of work by the performers stress, by contrast, the reality of hard labour in Cambodia. The theatrical metaphor also allowed Vitorović to convey more strongly to the public the idea of Khmer Rouge mise-en-scène. The Yugoslavs had managed to some extent to peek behind-the-scenes, or at least to lift the veil for a while, hence the damning effect (for the Khmer Rouge) of *Kampučija 1978*. Yet, the question remained of what 'ethnography' was possible in DK, when the country was seen from 'a bubble that glided by people and places' as journalist Elizabeth Becker once described her own visit.[18] As will be argued in the next section, Myrdal's *Democratic Kampuchea* proposed a completely different perspective on that issue.

Kampuchea as Diary

The Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association delegation arrived in Cambodia on 12 August 1978 for two weeks.[19] Besides China's old friend writer Jan Myrdal, it included chairman Gunnar Bergström, Hedda Ekerwald, and Marita Wikander.[20] Much has been written on their journey, including the

[18] Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998 (first publ. by Simon and Schuster in 1986), p. 399.

[19] Established in April 1977, the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association replaced the initial support workgroup Kampuchea born out of the anti-Vietnam War movement and the Swedish Clarté League, an old socialist student association affiliated for a time with the Communist League Marxist-Leninist (KFML). See: Peter Fröberg Idling, *De Glimlach van Pol Pot: Over en Zweedse Reis door het Cambodja van de Rode Khmer* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2009), pp. 65–66; Per-Olof Eriksson, 'När vibildade Vänskapsforening', *Kampuchea*, 2, 1977; Perry Johansson, 'Mao and the Swedish United Front against USA', in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, ed. by Yangwen Zheng, Hing Liu, and Michael Szonyi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 217–240 (pp. 223–226).

[20] Marita Wikander was the wife of Someth Huor, a former representative of DK in East Berlin who

articles the delegates published upon return and Peter Fröberg Idling's popular book *Pol Pots Leende* (2006). As well, Myrdal's pro-Khmer Rouge positions, unchanged since the 1970s, are well known. These make his articulation of ethnography and ideology a unique one. As the movie's first sequence, which showed the Swedes visiting Angkor Wat, reminded it, the link between ethnography and ideology had long been a concern for Myrdal. Obviously, the latter's appearance in front of the most identifiable landmark in Cambodia reinforced his status as eyewitness. But for those who knew his previous works, it was also a reminder of his earlier engagement with the country, which he had visited with his wife Gun Kessle on the invitation of Sihanouk in 1968, in the days of heavy bombing by the US Army. The resulting account, *Angkor: An Essay on Art and Imperialism*, was a lengthy discussion of ethnographic issues. Through the deconstruction of the myths of European superiority, Myrdal devised a political project based on cultural alterity. This, in his view, was how solidarities with the Third World against imperialism could be built.[21] The meaning of 'us', thus, could not be clearer. It included those, non-Westerners and Westerners alike, who participated physically or intellectually in this great cultural and political change.

Logically, 'them' included those standing in the way of change, such as Vitorović with his defamatory movie on DK. Myrdal conceived of *Democratic Kampuchea* as the refutation of it. Therefore, he had to tackle the 'ghost city' issue. Myrdal knew it was a critical point. Unable to provide a sound explanation about the situation in Phnom Penh, he did not dwell on it, dedicating only one sequence to the subject. The few shots of Phnom Penh's streets (where, conveniently, some truck happened to drive) were followed by a long take of the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda, possibly as a counter-effect demonstrating the Khmer Rouge's respect for Cambodian heritage. The next scene was a tracking shot from a boat going down the stream of the Tonle Bassac River. During the cruise, the Swedes encountered a man on a pirogue and a group of children swimming and playing in the river — having a good time, unlike the children in Vitorović's film. This sequence may be considered as the movie's actual opening. Far from the violent contrast between cities and countryside established in the first minutes of *Kampučija 1978*, Myrdal took the spectator to a fluid journey into the new Kampuchea. The story he told from that point, using Khmer Rouge official numbers and arguments, was that of a successful economic and social experiment. Myrdal depicted the mutual transformation of man and nature in a style close to that of Khmer Rouge film production. Through the alternation of wide shots of landscapes and medium shots of enthusiastic farmers and workers, he reconstructed the entire line of rice production, from the building of dams enabling the control of waters to the final product: the big bowls of rice served

had not been heard of since his return to Cambodia in 1977.

[21] On the subject see E. San Juan Jr., *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

at cooperatives and the bags of rice for export stored at warehouses in Kompong Som.

Myrdal certainly thought he was filming DK from within, as one of 'us'. He made his standpoint clear from the outset. 'These are notes from a journey in DK during the monsoons. These notes are biased', he said at the start of the movie. Those familiar with his *Report from a Chinese Village* knew what he meant since he had provided a detailed explanation of the term 'bias' in the book: the subjective inclination colouring any 'objective' account. His own was 'of an intellectual and humanistic tradition' and a 'peasant bias' stemming from Sweden's historical tradition of peasant insurrection and his own family story.[22] How did this influence his filming of the locals in DK? Myrdal tried to show the companionable mingling of the delegates with the Cambodians — for instance, Bergström was shot sitting with women and children at a bus station. Of course, the shots of peasants smiling at the camera emphasised the friendly atmosphere. Yet, far from offering the empathetic scrutiny to be expected from such a champion of peasant revolutions, Myrdal made no attempt to go beyond the façade. He ignored the small signs such as 'a wayward facial expression or something in people's eyes' that might have revealed a different reality.[23] In that sense, his depiction of Cambodian farmers was a benevolent objectification that turned them into interchangeable props serving a pre-determined discourse. This raised the question who was the actual 'hero' in the movie — the Kampuchean people or Myrdal himself? Drawing on scholar Elena Balzamo's analysis of Myrdal's identification with specific causes as the projection of personal issues onto the political realm, one may interpret his ethnography of DK as the combination of emotional blindness and ideological tunnel vision.[24] Myrdal did not only hold a mirror back to the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia was also the very mirror in which he contemplated himself. In that sense, the photo published in the book *Gunnar in the Living Hell*, showing Myrdal standing on a muddy pathway and filming the Kampuchean landscape, is an apt representation of the ethnography of fellow travellers in the Third World, Westerners observing themselves being on the 'right' side of progressive struggles.[25]

[22] Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *Report from a Chinese Village* (London: Heinemann, 1965), pp. xiv–xv.

[23] He had done the same in China. See Perry Johansson, *Saluting the Yellow Emperor: A Case of Swedish Sinography* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 211.

[24] Elena Balzamo, 'Jan Myrdal: L'Autobiographie comme apologie', *Germanica*, 20 (1997), 31–45 (pp. 36-37).

[25] *Gunnar in the Living Hell* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2008) contains about hundred photos of the travel of the Swedish delegation in DK, courtesy of Bergström. It was also an exhibition project presented in Cambodia, and in another form at the Living History Forum in Stockholm in 2009-2010. See Conny Mithander, 'From the Holocaust to the Gulag: The Crimes of Nazism and Communism Swedish post-1989 Memory Politics', *European Studies*, 30 (2013), 177–208.

Conclusion

To the untrained eye, films about Khmer Rouge Cambodia all look the same. Yet, as seen with the impact of *Kampučija 1978* in DK and in Western Europe, editing choices could make a difference and enlarge the gap between mere propaganda and the attempt, however limited, to deconstruct the scenery elaborated by the CPK leaders. The movies of Vitorović and Myrdal both deployed in the wake of Khmer Rouge visual production. Yet, they offered contrasted ethnographies of DK, organised around distinct perceptions of 'us' and 'them', solidarity, identification, and denunciation. By shifting the focus on small dissonances, the 'parallax effect' enables a more nuanced view of the representation of DK in films in the years 1975–1978, far from the monolithic perception people may have of it today. As such, it helps reframe questions about the representation of cultural difference, as Ginsburg suggests, and thus contributes new perspectives to the analysis of the role of visual culture in the memorialisation of the Khmer Rouge period.[26]

[26] Ginsburg, p. 65.

The Spring Thunder[1]
Revisiting the Naxal Movement in Indian Cinema

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Abstract

This article investigates why and how the Naxal movement, a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist armed revolutionary movement which emerged in May 1967 in India, has been repeatedly addressed, adapted, and accommodated in Indian cinema. As an organized political movement with specific manifesto and vision of the nature of the state, the Naxal movement attempted to disrupt and dismantle the quasi-feudal Indian social structure and an oppressive Indian state that functioned still under colonial administrative regulation, as caretaker of interests of the powerful classes. In this article, I argue that the Naxal movement helped Indian cinema to map out the history and internal architecture of political dissent in post-independence India and construct a counter-nationalist discourse. The paper aims to evaluate how the Naxal Movement serves as a resource to represent the politics of dissent in India in the 1970s in parallel cinema and as a critique of the neo-liberal policies of the Indian State in the postmillennial Bollywood films. It aims to analyse selected films that deal with the Naxal/Maoist movements in India as a counter historiography.

Introduction

The socio-political context of India between 1947 and 1970s was tremendously tumultuous, marked by several mass movements and peasant uprisings that were led by different Communist organizations. The most influential among these was the armed revolutionary movement that began in May 1967, known popularly as the Naxal movement. It closely followed the Chinese Cultural revolution

[1] Radio Peking on 28 June 1967 and an editorial in *The People's Daily* (an organ of the Central Committee, Communist Party of China) on 5 July 1967 used this allusive phrase to refer to the Naxal Movement: 'A peal of *spring thunder has crashed over the land of India*' [emphasis added] <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/peoples-daily/1967/07/05.htm> [accessed 12 November 2017]

[2] I'd like to thank Dennis Hanlon, Syed Sajjad, Omar Ahmed, Grazia Ingravalle and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and feedback on the draft of this paper.

led by Mao Zedong as its model and incorporated Marxist-Leninist principles, declaring the 1970s as 'the decade of liberation'. The Naxal movement was the culmination of other revolutionary peasant movements such as the Telangana Rebellion[3] (1946-1951) as well as the Tebhaga[4] (1946-47) that challenged and aimed to change India's quasi-feudal social structure. The 1970s was also a decade of liberation for Indian cinema. It was during this decade that the search for a film-aesthetics that was distinct from the mainstream reached its culmination. This led to the flourishing of an alternative film practice through the Indian Avant Garde and parallel cinema in subsequent decades. Such a cinematic praxis seems to have partially influenced post-millennial Bollywood[5] and indie films with political contents.

This article investigates how the Naxal movement has been repeatedly adapted and accommodated in Indian parallel cinema and Bollywood, albeit through very different approaches. Though there are other Indian mainstream film industries that produced films on the Naxal movement, they are considered 'regional' – unlike Bollywood, which is projected not only as India's 'national' cinema but also a cultural commodity in the global market broadly.[6] Despite considerable differences in aesthetics, content, funding and target audience, both parallel cinema and Bollywood share a transnational reach through festival circuits and global distribution channels respectively, unlike Indian regional cinemas. This transnational reach prompted me to compare films from these two rather antithetical film practices. In this essay, I therefore explore Indian film history through close textual and historical analysis within a Marxist framework, so as to unravel the socio-cultural impact of these films.

Chronicles of political movements aiming for social change have provided a recurring motif in film, as exemplified in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, 1925) and *October* (*Oktyabr'*,1928), Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri*, 1966), Godards's *La Chinoise* (1967), Littin's *The Promised Land* (*La Tierra Prometida*, 1973), and Brocka's *Fight for Us* (*Orapronobis*, 1989). In the same vein, Indian parallel cinema from the 1970s on has documented the Naxal movement as a pivotal moment in post-independence India, archiving/constructing the history of the politics of dissent through cinema. As a thematic kernel, the Naxal movement helped parallel cinema to align itself to New Wave movements in different parts of the world in terms of content and aesthetics. It also helped parallel cinema trigger a

[3] The Telangana peasants' armed struggle was a rebellion against the feudal landlords in the Telangana region of Hyderabad.
[4] The Tebhaga movement, led by the Kisan Sabha (the peasants' wing of the Communist Party of India) demanded two thirds of the harvests for the sharecroppers while a third being given to the landowning feudal lords.
[5] Here I refer to the post-1991 Mumbai mainstream Hindi film industry after it was accorded the industry status following the economic liberalization of India.
[6]*Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance,* ed. by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

transnational cinema project prior to its formal shaping as a global conceptual category. Like 'transnational cinema', Indian parallel cinema was also a response 'to the perceived insufficiencies of existing categories such as National Cinema'.[7] The Naxal movement further helped this emerging form to represent dissent in India, both in terms of political activism and the politics of subversive film practices. These filmmakers rigorously followed both forms of action, seeking to create a new cinematic language that was distinct from the mainstream. In place of mainstream narratives that revolved around individuals, parallel cinema represented 'the spirit and life breath of a whole people'.[8]

Bollywood began to depict the movement only in the late 1990s, after the decline of parallel cinema and long after the repression of the Naxal movement by the Indian state. References to Naxalism are interweaved in the plots in the mainstream and in parallel cinema in different ways. Both filmmaking practices address issues of nationalism and counter-nationalism in singular and remarkably different ways, which merit careful study.

The first part of this paper focuses on a set of texts that invoke active spectatorship by inviting critical engagement from the audience, and moreover come to serve as a repertoire of images and thematic motifs for later mainstream films on the Naxal movement. The second part examines how Bollywood films are functional to the maintenance of the state's ideological apparatus despite their radical content.[9] I restrict my argument to *The Adversary* (*Pratidwandi*, Satyajit Ray, 1970), and *Calcutta 71* (*Kolkata 71*, Mrinal Sen, 1972) from parallel cinema, as well as *Squared Formation* (*Chakravyuh*, Prakash Jha, 2012), and *Newton* (Amit Masurkar, 2017) from Bollywood.

Chronicling Revolution, Representing Dissent: Indian Parallel Cinema of the 1970s

The depiction of the Naxal movement on 'national' screen matches the emergence of the Indian parallel cinema inaugurated by Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* in 1969. There were several reasons behind the choice to represent the Naxal movement in parallel cinema narratives. Firstly, filmmakers such as Ray and Sen were deeply dissatisfied with mainstream cinema's falling (and failing) standards in terms of maturity, content, stylistic sophistication, and technique.[10]

[7] Vijaya Devadas, 'Rethinking Transnational Cinema: The Case of Tamil Cinema', in *Senses of Cinema*, 49 (November 2006) <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/film-history-conference-papers/transnational-tamil-cinema/> [accessed 19 October 2017].

[8] Jorge Sanjines, 'Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema', in *New Latin American Cinema*, ed. by Michael T. Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 62–70 (p. 63).

[9] For details see Madhav Prasad, 'Introduction', in *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 6-14.

[10] Satyajit Ray, 'What is Wrong with Indian Films?', in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Scott MacKenzie (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 117-120 (first publ. in *Calcutta Statesman* (1948)).

This led to the search for an alternative idiom which spoke to the international audience through form and content, yet was remained uniquely Indian in its cultural representation.[11] The potential of film form inspired them to use it as a political tool to appeal to the domestic audience as well. India's prolonged history of anticolonial struggle coupled with the left political movements that sought to transform its quasi-feudal structure created a formidable intellectual class as well as proletarian contingencies who were waiting to engage in conversations about social transformations through artistic means. The parallel filmmakers simply needed to tap in to this social class to counter the pressure of commodification of film media. Besides, because 'Bengal [had] been in an increasing state of political flux' since the 1960s,[12] it became necessary to document this in cinema. By doing this they were able to establish a link between film and contemporary reality, assuming their responsibility as artists and embodying underrepresented history. In one of his interviews Mrinal Sen comments, '[t]hat was a time when there was a lot of unrest in Calcutta and I cannot just pull myself out of the atmosphere in which I grew…. That is when … I used to bring the physical reality onto the screen'.[13] It was as much a search for the idiom and form as it was for content, so as to suitably complement their film practice. The filmmakers that shared the Naxal movement's sense of desperation and urgency to transform a stagnant system found apt cinematic and stylistic content within the movement.

Secondly, the Naxal Movement — with its far-reaching consequences in Indian society, echoing the transnational revolutionary waves of the late-1960s — provided both a metaphor and a statement of alignment which was ambivalent in the case of Ray, but explicit in the case of Sen.[14] It also helped to put Indian parallel cinema in dialogue with the currents of Third Cinema in the mostly apolitical world cinema of that period. Although some critics explain the sympathetic representation of the movement on film in terms merely of an artistic infatuation of filmmakers, there is more to it than this. Parallel filmmakers sought to capture the 1970s in their films in order to embody contemporary history; this would be impossible without addressing the Naxal movement. For Mrinal Sen 'the most important purpose of cinema is political commentary and documentation'.[15] He mentions serving three mistresses while making films, 'the text (*the subject*), the medium (*the language of cinema*) and my own time'.[16] Such a political conundrum seems to have moved Ray too, who had avoided political content

[11] Arun Kaul and Mrinal Sen, 'Manifesto of the New Cinema Movement', in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures*, pp. 165-168 (first publ. in *Close Up* (1968)).
[12] Indrani Majumdar, 'Postscript', in Marie Seton, *Portrait of a Director: Satyajit Ray* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), p. 283.
[13] From *Mrinal Sen: An Era in Cinema* (Rajdeep Paul, 2016) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnZd-uNXlSk&t=629s> [accessed 9 September 2017].
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Mrinal Sen, *Always Being Born* (New Delhi: Stellar Publishers, 2006), p. 85 [emphasis in the original].

in his films before making *The Adversary* in 1970. The 1970s were, moreover, the decade in which India witnessed the Emergency for 21 months, between 25 June 1975 and 21 March 1977, which effectively impaired Indian democracy. It was also the epoch in which Ray 'embarked in a documentary interlude',[17] making his Calcutta Trilogy: *The Adversary*, *Company Limited* (*Seemabaddha*, 1971) and *The Middleman* (*Jana Aranya*, 1976). He used documentary footage of 'Calcutta streets and actual political demonstrations',[18] that he filmed along with ambient sound and montage to represent on screen the spirit of the time. By representing the Naxal movement, filmmakers, like Ray, chronicled their own politics of dissent and subversion while creating a cinematic counter-culture that responded to the viscerally 'Pavlovian' mainstream cinema, which either stayed away from the controversy or made highly clandestine reference to the political chaos.

The depiction of the Naxal movement and its impact on people offered these filmmakers a further opportunity to expose the Repressive State Apparatus (RSAs)[19] such as the police, government, judiciary and its different wings as well as semi-government organizations. These RSAs followed the colonial model, albeit used in post-colonial India to forge a consensual equilibrium between the ruling class and their subjects. For example, in the first interview sequence of *The Adversary*, the exchanges between the members of the interview board and Siddhartha, the protagonist, for a Government job, exposes the strong prejudice of the Indian state towards the ongoing Communist movements in different parts of the world (fig. 1). Siddhartha's opinion, referring to the Vietnam war, and the people's remarkable heroism resisting it, as the most extraordinary achievement of humanity in twentieth century over the moon-landing, makes the interviewers/authority figures visibly disturbed. Baffled by his answer, one of the interviewers asks him: 'Are you a communist?'. The interview sequences in general and this question, in particular, immediately solicit a reference to McCarthyism, the communist witch-hunt and the trial of the Hollywood ten in post-World War II America. Moreover, the interview sequences in the film resemble custodial interrogation and courtroom trials that elliptically represent the Naxal activists' plight under an oppressive regime (fig. 2). This interview/interrogation motif recurs in other Indian films that depict the Naxal movement. Ray subtly incorporates his own critique of the nation into the narrative. When asked who the Prime Minister of Britain was at the time of independence, Siddhartha casually enquires: 'Whose independence, Sir?' (fig. 3), immediately invoking the communist slogan of the period: 'Yeh Azadi jhuta hai [This is a false independence]'.

The Naxal movement helped parallel cinema unmask the vacuity of

[17] Majumdar, p. 283.
[18] Ibidem.
[19] See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

Fig. 1: Hegemonic paranoia towards revolutionary politics

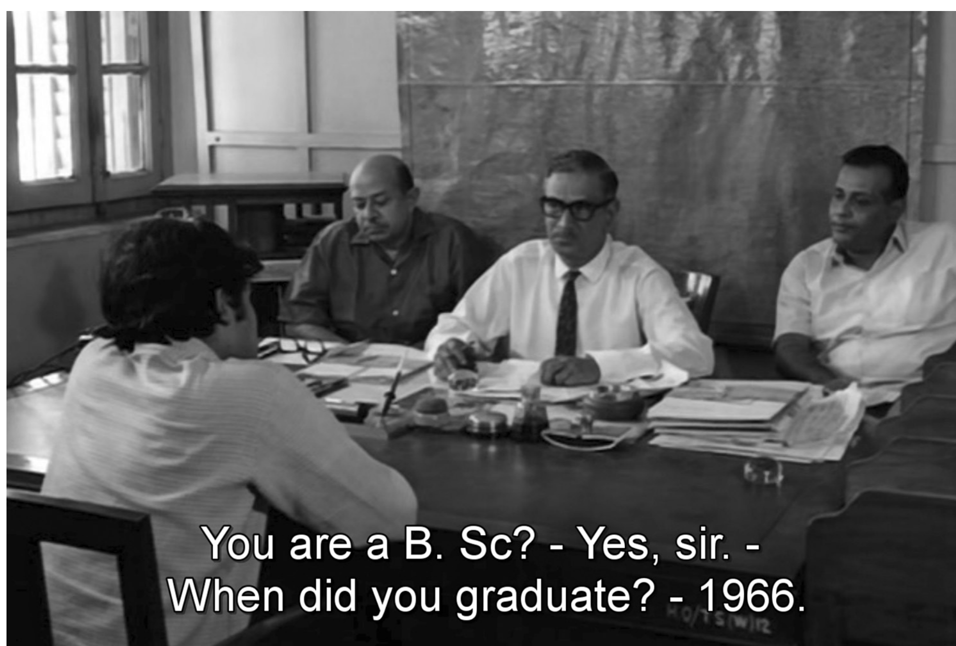

Fig. 2: Job interviews elliptically represent custodial interrogations

Fig. 3: This is a false independence

development discourse by the state on one hand, and the condition of the disenfranchised populace suffering from the trauma of partition, social inequality, brutal poverty and hunger combined with unemployment, on the other. After the fateful interview, Siddhartha goes to an airconditioned theatre to avoid the scorching sun of the Calcutta road. As he enters the hall, the mandatory propaganda documentary on a five-year plan for national growth, was playing. Without paying any attention to that, he closes his eyes to take a nap. However, his siesta is ruined by a blast that references a Naxal bombing.

Mrinal Sen's Calcutta Trilogy, comprising *Interview* (1971), *Calcutta 71* (1972), and *The Guerrilla Fighter* (*Padatik*, 1973), similarly represents these concerns. There is a gradual progression in presentation of Sen's cinematic polemic in the trilogy through which he investigates the cause and effect of the angry outburst through the Naxal movement in Indian society. *Interview* foregrounds the collective disillusionment of the disenfranchised Indians about the nature of the Indian state and its Nehruvian socialist mixed economy, with the protagonist serving as an allegory of the nation.[20] Having introduced the class-based structural deprivation of ordinary people, Sen goes on to explore

[20] The economic policy of the development model adopted by Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister was that of a mixed economy based on socialist ideals, with the private and public sector coexisting.

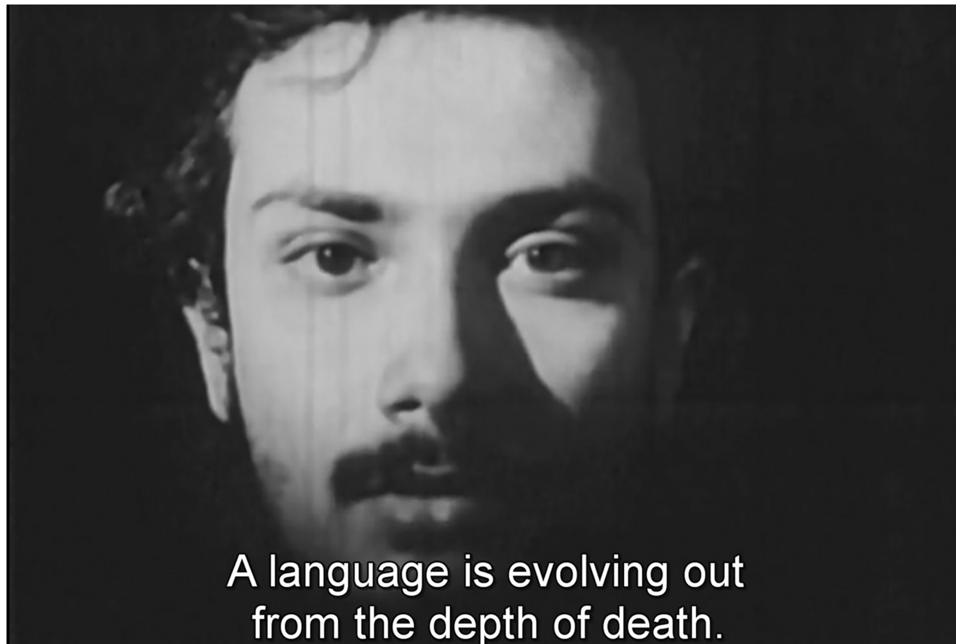

Fig 4: Radical revolutionary politics as the language of resistance

further the long history of exploitation in India under colonialism together with feudalism, and mass movements resisting this coalition, in order to contextualize the Naxal movement as its vertex (fig. 4). The voice over narration in the opening sequence of *Calcutta 71* epitomizes the spirit of *The Communist Manifesto*. The film critiques the colonial nature of the Indian state and advocates the need for decolonization for a complete social transformation. Through the objective precision of a documentary, the film represents the 'dialectics of hunger'[21] in India highlighting the interconnection between the infamous Bengal famine of 1943 and the Food movement of 1959, demanding food security, with other movements building the base for the Naxal movement in the late 1960s. Sen points out: 'I wanted to interpret the restlessness, the turbulence of the period that is 1971 and what it is due to […]. What we wanted to do in [*Calcutta 71*] was to define history, put it in its right perspective'.[22] An eclectic interspersing of contemporary documentary footage, location shooting, jump cuts and montage marked Sen's aesthetics of cinema of the oppressed, constructed agitprop; giving his Calcutta Trilogy the look of a newsreel thereby helped him to archive his 'time' and the cityscape in cinema.

[21] Udayan Gupta, 'Introducing Mrinal Sen', *Jump Cut*, 12–13 (1976), 9–10 <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/jc12-13folder/MrinalSen.html> [accessed 20 March 2017].
[22] Ibidem.

The Calcutta Trilogies of Ray and Sen are complementary, with each film providing important blocks in the counter-historiographic discourses on contemporary India that they construct. While Sen's films present the social and political realities from the perspectives of direct political engagement of the protagonists, Ray represents the view of those disengaged from political activism yet equally affected by it. *Calcutta 71* represents the memories of underdevelopment and hunger[23] whereas *Adversary* foregrounds the social, cultural and ideological discordance that symbolize the rapture within the nation. Ray's style is more akin to Italian neo-realism and the French New Wave, while Sen's is motivated by the aesthetics of hunger and the imperfect cinema of Latin American. Their films on the Naxal movement work simultaneously as visible evidence of the political mayhem and state-sponsored violence against political dissent in India, and the visual archive of political activism in Calcutta.

The Naxal movement was instrumental to parallel cinema's impetus to go beyond the 'swadeshi enterprise'[24] of that national cinema which sought to validate the nation-building project, by uncritically recycling cultural stereotypes of 'Indianness' on screen. The political elite considered the Naxal revolt against the Indian state an anti-national insurgency that destabilized consensual equilibrium. It is not surprising therefore that national cinema, working as what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA),[25] abstained from representing it while the movement was at its helm.

Spectacularizing the Revolution: Bollywood Revisits the Naxal Movement

While parallel cinema actively ventured to free itself from the 'swadeshi enterprise', Bollywood consistently held onto it. After being accorded with

[23] This film is thematically and aesthetically aligned with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* (*Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968) and Glauber Rocha's *Land in Anguish* (*Terra em Transe*, 1967), demonstrating Rocha's influential aesthetics of hunger.

[24] M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 2. The term *Swadeshi* (literally meaning indigenous, or of one's own country) has a close association with India's nationalist struggle for Independence from the colonial rule. The term *swadeshi enterprise* was first used by noted Indian film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha in 1987; Madhava Prasad borrows the term to refer to specific characteristics of Indian popular cinema.

[25] ISAs, as Althusser points out are institutions/configurations that remains formally outside the state control, yet which propagate the ideology of the state. ISAs are different from the RSA in their apparent detachment from the state. Whereas RSAs are formal instruments through which the state functions, ISAs function subliminally to realise the same goal, i.e. to establish and perpetuate the ideology and the hegemony of the state. In addition to education, religious institutions, media, and family, ISAs also include the social media platforms and cultural festivals that disseminate the ethnocratic Hindutva ideology of the present regime. However, prior to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming to power with an absolute majority in 2014, Bollywood and Indian TV were the most potent state apparatuses used for ideological conditioning of the masses towards the Hindutva ideology.

industry status in the 1990s, following the official denouncement of the Nehruvian economy in favour of a neoliberal one by the Indian state, Bollywood experienced a dramatic change in terms of funding, marketing, distribution, exhibition and the target audience in the process of becoming a global cultural commodity for India. Multiplexes transformed the film-viewing experience into 'an elite affair', and Bollywood films were gentrified to cater to the changing audience demography.[26] Ganti demonstrates how Bollywood began to erase traces of 'poverty, labour, and rural life' from the mid-1990s as part of this gentrification process.[27] Post-millennial Bollywood films use the Naxal movement to bring these traces back within the visual style to make them 'realistic'. Like the parallel filmmakers, the intent of responding to the contemporary political situation was also at work for some of the directors while depicting the Naxal movement. Prakash Jha notes: 'I strive to create realistic images […] content […] weave everything into a popular grammar […] make it engaging because everybody has to see the film, and it has to compete with other films. It's a big battle for me to package my stories for a commercial audience'.[28] During this period people made films with the overseas market, online exhibition platforms and international festivals in mind. Unlike the 1990s, these films aimed to reach to audiences beyond the Indian diaspora. It was therefore imperative for them to break the popular myth about Bollywood films as musicals, offering fresh perspectives. This led the scriptwriters and directors to look for 'realistic' and relatable issues, to introduce novelty while representing the ground reality about India. Naxalism and Maoism — with their long histories of conflict with the Indian state — made Bollywood films appear realistic and relatable to the international audience, thus acquiring parallel cinema's 'artistic seriousness' through the co-option of political content, without disturbing the syntax of cinematic spectacle and attraction. Following Hollywood, Bollywood too ventured 'to create a "world cinema" gaze within a commercial […] framework', by modifying its representational priority and pattern.[29]

Besides this, a change in the post-1992 Indian political scenario may also be responsible for Bollywood's shift in representational priorities. Prasad shows the outward expansion of the political spectrum during this era in India. Rising Hindutva nationalism attempted to redefine 'political unity on a communal foundation' by appropriating of the 'fragile national project,' whilst rampaging capitalism accompanying globalization eroded the function of the state as a political constraint.[30] There was also the emergence of Islamist terrorism as a

[26] Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2012), p. 77.
[27] Ivi., p. 79
[28] Samuel Wigley 'Facing Deadlock: Prakash Jha on Chakravyuh' (2014), <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news/prakash-jha-chakravyuh> [accessed on 21 April 2017].
[29] Deborah Shaw, 'Babel and the Global Hollywood Gaze', *Situations*, 4.1 (Fall–Winter 2011), 11-31 (p. 11).
[30] Prasad, pp. 8-9.

backlash to Hindutva fundamentalism — its pinnacle being the demolition of the Babri Mosque by the Sangh combine.[31] Outside this religious fundamentalist politics, the Maoist movement was re-consolidated through the Red Corridor,[32] a reaction to neoliberal policies of the Indian state. The representation of Naxalites as a radicalized group of individuals in Bollywood, such as in *Chamku* (Kabeer Kaushik, 2008), *Reign of the Overlord* (*Sarkar Raj*, Ram Gopal Varma, 2008),[33] *Shanghai* (Dibakar Banerjee, 2012),[34] and *M.K.B.K.M.* (*Matru Ki Bijlee Ka Mandola*, Vishal Bhardwaj, 2013) appear as non-communal secular ways of referencing terrorism and political disruption in India. In this section I discuss how in two post-millennial Bollywood films, i.e. *Squared Formation* and *Newton*, the Naxal movement is used as the narrative backdrop and the source of drama contributing to their genericity. Both films represent a balanced picture of the Naxal movement and the oppressive role of the Indian state, while attempting to unravel the issue of corruption and the corporation-politician nexus in India. However, the films are designed in conformity with the nationalist discourse that promote the idea of the nation as a benevolent family with the government acting as protective patriarchs.

As part of its narrative, *Squared Formation* represents the reinvigoration of Maoist influences as a counter point to the intensified neo-liberal policies of the Indian state, leading to a Naxalite declaration of war against the nexus of the state and multinational-corporations, over the acquisition of natural-resources-rich land — which seriously impaired the environment and the rights of the tribal populations, as well as the socially marginalized Indians inhabiting those spaces. The conflict escalated to such an extent that the Indian Prime Minister declared Naxalism as 'the biggest internal security challenge', seemingly impairing 'the country's growth'.[35] In labelling Naxals thus, he echoed his political predecessor, sharing this opinion as a pretext to declare the Emergency rule of 1975 to deal with the projected 'threat' from the voices of the dissent. Jha's film includes the Prime Minister's comment and a brief history of the Naxal movement in India, which is delivered through fictional TV news. This was to introduce the movement as the backdrop of his film, immediately establishing a foreboding atmosphere to launch dramatic tension. Instead of a disclaimer, the film begins with a 'claimer' that it 'is based on real-life incidents and characters and nothing is coincidental'.

[31] Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan used the term for the outfit popularly known as the *Sangh Parivar* comprising *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), *Visva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), *Bajrang Dal* (BD) and *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), that led the demolition of the controversial Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992 completely transforming the nature of Indian political scenario. This event marks the watershed moment for the rise of the ethnocratic Hindutva fundamentalism in India. See Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Sage, 2008).

[32] The name of the extensive area covering more than 100 districts in eastern, central and southern India, strongly influenced by Maoist insurgency.

[33] Inspired by Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part 2* (1974).

[34] The film is a Bollywood adaptation of Costa Gavras' *Z* (1969).

[35] Manmohan Singh, 'Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security', *Hindu,* 24 May 2010, p. 1.

Interestingly, although the film denounces its apparent 'fictionality' through a 'claimer', the action of the film takes place in a fictional space named Nandighat.

Squared Formation, a well-researched film on Naxalism in contemporary India, is a political thriller about friendship, estrangement, fratricide, political solidarity, corruption and mis-governance, cast in the Mahabharatik mythical mould. The story revolves around three friends who went to college together. Two of them, Adil Khan (Arjun Rampal) and Rhea Menon (Esha Gupta) become police officers. The third friend, Kabir (Abhay Deol) drops out of the police training academy, unable to cope with the bureaucratic hierarchy, leading to estrangement among the group of friends. The title of the film, *Chakravyuha*, a highly complicated military formation used in the fratricidal battle of Kurukshetra in the *Mahabharata,* refers to a tragic episode in the epic. In it, Abhimanyu, the 16-year-old son of Arjuna, knew how to break this formation but did not know how to get out of it. Consequently, after voluntarily getting into it, he was trapped and was killed by seven other great warriors — all blood relatives. This term acquired proverbial significance in several modern Indian languages, referring to a situation that does not allow anyone to escape unharmed. The title of the film plays out the metaphorical meaning, signifying an inescapable situation that Kabir voluntarily puts himself into to help Adil, only to be killed by him at the end. The film also uses the fratricidal reference, associating it to the Naxal movement, which saw the murder of revolting Indians by compatriots serving the state. Adil and his wife Rhea are posted in Nandighat, a fictional location in Madhya Pradesh, to subdue the Naxal influence and enable a multinational corporation to acquire the tribal land for a business project. Kabir, a talented telecommunication engineer, volunteers to infiltrate the Naxal guerrillas to provide inside information to help Adil complete his mission. However, after living with the revolutionaries for some time, Kabir begins to sympathize with their plight and joins them. This dismantles the plan as Kabir then becomes a threat to the Indian state. Adil and Rhea lead an attack on the Naxal guerrillas, killing Kabir along with a lot of his comrades. Though the film did not perform well in the domestic market, it received the Indian Maoists' approval for its depiction of their politics. With objections for certain exaggerations, the Maoists expressed their gratitude for political representation on the big screen.[36]

Masurkar, a successful director of critically acclaimed independent films, brilliantly blends necessary components from the national context with 'transnational socio-political issues'[37] contextualizing his black comedy, drama and political satire *Newton* in alignment with the 'growing discourse of politics as an international issue'.[38] Though *Newton* depicts Indian elections as central

[36] Jaideep Deogharia, 'Maoists Give 4 Stars to "Chakravyuh"', *Times of India*, 11 November 2012 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/Maoists-give-4-stars-to-Chakravyuh/articleshow/17176710.cms?referral=PM> [accessed 21 February 2018].
[37] Shaw, p. 12.
[38] Alex Lines, 'Adelaide Film Festival: Week 2 Report', *Film Enquiry*, 24 October 2017 <https://www.filminquiry.com/adelaide-film-festival-week-2-report/> [accessed 20 February 2018].

to India's democracy, it also represents several social issues that Jha's film also addresses. The film depicts the Maoist insurgency as politics of disruption impairing the nation's growth and subtly pointing to a consequent disillusionment of the tribal people with the Naxals (fig. 5). Masurkar uses elliptical references to the Naxal movement in his film. Apart from the opening sequence, in which a group of masked armed men kill a politician for having ignored the Naxal's call to boycott the election, the reference to Naxal/Maoist politics is present only through graffiti and discussion among characters in the film. In terms of filmmaking practice, Masurkar seems to do what Alejandro González Iñárritu does in Hollywood: creating hybrid texts as part of the cinema of globalization, amalgamating elements from both national and world cinema to 'create thematic links'.[39] The first postmillennial Bollywood film to receive a government grant of INR ten million, *Newton* had its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival, where it was awarded the CICAE [40] award for the best film before its release in India. A massive box office success that received critical acclaim in India and abroad, this film lauds the electoral systems as a pillar of participatory democracy, leading to social progress as a binary of the revolutionary politics of the Maoists (fig. 6).

Despite being critical of the neoliberal policies of the Indian state run by 'the coalition of bourgeoisie, the rural rich and the bureaucratic elite',[41] corruption, the systemic violence targeted against the disenfranchised, these films do not rigorously challenge the status quo. They fit the fourth category of Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni's classification as films with 'an explicitly political content […] but which do not effectively criticize the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery'.[42] Consequently, political dissent is either tokenized without repercussions or is memorialized as a deviant political action. This helps Bollywood create a narrative of permissive 'difference' while working as the ISA. For example, *Squared Formation* represents the Naxal movement as the rural/tribal India's struggle against the hegemony of the state (fig. 7). It makes subtle references to Maoist politics by using Mao Zedong quotes that serve as slogans. Ironically, a police officer in charge of subduing the movement counters a crucial slogan to turn the villagers against the revolutionaries and win them over as abiding subjects of the Indian state (fig. 8). Nevertheless, compared to other postmillennial Bollywood films on the same subject, *Squared Formation* tries to present a balanced picture of reality through its subtly subversive narrative, representing the contestations of the competitive patriarchy in India. The subversive masculinity of Maoist activists is shown in combative conflict

[39] Shaw, p. 13.
[40] Confédération Internationale des Cinémas d'Art et d'Essai.
[41] Prasad, p. 7.
[42] Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema, Ideology, Criticism', *Screen*, 12.1 (1971), 27–38 (p. 32).

Fig. 5: Maoist politics as an archetype of counter-hegemonic resistance in India

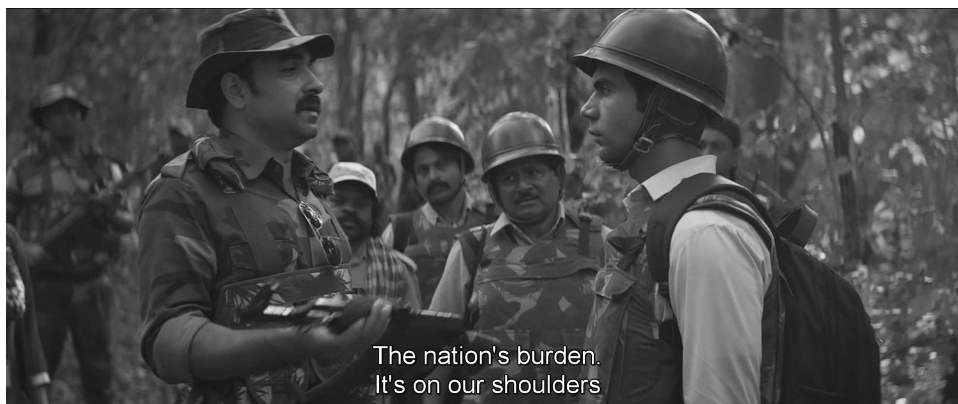

Fig. 6: Newton: critiquing heavy military intervention by the Indian state

Fig. 7: Police-politician-corporate nexus working against the interest of the dispossessed

Fig. 8: The Indian state appropriates the revolutionary slogans used by the Naxals

with the 'hegemonic masculinity' of the state.[43] Images of gun-wielding guerrillas fighting against the state have been repeatedly employed in films thanks to their spectacular potential to concretize on-screen the invisible political expediencies.

Unlike parallel cinema, Bollywood films are teleological and 'Pavlovian'. They trigger a passive spectatorship and are made in consonance with the 'conceptual or belief system'[44] of the Indian state, conforming to the mainstream cinema as part of the Ideological State Apparatus. It is Pavlovian because it elicits 'conditioned response […] based on the prediction and control of observable behaviour'.[45] These films are pedagogical and authoritarian insofar as they limit the viewer's analytic capability while legitimizing an authorized version of nationalism and proscribe the politics of dissent that strongly opposes the oppressive regime of the state. As socio-politically conscious filmmakers repeatedly making films on contemporary issues, both Jha and Masurkar provide nuanced depictions that are strewn with representational stereotypes and subtle contradictions. For example, intercommunal friendship (Adil and Kabir), interstate and intercommunal marriage (Adil and Rhea Menon), a good Muslim in charge of a counter-terrorist operation working under a corrupt Hindu minister and complicit bosses, naïve and helpless tribal subjects, a trigger-happy Naxal guerrilla (the masked figure in *Newton*), a hapless non-committal government employee (Loknath in *Newton*) and an extra-cautious hypersensitive government official (*Newton*) are some of the clichés they use in their films in conformity with the prescriptive nationalism.

[43] R.W. Connell, *Gender* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002); R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society*, 19.6 (2005), 829-859.
[44] Prasad, p. 7.
[45] Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 28.

Despite foregrounding crucial issues of gender, oppression, state-sponsored violence, and the patriarchal nature of the Indian state, these films end predictably by undermining the dissenting contingents that disrupt the projected 'consensual equilibrium' within the nation. They articulate both the official 'story' and myths of competing masculinities in India, in conformity with the ideology of the State.

Conclusion

Contrary to parallel cinema, which aimed to create an audience for political cinema through active engagement, these Bollywood films stick to the usual Hindi-film formula to weave in political content conforming to popular tastes. Hence, in such contexts, the Naxal movement is reduced to 'a backdrop', a 'commodity capital' in a story that is about individuals and not about the collective. The radical politics turns into a commodity capital because of its use as the source of drama to contribute to the films' genericity while being dissociated from its immediate historical contexts, incidentally promoting the prescribed nationalism of Bollywood's 'cinema of consensus'.[46] Interestingly, revolutionary politics is appropriated, by Bollywood as the nation's nemesis on one hand, and to accommodate a critique of the post-1991 neo-liberal policies of the Indian state on the other.

The most distinguishing difference between the parallel cinema and post-millennial Bollywood films is the presence and absence of history as a continuum. The former tries to place the Naxal movement as part of the historical continuum of India and a consequential, collective reaction to the systemic exploitation and structural oppression of poorer Indians. The latter uses the Naxal/Maoist movement as an isolated event without a past and a future, merely as a source of dramatic conflict of the film narrative. Inspired by various counter-cinema movements, from the French new wave to Latin American Third Cinema, parallel cinema found in the Naxal Movement a ready set of political arguments that were consonant with both their own political alignments and their ambitions to revitalize Indian cinema. This entailed an explicit rejection of mainstream film style, in accordance with traditional Marxist views on the interrelationship between form and content.[47] In post-millennial Bollywood films, the revolutionary content, again as a convenient source of familiar political critiques, was imported into a wholly conventional aesthetic framework, with the result that the original critique is reduced into an empty signifier by being evacuated of its 'ideological dynamics',[48] and historical decontextualization. While parallel cinema was in dialogue with the more radical currents of world cinema, the postmillennial

[46] Eric Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus', in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 260-277.
[47] Sanjines, p. 62.
[48] Ibidem.

Bollywood films share a common premise with cinema of globalization, representing political repression through more conventional means. As such, they mostly appropriate content from parallel cinema, and to a lesser extent its style (deprived of its political import), in the same way that parallel cinema borrowed from world cinema. In that, Bollywood films with political content are in league with a number of Latin American popular films such as Pablo Larrain's *No* (2012), Caetano's *Chronicle of an Escape* (*Crónica de una fuga*, 2006) and Puenzo's *The Official Story* (*La historia oficial*, 1985).

What's Chairman Mao Got to Do with It? Nostalgia, Intertextuality and Reconstructing Revolutionary Myth in Tsui Hark's The Taking of *Tiger Mountain by Strategy*

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Abstract

Tsui Hark's 2014 film *The Taking of Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weihushan*) is the latest in a long line of adaptations of Qu Bo's historical novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan*), one of the most canonized and adapted revolutionary works in the 1950s and 1960s. This essay seeks to trace the success of Tsui's remake to its melodramatic reconfiguration of history, memory and nostalgia. Specifically, it investigates the ways in which the film undercuts the reverential Maoist revolutionary discourse inherent in the original source material by modeling on the *wuxia* (martial arts) paradigm. In addition, the essay argues that by bookending the 1946 war story with a 2015-set prologue and epilogue, Tsui's adaptation presents the audiences with an exquisite example of how memory invokes and re-presents the past, and ultimately points to the fictionality of the reconstructed past. Finally, the essay focuses on the film's self-consciously simulacral status, and argues that Tsui is motivated by a desire to address the prevailing social climate of excessive commercialization and moral decay in contemporary China, and his retelling of a revolutionary tale is deeply implicated in nostalgic longing for idealism of a bygone era.

In the final week of 2014, the Chinese audience, old and young, flocked to the theaters across the country to watch Tsui Hark's film *The Taking of Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weihushan*; *Taking of Tiger Mountain* henceforth), making it one of the highest-grossing films of all time in Chinese cinemas. More remarkable than its commercial success, the film was heaped with critical acclaim. Tsui's film is the latest in a lengthy line of adaptations of Qu Bo's massively popular 1957 novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan*; *Tracks* henceforth), one of the most canonized Red Classics (a collection of the canonical Chinese socialist literary, theatrical and cinematic works depicting the Communist armed struggle produced in the PRC between 1949 and 1966). 1958 saw the first adaptations of the novel in the form of a spoken drama and multiple versions of Peking opera. Impressed by the stage version of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, supervised a revision and renamed it *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weihushan*, Group of the Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe,

1963). Jiang's version won the approval of communist party leaders at the 1964 National Peking Opera Convention and, after further revisions, was selected as one of the Eight Model Revolutionary Works in 1966. Arguably the best-known of the very few operas allowed to be staged in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), its main characters became household names, especially after it was made into a film by Xie Tieli in 1970.[1] The 1970 version is the one that Tsui remembers watching in New York's Chinatown in the 1970s, an experience that presumably sparked his desire to retell and re-interpret the story.[2] Tsui was keenly aware of his film's intertextual predecessors and acknowledged the circulation and interplay of meaning across numerous preexisting texts when he confessed in his interview: 'I approached this iconic story with utmost respect and caution'.[3]

We could not help but wonder: how did a Hong-Kong based and US-educated director like Tsui Hark successfully tap into the cultural-historic source of the red classics while his peer filmmakers in the mainland struggled to re-package the revolutionary past for contemporary audiences?[4] What set of social-political circumstances impelled broad public to identify *so strongly* with such a film? These questions make the film an interesting case study of the discursive relationship among history, memory, narrative, and subjectivity. In the following, I begin with the relationship between Chinese revolutionary classics and traditional vernacular fiction. Then I proceed to explore the vexed interrelation of nostalgia, historicity, and re-presentation of past in Tsui's remake.

[1] For an excellent analysis of the poetics of Xie's screen adaptation, see Chris Berry, 'Red Poetics: The Films of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Revolutionary Model Operas', in *The Poetics of Chinese Cinema*, ed. by Gary Bettinson and James Udden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 29–49.

[2] Rui Zhang, 'Tsui Hark revives China's red classic', in *China.org* <http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2014-12/22/content_34380847.htm> [accessed 12 July 2017].

[3] Yang Xiao, 'Taking of the Tiger Mountain Qiang Qiang San Ren Xing: Interview with Tsui Hark, Zhang Hanyu and Liang Jiahui', in *news.ifeng* <http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141229/42817262_0.shtml> [accessed 12 May 2017]. Unless indicated otherwise, translations from Chinese are those of the author. On Tsui Hark's reworking literary and filmic classics prior to making *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, see Po Fung, 'Re-Interpreting Classics: Tsui Hark's Screenwriting Style and Its Influence', in *The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film*, ed. by Sam Ho and Ho Wai-leng (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002), pp. 64-69.

[4] Tsui was certainly not the first Hong Kong filmmaker, who went north of the border to embrace the vast mainland Chinese film market. After the inauguration of the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement in 2003, which exempted Hong Kong-China co-productions from the import quota in mainland China, Hong Kong's film industry entered an age of co-productions with mainland studios. However, the phenomenon of Hong Kong veterans directing 'main melody' films (the Chinese government's official name for the revolutionary propaganda genre) started with Tsui's *Taking of Tiger Mountain.*

Wuxia Paradigm and Reconstructing Revolutionary Myth

The bulk of *Taking of Tiger Mountain* takes place in the snowy mountains of northeastern China in 1946 amid the civil war (after the Japanese had been defeated in the Second World War). A squad of the Communist People's Liberation Army, Unit 203, is tasked to take down a gang of bandits, led by Lord Hawk, headquartered at a former Japanese fortress and arsenal atop of Tiger Mountain. Outgunned, outmanned and with time running short, the squad attempts to accomplish its mission by sending one of their men, Yang Zirong, to infiltrate the bandits' camp. Posing as a fellow bandit, Zirong surreptitiously smuggles out information regarding the stronghold so that his squad can plan an attack. Hawk and some of the other bandits are suspicious of the newcomer's motives, and Zirong is constantly tested for his loyalty. Zirong eventually forms an alliance with Qinglian, Hawk's kidnapped concubine, who uses her feminine wiles to try to escape Hawk's clutches. Their alliance is formed after she learns that her son, Knotti, whom she was forced to leave behind, has been rescued by the PLA unit. With Zirong's help, Unit 203 launches its attack on Tiger Mountain during a New Year's Eve celebration and triumphantly brings Hawk and his gang down.[5]

One of the reasons that Tsui felt such an affinity for an iconic red classic can be partly attributed to the fact that Qu's novel, despite its revolutionary realism trappings of the 1950s, reads like a 'chaptered novel' deeply rooted in Chinese vernacular fictional tradition, with larger-than-life heroes and legendary adventures. Unlike many of his contemporary writers, who were trained in the leftist, socialist realistic rhetoric and literature, Qu had little formal orthodoxy revolutionary education in writing. But he was well read in classical Chinese fiction. In his post-scripts to *Tracks*, Qu confesses that his true literary imagination is fueled by classical novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*, Luo Guanzhong, fourteenth-century; *Romance* henceforth) and *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*, Shi Nai'an, sixteen-century) from which he could recite long passages from memory. Believing that the traditional aesthetics is well suited for the narration of a revolutionary story, Qu acknowledges, 'when I wrote [*Tracks*], I tried hard to write in the traditional style in terms of structure, language, characterizations'.[6]

Robert E. Hegel offers an in-depth and illuminating study of the parallels of *Tracks* with classical vernacular fiction and identifies Qu's debt to *Water Margin* and *Romance*. Most obviously, Qu Bo adapts a well-known *Water Margin* episode:

[5] Tsui's fascination with narratives set in China's Republican era (1912–1949) can be traced back to as early as his 1986 film *Peking Opera Blues*, which centers on three young women from different social classes who become embroiled in a revolutionary plot to overthrow the military government. For a comprehensive discussion of the film, see Tan See Kam, *Tsui Hark's Peking Opera Blues* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

[6] Bo Qu, *Lin Hai Xue Yuan* [Tracks in the Snowy Forest] (Beijing: Ren min wen xue chu ban she, 1997), p. 588.

Figs. 1-2. Undated photograph of Zirong (on the left); historical group photo (above).

Fig. 3. Re-enactment by the film's cast of the historical group photo

Fig. 4. Photograph of Squad 203 after their Triumph at Tiger Mountain. Photographer unknown.

in the imitation of Wu Song killing the tiger with his bare hands while passing through a mountainous region, Qu's protagonist Zirong crosses a mountainous region of China's northeast and kills a tiger with his gun.[7] In Tsui's remake, the tiger-killing scene is not only recast, but with the help of 3D technology and CGI imagery, Zirong battling the hungry tiger on the treetops is one of the most thrilling moments in the film. Later in the film, Tsui also made Zirong sing a song with references to Zhao Zilong, one of the most celebrated heroes of *Romance*.[8]

Moreover, *Water Margin* and *Romance* are military romances-cum-tales of chivalry and literary antecedents of the *wuxia* (martial arts) genre. There are many elements of the classical *wuxia* genre in Qu's episodic adventure novel. For instance, the opening chapter, titled 'Blood Debt', is a giveaway of the style of the *wuxia* fiction. This chapter begins with the residents of an entire village being brutally massacred by bandits, thus setting up the archetypical chivalric narrative themes in the chapters to follow: bloodshed, grievances and revenge. The parallels between Qu's novel and the *wuxia* fiction are also evident in their worldviews. Like *wuxia* writers, Qu perceived the world as polarized camps. His communist heroes, like his *wuxia* counterparts, seek to find justice in an unjust world with a clear definition between right and wrong, with the only difference that in Qu's adaption, justice for individuals is replaced with a collectivist cause. In addition, Qu drew the characterizations of his heroes and villains from the *wuxia* tradition that emphasizes type-characters and clearly defined role categories with the extremes of behavior. The PLA soldiers are portrayed as virtuous, principled, and altruistic heroes in their quest to eliminate evil on behalf of the oppressed. They exhibit a clear affinity to the traditional knight-errant in their unflagging strength and courage. As the perfect embodiment of selfless devotion to the communists' goals, they are utterly lacking in moral, political and ideological ambiguities and complexities. By contrast, the bandits are treacherous, covetous and sadistic villains. They are depicted with an almost cartoon-like exaggeration of insidiousness.

As a member of the Hong Kong New Wave, Tsui is responsible for reviving and reshaping the Chinese *wuxia* films at the end of the 1970s and start of the 1980s and known for his well-choreographed, imaginative action sequences. It seems only logical for him to highlight the *wuxia* elements embedded in the Mao-era red classic and rework it into a '*wuxia* film with guns'. In a classical *wuxia*

[7] Robert E. Hegel, 'Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama from the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution', in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, ed. by Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 197–223 (p. 215). For further discussion on the intersection between classical vernacular fiction and revolutionary discourse in *Tracks*, see Krista Van Fleit Hang, *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period (1949-1966)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 91–117.

[8] The military Song of Beiyang Army's 4th Division during the Republic of China sung by Zirong has the following lyrics: 'Among all the heroes of the Three Kingdoms, Zhao Zilong was the best. At the Battle of Changban, on full display was his bravery'.

Figs. 5-8.
The Taking of Tiger Mountain. Scene stills.

fashion, Tsui uses the vast sparsely populated mountains of Manchuria covered with snow, the pine forests, a steam locomotive snaking through the ice, and a gothic castle built with huge cement, as the backdrop for the actions. In a keen reminder of the imaginary, utopian world *jianghu* (literally 'rivers and lakes'), the good (PLA soldiers) and bad knights-errant (bandits) engage in an epic battle based on the codes of *xia*: justice, altruism, loyalty, bravery, and righteousness.

Zirong in Tsui's version is a more complex character than in Qu's novel. It involves another archetypical stratagem of the *wuxia* genre: a flawed hero succeeds in overcoming a rapacious and powerful villain. At the start of the film, Zirong joins the squad as an outsider and, with his full beard and unusual outfit, looks like a bandit more than a PLA soldier. When the squad commander expresses mistrust based on his non-soldier like behaviors, Zirong feels compelled to resign from the PLA to assume his undercover disguise. Disobeying orders from his commanding officer and acting on his own initiative set Zirong apart from the one-dimensional communist hero portrayed in Qu's original work. Upon entering the bandits' lair, Zirong outsmarts the bandits with incredible skills and courage. In all these, Zirong seems to pose as a stand-in for *wuxia* genre's wandering, chivalrous swordsman seeking self-serving adventures.

At the core of the *wuxia* genre is the well-choreographed spectacle of violence — heroes and villains fighting each other and performing extravagant feats. *Taking of Tiger Mountain* models on the *wuxia* paradigm and overloads the viewer's senses with bullets-flying and blood- spurting shootouts between the PLA and the bandits. There are three major action sequences in the film — the opening warehouse skirmish, the bandits' attack on Leather Creek village, and the final siege on Hawk's mountain fortress. In his analysis of the Hong Kong action film, David Bordwell stresses the importance of *stasis* in the choreography of a fight sequence.[9] One could argue that the narrative structure of Tsui's remake is organized around a 'pause-thrust-pause' pattern, with the action sequences interspersed as pure spectacles to break the diegetic flow. The moments of excessive violence, gunplay, and explosive pyrotechnics are best displayed in slow motion cinematography or 'Bullet Time', as made popular by the Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003): the camera follows the advance of bullets as they fly at and through their targets and sees how they ricochet through them.

While Qu deploys many fantastic elements and the episodic structure of the *wuxia* fiction in the service of a narrative of communist liberation, it is interesting to note that Tsui transforms an episode in China's civil war between the communists and the nationalists, a deeply political discourse, into an ideologically neutral narrative of an epic battle between heroes and villains. The communist propaganda, i.e. the logic of class struggle, is thus concealed and suspended

[9] David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 221–247.

by a *wuxia* concept of good vs. evil.[10] In the climactic finale, the PLA squad commander says: 'It's over. I hope Knotti's generation won't see war again'. As such Tsui's representation of the communist history serves mainly to articulate a value that is universal and undifferentiated: the belief in a better tomorrow, which is apparently at odds with the hegemonic Maoist revolutionary discourse of a 'continuous revolution'. In fact, *Tracks* ends with the last entry of Jianbo's diary: 'Today, a new struggle begins'. As Hegel rightly points out, 'Qu Bo here prefigures a sequel; his work thus becomes a single, multi-segmented episode in the saga of the broader revolutionary struggle'. Although his larger-than-life knights-errant fit well with the tradition of the Maoist hero: indomitable of spirit and formidable of strength even in the face of the most pernicious obstacles, Tsui slyly undercut the reverential Communist ideology of the highly political original text by eliminating any symbols of political significance. Red stars, red flags, PLA-specific cap insignias, and any mention of the communist party or Chairman Mao are stripped away in his remake. Also, the Leather Creek villagers are portrayed as cowards and in dire need of salvation, which is in stark contrast to Qu's portrayal of their impassionate support for the PLA soldiers. Eager to fight Hawk and his men and by extension the nationalists, the villagers in Qu's narrative are not only the object of salvation but the agent of salvation. With the political event being transformed into a chivalric tale, Tsui's remake suggests a degree of subversiveness and challenge to the government-sanctioned narrative of history.

Nostalgia and Historical (In)authenticity

As shown previously, *Taking of Tiger Mountain*'s emphasis on punishing evil and exalting goodness and on a visual style less concerned with cinematic verisimilitude than bombarding audiences with a series of images of spectacular excess results in deliberate de-politicization of the highly propagandist narrative inherent in the original source material. The strategic absences of political consciousness are reinforced by Tsui's inventing a modern-day narrator Jimmy (played by Hang Geng, the Chinese Justin Timberlake), and bookending the 1946 war story with a 2015-set prologue and epilogue, thus recasting the historical event into an individual, personal witness account. Tsui's remake is often taken to be a historical epic, but the individualist perspective points to the ultimate fictionality of the narrative. I argue that this fictionality lays claim of the film as an alternative to Maoist histories and presents us with an exquisite example of

[10] In this respect, *Taking of Tiger Mountain* feels like an update of *The Raid* that Tsui co-directed in 1991, which is based on the historical events of the 1930s, when Japanese-occupied Manchuria have set up the last Chinese emperor Pu Yi as their puppet leader. Like *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, *The Raid* uses the Sino-Japanese War as a backdrop for an action-adventure narrative that sidesteps most political themes.

how memory invokes and re-presents the past. What is at stake here is not how accurately the film recreates an episode from China's civil war, but rather how, or how far, it is shaped by a desire to offer a particular interpretation of the past, by the cultural and political imperatives informing the film's moment of production.

Tracks has many autobiographical elements. The plot draws on its author's real-life experiences in the civil war. Shao Jianbo, the PLA squad commander, bears a great resemblance to Qu, who commanded the squad himself that defeated Hawk's bandit gang. Zirong was closely based on one of Qu's close comrades-in-arms. Zirong, whose real name was used in the novel, was famous for his experience in different trades and his expertise in local culture and bandit argot. His versatile skills made him an ideal PLA scout after he joined the army. In 1946, when his squad became aware of the hidden fortress of Hawk and his gang, Zirong masqueraded as a bandit in a rival gang and went undercover. He quickly won the trust of the bandits and eventually captured Hawk along with 25 other bandits. The head of the bandits, Hawk, and some minor characters, such as Gao B, were modeled after real-life people as well. In fact, the novel was mainly written to honor Qu's memory of his fellow soldiers: 'With utmost respect, the book is dedicated to my heroic comrades-in-arms Yang Zirong and Gao Bo'. Yet, based on Qu's account, his first draft, which started with dry facts, went through so many revisions that the final product was largely fictionalized and dramatized.[11] However, without being labeled or advertised as a memoir or a realistic historical account, the novel never deterred its readers from reading it as an autobiography.

Tsui was fully aware of the connection between the fictional story and the historical event when he concludes with his film with 3 black and white photographs. The first one is an undated photograph of Zirong, the historical figure, captioned by details of his life, such as the year of his birth and death, and his original name and birthplace (fig. 1). The second one is a historical group photo taken on August 1, 1946, featuring Zirong and his comrades-in-arms at an awards ceremony (fig. 2). The photo then dissolves into a third photograph and the final shot of the film, showing the heroes of the PLA squad celebrating their triumphant attack at Tiger Mountain (fig. 3). Despite providing the illusion of a historical moment coded in the past tense, the third photograph is in fact a re-enactment by the film's cast of the historical group gathering as recorded in a 1946 photograph (fig. 4). While the inclusion of the first two historical photographs integrates the historical event into the fictional world of the film's diegesis, the third image, in its sudden arrest of movement and black and white contrast, functions as a mechanism of narrative closure and as a figure of aligning the film with the authentic telling of history. The momentary 'lapse' from a 'real'

[11] The popularity of the novel brought Qu's former comrade-in-arms, Sun Dade, unexpected fame and he suddenly found himself in high demand for interviews and speech tours. However, his eyewitness account of the battle, a more accurate and closer version to historical truth without any flourishes and embellishments, offered contrast to Qu's fictionalized account.

representation into an imaginary one highlights the filmmaker's conscious choice of dialogue between history and the retelling of history and memory. Moreover, the subtle blending of history and the imagining of history seems to emphasize his efforts in erasing the mediation and its representational status.

However, the very notion of 'realness' is cast into doubt by the film's self-conscious employment of a narrator. It begins with a present-day scenario that portrays Jimmy, a young Chinese expat, fresh out of college and Silicon Valley-bound, attending his farewell party thrown by a group of friends at a karaoke bar in New York City. When a famous aria *Climbing Tiger Mountain* from *Tiger Mountain* is queued up on the karaoke machine, the partygoers become confused and quickly switch to another song. But Jimmy is mesmerized: the *Tiger Mountain* story happens to be set in his hometown. After the party, he is due to fly back to China to spend Chinese Lunar New Year with his family. On his way to the airport, Jimmy decides to re-watch the aria on his phone (fig. 5). Safely separated from the outside world in a mood of subjectivity, Jimmy's viewing in the taxi blends into a retelling of the first segment of the 1946 *Tiger Mountain* tale taking place in China's northeast — the warehouse skirmish between Hawk's men and PLA squad.

The second sequence of the film begins with a historical steam locomotive traveling through the snow-covered forests, which is soon superseded by a contemporary high-speed bullet train apparently traveling the same route but with the narrator Jimmy as one of its passengers. When Jimmy sets his eyes on a sketchbook image featuring a sleeping woman, it dissolves into a shot of a mysterious artist working on the sketch while traveling in the steam locomotive back in 1946. This sequence concludes with a full-color image of the sunrise on Tiger Mountain following the night of PLA's victorious attack, which fades into a sketch of the exact sunrise scenery in black and white. As the camera pulls back to reveal it as an image in the sketchbook that Jimmy is holding, the film returns to its present-day frame. The identity of the artist of the sketchbook is now unmasked as Zirong. Thus, the second segment, starting with the entrance of Zirong and ending with his squad's defeat of Hawk, is framed by Jimmy's reminiscences and unfolds in one long flashback narrated from his point of view.

The film's present-day frame continues in the epilogue as Jimmy arrives at Grandma's house. Noticing the huge amount of food on New Year's Eve's dinner table, Jimmy inquires if Grandma is expecting any guests. 'What guests? They are all family', Grandma's response triggers Jimmy to imagine the PLA squad and Knotti being transported from 1946 and joining him at the table (fig. 6). It is only now revealed that Knotti is Jimmy's now deceased grandfather and the young daughter of the Leather Creek village head, Little Juan, his grandmother. Invoked by the sight of the heroes from the past, Jimmy recalls the hidden airstrip at Tiger Mountain that his grandfather has mentioned and offers an alternate ending to the wartime drama, in which Zirong duets with Hawk and eventually rescues Qinglian, Jimmy's great-grandmother, from a plane that Hawk is trying to take off in an action-packed and spectacle-laden fashion. The final scene sees

the film transition back to the present time with Grandma, Jimmy and the PLA squad watching an iconic sequence from *Tiger Mountain* featuring Zirong's first encounter with Hawk at the bandits' lair on TV (fig. 7). The camera gradually closes in on the TV image until it takes over the full screen (fig. 8).

Tsui's employment of a personal narrator stands in stark contrast to his predecessors. The earlier adaptations of *Tracks*, including the 1960 film and the 1986 and 2003 TV dramas, all use an opening crawl or a neutral authoritative narrator's voice to introduce the historical background of the story.[12] With the constructed nature of the fictional historical discourse being concealed by the apparently unmediated, objective voice, the viewer is presented the illusion of accurate representation of an actual past and historical reality. However, Jimmy's visible narrative presence in Tsui's remake destroys any seeming transparency to the past and prevents the film from ever taking on the appearance of a true chronicle of events. The past is conjured up, restructured and reconstructed through the eyes of an invented figure. The film is Jimmy's personal, subjective and partial reimagining of the 1946 event. His preoccupation with his own family history and his urge to reconnect to the greatness of his forebears drive the narrative. A grand narrative of class struggle and national salvation is thus turned into a family legend.[13]

Jimmy finds his connection to the past resonant with personal meaning and through him multi-generational Chinese project their longing for the past onto the screen. It is important to read nostalgic longing as fundamentally concerned more with the present than with the past.[14] Tsui's film re-stages and re-packages the revolutionary tale for contemporary audiences and speaks explicitly to current social and political issues confronting Chinese society. With excessive commercialization and ruthless market and profit-driven ambitions readily embraced by as global norms, the post-Mao society in the past twenty years has been pestered by commercialism, ethical relativism, and moral decay. In Tsui's remake, the lament about the loss of heroism and idealism today is translated into the yearning for the glory of a bygone era. Tsui tries to re-appropriate the iconic

[12] For a more detailed comparison between *Taking of Tiger Mountain* and the previous adaptations, see Zhang Xiuhe, 'The Reincarnation of Tiger Mountain: Post-Socializing the Model Opera Film (Yangbanxi)' (unpublished M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 2017), <https://sfsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/197283/AS362017FILMZ43.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed 21 March 2018].

[13] Nathan To also points out the role of the narrator Jimmy in urging diasporic Chinese in the West to rediscover their roots and heritage through a vision of re-connecting with the Motherland, see 'A Revolution for Memory: Reproductions of a Communist Utopia through Tsui Hark's The Taking of Tiger Mountain and Posters from the Cultural Revolution', in *Frames Cinema Journal* <http://framescinemajournal.com/article/a-revolution-for-memory-reproductions-of-a-communist-utopia-through-tsui-harks-the-taking-of-tiger-mountain-and-posters-from-the-cultural-revolution/> [accessed 21 March 2018].

[14] Grainge, Paul, 'Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes and Media Recycling', in *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, 23.1 (2000), 27–34 (p. 27).

idealism in the Red Classics and seems to be certain that the revival of heroism and chivalry will fill the spiritual vacuum and purge society of threatening evils.[15]

In *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, nostalgic longing is based on both memory and imagination, inspired by Jimmy's contact with representations, whether they be his grandfather's witness account (for that matter, legend), the historical photographs, the 1970 model opera film that sandwiches his flashback to the past, or Zirong's sketchbook — apparently inherited from his grandfather. The representations demonstrate Tsui's attempt to forges explicit continuity with its predecessors and to integrate his adaptation into authentic history. At the same time, they are also unmistakable evidence of the film's intertextuality and its nostalgic structure. It is a reproduction of past modes of representational styles and narratives that include productions and transpositions from Qu's 1957 novel onward. In Tsui's recreation of the wartime drama, historical reality and its representation are collapsed and Tsui's/Jimmy's 'reality' takes on quotation marks. With the modern-day framing device, its repeated quotation and revision of pre-existing texts, the film is self-consciously positioned as representational rather than original. Its self-consciously simulacral status undermines any claims to verisimilitude and belies any attempts to read the film as historically 'authentic'. Like modeling on a *wuxia* paradigm and de-politicizing the communist ideological dogma, the anti-realist tendency is one of the primary means employed by the filmmaker to resist and propose an alternative approach to the Maoist discourse that has dominated the previous adaptations. Without laying claim to 'truth' or 'reality', Tsui's remake encourages a thoughtful, self-aware spectatorship and potentially addresses the insistent and unabating yearning for heroism and idealism.

[15] 'Why would these exhausted soldiers in the archived photos continue to sacrifice for their hometown and their fellow countrymen? It was […] because they had faith. I think Zirong's faith was most romantic. People need faith. If we don't have it, our lives would be empty and shriveled'. Tsui Hark, 'I Think Yang Zirong's Faith Was Most Romantic', *Huashang Bao* <http://hsb.hsw.cn/2014-12/27/content_8560496.htm> [accessed 6 May 2018].

Chinese Fictions in France and Shadows in China[1]

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Abstract

Unlike written production, which was plentiful, only a few French fictional films about the Cultural Revolution were produced between 1966 and 1976. Nevertheless, it was the object of contradictory discourse in two films which reveal the cultural cleavages in 1960s and 1970s French society. Jean-Luc Godard's La Chinoise (1967) and René Viénet's Can Dialectics Break Bricks? (La Dialectique peut-elle casser les briques?, 1973) confront Maoist and anti-Maoist perspectives, as seen from France. Simon Leys's seminal book Chinese Shadows and its problematization of the achievements of the Cultural Revolution serve here as a point of departure for an analysis of the various debates of this period. This article will also take into consideration a few contemporary Chinese films that form a sort of counterpoint to the French fiction films of the 1960s and 1970s. Wang Bing's The Ditch (Jiabiangou, 2010), for instance, unveils the consequences of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960).

In what terms can we consider the role of the fiction that addressed the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s? This revolution was visible early on in Chinese propaganda films and news reports that were widely screened abroad. Yet in France, it remained relatively unseen in the cinema, albeit frequently covered in the context of the May 1968 events. From the start of the Revolution in Beijing 1966, the French Broadcasting and Television Office (ORTF) devoted several reports and critical commentaries to the Cultural Revolution, underlining its violent nature.[2] Rarely filmed as fiction, it was the subject of two contradictory films, which are today considered masterpieces: *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967) and *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* (*La Dialectique peut-elle casser des briques?*, René Viénet, 1973). Both films are particularly striking in their revelation of cultural divisions in French society in the 1960s and 1970s.[3] Apart from a few

[1] The author wishes to thank Precious Brown for her translation; Flora Lichaa of the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) for her filmography; Bruno Philip, Beijing correspondent for *Le Monde* from 2004 to 2010, for his critical review; and, René Viénet for his comments.

[2] See various reports broadcast since August 1966 viewable at the French National Audiovisual Institute (Ina). The French media often experienced difficulty in dealing with the complexity of Asia. This was especially evident when the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh in 1975. See in this regard *Cambodge, le génocide effacé*, ed. by Pierre Bayard and Soko Phay-Vakalis (Paris: Cecile Defaut, 2013), which examines misinformation about the reality of Cambodia in the media, like that of Patrice de Beer, correspondent for *Le Monde* who, from April 1975, viewed these events through a Maoist lense.

[3] Julian Bourg, 'Tempered nostalgia in recent French films on the 68 years', in *The Long 1968:*

other purely militant or conjunctural films, such as the comical *Chinese in Paris* (*Les Chinois à Paris*, Jean Yanne, 1974), in an essentially fictional fashion, these politically-oriented films with burlesque accents juxtapose French Maoist and anti-Maoist perspectives, without ever really showing the abundant images that were seen in the media. *La Chinoise* is a fiction film produced by a well-known director at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* is a politically engaged sinologist's remake of Tu Guangqi's kung fu film *The Crush* (*Tangshou taiquan dao*, 1972).

In contemporary China, a few isolated films have recently reconsidered the Cultural Revolution in the 'chiaroscuro' perspective that sinologist Simon Leys's seminal work *Chinese Shadows* described at the time[4]. These rare fiction films and documentaries, which will be discussed in the final part of this article, which were either not screened or seen only by small audiences in China, critically retrace this past, honouring those who were forgotten by Chinese history.

La Chinoise

In Paris, five students, Véronique (Anne Wiazemsky), Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Léaud), Henri (Michel Semeniako), Yvonne (Juliet Berto), and Kirilov (Lex de Brujin) move into one of their parents' flats to form a revolutionary cell, *Aden-Arabie*, a tribute to Paul Nizan, revisiting the ideological speech broadcast by Radio Peking.[5] One day, while studying Marxism-Leninism and learning Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* by heart, they plan to assassinate the Soviet Minister of Culture who is visiting Paris. The band disperses when vacation starts.[6]

Forming something of a political trilogy with his two previous films, *Made in USA* (1966) and *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1967), *La Chinoise* alternates between still shots, longer animated sequences, and short lectures filmed behind closed doors in rooms lined with copies of the *Little Red Book*. How can imported revolutionary methods applied to French society help combat revisionism and capitalism and spark a permanent revolution, with the Vietnam War and the United States, the Sino-Soviet dispute, and the Cultural Revolution as a background, and China appearing as a radical and new communist alternative to the bureaucratic Soviet Union, supported

Revision and New Perspectives, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman, Ruud van Dijk, Jasmine Alinder and Alinder Aneesh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 327-355; Sebastien Layerle, *Caméras en lutte en mai 68: 'Par ailleurs le cinéma est une arme…'* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2008).

[4] See Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

[5] Paul Nizan, *Aden Arabie* (Paris: Rieder, 1931).

[6] See Alain Jouffroy's presentation of the film's storyboard in *L'Avant-scène Cinéma*, 114 (1971), and Alain Bergala, *Godard au travail: Les années 60* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2006), pp. 342–362. See also Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 296–317.

blindly by a hegemonic French Communist Party? The camera also serves to re-evaluate the Vertovian theories of the Kino-Eye in a mise-en-scène that serve the word in an anti-spectacle film.[7] In grotesque fashion, the film provides a counterpoint to an official Chinese comedy of that time, Wang Ping's *The East is Red* (*Dongfang hong*, 1965). Chinese vestimentary codes are respected from the cap to the mandarin collar jacket, and morning exercise is punctuated by slogans and *clichés* with different rough sound recordings, usually over a red background. One instance is the recurring slogan: 'The imperialists are still alive. They continue to reign arbitrariness in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the West, they still oppress the masses'. Outside of these quotes from the *Little Red Book*, the script is peppered with references to Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan who were already deemed to be the new theoretical, leftist version of Mao, but probably unreadable to a majority of Chinese viewers. Plastic and didactic elements coexist in the film, contrasting a (rather caricatured) French generational phenomenon of young Maoists to Mao's Chinese Red Guards (1966-1976), challenging hierarchy and the sudden return of 17 million *Zhiquings* (educated, urban youths) to the countryside in 1968 and 1969. Dotted with public trials, this campaign allowed for the purging and complete reorganization of the Chinese Communist Party in order to institute Mao's weakened power more durably. In fact, Godard's film, confined to a bourgeois Parisian flat, is far from this context — one that was unfamiliar to him.[8] Only one of his actresses was of peasant origin (Juliet Berto) in this predominantly student-intellectual environment. Yet, for Parisian critics the caricatural film was ahead of its time, if not daring.

How then should this film be interpreted with respect to both Godard's filmography and the political context of an already turbulent era in France? *La Chinoise* in particular allowed Godard to take a more radical stance towards the cinema, both politically and artistically. Aiming to break with commercial cinema, this film followed the fashion of the time. The cinema had become an instrument or a revolutionary tool using Maoist ideas to connect theory and practice. It was a question of adapting these ideas to the cinema, as he had tried to do in other films such as *My Life to Live* (*Vivre sa vie*, 1962), where prostitution echoes the consumer society, or in *Week-end* (1967). Undoubtedly, *La Chinoise* marked a new militant turn in Godard's work. *The Joy of Learning* (*Le Gai Savoir*, 1968), which was not released, focused on the Third World and the Cultural Revolution in factories. *A Film Like Any Other* (*Un film comme les autres*, 1968) was shot in factories in Flins, with workers and Maoist students. This anti-film period differs sharply from the first narratives of the French New Wave. Championing Bertolt Brecht's theatre, the quasi-filmed Eastern stage of *La Chinoise* features all

[7] See Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, *Godard et la société des années 1960* (Paris: A. Colin, 2004).
[8] Regarding these misunderstandings and Godard's position during May 68, see Vincent Lowy, 'Rive droite /rive gauche: face à la *Nouvelle Vague*', in *Chris Marker: Pionnier et novateur*, ed. by Kristian Feigelson (Condé: Corlet, 2017), pp 54-63.

the clichés of French Orientalism, chanting a new relationship between content and form. Faithful to the maxims of the Cultural Revolution, the film, in most caricatural fashion, proclaims the crisis of world imperialism, the need to fight from the factory to the countryside, as the cinema — on a steady diet of Maoist slogans — had to be opened up in order to connect theory and practice.[9] The film takes the form of a *ciné-tract* that is centred on the cult of Mao and supposed to synthesize these ideas, but paradoxically confined in a Parisian flat. Like the post-1968 slogans, this cinema appears as a graffitied if not elliptical form. Since then, as Godard adds, 'realism is not how real things are, but how things really are'.[10] Godard seeks a more radical questioning of the procedures in force in the cinema, although the real China seems but a pretext to support these efforts. Similarly, *Far from Vietnam* (*Loin du Vietnam*, Chris Marker, 1967) on which Godard collaborated, synthesized a collective process that was already underway in *La Chinoise*. Be that as it may, if the Vietnam War, both near and far from Paris, recalls 'the Chinese strategy of encircling places of power',[11] it also played a more important role than China in catalyzing and unifying a generation. *Half a Life* (*Mourir à 30 ans*, Romain Goupil, 1982) an autobiographical documentary, later showed the impact of this war among the young generations between 1965 and 1975.[12]

The 1960s and 1970s also coincided with a major attempt to erase any notion of the author in favour of a collective and revolutionary practice. The problem is equivalent to that of the writer facing his reader: how can the spectator be placed at the centre of a collective interrogation? As *La Chinoise* illustrates, film for Godard represented a specific mode of course, which he continued between 1969 and 1972 in a series of other films such as *Wind from the East* (*Vent d'Est*), *Pravda*, *Vladimir and Rosa* (*Vladimir et Rosa*), within the Dziga Vertov collective (1968-1972) that he had founded with Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Henri Roger.[13] Apart from its obvious failure, *La Chinoise* marked the beginning of a rupture and Maoist radicalization for Godard, which culminated in *Wind from the East* in 1970. Godard claimed to make films differently, seeking also to rebuild the filmmaker's social function within the Dziga Vertov collective. The Cultural Revolution was no longer perceived as an event that had been lived or as an event to live; it was already mythologized, allowing Godard to

[9] See Alain Jouffroy, 'Le guerillo et le savant', *Le Fait public*, 2 (1969) <http://derives.tv/le-guerillero-et-le-savant> [accessed 11 February 2018].
[10] Ibidem.
[11] Jalabert Laurent, 'Aux origines de la génération 1968: les étudiants français et la guerre du Vietnam', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 55.1 (1997), 69–81.
[12] Romain Goupil, *Interviews with Bernard Lefort* (Paris: Punctum, 2005). Later, a handful of fictional films gave an idea of what the uprising was actually like, such as *Regular Lovers* (*Les Amants réguliers*, Philippe Garrel 2005), *Something in the Air* (*Après Mai*, Olivier Assayas, 2012).
[13] Later, Jean-Henri Roger founded another group, Cinelutte (1973-1976), and taught at the University Paris 8. See David Faroult and Gérard Leblanc, *Mai 68 ou le cinéma en suspens* (Tarascon: Syllepses, 1998); *Voyages en utopie Jean-Luc Godard, 1946-2006*, ed. by Nicole Brenez (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2006).

rebuild this posture around a film in the making. In some ways, this is true of *La Chinoise*, as evidenced by its discontinuous soundtrack. The New Wave had already been buried for several years, and for Godard, the Cultural Revolution was synonymous with a new revolution of the image, which banked on scandal, espousing the political situation. He had already done something similar in *The Little Soldier* (*Le Petit soldat*, 1963), which was censored during the Algerian War, and *Pierrot le fou* (1965), which was prohibited to people under the age of 18. The stinging competition of the cinema market, fuelled by the rise of television, forced Godard into the cultivated posture as a cursed artist, doomed to constantly revive himself on the social scene in order to continue to exist and produce.

When *La Chinoise* was released, the French press (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Combat*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Le Monde*…) responded favourably to the film. To critics, Godard was almost prophetic in his retrospective re-reading of a history in the making.[14] Together with the rather hostile right-wing press, the Chinese Embassy in Paris, in utter disbelief at the excessive calls to violence, reacted negatively to the film. In retrospect, this film — if not the international context and lack of knowledge of China in France at the time — can be read as dithering and unfinished, halfway between propaganda and parody. Screened only in Paris at the time, the film sold some 100,000 tickets upon its release — actually a good outcome for an auteur film in a very competitive market — it was undermined by the release of films like *Don't Look Now... We're Being Shot At!* (*La Grande vadrouille*, Gérard Oury, 1966), emblematic of a popular success with more than 17 million tickets as well as several reruns.

However, should Godard's convictions or positions with regard to the Cultural Revolution be measured retrospectively more as anti-Americanism than an affiliation with Maoism, within the climate of the era and his public sympathy during the Langlois Affair at the French Cinémathèque and the French Cinema's States-General in May 1968? For Antoine de Baecque, the filmmaker was still more determined by economic conditions than by any precise ideology, passing from one fascination to another.[15]

Can Dialectics Break Bricks?

A member of the Situationist International who had studied Chinese at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations, René Viénet was one of the first in France to condemn Chinese communism, observing that

[14] See for example Jean de Baroncelli, '*La Chinoise* de Jean-Luc Godard: un film qui "eclipse" tous les autres, *Le Monde*, 6 September 1967, p. 16.
[15] Antoine de Baecque, *Godard* (Paris: Grasset, 2010), p. 351. See also Raphaël Jaudon, 'Une politique sans théorie? Marxisme et émancipation dans le cinéma politique du Groupe Dziga Vertov' (unpublished Master's thesis, Université Lyon 2, 2013).

'official Chinese newspapers themselves did not give an account of the Cultural Revolution that was as watered down as the one proposed by sinologists and Western journalists'.[16] As early as October 1967, spurred by Viénet, Guy Debord published a brochure, *The Explosion Point of Ideology in China*, as a counterpoint to the discourse of Western intellectuals and Maoist splinter groups of the time.[17] In February 1971, Viénet left the Situationist International, but maintained friendly ties with Debord. In 1973, inspired by Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*,[18] he produced a few films with *détourned* soundtracks: the aforementioned *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*, a pastiche of the Cultural Revolution based on a martial arts film, *Girls of Kamare* (*Les Filles de Ka-ma-ré*, 1974), which applied the same process to a pornographic film, and *Peking Duck Soup* (*Chinois, encore un effort pour* être *révolutionnaires*, 1977), featuring the Maoist propaganda rituals and delusional cult of Mao. These films can probably be best considered as an indirect response to both the first aphorisms of Godard's *La Chinoise* and the place of China on the French far left's cultural scene in the Mao-Stalinist era.

In *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* the relationship between cinema and politics was also of interest but in a diametrically opposed way than in Godard's *La Chinoise*. Using images from a pre-existing film (*The Crush*), *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* seems more akin to a form of Pop Art, a nod to Andy Warhol and his ironic, colourful portrait of Mao (1973) splashed on posters all over the world. The film enjoyed the great popularity of Hong Kong films distributed in France at the time. *The Crush* told the struggle of young Koreans against the Japanese imperialists, the revolt of kung fu fighters against supporters of kendo. Viénet *détourns* this original narrative to show the spontaneous revolt of the masses against the bureaucracy which seized the revolution to oppress the masses. The sinologist revisits Cultural Revolution thematics, *détourning* them from their contexts — just like Godard's *La Chinoise* — knowingly and ironically from beginning to end, 'in a region occupied by bureaucrats, logicians will avenge the Commies and the Bonnot band' (as one of the characters states in the movie).

Can Dialectics Break Bricks? proposes new montages between soundtrack and image, prefiguring commentary on the image. In *détourning* a popular Hong Kong karate film, Viénet also parodies Maoist logorrhea. The shifts between soundtrack and image create comical situations. The subtitles are false translations of dialogue where a lovers' exchange becomes a critical

[16] Simon Leys, *Essais sur la Chine* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1998). On the meeting between the Belgian Catholic sinologist and the French situationist, see Laurent Six, 'Aux origines d'*Ombres chinoises*: une mission de six mois au service de l'ambassade de Belgique en République populaire de Chine', *Textyles*, 34 (2008) <http://journals.openedition.org/textyles/1572> [accessed 5 May 2017].
[17] Guy Debord, 'The Explosion Point of Ideology in China', *Internationale Situationniste*, 11 (1967), 499–508.
[18] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, trans. by Fredy Perlman and John Supak (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970).

consideration of decadent Trotskyism, or, in silent scenes, a denunciation of capitalist exploitation. The movie's opening titles read:

> The first entirely *détourned* film in the history of cinema, a toast to the exploited for the extermination of the exploiters, an epitaph for friends [*les copains*] where all films can be *détourned*, duds [*les navets*] as well as Pasolinis, Vardas, Godards, Bergmans, but also Spaghetti Westerns and commercial films, at the cinema where the producer is alienated and has no control over his life. This will change but not by voting for the common program or by joining the PSU...!

The traditional Chinese imagery on screen distorts Maoist thought, and is as much a criticism of the despotic communist universe as it is of capitalist domination ('Speak no more of class struggles, or I'll send you my sociologists, my psychiatrist, or even a structuralist'), for 'while we may well be the dominant class, we are often in the shit'. The film's dialectical mode works in an often rudimentary opposition of good and bad. It remains, nevertheless, true to the narrative structure of popular kung fu films, attacking all forms of alienation in an anarchist vein. Having targeted the permanently criticized bureaucrats, Viénet turns to the accomplices of intellectual alienation in France — 'those idiots who observe and see nothing', as one character puts it in the movie — revisiting, in this way, the failure of the world's revolutionary movements. In highlighting the archaisms of allegedly revolutionary discourse, *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* plays with words and becomes a counterpoint to Godard's *La Chinoise*, which by 1973, already appeared aged and fairly conformist. However, for Viénet, an informed sinologist breaking with the decaying situationist movement, filming Politics contributed to the creation of new political alternatives. It was a question of breaking with the dominant order in light of his knowledge of the Cultural Revolution's devastating effects in order to criticize militant and media blindness in France.

Charting the limits of the Cultural Revolution in a polemical, pamphleteer fashion, Viénet's film remained confined to intellectual circles. Yet in 1973, the revolutionary process itself was winded and most militant groups had dissolved. The same year, *Libération* was launched by Serge July, a former Maoist, as a morning and daily newspaper supported by Jean-Paul Sartre. A political page had turned in France, restoring conservative power and strengthening the Gaullist state institutions that had been disparaged and weakened since May 1968. Charles De Gaulle left office in 1969, and Georges Pompidou died in 1974. In France, the controversial publication in 1974 of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) put Soviet (rather than Chinese) totalitarianism in the spotlight. In 1975, André Glucksmann's *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes* [The Cook and the Man-Eater] was published.[19] Glucksmann defected from the

[19] André Glucksmann, *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

French Communist Party and joined the Maoist movement and the Proletarian Left in 1968-1969. After reading Solzhenitsyn, he opened the debate on the post-left and the responsibilities of Marxism in his essay on the State and concentration camps. A number of French intellectuals (Cornélius Castoriadis, Michel Foucault, and Claude Lefort, to name only a few) had already relayed such ideas after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, but little attention was paid to them.[20] Jean Pasqualini's *Prisoner of Mao* was translated in French in 1975, describing the author's own seven-year experience of forced labour, after having been accused of being a counter-revolutionary during the Hundred Flowers Campaign.[21]

Upon its release, *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* was regarded as being rather non-conformist. It was screened in a handful of art house cinemas in the Latin Quarter, and it did not enjoy the publicity and aura of a confirmed director that *La Chinoise* had a few years prior. In the shadow of Guy Debord, Viénet was largely unknown, despite his academic reputation in Chinese studies. His film allowed him to make a radical critique of the society of spectacle using the very tools of spectacle; it presents a few commonalities with *La Chinoise*. In both films, almost messianic visuals illustrate the mythical idea of saving a people from alienation, using the fashionable concept of 'contradictions' (those of capitalism and those of Chinese communism) dialectically. Viénet's film resonates quotes and slogans led astray, most likely those of an educational cinema that complied with Maoist precepts of the time. Amidst sabres and karate, anathema transform into an oratorical sparring match, merrily refuting falsehood with truth in opposition to Chinese realities, with no real interest in a chronological history of current events in mainland China. In both films, the traditional film narrative is disrupted in favour of supposedly more innovative forms, so as to present ever abstract theses. First and foremost, both films were primarily intended for a small, informed French audience and they remained exterior to any historical treatment. Through essentially political questions, these films raise issues of political representation in a reified society of spectacle. Further, in both cases the commentary carries more weight than the images. In *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*, this questioning paradoxically comes from Hong Kong, from a China that was simultaneously urban, rural and Communist. Although the images were *détourned* and parodied, like Godard, Viénet sought to challenge the spectator. His comments distanced the ideas of Mao, the heir of Confucianism, and condemn domineering capitalism. Viénet depicts a set

[20] See Florence Grandsenne, 'Les intellectuels français face aux crises du communisme en Europe du Centre-Est (1956-1981)', *Labyrinthe*, 7 (2000); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Press, 2005); Jeannine Verdès Ledoux, *Au service du Parti: Le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1944-1956)* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).
[21] Jean Pasqualini, Rudolph Chelminski, *Prisoner of Mao* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973).

of opposites such as text/image or criticism/self-criticism, unveiling these 'contradictions' in the Maoist sense of the term. This inversion of principles updates the ideological mechanisms of a totalitarian system of thought.

A Posteriori Chinese Views

Broadly, Chinese cinema has ignored the Cultural Revolution or continued to censor this period partially, without consistently providing historical or visual documentation. Chinese television avoids addressing this censored topic, contributing to a general amnesia. There are far more literary productions on the question of the Cultural Revolution. The majority of related film production constitutes a few independent documentaries, featuring filmed testimonies. On the other hand, some critical documentaries have been broadcast on Hong Kong channels. As early as 1993, post-Maoist films participated in the implementation of a specific — but also very fragmentary — audio-visual writing, which could allow for an in-depth overhaul of the past and its many gaps. This marginal cinema nevertheless maintains a sensitive relationship with written history and the testimonies of Chinese totalitarianism. They provide a counterpoint to the ever-dominant national narrative.[22] Aside from a very partial, fictional reconstruction of these events, only about a dozen attempts at the margins of documentary production have been made: a fairly weak corpus of films considering that China produces nearly 500 films a year. Where fiction film fails, these few documentary films strive to act as a counter-memory to official speeches in China yesterday and today, to illustrate the abuses committed. Finally, in Europe, although there are many archival images, precious few documentary filmmakers have treated this chapter of world history. Philip Short, the BBC's Beijing correspondent, who also wrote biographies of Mao and of Pol Pot, contributed by way of a four-part documentary *Mao, une histoire chinoise* (2006) co-authored and directed by Adrien Maben for Arte.[23]

A few Sixth-Generation film directors including Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai and Wang Bing have produced Chinese fiction films on the topic. These directors offer a critical vision of China, which differs in any case from those given by

[22] Amongst others, these films include *1966, My Time in the Red Guards* (*1966, Wo de hongweibing shidai*, Wu Wenguang, 1993); Hu Jie's films, *Though I Am Gone* (*Wo sui si qu*, 2006), *Searching for Lin Zhao's Soul* (*Xunzhao Lin Zhao de linghun*, 2006), and Mother Wang Peiying (*Wo de muqin Wang Peiying*, 2011); the archival footage film, *Storm under the Sun* (*Hong ri fengbao*, Peng Xiaolian and S. Louisa Wei, 2009); the docu-fiction *Mr Zhang Believes* (*Chi*, Qiu Jiongjiong, 2015); *To Justify Bu Qinfu* (*Huan Bu Qinfu yi meili*, Wang Yunlong and Han Yi, 2011); Xu Xin's films, *Pathway* (*Daolu*, 2011), *My Cultural Revolution* (*Wo de wenge biannianshi*, 2014) and *Summary of Crimes* (*Zuixing zhaiyao*, 2014); and *Farewell, Beijing* (*Zaijian Beijing*, Zhang Tianhui, 2009).

[23] See René Viénet, 'Arrêts sur images', *Le Figaro*, 7 September 2006 <http://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/2006/09/07/01005-20060907ARTWWW90420-mao_arrets_sur_images.php> [accessed 11 March 2018].

the Maoist propaganda and the few (and often romanticized) historical re-enactments.[24] Many Sixth-Generation films that have been censored in China such as Wang's *11 Flowers* (*Wo 11*, 2011) and *Red Amnesia* (*Chuangru zhe*, 2014), have reappeared in international festivals. More recently, Zhang Yimou's film, *Coming Home* (*Guilai*, 2014), follows the itinerary of a father returning from a labour camp at the end of the Cultural Revolution, confronted by his amnesiac family. This film was expected to represent China at the Oscars, but it did not. These films had little distribution in China, if any at all.

On another note, Wang's *The Ditch* (*Jiabiangou*, Wang Bing, 2010), was chosen to be the *film sorpresa* in the 2010 Venice Film Festival. at the Venice Film Festival. Though the film is structured around a true filmic writing, it remains marginal on the audio-visual landscape of Chinese fictional cinema, both in terms of the point of view of its content and its form. Realized with an economy of means and filmed most often with direct sound and all the vagaries of a pale light behind closed doors, Wang's cinema is difficult to understand. The image here serves as a 'chiaroscuro' mode of observation. It is a question of filming everything before all traces disappear or are erased.

Wang had already filmed *Fengming: A Chinese Memoir* (*He Fengming*, 2007) in mostly static shots with minimalist montage. This three-hour long film is the account of a former journalist and survivor of the re-education camps. Wang's cinema is symptomatic of a story written from the bottom up. In symbolic fashion, he summons all those who were excluded, every victim of the Maoist experience, and films them, providing them, at last, an opportunity to speak. *Fengming: A Chinese Memoir* is a documentary that anticipates the subsequent writing of Wang's only fiction *The Ditch*, itself at the crossroads of documentary. Wang travelled all over China to record these testimonies, in search of survivors and families of the victims of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. He met Fengming whose husband died of hunger at the Jiabiangou camp on the edge of Mongolia. Prior to filming *The Ditch*, Wang filmed Fengming's account from narrated stories and tight frames. She evokes the advent of the communist regime in 1949, the anti-rightist campaigns, and her confinement in a labour re-education camp before her rehabilitation in 1978, after the Cultural Revolution.

In this way, *The Ditch* revisits, in a fictitious fashion, the effects of the Maoist repressive system. The challenge is to reconstruct the traces of a visual history in a society that has become amnesic about these issues, without reducing this period to the camps. Wang was inspired by a collection of short stories, chronicling the internment and the tragic destinies of those accused of rightism and betrayal of the Communist Party and sent to re-education camps during the Great Leap Forward, between 1950 and 1960. *The Ditch* is adapted from the 2003 novel *Farewell to Jiabiangou* (*Gaobie Jiabiangou*, Yang Xianhui) which counts roughly

[24] Luisa Prudentino and Kuo-Quiquemelle, 'Du cinéma réaliste au cinéma de propagande dans la Chine maoïste', in *Une histoire mondiale des cinémas de propagande*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2008), pp. 661–680.

nineteen testimonies. This novel was published the same year in France under the title *Le Chant des martyrs: Dans les camps de la mort de la Chine de Mao* [The Song of Martyrs: In the Death Camps of Mao's China].[25] The filmmaker revisits the evocative power of speech to stage a taboo story in China, visually examined from the perspective of the victims. This period is as little discussed as that of the Cultural Revolution. However, it makes it possible to better understand this historical continuity by producing an anti-hero cinema at the antipodes of Chinese film propaganda of the time. The film is based on a series of questions about this tragedy in a perspective that limits the use of archival images based on testimonies collected from the deportees, their families and the guards.[26]

Focusing on the victims, this film, shot in the Gobi Desert in extreme climatic and material conditions, fictitiously depicts hidden memories. The film is about the Hundred Flowers campaign, which began in 1957, and anticipates the Chinese Cultural Revolution ten years later. It also openly criticizes the blockages of the State-Party. This campaign against the right-wing movement also targeted those who dared to criticize Mao openly. The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) implied forced industrialization with famines of great magnitude in the countryside where nearly 40 million people perished. During the Great Leap Forward, the camps — which did not necessarily refer to any criminal status — were based on the idea of a new re-education through work that corresponded to a political and social program that ensured the 'success' of communism. The Cultural Revolution trivialized the Leninist notion of 'class enemy' through re-education.[27] To measure further the gap between the written word and the images of the time, it would probably be necessary to consider the Cultural Revolution within the context of terror in China, beyond its ideological legacy. The film also deals with conflicts between the living and the dead behind closed doors, in a prisonlike environment, for instance, when a woman fights camp bureaucracy in order to give her husband a decent burial.

Can this inhuman reality become human? Echoing Simone de Beauvoir's slightly unorthodox position: 'In China, man is tearing himself away from his immanence in order to understand what is human'.[28] Wang Bing's cinema mirrors the madness of a system and its discontinuity in history, from the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution. In *'Til Madness Do Us Part* (*Feng'ai*, 2013), he uses raw images, describing the universe of the excluded through their daily lives in a psychiatric hospital in Yunnan. It is his way of restoring not only an individuality that was denied by the system, but also a humanity beyond the prison for individuals with no future. A few decades later, these Chinese films

[25] See Caroline Renard, Isabelle Anselme and François Amy de la Bretèque, *Wang Bing, un cinéaste en Chine aujourd'hui* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2014).
[26] See Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Dans l'enfer du goulag chinois', *Slate FR*, 8 March 2012 <http://www.slate.fr/story/51101/fengming-fosse-goulag-chinois-cinema> [accessed 11 March 2018].
[27] See Patrick Cotelette, 'Wang Bing, *Le Fossé* et *Fengming. Chronique d'une femme chinoise*', *Lectures*, 7 January 2013 <http://lectures.revues.org/10303> [accessed 11 March 2018].
[28] Simone de Beauvoir, 'Témoin à charge', *Les Temps modernes*, 127–128 (1956), 297–319.

give perspective to the initial remarks on the present and future of the Cultural Revolution in Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* and René Viénet's *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*. As a counterpoint, these posterior Chinese views establish an inverted model of French fiction films in the 1960s and 1970s, avoiding the central question of politics so as to decipher a utopia based on a devastating ideology,[29] by retrospectively revisiting its consequences through an anonymous social history. Through their intersecting viewpoints, these recent Chinese films provide a means to challenge certain intangible assumptions about political history in a yet closed China, as well as to measure the effects or impacts of the Cultural Revolution that are known today.

[29] Wang Bing, *Alors, la Chine? Entretien avec Emmanuel Burdeau et Eugenio Renzi* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2014).

We Have Never Been Chaste
Sexuality and Cinephilia in Post-Maoist Cinema

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Abstract

The essay examines post-Maoist cinema by looking at two interrelated issues: the portrayal of sexuality and cinephilia during the Maoist period. Sexual urges are inextricable from post-Maoist cinema; in particular, the connection between eros and revolution serves to criticize Maoism from within. Another common trait is the long shadow cast by films made in the Maoist period. Whether by explicit reference to movie-going in the diegesis or through allusions understood by those familiar with Maoist oldies, post-Maoist cinema tends to be highly cinephilic. The onscreen reemergence of cinephilia – often in conjunction with the eruption of youthful libido – is no low-stakes game; rather, it enables a critical view of Maoism. This essay focuses on *The Dreamers* (*The Dreamers - I sognatori*, Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003) through a diachronic and synchronic lens, placing the film side by side with other movies – the historical precedent *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967) and the roughly contemporary Chinese film *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, Jiang Wen, 1994).

Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* (*The Dreamers - I sognatori*, 2003) is regarded by many as a post-ideological portrayal of the 1968 Paris riots, a semi-pornographic revisionist account of French Maoism. Slavoj Žižek writes that '[the] shift from political engagement to the post-political Real is perhaps best exemplified by the films of Bernardo Bertolucci, that arch-renegade […]. This span achieved full circle with *The Dreamers*'.[1] In this view, the Maoist disruption of capitalism that fueled the 1968 events, already defused by late twentieth-century neoliberal cooptation, receives a dog's burial by Bertolucci. I argue otherwise: *The Dreamers* offers a sober-minded, sympathetic corrective; as such it is a prime example of post-Maoist cinema. As I define it, post-Maoist cinema explicitly addresses its position as heir to Maoist films. Probing into Maoist ideology and practice in the 1950s to 1970s, post-Maoist cinema is largely neither post-political nor flippant. It explores both the allure and limitations of Maoism and Maoist cinema.

[1] Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 59.

I examine the position of post-Maoist cinema by looking at two interrelated issues: the portrayal of sexuality and cinephilia during the Maoist period. Libidinal passion, and especially young people's budding sexuality, have been crucial components of professing Maoism, and sexual urges are inextricable from post-Maoist cinema. In particular, such films build upon the connection between eros and revolution to criticize Maoism from within. Another common trait in post-Maoist cinema is the long shadow cast by films made in the Maoist period. Whether by explicit reference to movie-going in the diegesis or through allusions understood by those familiar with Maoist oldies, post-Maoist cinema tends to be highly cinephilic. The protagonists are avid film watchers; the frame is filled with movie memorabilia; and the later films imitate earlier classics. The onscreen reemergence of cinephilia – often in conjunction with the eruption of youthful libido – is no low-stakes game; rather, it enables a critical view of Maoism.

Maoism, as addressed in this essay, is always at a remove from the ideology and writings of Mao and his apparent followers outside China. Maoism takes the form of performative acts: it amounts to a pledge of allegiance, often uninformed of ideology and policy; Maoist references often aim at gaining social capital. Such self-fashioned Maoism is further veiled by onscreen representation. The films at hand do not provide straightforward documentation; rather, the directors reflect on what Maoism could be, or could have been, or might have signified in earlier films.

Many studies argue the exact meaning of Maoist ideology, and how it was interpreted and deployed differently around the world.[2] Scholars also debate the role of sexual repression and liberation among the youth who found themselves overnight drawing a line from their parents' generation. Memoirs and novels suggest the prominence of sex in the life of young people at the time.[3] As part of the film's plot and imagery, however, the protagonists' desires are transposed to a symbolic register. Onscreen carnal and cinephilic passions are commentaries on historical and current perceptions of Maoism. This essay focuses on *The Dreamers* through a diachronic and synchronic lens, placing Bertolucci's film side by side with other movies – the historical precedent *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967) and the roughly contemporary Chinese film *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, Jiang Wen, 1994). The circumstances in France and the People's Republic of China (PRC) diverge, of course, widely: Mao's policies were different from how his thought was received and interpreted around the world. From today's perspective in particular, a contrarian gesture, even shouting

[2] See for example Robert J. Alexander, *Maoism in the Developed World* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2001); Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajat Kumar Kujur, *Maoism in India: Reincarnation of Ultra-Left Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[3] See for example Emily Honig, 'Socialist Sex: The Cultural Revolution Revisited', *Modern China*, 29.2 (April 2003), 143-175.

Maoist slogans, may be welcome in Europe or the U.S. when besieged by the ultra-right. The PRC, on the other hand, is still ruled by Mao's party, and the return to repressive Maoism is possible if not already in motion. In juxtaposing European and Chinese post-Maoist cinema, I do not claim their affinity as much as challenge their identification as post-political cinema.

The reception of *The Dreamers* resonates with the debate around onscreen reconstructions of the Maoist period in the PRC. In this article I look also at the relation between sexuality and Maoism in *The Dreamers* and in Chinese films. I argue that the sex in these films, often breaking taboos and represented in transgressive form, aims at a critical reassessment of Maoism. The question is not whether such sexual behavior ever took place, but rather what its symbolic value may be.

Having just voiced my reservation about Žižek's reading of *The Dreamers*, I should stress the relevance of his reproach of post-politics. Not only has militant ideological engagement gone out of vogue, but the self-congratulatory tone in discussing communism in the post-Cold-War era is uncritical and self-righteous. Žižek disavows the 'vulgar anti-communist cliché' that Eastern Bloc totalitarianism was tragedy, and the return to communism would be a farce.[4] To this we may add that communism, murderous and totalitarian as it was, has always had its farcical side as it could not live up to its utopian ideals.

In *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), Žižek makes the case that dictatorship is especially vulnerable when it claims to speak in the name of the people. To undermine such a political system one needs not to deride the leader but the people. Showing 'ordinary people […] in their daily conformism, stupidity, egotistic lust' proves that 'there is no mythic people which serves as the ultimate legitimization'. Indeed, some of the most effective cinematic blows to communism were delivered in Miloš Forman's scenes of debauchery mentioned by Žižek – and in carnivalesque moments in post-Maoist Chinese films. These episodes should not be dismissed as nihilistic but rather understood as a level-headed rethinking of Maoist ideology and the Maoist cinematic legacy.

Maoism as an Adolescent Fantasy

The Dreamers is told from the perspective of Matthew, an American student in Paris in 1968. He frequents the Cinémathèque Française and identifies himself as a cinephile. During the demonstrations over the firing of the director of the Cinémathèque – the event that foreshadowed the more overtly political riots three months later – he meets a brother and sister his age, Theo and Isabelle. Raised by an artistic bourgeois couple happy to pay lip service to the revolution and to buy social stability with their money, the two siblings take a more

[4] Žižek, p. 1.

rebellious approach. Before storming the barricades at the end of the movie, the siblings show their nonconformism by studying Mao's Little Red Book and carrying on an incestuous relationship in front of Matthew. The plot follows the three young people as they lead a carefree existence together, without any grown-ups to watch over their antics. They seem to represent a microcosm of the Maoist movement in 1968 Paris.

In between increasingly transgressive sexual acts – and in conjunction with them – the three reaffirm their fervor for the cinema. They often challenge each other to recognize reenactments of famous scenes. When Theo fails to recognize his sister's version of *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), she orders him to masturbate, in her and Matthew's presence, to Marlene Dietrich's photo. Later Matthew fails to name *Scarface* (Brian de Palma, 1983) and is coerced into making love to Isabelle – her virginal experience, it turns out – in front of Theo. (In the original novel, *The Holy Innocents*, the brother also rapes Matthew and proceeds to scatological humiliation.[5]) The made-to-shock sexual scenes overshadow the cinephilia and Maoist imagery that facilitate the unusual ménage à trois. The sexual degradation follows a cinephilic fall from grace as the young men admit their incompetence in putting image and film title together. In both scenes, the defeated men are overpowered by artwork hanging behind them – a poster of *La Chinoise* and a Chinese print of Mao standing above a sea of red flags, respectively. Theo has made his room into a Maoist shrine; as the three act out their fantasies, the ideological backdrop literally frames them and symbolically creates an ineluctable scaffolding around them.

The poster of *La Chinoise* alludes to many strands in Bertolucci's film: it refers to the siblings' cinephilia and to their interest in Marxism, as Godard's film is viewed as presaging the events of 1968 and marking the beginning of Godard's Maoist filmmaking period. More importantly for the purposes of this essay, the poster suggests an analogy between *La Chinoise* and *The Dreamers*. Godard's film is hardly an encomium to 1960s French Marxism; rather, it offers a sympathetic criticism of the fate of ideological fervor in the hands of well-meaning but naïve youth. A five-person Maoist cell is ensconced in a bourgeois Paris apartment, where they make love, read the Little Red Book, and lecture to each other. The one woman who comes from the countryside parrots their slogans, serves their meals in porcelain ware, and occasionally prostitutes herself to finance them. The leader, a woman who fancies herself as a Chinese revolutionary by wearing a Parisian couture version of the Mao suit, attempts a botched political assassination. Godard's Marxist sympathy and his later fashioning of *La Chinoise* as a Maoist manifesto notwithstanding, *La Chinoise* reads as a satire.[6]

The Dreamers is often compared to *The Terrible Children* (*Les Enfants terribles*, Jean-Pierre Melville, 1950), which also describes a love triangle that includes two incestuous siblings. Bertolucci seems, however, equally indebted

[5] Gilbert Adair, *The Holy Innocents* (London: William Heinemann, 1988).
[6] On Godard's claims that *La Chinoise* voices his commitment to Marxism, see Wolin, pp. 114-17.

to *La Chinoise*, which also takes place almost entirely in a well-heeled Parisian apartment decorated in Maoist chic, revolves around an enigmatic and sensuous redhead and, most importantly, features a small group of college-age youngsters who keep tormenting themselves over finding the correct political response to current affairs. In structure and ideological content, *The Dreamers* resembles *La Chinoise* rather than *The Terrible Children*. Insofar as *La Chinoise* is a Maoist film, *The Dreamers* identifies itself as explicitly post-Maoist: not a flattening of the ideological content, but a nuanced and often critical way of looking back.

Post-Maoist Cinema and Post-Cinema

The identify-the-movie game played by the protagonists of *The Dreamers* is on its face cinephilia gone awry, reduced to a trivia game and at the same time played for exceedingly high stakes. Yet the scenes also address the viewers of Bertolucci's film and signal the post-Maoist fate of cinephilia. Wanda Strauven has noted that the games in *The Dreamers* show how movie watching now extends to the home, where a film can be paused for reflection.[7] By this interpretation, Bertolucci anachronistically introduces a cinephilia divorced from the film theater through the use of home video. Strauven is correct in seeing *The Dreamers* as a reevaluation of cinephilia from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, but she ignores an important twist in Bertolucci's presentation of the cinephilic quiz. The game scenes keep interrupting the diegesis with sequences from the films to which the youngsters allude. (Such non-diegetic asides also resonate with *La Chinoise.*) The film viewers are therefore privy to images and sounds unavailable to the protagonists. This additional information involves the viewers in separate challenges to recognize the earlier films. The film viewers identify with the characters' cinephilia; yet the viewers are placed in a different position: unlike the characters, the viewers avail themselves of readymade images, easier and quicker to spot, that indeed suggest an early twenty-first-century home video setting.

Similarly, references to places of cinematic significance around Paris seem to address Bertolucci's viewers as much as to gratify the protagonists. The three young people go to the Louvre, where they reenact the run through the museum in Godard's (now) classic *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à part*, 1964). As in the quiz scenes, the diegesis is intercut with shots from the originary film. To fully appreciate the parallel, one must observe the scenes from outside, as only the viewers of *The Dreamers* can. Such is the anachronistic, meta-cinematic image of Jean-Pierre Léaud in front of the Cinémathèque, as his younger self appears in documentary footage from the Cinémathèque demonstrations Roland-François

[7] Wanda Strauven, 'The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch', in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 148-63 (pp. 159-160).

Lack notes such references as examples of the current cine-tourism that traces New Wave film locations. The viewers can return to Paris and Parisian films of the 1960s.[8] Yet Bertolucci does more than serve as a tourist guide: he suggests that film is now known mostly second-hand, through appropriations and home-consumption copies. Cinematic images all become déjà-vus. *The Dreamers* bids farewell to an era – and suggests the potential of post-cinematic cinephilia.

Were the Red Guards Maoist?

A prominent contradiction in the behavior of the protagonists in *The Dreamers* is their patent lack of political involvement. Matthew tells Theo:

> The Red Guards that you admire – they all carry the same book, they all sing the same songs, they all parrot the same slogans. So, in this big, epic movie, everybody is an extra. […] if you really believed what you were saying, you'd be […] out there, on the street […]. But you're not out there. You're inside, with me, drinking expensive wine, talking about film, talking about… Maoism. […] I don't think you really believe it. You buy the lamp, and you put up the posters, but it ain't…

Matthew refers to the lamp next to him, a glass Mao bust lit from the inside, as a symbol of Theo's vacuous and vain relation to Maoism. At the same time, he criticizes Maoism as practiced in China. Indeed, a frequent question about French Maoists has been, to what extent did their ideology and actions comport with Mao's thought? The Maoist sympathy of prominent thinkers such as Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and the Tel Quel group in the 1970s seems to have overshadowed initial misgivings such as those voiced by Matthew, that Maoism was a fashion, an Orientalist fantasy, an empty use of slogans. As I have mentioned, traces of such doubt are discernible already in *La Chinoise*. Yet if in *La Chinoise* the group's choice to isolate itself in an apartment might be interpreted as keeping apart from the Parisian bourgeoisie, Matthew's view in *The Dreamers* exposes the solipsistic tendencies of the self-proclaimed Maoists. By putting these words in the mouth of Matthew, with whom the viewers may identify, Bertolucci – who has repeatedly admitted his debt to the French New Wave – offers an elegy to the idealism of his generation's youth.

The Dreamers is emblematic of how post-Maoist cinema finds itself between a rock and a hard place, as directors express both nostalgia for an idealistic period (in which they may have been personally involved) and criticism of past excesses and equivocations. Such nuanced view of Maoism might be interpreted as selling

[8] Roland-François Lack, 'The Cine-Tourist's Map of New Wave Paris', in *Cinematic Urban Geographies*, ed. by François Penz and Richard Koeck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 95-111 (pp. 106-7).

out. This was the case not only for Bertolucci's film but also for many movies produced in the PRC since the mid-1980s.

In the PRC, post-Maoist cinema may be considered a distinct and prolific genre. At first came films reassessing the scars of the Maoist period and the Cultural Revolution in particular, such as *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (*Tianyunshan chuanqi*, Xie Jin, 1980) and *Blue Kite* (*Lan fengzheng*, Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1993). Since the late 1980s, most treatment of the Maoist period turned to double-entendres and sarcasm. In addition to a general disenchantment with the government's dogmatism, people felt a growing cognitive dissonance between the free market economy promoted officially since 1992 and the Communist Party's insistence that the country still adhered to Maoist ideology. 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' looked more and more like capitalism, and the ensuing inconsistencies were foregrounded in what Western scholars have called 'postsocialist cinema'. In fact, films were especially apt vehicles of criticism: as older cultural elites were marginalized, popular media gained what approximated moral authority.[9] The noncommittal, tongue-in-cheek tone of many films reflected the realization that in post-Maoist China artists were not presented with a simple choice between cooptation and dissent. Rather, the ideological use of art – and the representation of Maoism in particular – were subject to a complex and fluctuating politics of memory.[10]

One of the most prominent films in this category is *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi, Jiang Wen, 1994)*, whose contents and reception evidence the complexity of post-Maoist cinema. The plot follows a group of teenagers in Beijing around 1972. As many youth during the Cultural Revolution, they are left to their own devices while the parents are away, either sent to reeducation camps or on military duty. The movie does not show the violence of the first phase of the Cultural Revolution, when in the late 1960s houses were ransacked and people brutally beaten. Instead, the teenagers are seen horsing around and discovering their sexuality. As soon as it came out in 1995, the film ran intro controversy. Feng Jicai, who had compiled an oral history of the Cultural Revolution, wrote that the film had nothing to do with his experience. Others noted that there were many perceptions of the Cultural Revolution, and that young people in particular lived through the period as 'a bright, sunny vacation'.[11] *In the Heat of the Sun* suggests the possibility of multiple, fragmented views of the Maoist

[9] See Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

[10] See Yomi Braester, 'The Post-Maoist Politics of Memory', in *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. by Yingjin Zhang (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 434-451.

[11] Yomi Braester, *Witness against History: Literature, Film and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 192, 200.

period – at odds with each other, marred by the breakdown of memory, and mediated through cinematic images.

In a key moment in the film, the voiceover narrator brings the storyline to a halt (while the image freezes) and states that he no longer knows what truly happened: 'Ha-ha! Don't believe any of it. I never was this brave or heroic [...]. I sadly realize that I have no way to return to reality'. The narrator, identified as the protagonist Ma Xiaojun speaking from the vantage point of the present, twenty years after the events, suggests the failure of both Maoist and post-Maoist historical interventions. The Red Guards' purported heroism amounted to little, and the attempt of their generation to reconstruct the past in any meaningful way is doomed. The director Jiang Wen, who also plays the present-day Ma Xiaojun, distances himself from Maoist idealism. With self-effacing humor typical of Chinese post-Maoist cinema and much more sarcasm toward the protagonists' motives than Bertolucci would exhibit, Jiang strips the Cultural Revolution of its ideological veneer. Ma Xiaojun and his friends, the three youngsters in *The Dreamers*, and the generations they represent in China and France, blurted Maoist slogans with great enthusiasm and even conviction, but Maoism was largely a subterfuge for more mundane passions. One may very well regard Mao himself as a phantasm that existed only in people's minds.

Cinephilic and Carnal Passions

The failure of memory in *In the Heat of the Sun* is partly due to how the protagonists construct their lives around fleeting and moving images. Much like the three youngsters in *The Dreamers*, Ma Xiaojun and his friends reenact film scenes as a form of social bonding. Reference to revolutionary films such as *Lenin in 1918* (*Lenin v 1918 godu*, Mikhail Romm, 1939) and *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* (*Qixi baihu tuan*, Su Li, 1972) becomes part of their daily lives. The use of cinematic allusions within the diegesis, invoked by the protagonists and motivating the plot, may be regarded as a defining trait of post-Maoist cinema. The tribute to film classics suggests not so much an ideological continuity but a cinephilic alliance that destabilizes the claim to truth of both past and present.

As in *The Dreamers*, the film reenactment scenes in *In the Heat of the Sun* are linked to sexual exploration. In conjunction with their cinephilic bonding, the boys try to impress girls, comment on the girls' bodies, and tease them into kissing. The most explicit scene, excised but still implicit in the final cut, shows Ma Xiaojun masturbating to the photo of a young woman, on her bed, after he had snuck into her apartment. The photo acquires cinematic attributes as Ma Xiaojun first views it through a telescope, and it later changes shape in his memories, from color to black-and-white. By coincidence, photos are also linked to masturbation in *The Dreamers* – Matthew places Isabelle's photo in his underpants, and Theo ejaculates on Greta Garbo's image. Such adolescent behavior is a common cinematic trope; what makes the parallel significant is that

both films link the cinephilic gaze to sexual initiation and (relatively) explicit imagery. Cinephilic fetishism leads to loss of sexual innocence, and by extension to ideological disenchantment. One can only look back at the Maoist period through a distorting telescope and wonder where things went wrong.

Post-Maoist cinema has inevitable sexual connotation, as the events of Paris 1968 are associated also with the sexual revolution. In the PRC, filmmakers were highly aware of the ideological implications of onscreen sexual appeal. At first, films such as *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (*Lushan lian*, Huang Zumo, 1980) and *Old Well* (*Lao Jing*, Wu Tianming, 1987) presented sexually charged scenes (tame by current standards, but scandalous at the time) as an ideological affront to Maoist repression. The so-called Fifth Generation of directors that rose to fame in the 1980s distinguished itself from Maoist cinema by flaunting 'primitive passions'.[12] Other films, such as in *Xiu Xiu: The Sent-Down Girl* (*Tianyu*, Joan Chen, 1998), expose cadres' abuse of political power for sexual harassment. By the 1990s, films started foregrounding also how sexual exploration continued in various guises during the Cultural Revolution. Examples include *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (*Xiao caifeng*, Dai Sijie, 2002) and *Peeping* (*Feng*, aka *Kui,* Li Wake, 2003). These films go against the grain of the official line about the Cultural Revolution simply by recasting Maoist ideology and practice in a down-to-earth context. As Ma Xiaojun says in *In the Heat of the Sun*, 'I never was this brave or heroic'. The youth stoking the Cultural Revolution were no glorious activists; they shouted slogans in the streets and masturbated at home. Acknowledging this unremarkable situation can be highly damaging to the Communist Party because of the Maoist claim to a revolutionary sublime. Post-Maoist cinema shows communism not as cowardice, but worse by its terms: as masturbatory.

The central role that sex plays in the plot and imagery of *The Dreamers* may also be illuminated by the post-Maoist criticism of revolutionary purity. Bertolucci's choice of explicit imagery, which in the US won the film the rare NC-17 rating, may be overdetermined. It may be seen as an auteurist gesture, a return to the director's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Both films portray transgressive, borderline nonconsensual sex. As Asbjørn Grønstad notes, *The Dreamers* is part of a brutalist trend that makes the viewer ask, 'Should I stay or should I go? If I continue watching, what exactly are my motivations? If I leave, what does this protest signify, besides discomfort?'.[13] The sex in *The Dreamers* is beautiful and sensuous, but also disorienting and scarring. As in Bertolucci's earlier film, the viewers are kept on edge and must recognize their complicity in ethically compromised situations.

At the same time, the homage to *Last Tango in Paris* highlights the chasm

[12] See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[13] Asbjørn Grønstad, *Screening the Unwatchable: Spaces of Negation in Post-Millennial Art Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 44.

that has opened since the early 1970s: *The Dreamers* cannot recreate the shock caused by *Last Tango in Paris* since many movies have paved the way in the meanwhile. *The Dreamers* is by definition a post-*Tango* film. By extension, *The Dreamers* is perforce post-1960s; it cannot revert to the mindset of the Maoist period, only mark the growing gap. No one steps in the same ideological river twice. Moreover, Bertolucci's film, post-*Chinoise* and post-*Tango*, is also a post-Maoist statement, suggesting not only that there is no return, but that the haloed point of origin was never all it's cracked up to be.

Post-Maoist cinema as I have defined it – films that have established an explicit rapport with the Maoist period – offer conflicted accounts of that time. The flagrantly deny the possibility of return to, or even reconstitution of, the 1950s to 1970s. The films provide complex descriptions that counter dogmatic narratives. *La Chinoise, In the Heat of the Sun*, and *The Dreamers* seem to suggest: we may never have been Maoist. Ideologically and sexually, we may never have been chaste.

Beyond Cinema

Permanent Call for Essays – Beyond Cinema

Following the so-called 'digital revolution', dramatic transformations have affected the ways in which cinema is produced, consumed and perceived, to the extent that it seems to have gone 'beyond' itself: beyond its very language and discourse; its traditional consumption practices and spaces; its position and function within the social (as well as the medial) sphere. As a consequence, during the last two decades, research in film studies has significantly widened its scope: the study of cinema has been re-articulated in several fields of inquiry and through a variety of methodological approaches and (inter)disciplinary perspectives, in an attempt to keep up with these most recent developments.

This section of *Cinéma & Cie* aims therefore to function as a permanent observatory of this 'beyondness'. Specifically, it provides a space to re-discuss the thresholds of the cinematic medium, as well as the boundaries of traditional film studies, by addressing a variety of under-investigated contexts and objects through innovative and unconventional approaches and references.

Beyond Cinema encourages proposals related to the following main frameworks:

Cinema Beyond the Film Text. Cinema in a transtextual perspective: intertextual, metatextual and hypertextual relations among films, and/or between films and other cultural products; practices of appropriation of pre-existing images (found-footage, archival footage, collage films, and so on).

Cinema Beyond the Cinematic Medium. Cinema in a transmedia perspective: remediations and intermedial practices; processes of translation, differentiation, assimilation, hybridization and mutual exchange with other media formations, on both the aesthetic and material level.

Cinema Beyond the Movie Theatre. Cinema in a translocational perspective: the relocation of cinema and new forms of circulation and consumption (from mobile phones to urban screens); musealization and exposition of cinema and films; non-institutional forms of filmmaking (amateur cinema and non-theatrical genres, such as the medical, industrial, touristic film, etc.).

Cinema Beyond Film Studies. Cinema in a transdisciplinary perspective: intersections between film studies and other disciplines, from both the humanities and hard sciences (cinema and philosophy, cinema and neuroscience, cinema and

cultural studies, etc.); the role of cinema as a didactic tool and as an instrument of scientific inquiry.

We invite the submission of articles in English or French (5,000-6,000 words), edited according to the journal's style guidelines (http://www.cinemaetcie.net/authors-guidelines/). Contributors are also asked to provide an abstract (300-500 words), 5 keywords, and a short biographical note (150 words).

Submissions should be sent to: beyondcinema@cinemaetcie.net. Authors will be notified of acceptance or non-acceptance within one month of submission. Once their article has been assessed for suitability by the section's editors, it will then be peer-reviewed by anonymous, expert referees.

As a permanent call for essays of a biannual journal, *Beyond Cinema* presents two fixed deadlines for submission every year, as follows:

Articles submitted by March 31st will be considered for publication in the Spring issue.

Articles submitted by October 30th will be considered for publication in the Fall issue.

Connect, Disconnect, Reconnect
Historicizing the Current Gesture towards Disconnectivity, from the Plug-in Drug to the Digital Detox

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Abstract

This essay picks up on the invitation extended by the sessions on 'Media Archeology: Network(s)' at FilmForum 2017 to engage, with some political urgency, in 'an archaeological excavation of the post-Fordist, post-industrial and global emergence of the Network(s).' In a time and age in which the network, to speak with Galloway and Thacker, 'has emerged as a dominant form describing the nature of control today, as well as resistance to it'[1] such a historicizing move seems all the more important, not just for the sake of historical depth, but also, in particular, in our attempts to refine our understanding of the present-day situation. Taking up their invitation and yet giving it a somewhat different twist, in this paper, I will appraise a genealogy of what could be seen as the inverse of the network, or the idea of networked connectivity, which, I argue, in the last decade has manifested itself most clearly in the desire to disconnect. Drawing a link between the current preoccupation with digital detoxing and anti-television movement of the 1980s onwards, I will reflect on the relevance of doing such a historicizing comparative analysis.

Digital detox holidays, phone stacking dinners, virtual suicide, a year without Internet. In a culture obsessed with social networking, participation and connectivity, to disconnect has come to mean going off-line: to reclaim presence in the physical world; to revitalize face to face communication; to salvage the actual over the virtual. To disconnect signals a desire to re-connect: with ones off-line identity, with friends, with the spiritual values of life, with ones natural environment, with the world at large. Disconnectivity thus bespeaks connectivity, and vice versa. For every form of connectivity, whether desired or feared, there is a correlative form of disconnectivity, dreaded or longed for. Each connection

[1] Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 4; here quoted in 'FilmForum Udine/Gorizia, XV MAGIS Spring School', *Program*, 2017, <https://filmforumfestival.it/program/programs-in-pdf/program-2017.pdf> [accessed 21 April 2018]. I thank Diego Cavallotti, Simone Dotto, and Andrea Mariani and the anonymous reviewers at *Cinéma&Cie* for their generous support and productive commentaries on earlier drafts of this article.

evokes the possibility of a disconnection that would instantly annul it, that precedes it, and that conditions it.[2]

In this paper, I would like to expand on this discussion on disconnectivity as played out in public and scholarly discourse alike by offering a brief commentary, in the first part, on one of the more dominant strands within the existing research on disconnectivity, i.e. the discussion on technology non-use, which stands out in the present context for its often overt lack of (critical) historicity. Then, in the second part, I will respond by considering one possible way of historicizing the current gesture towards disconnectivity. I will do so by drawing a link between the call for digital detoxing that seems to have permeated public discourse today and the anti-television movement's appeal against the 'plug-in-drug' television from the mid-1980s onwards. To conclude, in the final section I will end with some remarks on the relevance of doing such a historicizing comparative analysis.

1.

One of the more dominant trends within the existing research on the desire to disconnect largely has its roots in the social sciences and emerged, first and foremost, out of the investigations into the *uses* of technology instigated by the advent of the digital in the 1990s. The realization that non-use can provide valuable insights into the social functioning of technology more or less coincided with the diffusion and arguable 'domestication' of the digital technology itself from the mid-2000 onwards.[3] In the social sciences this resulted in a expanding body of empirical studies that not only challenge the pro-innovation bias of digital media technologies (and arguably of media studies as such), but that also seeks to depart from the user/non-user binary, thus opening up the way to conceptualize technology non-use beyond the initial digital divide research. This, amongst others, has given rise to a number of alternative taxonomies of non-use that seek to complement and refine the typologies of 'haves', 'have-nots', and 'want-nots' to include more nuanced categorizations of non-users, like 'rejecters'

[2] Elsewhere I have commented on the structuring paradox at play here, in part, by considering how the (im)possibility of 'opting out' in an 'always on' culture is ruminated in scholarly discussions on technology non-use, media resistance, and media disruption in particular. So many articles on each of these topics have been published that it would take up way too much space to list them all here, and any selection would be random without further comments. However, the reader will find an extended (but by no means extensive) literary overview in the article listed below (with which this article could be well read in tandem), as well as my take and a more elaborate reflection on the gains and limitations, pendulums and pitfalls of the scholarly discourse on disconnectivity. Pepita Hesselberth, 'Discourses on Disconnectivity and the Right to Disconnect', *New Media & Society*, 20.5 (June 2017),1994–2010.

[3] The reference here is to Roger Silverstone, 'Domesticating Domestication. Reflections on the Life of a Concept', in *Domestication of Media and Technology*, ed. by Thomas Berker and others (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), pp. 230–48.

and 'resisters', 'rare users' and 'lapsed users' to name but a few.[4] These studies are illuminating in that they draw attention to the complexity and ambiguity of people's motivations for, and practices of, technology non-use. Furthermore, these studies are historically interesting because they all signal a growing unease with the ubiquitous presence of connective media devices within our everyday life and environment. The significant increase of these publication over the last decade suggests that this unease has substantially grown from the mid-2000s onwards.

It is not my intention to downgrade the relevance or validity of these studies, or of other persons perceived, performed, or uttered opposition to technology-use as such. However, what bothers me about most of these studies into the non-use of technology is their often manifest — or at times even blatant — lack of (critical) historicity. To put it boldly: with its primary focus on the role of individual agency in the social construction of technology — a focus that is at times well motivated, and indeed historically well fought over — along with the often descriptive use of data-driven taxonomies, these studies tend to privatize and de-historicize the gesture towards disconnectivity without paying heed to the historicity of the gesture, and therewith, to the specificity of its (re)incarnations under the conditions of neoliberalism and our so-called 'culture of connectivity'.[5]

But the gesture towards disconnectivity, we know, is hardly a new phenomenon. Resistance to (modern) technology is of all times, as are other forms of collective or solitary reclusion. Practices like simple living and the slow movement find their roots in anarcho-primitivism and the back-to-the-land movement that emerged in the aftermath of the second industrial revolution, after the first had given rise to the Luddites' opposition to modern technology, which in turn finds its contemporary in today's neo-Luddite and other anti-technology movements (including, arguably, Salafism). And the list goes on. That we are able to establish such links requires hindsight, and does not mean that these movements are necessary the same. But it does mean we can learn from them.

[4] See, for example, Sally Wyatt, Graham Thomas and Tiziana Terranova, 'They Came, They Surfed, They Went Back to the Beach: Conceptualising Use and Non-Use of the Internet', in *Virtual Society? Technology, Cyberbole, Reality*, ed. by Steve Woolgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 23–40; Neil Selwyn, 'Digital Division or Digital Decision? A Study of Non-Users and Low-Users of Computers', *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research in Culture, Media and the Arts*, 34.4-5 (2006), 273–92; Christine Satchell and Paul Dourish, 'Beyond the User: Use and Non-Use in HCI', in *Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference of the Australian Computer-Human Interaction Special Interest Group OZCHI 2009* (New York: ACM, 2009), pp. 9–16, <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1738826.1738829> [accessed 6 December 2016]; Eric P. S. Baumer and others, 'Limiting, Leaving, and (Re)Lapsing: An Exploration of Facebook Non-Use Practices and Experiences', in *Proceedings to the CHI 2014 Workshop: Refusing, Limiting, Departing* (New York: ACM 2013), pp. 3257–66, <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2470654.2466446> [accessed 6 December 2016].

[5] The reference is to José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); for a more elaborate discussion of (the limitations of) this debate and the paradox inherent to it, see Hesselberth.

In the remainder of this paper I would like to trace one of such possible lineages — for indeed there are many: some compelling research has already been done in this direction from the mid-2010 onwards. Here I think of the studies of, for example, Ethan Plaut, who has likened today's self-monitoring apps to the swear jar as an early technology of communication avoidance; of David Banks, who has traced the etymology of the distinction between 'on- and off line' back to the emergence of the railroad in the late nineteenth century; and of Florian Sprenger, who in a forthcoming paper reflects on the persistence of notions of dis/connectivity in the earliest fantasies of electricity.[6]

My ambition, here, is slightly less ambitious, and indeed less vested in the archive or the histories of ideas as such, if only because, first, the lineage I trace — from the digital detox to the plug-in-drug television — goes far less back in time, and, second, my paper, in a way, is more critical than historical in intent. What it shares with the aforementioned publications, however, is the acute awareness of the need to historicize the contemporary gesture towards disconnectivity, an interest that serves at once a cultural analytical and media-archeological end.

2.

That pre-occupation with the possibility 'opting-out' or 'going offline' is not a new phenomenon, becomes clear when we compare the current fixation on media addiction and digital detoxing to the moral concerns — expressed in both public and scholarly discourse alike — about the 'plug-in drug' television, as, for example, reflected in the following quote from one of the exponents of the anti-television movement in the 1990s, TV-Free America:

> TV-Free America 'encourages Americans to reduce, voluntarily and dramatically, the amount of television they watch in order to promote richer, healthier, and more connected lives, families, and communities'.[7]

A similar vocabulary and intent is resounded in the definition of Digital Detox

[6] Ethan R. Plaut, 'Technologies of Avoidance: The Swear Jar and the Cell Phone', *First Monday*, 20.11 (November 2015) <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6295> [accessed 6 December 2016]; David A. Banks, 'Lines of Power: Availability to Networks as a Social Phenomenon', *First Monday*, 20.11 (2015) <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6283> [accessed 6 December 2016]; Florian Sprenger, 'Continuity and Disconnection, Flows and Bursts: On the Interruption of Communication', unpublished guest lecture given at the University of Copenhagen on 13 February 2017; also see Florian Sprenger, *The Politics of Micro-Decisions: Edward Snowden, Net Neutrality, and the Architectures of the Internet*, trans. by Valentine A. Pakis and Christopher M. Kelty (Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2015), pp. 100–04.

[7] Here quoted in Jason Mittell, 'Cultural Power of an Anti-Television Metaphor: Questioning the "Plug-In Drug" and a TV-Free America', *Television & New Media*, 1.2 (May 2000), 215–38 (p. 215).

that can be found in the online Oxford *Living* Dictionaries (emphasis in the original; the pun, however, seems unintended):

> Digital Detox
> NOUN
> A period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices such as smartphones or computers, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world; *break free of your devices and go on a digital detox.*[8]

Indeed, it is easy to see how the current discourses on disconnectivity tap into some of the same metaphors used by the anti-television movement in the 1980s and '90s, as eloquently described by Jason Mittell in his essay 'The Cultural Power of an Anti-Television Metaphor'.[9] Here one can think, for example, of the discursive framing of entertainment media as 'low culture' or a 'time waste' (especially when compared to other activities); of their shared cultural nostalgia for a 'pre-screen' era, when (or indeed where) people spend their time in physical and mental good health, connecting with nature, family and friends, unspoiled by the detriments of mass distraction; and finally, of the recurrence of the drug metaphor in phrasings such as 'plug-in-drug' and 'digital detox'.[10] Of these three, Mittell convincingly argues, it is first and foremost the latter that allowed these media to be 'viewed as a social problem […] worthy of a grassroots movement dedicated to its eradication'.[11]

Mittell goes on to unpack the metaphor of television-as-drug in a series of tropes, or associated meanings, that again ring home to today's discourses on disconnectivity. Signaling the ubiquitous presence and overuse in the everyday lives and environments of people (often supported with objective numerical facts: so many hours of use, so many devices, and so on), these discourses tend to stress the physiological effects of these omnipresent media on both the individual and the social body, framing overuse as a public health issue (or even crisis) in need of social control. This is reinforced by the equation of these media with mind-altering substances — whether they be sedative, (over)stimulating,

[8] 'Digital Detox', *Oxford Dictionaries | English* <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/digital_detox> [accessed 3 October 2016; emphasis in the original].

[9] The anti-television movement also had its contemporary scholarly discourse, where television consumerism by some critics was considered a threat to democracy and even seen as a potential source of violence. See for example George Gerbner and Larry Gross, 'Living With Television: The Violence Profile', *Journal of Communication*, 26.2 (1976), 172–94 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x> [accessed 3 October 2016]; Karl R. Popper and John C. Condry, *La Télévision : un danger pour la démocratie*, (Paris: Anatolia, 1994). Popper's BBC interview 'Against Television' (13/04/1993) also circulated widely in academic discourse, especially in Italy.

[10] Mittell, pp. 216–17. The term 'plug-in drug' in Mittell is derived from Marie Winn, *The Plug-In Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

[11] Ivi, p. 216.

or hallucinatory —, by extension of which their usage is framed as a dangerous habit, causing long-term degradation that must be eliminated for the sake of one's own health. This feeds into a third trope, which is the suggestion that these media are addictive, causing people to struggle with their 'use' and suffer from 'withdrawal symptoms' when they stop using. '[T]o complicate notions of personal responsibility and consensual activity' even further, Mittell observes, these discourses are often centered around children, thus strengthening the call for political action.[12]

Drawing on Janice Radway's examination of the metaphorical framing of the reading of popular literature in terms of 'consumption' (Radway's essay is called: 'Reading is not Eating'[13]) Mittell maintains that the seeming simplicity of these metaphors work to structure the very way we conceive of these media in terms of consumption and sedation – whether it be popular literature (in Radway), television (in Mittell), or connective media (as in our case). Instead of being likened to a drug, they become identified with them, thus working to naturalize the metaphor at hand (from being 'like-a-drug' to 'is a drug').[14] This is problematic, Mittell contends, not in the least because the drug metaphor is premised on a circular logic[15]: it is because our engagement with television is framed in terms of addiction that they are perceived as like-a-drug. Yet, at the same time its framing in terms of addiction is already predicated on the assumption that television is like-a-drug, rather than, say, a legitimate leisure activity (which indeed would significantly have altered the discourse).

What Mittell's analysis of the profoundly reiterative effect of drug metaphor makes clear, is how it works to obscure the complex socio-economic processes of which these media and their reception partake, thus allowing for these media to be constructed 'as a scapegoat for social ills'.[16] Crucial to the latter move, Mittell observes, is the 'understanding that it is the medium itself, not its programming or its mis-use, that is the cause of the problem'.[17] The same, I would argue, holds true for today's discourses on disconnectivity, in which the drug-metaphor still strongly reverberates.

3.

That the drug-metaphor persists so strongly within today's discourses on disconnectivity is perhaps not altogether surprising. Mittell — writing in 2000 —

[12] Ivi, pp. 220–30; quote is on p. 230.
[13] Janice A. Radway, 'Reading Is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor', *Book Research Quarterly*, 2.3 (September 1986), 7–29.
[14] Mittell, p. 218; this argument is brought to the fore in Mittell's critique of Winn.
[15] Ivi, p. 222.
[16] Ivi, p. 235.
[17] Ivi, p. 234.

notes in the first footnote to his paper that: 'Ironically, TV-Free America has not come out with any positions about the medium of computers and the Internet, a format that they willingly use for publicity, yet do not criticize (or defend) for its similarities to television.'[18] A lot has changed since. TV-Free America, now goes by the name of the 'Center for SCREEN-TIME Awareness' (CSTA), while their annual event, the 'TV Turnoff Week' — in which millions of Americans are said to have participated since its initiation in 1994 — was renamed 'Screen-Free Week' in 2010 by the 'Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood' (CCFC), after it was first transformed into 'Digital Detox Week' by Adbusters in 2008, to reflect the growing prominence of digital devices in our everyday environment.[19] But of course the spin-offs are numerous, and, somewhat ironically perhaps, widely circulate online.

Situating the current discourses on disconnectivity against the backdrop of Mittell's reading of the anti-television movement, then, is illuminating in that it reveals, how, in the seemingly smooth transition from the anti-television movement into the digital detox discourse, the drug-metaphor is retained, as are its associated meanings. The comparison is also productive, however, in that it brings to the fore some notable differences between the anti-television movement and the current call for disconnectivity, of which the preoccupation with digital detoxing is but one case in point.

As already becomes clear from the various name changes above, for example, the current discourses on disconnectivity and digital detoxing, which have proliferated significantly, are much less unilaterally directed towards one specific medium or device, but rather pertain to a wide variety of forms of mediated connectivity (including screens but also, for example, wireless connectivity). In addition, the current discourses on disconnectivity are much more ambivalent in what they aim to achieve. To silence one's digital device, to go off-line, to unglue from the screen, or to unplug from wifi-connectivity are all identified as a (seemingly self-imposed) means to often uncertain and wavering higher ends. The Oxford *Living* Dictionaries' definition of digital detox quoted above is illuminating here. On the one hand, it demotes the current discourses on disconnectivity to a singular problematic — i.e. that of the omnipresence of (addictive or poisonous) media devices in our everyday environments. On the other hand, however, it leaves undecided

[18] Ivi, p. 235.

[19] 'Screen-Free Week 2017', *Screen-Free Week* <http://www.screenfree.org/> [accessed 10 April 2017]; admittedly a rather dubious website that also gives advice on cosmetic dental surgery for children, presented by 'Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood' <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/> [accessed 10 April 2017]. Adbusters has removed almost all but one reference to the Digital Detox Week, which can be found here: Andrew Tuplin, 'Digital Detox Week Archives: Journal of the Mental Environment', *Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment*, <http://www.adbusters.org/tag/digital-detox-week/> [accessed 10 April 2017]; further see 'Screen-Free Week', *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Screen-Free_Week&oldid=756449484> [accessed 10 April 2017].

to what ends such detoxing may be put, thus allowing the fantasy or desire of disconnectivity and technology non-use to tap into a more complex and multifarious social dynamics than the sheer material presence of these screen devices in our everyday lives alone suggests.

Significantly, in the Wikipedia entry 'Digital Detox', concerns about time waste, loss of touch with reality, and addictive behavior, are complemented with concerns over privacy, reduced productivity, increase of stress, and attention deficit disorder. This mix of concerns, which resonates with the overall public discourse on digital detoxing, both on- and off-line, conspicuously ties various micro-stressors (like fear of reduced productivity and 'time waste') to a single macro-stressor, that is: the loss of certain ways of livelihood associated with the advent of connective media, which, in turn, cannot but be linked to concerns over labor loss due to automation and the flexibilization of labor under the conditions of neoliberal reform. Moreover, where television was fiercely criticized for its leisurely appeal from which the arguably 'vulnerable' viewer[20] then had to be emancipated or saved, the digital detox discourse started to emerge at the precise moment when the initial appraisal of the so-called 'new' media — which were celebrated for their emancipatory and democratizing potential and their invocation of a renewed sense of agency long lost to the image of television's 'couch potato' —, started to make way for more critical views of mass online connectivity.[21] While echo's of the concerns over the viewers/ users vulnerability, thus, can still be found in today's discourses on disconnectivity, the general tone of the current debate is significantly different, not in the least because it largely retains the rhetoric of emancipation and a reclaimed control. Consequently, contrary to in the anti-television discourse, the need for digital detoxing today is often much less strongly defined around what it is *against* (television, consumerism, time-waste). Consider, for example, the 'Facts and Manifesto' on digitaldetox.org, which is indeed far more ambivalent in this regard, in part because it is less univocal.[22]

[20] For a reflection on this discussion in the Dutch context of public broadcasting, see Vincent Crone, *De Kwetsbare Kijker: Een Culturele Geschiedenis Van Televisie in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspert UvA/Amsterdam University Press, 2007); the notion of the 'vulnerable viewer' is derived from there.

[21] Illustrative, here, in my view, are the progressive titles of Sherry Turkle's writings, from her 1984 classic *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit,* reprinted for the 20th anniversary edition (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), to her more recent *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012) and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) (and everything in between), which have become ever more critical.

[22] 'Facts & Manifesto — Digital Detox®', *Digital Detox* <http://digitaldetox.org/manifesto/> [accessed 10 April 2017]; the manifesto is included as a whole; the European equivalent of these 'facts and manifesto' can be found on Timetologgoff.com, 'home of the Digital Detox' in Europe, here: 'Digital Detox Facts | Internet Addiction Facts', *Time to Log Off* <https://www.itstimetologoff.com/digital-detox-facts/> [accessed 7 May 2017]; and here: 'Manifesto', *Time to Log Off* <https://www.itstimetologoff.com/digital-detox-manifesto/> [accessed 7 May 2017].

THE FACTS:
WHY DIGITAL DETOX®?

61% admit to being addicted to the internet and their devices

The average American dedicates 30% of leisure time to perusing the web

50% of people prefer to communicate digitally than in person

67% of cellphone owners find themselves checking their device even when it's not ringing or vibrating

One out of ten Americans report depression; heavy internet users are 2.5 times more likely to be depressed

The average employee spends 2 hours a day recovering from distractions

Fig. 1

Although addiction and time abuse are still listed as number one threats in the list of alarming 'facts' about our media usage (fig. 1), the 'manifesto' itself (fig. 2) brims with positivity and empowerment, postulating all the things 'we believe in' (i.e. — personal! — freedom, joy, mindful living, and integrity) and 'we value' (real smiles and creativity, IRL — in real life — community experience, and the outdoors).

DISCONNECT TO RECONNECT.

Human beings are incredible.
The value of our ability to connect and share experiences is infinite.

We believe in living a life of freedom, balance and joy. We believe in a world where people are given permission, resources and the opportunities they need to feel alive, whole,complete and deeply connected to the beauty that is life. We believe in the power of play, mindfulness, integrity, intention, spontaneity, self expression, audacity, creativity,community, authenticity and vulnerability.

We believe that technologies should serve as tools to connect us to these tenants as we celebrate life, truly improving our unique existence, instead of distracting, disturbing or disrupting us. And we believe that these technologies should be created mindfully and ethically, for the benefit of and not at the cost of consumers and users. In fact, the relationship that grows between the creator and consumer should be truly symbiotic and honest.

We value smiles, DIY, nature and the great outdoors, long hugs, laughter, tears, good eye-contact and IRL (in real life) community experiences. Life is about about sharing moments with the people sitting around us on a bus ride to work, across from us at the dinner table, or walking by us on the street. It's about creating a new code of ethics and etiquette where people and nature come first, amongst everything else.

We believe that it's time to ask really big questions of the things we've taken for granted. To work really hard to remind ourselves of the simple things we've forgotten. And to take a big deep breath, pause and remember that we are all in this together.

So that someday, our grandchildren will look back on the choices we've made and say thank you.

Fig. 2

More than an attempt to reclaim life in the face of mass media consumerism, then, the current discourses on disconnectivity, of which the digital detox craze seems symptomatic, in my view signals something else. Here I would like to quote Tiziana Terranova who summarizes the argument poignantly in her brief comparison between television and digital media in her seminal essay on 'Free Labor', stating that, where television is characterized by its 'majoritarian discursive mechanisms of territorialization' and the application of morality, these mechanisms have become largely redundant on the net, which in turn is driven, first and foremost, by 'an abundance of production, an immediate interface with cultural and technical labor whose result is a diffuse, non-dialectical antagonism and a crisis in the capitalist

modes of valorization as such.'[23] Elsewhere I have elaborated more extensively on the link between free labor and the 'the right to disconnect' discussion.[24] Suffice it to say for here, is that there is a significant difference between the morality of anti-television movement and the digital detox discussion, which is intimately tied up with the changing status and flexibilization of labor under the conditions of neo-liberal reform and our increasingly media saturated culture. Watching less television, in other words, was seen to make you a better person, spending less time (wastefully) on-line, is above all seen to make you a better worker: more productive and less prone to stress and burn-out — for which, incidentally, we now increasingly seem to be held personally accountable. Such is the might of the digital detox discourse: it privatizes the solution to what is in fact, and is seen by many, as a mounting social problem, which is mass online connectivity.

Symptomatic, here, is the slippery slope in the digital detox manifesto 'Disconnect to Reconnect' between quality of living (real life experience), stress reduction (mindful living, joy, the great outdoors), and increased productivity (reduce distraction). The addition 'to reduce stress' in the aforementioned definition of Digital Detox in the Oxford *Living* Dictionary, in my view, is crucial here, as it unveils how concerns over the ubiquitous presence of connective media in our everyday lives and environments that are biased towards constant availability have become linked to concerns over attention deficit disorder, labor precarity, and the desire, need or even 'right' to disconnect. Rather than obscuring the complexity of the social processes of which these technologies partake, then, as Mittell claimed in relation to television, I argue that the current discourses on disconnectivity are interesting precisely for what they *reveal* about the complexity of the social processes of which these technologies take part, so that it may be argued that it is in these discourses in particular that the limits of our current 'culture of connectivity' are most forcefully negotiated.

Funding

This work was supported by the Danish Council for Independent Research Humanities | Culture and Communication (grant no. 5050-00043B)

DET FRIE FORSKNINGSRÅD
DANISH COUNCIL FOR
INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

[23] Tiziana Terranova, 'Free Labor', in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. by Trebor Scholz, (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 33–57 (p. 52; first publ. in *Social Text*, 18.2, Summer 2000, 33-58).

[24] See my aforementioned essay on 'Discourses on Disconnectivity and the Right to Disconnect' with which this essay can be read in tandem. Also see Pepita Hesselberth, 'Creative Control: Digital Labour, Superimposition, Datafication, and the Image of Uncertainty', *Digital Creativity*, 28.4 (October 2017), 332–347.

Reviews / Comptes-rendus

The Structures of the Film Experience: Jean-Pierre Meunier, Film-Phenomenology and Contemporary Film Studies

International Symposium organized by the Department of Theater, Film and Media Studies of Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main (Prof. Vinzenz Hediger) and the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at the University of Groningen (Prof. Julian Hanich) in cooperation with the Permanent Seminar on Histories of Film Theories and the Städelschule — Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste, 23-25 November 2017.

Jean-Pierre Meunier's *Les Structures de l'expérience filmique. L'identification filmique* (1969)[1] is a largely forgotten book and yet, thanks to Vivian Sobchack and Dudley Andrew, a key text within the history of film studies. In it, the Belgian psychologist intertwines phenomenological reflections with ideas from the French *filmologie* movement, and systematically explores various viewer identification strategies with the material shown in the film. Inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (1940), Meunier defines three modes of spectatorship: the fiction attitude; the documentary attitude; and the home movie attitude. Meunier, it could be argued, was among the first to develop an interest in what has only recently become a thriving subfield of film studies, namely the exploration of useful films and home movies.[2]

On the occasion of the English translation of Meunier's book, a symposium in Frankfurt united film, media and culture historians, philosophers and theorists from different continents to discuss — in the presence of the author — the importance of this publication to current film studies. In the opening interview, Meunier described his astonishment at the renewed interest in his work and the papers' focus on the home movie attitude. He stated that in 1969 — with films such as Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle,* 1960), Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960) in mind — his primary research interest was in viewer identification with protagonists in feature films, more than in the home movie attitude.

Meunier's statement served as a preview to several of the talks at the symposium, but it also provided a historical perspective on contemporary interest in his book. The symposium's speakers underlined two further significant aspects of the volume. Several participants discussed at length the home movie attitude — the viewer's approach to 'useful films' or home movies. Others put Meunier's

[1] Jean-Pierre Meunier, *Les Structures de l'expérience filmique. L'identification filmique* (Louvain: Librairie Universitaire, 1969). The English translation will be published in a volume with essays based on the conference contributions, edited by Daniel Fairfax and Julian Hanich, in the "Film Theory in Media History" book series, published by Amsterdam University Press.
[2] In the original publication Meunier uses the term *film souvenir.*

book in an historical context, discussed its contribution to film philosophy in general and its relevance to phenomenological approaches to film in particular.

Following the interview with Meunier, Vivian Sobchack presented a paper that related the home movie attitude to the uncanny of the selfie. Therein she proposed a tripartite division of the uncanny: a) the 'axiological uncanny', describing the viewer's initial judgment of their own appearance and their questions of self-value: this arises from the difference between the image one holds of oneself and the externalized perception of oneself in a selfie image; b) the 'epistemological uncanny', which comes into play alongside the desire to recognize oneself within the visual image after the initial sense of estrangement has subsided; and c) the existential question 'What am I?', which stands at the centre of the 'ontological uncanny'.

From today's perspective, it is crucial to compare phenomenology's epistemological interest in perception with the specific historical contexts in which the discussion has taking place. Noting that in *Les Structures de l'expérience filmique* Meunier describes the experience of one's own body as well as the experiences and perceptions of other bodies, without considering specific differences between them or the specific historical situations, contemporary scholars are — to a certain extent — obliged to thematize this lacuna. Jenny Chamarette's talk addressed this aspect, focusing on questions of ethnic and gender differences in view of inter-subjectivity and corporality during the perception of Céline Sciamma's film *Bande des filles* (2014). The specifically female subject of perception was the topic of Kate Ince's paper 'Phenomenology and the Female Viewing Subject'. Her use of the term 'feminist consciousness' led to a heated debate prompted by the lack of terminological delineation, by the speaker herself and by other participants at the symposium.

The historical importance and positioning of Meunier's book within film studies in general and film theory in particular was discussed by Robert Sinnerbrink in his presentation 'The Missing Link: Meunier on Imagination, Empathy, and Emotional Engagement' and by Daniel Fairfax in 'A Missing Link in Film Theory? Meunier between Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis'. While Sinnerbrink focused on the importance that Meunier ascribed to imagination in the comprehension of audiovisual images, Fairfax presented an outline of *The Structures of Film Experience* within the 'family tree' of film theory. According to Fairfax's thesis, Meunier's book represents a missing link, which reconciles two usually opposing positions: a phenomenological film theory on the one hand, and psychoanalytical-based film theory on the other.

Marie-Aude Baronian highlighted the relevance and productivity of Meunier's thinking in view of contemporary filmmaking. Her focus lay on the depiction of home movies in the works of the Canadian-Armenian filmmaker and artist Atom Egoyan, such as *Family Viewing* (1987) and *A Portrait of Arshile* (1995), in order to emphasize cinema's memory function through the use of *film souvenirs.* She concluded that the *film souvenir* within cinema underlines its twofold desire: to remember, and to forget itself. Vinzenz Hediger, on the

other hand, did not discuss cinema *per se* but focused on the specific experience of ephemeral and authorless orphan films: films that are neither protected by copyright laws nor belong to a particular person or institution. The theoretical framework in Hediger's conception of a phenomenology of ephemeral films was based on Meunier's three modes of spectatorship. The linking of different yet simultaneously occurring attitudes, during the perception of ephemeral films functioned as a starting point for a further development of Meunier's *tripartite*. The speaker specifically reflected upon his own perception of these films as a film scholar during a screening at the German Mining Museum in Bochum. Under the heading 'With Meunier beyond Meunier' he focused on several possible intersections between the modes of spectatorship and on the difficulty of attributing a single attitude to the viewer. It appears that, for the theorization of the intersections between these attitudes, the chosen object of study — the ephemeral film — is extremely productive since it can neither be clearly defined as a documentary film nor as a *film souvenir*.

The breadth and diversity of the further subjects discussed was striking. Papers were presented on video-selfies (Christian Ferencz-Flatz); 'the person-in-general' and the theory of reference (Guido Kirsten); the film experience in the age of convergence (Florian Sprenger); the intimate relationship between a scholar and a book (Dudley Andrew); and phenomenological approaches to the photographic image from the perspective of Buddhist philosophers (Victor Fan).

The discussion following Julian Hanich's closing talk, 'A Brief Phenomenology of Daydreaming in the Cinema', became animated when Jenny Chamarette asked the speaker what was at stake in his elaborations.[3] The question 'What is at stake?' can also be asked of the symposium as a whole. What has contemporary film theory to gain from a re-reading of a somewhat neglected, 50-year old text written by a Belgian psychologist? As the talks from different research fields and the following discussions demonstrated, the critical and reflective analysis of historical key texts such as Meunier's not only is productive and thought-provoking, but it is also indispensable to the methodological self-understanding and development of a young academic discipline such as film studies.

[Rebecca Boguska, Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main]

[3] Jenny Chamarette was possibly asking how the speaker would define the difference between daydreaming in everyday life and daydreaming in the specific context of the cinema.

Geoblocking and Global Video Culture
ed. by Ramon Lobato and James Meese

Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2016, pp. 203

Geoblocking and Global Video Culture is the eighteenth (open-access) volume in the Theory on Demand series of readers published by the Institute of Network Cultures. The topic addressed in this edited collection, the result of a 'collaborative research experiment', has clearly much in common with the research interests to which Lobato has already devoted some important and successful books, such as *Shadow Economies of Cinema* and *The Informal Media Economy*. In this volume, edited with James Meese, similar interests in the informal, alternative, un-authorized, piratical ways of experiencing (digital) video content are considered under a specific light: that of geography. This approach shapes the whole volume, starting from the Introduction, which declares the volume's intent to investigate a 'cultural geography of video streaming' of sorts. In fact, certain observations (some more explicitly geographical than others) on the mappability — and unmappability — of 'subterranean' video distribution and consumption, which 'fall through the cracks of the measurement system and are rendered invisible', were already present in Lobato's previous books.

The volume is divided into two parts: the first, *Perspectives on Geoblocking*, is dedicated to many cultural, legal, historical and theoretical aspects of the phenomenon, and the second, *Circumvention Case Studies*, provides several useful examples of circumvention in nine different countries, both 'unfree' and 'privileged' — China, Australia, Turkey, Sweden, Malaysia, Brazil, Iran and the United States.

The book is very accurate in its understanding of the specificities of the regulations and localized blocking practices (in-line filtering, DNS tampering, keyword filtering, URL blacklisting, broadband speed limitations…), and its outline of their origins in both state and market economy demands. Geo-filtering is not only the aberrant prerogative of authoritarian regimes, but also, for example, an instrument that enables the windowing mechanism at the basis of the global distribution system of audio-visual content, which in turn enforces market segmenting strategies that maximize profit, e.g. by customizing the offerings of video platforms in different territories (Cameran Ashraf and Luis Felipe Alvarez León's chapter addresses this process). The volume moreover includes a detailed description of the relationship between geoblocking and legal compliance – that

is to say, how it can be considered as a way 'to comply with laws that create territorially-limited rights and responsibilities' (see Marketa Trimble's chapter).

The various possibilities of circumvention (VPNs, DNS proxies, location-masking browser plug-ins…) are also attentively examined in the book, from the consumers' point of view; in relation to certain physical precedents from the pre-digital era, from a media-archaeological perspective (in Roland Burke's chapter); and even in comparison to material practices of border-crossing and tunnelling in the literal sense of the words (in Juan Llamas-Rodiguez's chapter). While practices of circumvention are also addressed at length in the first part of the volume (and particularly in the chapters dealing with live-streaming apps and media sport, written by Adam Rugg and Benjamin Burroughs, James Meese and Aneta Podkalicka, and Florian Hoof), such practices are scrutinized and compared in greater detail in the second part through specific case studies of different nations (the authors are Jinying Li, Çigdem Bozdag, Chris Baumann, Sandra Hanchard, Vanessa Mendes Moreira de Sa, Hadi Sohrabi and Behzad Dowran, Fidel A. Rodriguez, Evan Elkins, and the two editors).

The morale of the volume apparently consists in a broad celebration — that nonetheless accounts for the multiple forms and sides of the phenomenon — of the open internet and its liberating qualities, in the framework of an opposition between ground-level (good) tactics and top-down (bad) strategies. That said, Ashraf and Alvarez León's chapter and Lobato's own Introduction argue that this is a narrow interpretation of the question. However, the whole book seems permeated by a sense of antipathy toward blockage practices — intended as forms of closure, control, censorship or surveillance — or indeed any attempt at territorializing cyberspace, that is, at building digital borders equivalent to the offline and physical ones between different nations. At the same time, circumvention and geo-evasion practices appear to gain the editors' and authors' sympathy, and their mainstream diffusion comes across as desirable.

It is perhaps possible to voice a few criticisms regarding precisely this fundamental faith in the emancipatory deterritorialization of the free web, or indeed a similar faith in the possibility to erode 'the link between IP address, location and identity', which VPNs (and other circumvention tactics) seem to promise.

First, we might observe that this negative conception of geoblocking takes for granted a 'geography of domination', a concept we borrow from the French school of geography and sociology of the last century. In the same way that urbanization, after the Second World War, was assisted by the creation and diffusion of a widespread idea of rural backwardness on an imaginary level (and through the 'urban' media), so today the 'soft power' of the nations that enjoy the first market windows of video distribution can contribute to the creation of anxiety and impatience among other 'commercially secondary' audiences. This is a key question: beyond the specific cases of China, Iran, Turkey and Cuba generally, there is a wider perception among those who 'geo-evade' — in the Western world too — that they are doing something progressive if not politically

radical, even though their real motivations lie in a sheer desire to consume entertainment and unhappiness about content unavailability. In other words, these viewers desire to be annexed to the territory of cultural hegemony. In his Introduction, Lobato tends to blur the differences between the demands of political activism and those of consumeristic pleasure; this could be accurate, but this point would doubtless require further investigation. For example, a lack of windowing policies would constitute a little desirable scenario culturally and economically for all but the strongest players in the game, perhaps. Indeed, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings's desire 'to end the geoblocking of their services one day' sounds like the disquieting premonition of a *Pax Romana* of video streaming, made of exclusive and global ownership of video rights, or something similar. It would be the end of geography in precisely the same way that scholars a few years ago speculated on the end of history. In other words, the ideological (geopolitical) notion of a free and frictionless internet (and its intrinsically Western character) should be taken into account in a more direct and concrete way. And before considering VPNs as the true tools of liberation, we should bear in mind Snowden's revelation (recalled a couple of times in this book) that those too are networks which are or can be controlled by the secret services.

Second, the subject of geoblocking needs to be better integrated into the larger frame of questions regarding data, its collection and its use. In the volume, this aspect sometimes emerges (together with questions about privacy, e.g. in the chapter about geo-circumvention in the U.S.), however it is never directly addressed. In fact, geo-localization and the consequent (*possible*, not inevitable) blockage of content and service availability is no more than a specific use of specific data and metadata, alongside the enormous amounts of data that are gathered and used online in more or less transparent ways by public institutions and private firms. In reality, compared to all of these data sets and their uses — e.g. profiling customers for advertising purposes — that of geoblocking is probably the most visible and obvious, and therefore one of the least sneaky and dangerous. In the end, ironically, geoblocking almost provides an epiphany, reminding us that the internet is never frictionless nor entirely anonymous, and that we constantly produce and disseminate data while online.

Of course, these two observations do not intend to diminish the importance of a well-written and solid book, but to show how *Geoblocking and Global Video Culture* could use an even broader perspective, and that its subject merits greater attention and further development still.

Ultimately, the merit of Lobato and Meese's edited volume lies in how it signals the importance of the geographical approach to the study of today's video culture – or perhaps even the geopolitical one — which is revealed to be extremely promising. It is no accident that one of the best, recent books on big data was been written by a geographer — *The Data Revolution* by Rob Kitchin.

[Giorgio Avezzù, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore]

Marxism and Film Activism: Screening Alternative Worlds
ed. by Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen

New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 290

This edited compendium, which comprises eleven essays split chronologically into two discrete parts, is a useful addition to what is a relatively small field in contemporary Film Studies: research into how Marxist practice informs types of film production. While there is ample research (which part one of this books adds to) into what Alain Badiou terms the 'short…strongly unified century'[1] that begins with the First World War in 1914 and ends with the termination of the Cold War in 1989, with the majority of it centring upon the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s, the various post-war European New Waves and the Latin American cinema of the 1960s and '70s, there is little on how Marxism has survived as a method in film praxis since neoliberalism gained its hegemonic position in the 1990s. Having said this, the title of this book does have the potential to mislead the reader: while the majority of the chapters do concern activism, they are not all concerned with Marxism nor informed by a historical materialist approach, be that of the classical or orthodox type, or indeed of the Gramscian or Althusserian turns that informed debates in Film and Cultural Studies in the final third of the last century. This is particularly true of the potentially most needed part of the book, its second half. In some ways, it would be surprising if they all did, due to the scarcity of Marxist approaches in the academy from post-structuralism onwards. That being said, the modes of film activism present here which have at best a tangential relationship to Marxism, do allow the reader to gain further understanding into the various directions that left oppositional film has taken in the last 30 years.

After an engaging introduction from Ewa Mazierska that presents the reader with an overview of the rise and part-fall of communism and the various occasions when it has functioned as a nodal point in both critical theory and film activism, along with of course a summary of the chapters to come, part one presents five historical case studies that range from the *Kinopoezd* (cinema-train) of Aleksandr Medvedkin to the Third Cinema of South America, with the middle chapters being devoted to various figures of the French New Wave and its post-'68

[1] Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 1.

incarnations: Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. As may be expected, the structure of the book, presenting as it does what is effectively the high point of the interaction of Marxism and film practice in its various guises (particularly the excellent chapter on revolutionary politics and Medvedkin), does rather give part two a lot to live up to, for the simple reason that the reader is not living in revolutionary Russia, the Paris of May '68, nor the tumult of Peronist Argentina. This does mean that the two halves read very differently, and the relative paucity of Marxist film activism in contemporary cinema cannot avoid being highlighted. One cannot help but think that the book would work better as two discrete volumes, with titles reflecting that.

To return specifically to the chapters concerned with the 1960s and '70s, the absence of any discussion of Maoism is of interest, considering the extent to which the post-'68 left, particularly in France and Germany, embraced it. For example, Jason Barker has gone so far as to refer to Mao as a 'master signifier in French theory of the 1960s and 1970s'[2] and it is certainly the case that the practice of Godard, Straub and Huillet is strongly inflected with Maoism; in particular the latter couple's 'peasant cinema', which is interrogated in chapter 4 by Manuel Ramos-Martinez, can be usefully seen in this light. His approach offers much insight into Marx's view that the peasantry could not represent itself, but this could be further illuminated via French Maoism's interest in the 'investigation', with its emphasis on resolving the dialectic of practice and theory.

The contemporary part of the volume is necessarily broad in range, with chapters concerned with the Marxist concept of value; oppositional cinema in Palestine; audiences; the Critical Mass movement and its modes of self-representation and two on video-activism in the UK: one a history; the other on labour process. Both William Brown's and Michael Chanan's contributions are notable for taking an aspect of Marxian thought and then using it as a method. They think about value in differing ways: the former to interrogate Deleuze's categories of cinema and as a referent in textual analysis; the latter to think about how his and others' video blogging practice can be understood within the framework of Marx's theory of surplus value. Haim Bresheeth's discussion of Palestinian cinema is of interest as it is the only chapter that bridges the two halves of the book, giving the reader as it does a global contextual history of cultural resistance in oppositional cinema in order to situate what is contiguous and what is specific to contemporary Palestinian cinema.

Steve Presence's chapter on contemporary video activism in the UK and Lars Kristensen's contribution regarding the Critical Mass movement, specifically the reclaiming of urban streets via mass bicycle rides, can be usefully considered together, as both concern movements which are not to any great degree Marxist, as both authors admit. Instead, what the reader is presented with is the myriad ways in which protest movements have responded to the defeats of the left in the

[2] Jason Barker, 'Master Signifier: a Brief Geneology of Lacano-Maoism', *Filozofia*, 69.9 (2014), 752-764 (p. 752).

1980s. We have eco-socialism, strands of anarchism and overall, the replacement of a class analysis via single issue politics; leisure and post-work; sustainability, and so on. Both chapters highlight the internet's role in the exhibition and distribution of oppositional film. Martin Barker's chapter on audiences and Marxism stands out in the volume as the only one not to be concerned with an oppositional cinema, but with the conditions of reception, and how audiences can respond to mainstream Hollywood cinema collectively in ways that suggest class-based agency, rather than as the individualised, passive spectator of Lacano-Althusserianism or the audience vulnerable to ideology common to other Marxian approaches, such as that of the Frankfurt School and its later proponents.

As an afterthought, it is worth commenting that this volume was published in 2015. Since then, the neoliberal consensus has started to unravel in a variety of ways: the election of Trump; the rise of the far right and differing populisms in various parts of Europe; the defeat of Syriza in Greece; the continued Pasokification of the European centre left, with the notable exception of the British Labour Party, which has seen a socialist left rise within it; Brexit and the success of Eurosceptic parties, of both left and right. With all that in mind, it is tempting to wonder what a second volume of this book might look like in a few years' time.

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Projects & Abstracts

Film Propaganda as Medium of Perception
Early Rural Screening in Maoist China (1949-1965)

Guo Yanping / Ph.D. Thesis Project[1]
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Despite that cinema was imported to China right after its invention in the 1890s, most of Chinese people, especially the peasants, had little access to film at that time. Film remained a bourgeois entertainment in the urban area for a long time. As the Chinese Communist Party took over China in 1949, the geopolitics of cinema transformed rapidly. Following the Soviet propaganda view that 'of all arts film is the most important', the CCP saw film as the most effective propaganda tool. The national film exhibition network was established in the 1950s to cover even the remotest area. Thousands of mobile projection team were sent out to the rural land in the name of educating the masses with socialist ideas and culture. It was the time that the large rural population of China finally got to encounter with film on a regular basis. Rural screening, the particular form of film exhibition conducted in the countryside area, then became a significant cultural practice of socialist China.

While Maoist China was known for its strict ideological control, the projection and reception of film in the rural area demonstrated that film propaganda was less a simple kind of brainwashing than a complicated process of communication. For the illiterate peasants, in the beginning, rural screening was a novel entertainment instead of socialist education. It was through their first encounter with film that for the first time they witnessed the arrival of modern technologies at the village. When projectionists brought the generator, projector, amplifier to screen film in the village, it was both the content of film and the film medium itself that led the rural viewer to experience the modernity. The peasants not only caught sight of the modern machine in the film but also learned about the cinematic equipment, the operation of electricity, and the socialist discourse of industrialization.

For the propagandists, rural viewers' unwanted responses should be diminished. The campaigns of 'helping the peasants understand film' were launched to standardize rural people's comprehension of socialist cinema, in which versatile projectionists performed different skills to attract viewers' attentions and translate the obscure political thoughts into local languages. However, such propagandistic strategy was in no way a foolproof. It was recorded

[1] Ph.D. thesis supervised by Professor Pang Laikwan. For informations: guoyp@m.scnu.edu.cn

that projectionists' aberrant action during the screening and rural viewers' deviant reception of film constantly hindered the efficiency of film propaganda.

Here, rural screening functioned as a mediated space, through which the cinematic experiences regarding the Party's ideological control towards the peasantry and the rural viewer's diverse reception of propagandistic messages were able to play out. It provides us an interesting conjunction to see how the Communist ideal propaganda interplayed with folk experiences (folk culture, folk wisdom) and how the active engagement of the viewer and the projectionist reframed the state propaganda. By offering analysis on the transformation of visual and bodily experiences in the rural society, which resulted from the advent of film, I attempt to conceptualize rural screening as an alternative framework so as to rethink the connections among film education, mass mobilization, and film propaganda. In so doing, I hope to complicate the Party-Masses relationship in a propaganda regime and enrich our understandings of socialist modernity from the rural stance.

The main body of my thesis consists of four chapters. In chapter one, I provide a historical analysis to explain what thoughts and practices contributed to the development of rural screening in Maoist China. I identify three kinds of sources. First, the Soviet Union had great influence on shaping the rural film exhibition network of China. I focus on Soviet 'cinefication' movement and Lenin's propaganda view to explain how the rural screening was made possible in the Soviet society. Second, I turn to Mao's 'Yan'an Talks' to understand to what extent Maoist rural screening differentiated itself from the similar practice of the Soviet Union. Third, I trace back the emergence of rural screening to the republican period in order to situate the practice of Maoist rural screening into a larger context of exploring the educational function of film in modern China.

In chapter two, I intend to discuss the early cinematic experiences of the rural audience during their initial encounter with cinema. I summarize these experiences into three patterns. First, I notice that the attractional elements of the film directly addressed the rural viewer and the viewer tended to receive the propaganda film as spectacles. I summarize this situation with the phrase 'seeing the attraction'. Second, I turn away from the viewing experience to examine the environmental context that framed the viewer's interaction with the film and the projectionist. Holding onto the term *kan renao*, I argue that the 'renao' environment offered a more flexible viewing/walking position for the viewer to casually 'experience' the rural screening. Third, I focus on discussing the bodily experience the audience gained from their 'tactile contact' with the film. I contend that their perception of film medium was closely related to the existed cultural experiences rooted in the rural society.

Peasants early film experiences mentioned above were considered as their 'incomprehension' of film by the Party, the Party therefore urged the projectionist to help the rural viewer understand the film. Against this backdrop, in chapter three, I investigate what kind of model projectionist was imagined by the Party to embark an ideal propaganda. I begin by explaining the concept *xiwen lejian*

(cater to the folk tastes), which became a standard to measure the success of the cultural practices in Maoist China. By following the instruction of catering to the folk tastes, the projectionist made use of the popular folk cultural form to propagate the Party's message to the rural masses. Moreover, the projectionist also strived to build a good relationship with the peasant by catering themselves to the rural community. Such an intimate relationship between the projectionist and the peasant facilitated to improve the popularity of film propaganda in the rural area.

By looking into the actual communication existed in the different stages of rural screening, I examine the effectiveness of Maoist film propaganda in chapter four. I replace the conventional communicative model of 'sender-receiver' to 'sender-mediator-receiver' to highlight the role of the projectionist in mediating the propaganda process. On the one hand, I discuss how the 'deviant behaviors' of the projectionists obstructed the effect of film propaganda during the rural screening. On the other, I analyze the rural audiences' diverse receptions of film propaganda in relation to two different genres of film: news documentary and war film.

In sum, my study conceptualizes rural screening in early Maoist China as the kind of film propaganda that was not an instrumental toll but an enabling environment that allowed the rural viewer to engage with modern media and to experience socialist modernity. I understand the rural viewer as an iconic figure who maintained a dubious distance with the operations of dominant ideology. The viewers managed to come up with multiple coping strategies in order to seek out fun and pleasure of the activity of film propaganda.

'Buy Film Not Megapixel': Analogue Photography as a Practice of Technological Resistance in the Digital Age

Sergio Minniti / Ph.D. Thesis Abstract[1]
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Over the course of the last decade, the simplistic view of technological change as a linear progress from 'old' analogue technologies to 'new' digital devices has been both theoretically and empirically challenged by the spreading of technologies and practices that illustrate how, within society, the 'old' and the 'new' are continuously and relationally produced.[2]

In the field of photography this phenomenon is exemplified, on the one hand by the diffusion of the so-called *digital retro photography*, i.e. the nostalgic remediation of the old technology by the new one enabled by the diffusion of digital applications reproducing the aesthetics of film photography, such as Instagram and Hipstamatic.[3] On the other hand, a more complex, and less studied phenomenon of revitalisation of analogue technology in our contemporary digital environment has occurred in the field of aspirational amateurism, where an increasing number of photographers begun to reappropriate and use film cameras, with the aim of counteracting the 'dematerialization' process supposedly triggered by digital photography and reaffirming the value of photography as a physical, multisensory experience.

In this scenario, analogue photographic technologies, such as the 'toy' plastic cameras used by 'Lomographers'[4] and the vintage Polaroid cameras privileged by 'Polaroiders',[5] have become prominent actors in a bottom-up attempt to reinstate the authenticity of the 'analogue experience' in a digital world, and to 'resist' the ubiquitous adoption of digital technology.

This dissertation analyses the contemporary reappropriation of film photography within aspirational amateurism and focuses on the role played by analogue

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[2] Simone Natale, 'There Are No Old Media', *Journal of Communication*, 66.4 (2016), 585–603.
[3] Gil Bartholeyns, 'The Instant Past: Nostalgia and Digital Retro Photography', in *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, ed. by Katharina Niemayer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 51–69.
[4] Bruna Mitchell de Morais Braga, 'Creative Possibilities of Analogue Photography: A Dialogue between the Past and the Present in the Era of Digital Images', paper presented at the VII World Congress on Communication and Arts, Vila Real, Portugal, 20-23 April 2014.
[5] Sergio Minniti, 'Polaroid 2.0. Photo-Objects and Analogue Instant Photography in the Digital Age', *Tecnoscienza*, 7.1 (2016), 17–44.

cameras and their materiality in the configuration of three photographic practices: *lomography*, *polaroidism*, and *pinhole photography*. These practices are exemplary of a phenomenon that Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch defined as *technological resistance*,[6] that is, a process of mutual construction of users and technology guided by a logic of opposition to mainstream technologies, which is often triggered by the obsolescence of technical artifacts.[7] By adopting this perspective, the dissertation proposes to look at analogue photography as a present technology rather than a past one, and it reflects on how the analogue and the digital had co-constituted each other through a multi-dimensional (cultural, material, and performative) process of opposition.

The dissertation highlights how the articulation of contemporary 'resistant' photographic cultures, practices, and discourses has been grounded on the establishment of four dichotomies, on the basis of which analogue and digital photography are opposed: 1) materiality vs. immateriality; 2) unpredictability vs. control; 3) visual imperfection vs. visual perfection; and 4) photography as an intense and reflective experience vs. photography as an impulsive act. It concludes that these elements characterize contemporary analogue amateurism and culturally justify film enthusiasts' resistance to digital photography, as well as their seek for authenticity.

From a theoretical point of view, the dissertation adopts the STS-informed *integrative theory of practice* developed by Elizabeth Shove and her colleagues,[8] according to which socio-technical practices can be understood as configurations of heterogeneous elements intertwined with one another and ascribable to three main dimensions: symbolic, material, and performative. This perspective is adopted in order to reconstruct the ways in which, in our contemporary digital environment, 'old' photographic technologies have acquired both a new meaning and a new social life, and how they have been transformed into 'resistant' tools allowing their users to reinstate the authenticity of the 'analogue experience'.

This dissertation is based on empirical data collected during a multi-sited ethnography[9] conducted in Italy between 2014 and 2015. Fieldwork included the observation of activities organized by six different communities of photographers devoted to analogue photography, such as workshops, meetings, and exhibitions. It also included visits to specialized shops and private homes. Forty in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the communities were conducted, and over 1,000 photographs documenting practitioners' activities were also produced.

[6] Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch, 'Users as Agents of Technological Change: The Social Construction of the Automobile in the Rural United States', *Technology and Culture*, 37.4 (1996), 763–795.
[7] See Christina Lindsay, 'From the Shadows: Users as Designers, Producers, Marketers, Distributors, and Technical Support', in *How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technology*, ed. by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 29–50.
[8] Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand and Jack Ingram, *The Design of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
[9] George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), 95–117.

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printed by Digital Team
Fano (Pu) in October 2018