

THE NEWS  
BELONGS  
TO US!



# THE NEWS BELONGS TO US!

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## 1. MOVIES

# THE UNCOMPROMISING RETURN OF NEWSREELS

In the 1960s and 1970s, radical cinema artists in Latin America, Africa, the U.S. and Europe explored the political and aesthetic plasticity of the newsreel, previously an almost archaic cinematic convention. The newsreel became a laboratory, a training ground, a set of proposals, the call and also the response. It helped instigate and replenish the most productive period of radical film praxis: the epoch of the third cinema. In the age of YouTube, the radical newsreel awaits a spectacular, transformative re-birth.<sup>1</sup>

The intensification of tensions in social and political conflicts has always had an effect on decisive responses in the field of art. Thus, in its committed forms, filmmaking often came close to turbulent events or even directly took part in them. The series of social upheavals in recent years also caused a series of reactions in cinema. In addition to discovering new ways of representing and staging class struggles and pressing social issues, these reactions involve an intensive process of revitalising certain seemingly “extinct” film genres. Certain forms of creativity that seemed to have ended up in the archives of historical periods in which they reached their peak have been returning—and more strongly than perhaps ever before. We can see that reviving the examples of radical documentary filmmaking that, until recently, were considered forgotten or at least outdated is becoming one of the important characteristics of the new political documentary. The filmmakers setting off for the new hotspots, battlefields and areas where emergency situations follow one after another or are simply becoming broader, deeper, obviously face creative challenges similar to the ones encountered by their predecessors from past struggles.

Consequently, certain forms of committed film (such as essayistic or compilation documentary) that have been continuously present and have become established as the key strategies of staging social conflicts are joined by “outdated” formats of agitprop films, film pamphlets, film leaflets, polemical films, newsreels... It is the newsreels in particular that have expanded to such an extent that they can be considered a wholly relevant

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<sup>1</sup> This motto is an excerpt from the “Declaration” of the project Now! A Journal of Urgent Praxis, <http://www.now-journal.com/declaration/> (accessed on 11 March 2017).

form of endeavours at liberation with filmic means and not merely a nostalgic attempt at imitating or “romanticising a revolutionary past”. New newsreel practices constitute one of the highpoints of today’s committed, experimental and innovative documentary filmmaking, which also openly professes its commitment to its history. More specifically, its commitment to the segment that would most adequately be named anti-newsreel; for it was in the 1960s that, through the historical development of an approach that, in the hands of power, served as a means of systemic indoctrination, newsreels were transformed into an expressly oppositional practice. The revival of newsreel activities today takes place both at the level of individual creativity and of collective engagement. At the level of personal endeavours, the following cineastes and activists follow the newsreel principles: Sylvain George, Jem Cohen, Alex Reuben and Donald Foreman. The most exciting among the collective initiatives are perhaps the work of the British activist collective Reel News, Now! A Journal of Urgent Praxis from the US, and Newsreel Front, an *ad hoc* collective from Slovenia.

In addition to the series of new initiatives, there still operate two organisations in the US that are direct successors of the American militant movement Newsreel; more precisely, their units from New York and San Francisco—California Newsreel and Third World Newsreel.<sup>2</sup> The first retained the name and the mission of the original collective and focuses primarily on aspects of racism, supporting the Afro-American communities in their efforts for social change and ultimate emancipation. The second internationalised at the beginning of the 1970s, when its direct engagement came to an end in the revolutionary seething, assumed the synonym of “underdevelopment” encapsulated in the concept of the “third world”, and began to spread its knowledge and experience among the unprivileged communities in various hotspots of global oppression. The activities of both organisations gradually extended from the production of militant newsreels in the 1960s to practically all forms of filmmaking, but their goal has remained the same—to work for social change and equality: “Ultimately, whether documentary, experimental, narrative, traditional or non-traditional, the importance of the media promoted by the organization is its ability to effect social change, to encourage people to think critically about their lives and the lives of others, and to propel people into action.”<sup>3</sup> Today,

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<sup>2</sup> The Newsreel movement was established in 1967 in New York, but it was soon organised as a network of units in other US hotspots. In the movement, which after 1970 began to transform and internationalise, almost a hundred filmmakers cooperated, making over forty medium-length and short films.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.twn.org/twnpages/about/about\\_1.aspx](https://www.twn.org/twnpages/about/about_1.aspx) (accessed on 2 March 2017).



their basic activities are no longer connected so much to their own film practice, but rather to providing support and help to those who want to obtain the right to speak, the possibility to express their opinion and form a suitable, unique articulation.

### **News from the front**

We shall begin our discussion of current newsreel activities by considering a reflection that refers to individual filmmaking, but points out the general determinations of all the variants of the mentioned “comeback”. In his “News on the March”, published in the 2013 February issue of *Sight and Sound*, Kieron Corless discusses current newsreel activities as a *revival* that is directly connected to a “new wave of 21st-century protest movements”. He focuses on the work of Jem Cohen, Alex Reuben and Sylvain George and on their recording of current confrontational campaigns. His “summary” of the interventions of three independent, activist filmmakers can easily be read as a unique manifesto of the new urgent newsreel practices:

Central to each undertaking is a desire not to propagandise but to honour complex realities and counter simplifying and politically partisan media-imposed narratives; to bear witness and pay homage to ordinary people of every stripe imbued with the spirit of revolt in the wake of the financial crisis; to build an archive for the future of potentially overlooked moments, of battles fought and lost, to capture history being made from below; to immerse viewers in those moments and get something out there fast, using all currently available distribution networks. (Corless: 74)

This reflection also corresponds to the strategies of operation and the endeavours of new collective initiatives. The collective that has retained the most original newsreel approaches is the British activist collective Reel News. A completely independent and “non-aligned” organisation based in London operates in the spirit of their motto “In the global war between rich and poor, we need news from the frontline.” Such a point of departure reflects the tendency to take part in a series of direct actions and initiatives, using film as a tool to effect social changes. Their main endeavours are directed towards spreading information about activities aimed at solving problems caused by austerity measures in Europe, the outbreaks of war in various parts of the world or global climate and environmental changes. They define their role both on the broader informational and the directly activist level. They emphasise that they “work with a growing number of

campaigns (often ignored by mainstream media) which are not only fighting back, but winning too—not just in the UK, but across the world.”<sup>4</sup>

The group, which was established in 2006, has released 47 90-minute journals of “activist video production”. They are usually compilations including contributions of various lengths dealing with different problems; each examines in more detail the main topic related to the events that, in the captured period, stirred society the most. They include a series of thematic issues centred on events in certain hotspots of the world, from Afghanistan to Iceland, from Iraq to Jamaica, from Bolivia to Germany, from Argentina to Bulgaria, from Gaza to Detroit... The areas of the most intense social turmoil in Europe caused first by the economic crisis and austerity measures and later by the intensification of the refugee tragedy, such as Spain and Greece, receive special attention in the independent segment “Reel News on the Road”. The selections largely consist of their own productions, but enough space is given to guest contributions in accordance with the principle of “two-way operation”, which, on the one hand, means the publication of the materials they receive from others and, on the other hand, their assistance in the creative film process. Thus, in addition to their films, we can find works by activists such as Jaime Alekos, Darren Cullen and Stewart Hume, or collectives such as Indyrikki, Labor Beat, Lewisham Green Party, Hidden Herstories, The Treatment Rooms, Camcorder Guerrillas etc.

In line with the very broad range of the captured problem areas and hotspots, the contributions collected on DVDs are also characterised by an exceptional formal diversity. Although the methods of the “classical activist” representation of direct action predominate, we often come across a number of untypical approaches, which complement the diversity in content. The expression within the quotation marks primarily refers to two typical forms of committed filmmaking: the militant and the guerrilla image. The first definition determines the broader context of purposiveness, which involves direct participation in social actions and showing solidarity with and providing information about them. “The militant image comprises any form of image or sound—from essay film to fiction feature, from observational documentary to found-footage cinepamphlet, from newsreel to agitational reworkings of colonial film production—produced in and through film-making practices dedicated to the liberation struggles and revolutions of the late twentieth century.” (Eshun and Gray: 1) At the same time, we can discern from this image the purpose or the key tendencies

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ReelNews> (accessed on 3 March 2017).

that guide the filmmakers in the forms of such production. Such intentionality can be seen in the creative protocol of *Ciné-tracts* (film leaflets), according to which they must “contest-propose-shock-inform-question-assert-convince-think-shout-laugh-denounce-cultivate” in order to “inspire discussion and action”.<sup>5</sup> The concept of the guerrilla image refers to the direct action imperative of aesthetic poverty related to filming in the heart of direct actions (from strikes, rallies, protests, marches, barricades to the direct clashes of protesters with the police and the army). This is why the variety of images from the field is practically inexhaustible and corresponds to the multiplicity of perceptions and perspectives characteristic of encounters within inflamed masses.<sup>6</sup> Such pictures receive their final image in the (most often anarchic or even frenetic) editing with possible sound interventions (most often ambient sound recorded on location) and (either spoken or written) commentary that additionally explains the situation when the filmmakers deem it necessary. One of the fundamental characteristics of composing individual elements is the principle of discrepancy as a form of “unravelling” and establishing an inner tension between combative images, which enables the viewers to connect them in their own way in line with their belief and imagination.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the released films produced by Reel News or with the help of their intervention are shot in the discussed manner of combining militant and guerrilla images. A not so rare practise is to combine activist images with “classical documentary” approaches—interviews, expert commentary, observations—and untypical factors such as “marketing approaches” in the form of slogans, clips, (anti-)advertisements etc. Such are also the last three works published on their website, which capture events that happened in December 2016. In the first, we witness a strike of postal workers against the privatisation of postal services and consequently the

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<sup>5</sup> These “operating instructions” for French filmmakers participating in their production were anonymous and undated, and they circulated them in the form of hectographic leaflets.

<sup>6</sup> Such pictures can be day, night, black-and-white, colour, infra-red, defocused, unfocused, zooming, dim, unclear, blurry, overexposed, dimmed, static, dynamic, slowed down, accelerated, panning, turning, tilting, rising, dropping, obstructed, concealed, restless, shaking, wandering, seeking, fleeing, lurking, persisting, withdrawing, attacking, pursuing, staring, spying, curious, aggressive, intrusive, shy, impatient, misleading, digressive, despising, overlapping, admiring, accompanying, distancing, falling and stopped if the cameraperson is a victim of the conflict...

<sup>7</sup> These strategies are akin to the ones that Simon Hartog precisely defined when analysing the creativity of the Newsreel movement: “Since they were for the most part made in the midst of extreme social disorder and popular ecstasy by people directly involved in the struggle, their poverty of means and style becomes a style in itself, a style which echoes the struggle rather than reporting it. The immediacy of the ‘Newsreel’ makes the message clear, and its spontaneity makes it real.” (79)

abolishment of public services that have existed for over 500 years. The second documents the happening related to the strike of the British Airways cabin crew, protesting against the wage disparity at one of the biggest airlines in the world. In the third, we are faced with the theretofore largest protest of locals against the deportation of refugees gathered at the refugee deportation centre Years Word, where women represent the largest share of the detainees. All films contain detailed information about further activities planned for the future and contacts through which those interested can be notified about related events.

### **The frontline here and now**

The unique combinations of diverse images of confrontation are also characteristic for a series of other committed initiatives in the current resistance endeavours. The most recent initiative of this type emerged in 2014 under the name *Now! A Journal of Urgent Praxis*. It arose in the virtual space of the World Wide Web as a reaction to the intensification of racism and police repression in the US and other forms of violence by the stronger against the weaker across the world. The contributions in the online journal primarily include radical forms of newsreels as reactions to crisis situations and the expansion of all-pervading repression, and are complemented by thematic bulletins devoted to pressing problems and historic icons of the class struggle. It was established by Travis Wilkerson, an American film activist, essayist and performer, and its international editorial board is composed of progressive cineastes, activists and theoreticians: Thom Andersen, Nicole Brenez, Toshi Fujiwara, Kelly Gallagher, John Gianvito, Jonathan Hall, Christopher Harris, Alex Johnston, Minda Martin, Jurij Meden, Vanessa Renwick, Kelly Sears, Can Tuzcu, Billy Woodberry.

The first issue in the series of newsreels is already most exciting. *Now! #1: NOW! AGAIN!* (2014) by Alex Johnston is a re-enactment of *Now!* (1965), a famous classic of militant cinema by the Cuban cineaste Santiago Álvarez.<sup>8</sup> This newsreel poem is still one of the most decisive attacks on American racism that presents both the oppression of Afro-Americans in various periods of segregation and the revolt against it. Johnston

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<sup>8</sup> Santiago Álvarez is a cineaste who radically changed the conception of a number of documentary forms and raised them to a new creative level. Among them, newsreels and compilation documentaries belong to the very top. In the framework of the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), he headed the production of weekly newsreels for more than thirty years and directed over six hundred newsreel units and more than sixty works of other documentary genres.

emphasises that his version was incited by the intensification of violence in Ferguson in the summer of 2014, and that it is the members of the police units that should be credited for the roles, script and direction: “Playing themselves, the cops re-enact their own vicious history as if they were checking their performance in a mirror shattered by gunfire. NOW! AGAIN! blows up at the intersection of an avant-garde film act and an urgent manifesto for militant action, demanding an end to police violence NOW!”<sup>9</sup> On a split screen, the film simultaneously shows scenes from Álvarez’s original and (almost identical) images of present-day police brutality against the dark-skinned population. Johnston retains the original music and especially the principles of syncopated editing, which, in the original, intensified the binding charge of the song and the meaning of its melody.

The spirit of the Cuban cineaste not only permeates the film production, but is also reflected in the programme guidelines of the Journal’s “Declaration”. In the manifesto, they point out the innovative newsreel practices from the revolutionary times of the second half of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s as their basic sources of inspiration. The dialogue, employing the typical methods and characteristics of radical cinema, forms the basis or the ideal and energetic field of creating film images, texts or sound recordings. They are produced as immediate but prudent actions in response to the “here and now” of political and cultural actuality. The team of filmmakers and likeminded people seeks alternative modes of production by researching new forms of critical reflection and experimental cinema that could be the most appropriate reaction today to the aggravation of exploitation and the intensification of violence in class conflicts. They strive for forms of engagement that could initiate a reaction both at the creative and presentational level. At the same time, they draw attention to the indispensable role of the history of film and culture, since they do not consider urgency to consist in focusing exclusively on the present, but rather see it as a reflection of the Benjaminian here-and-now (*Jetztzeit*). Walter Benjamin presupposes a historical perspective of recognising the past as a form of “instaurating” its time, whose creative or political charge lights up as a one-time insight in the critical moment of emergency situations: “It is important to note that urgency has nothing to do with ‘newness’. There are urgent documents that have existed for hundreds of years or more. Urgency is defined by NOW! in the simplest possible manner. NOW! foregrounds work, new or old, that has an urgent value for the present moment. Work that needs to be seen, read, and confronted NOW!”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alex Johnston, “NOW! AGAIN!”, <http://www.now-journal.com/archive/> (accessed on 2 March 2017).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.now-journal.com/declaration/> (accessed on 4 March 2017). This is also

## A front of news

The awareness of the necessity of establishing an audiovisual relation between the present and the past liberation initiatives is also one of the main “programme guidelines” behind the Slovenian newsreel variant. Nika Autor’s work in the framework of the *ad hoc* collective Newsreel Front are thus equally dedicated to happenings in the hotspots of Slovenian reality (from popular uprisings to advocating the rights of rightless workers, refugees, overlooked and silenced communities<sup>11</sup>) and the energy breakthroughs revealed in connecting the present with the past. The uniqueness of these endeavours can most distinctly be seen in two determinations. On the one hand, in the use of connecting elements that transcend the combination of archival or found footage and original images, for this use of connections refers both to the content-related and to the formal, poetic or analytic aspects, which means to the contextual status of factual images. On the other hand, the crucial features of these endeavours are the considerations of the correlations themselves and the essayistic charge of the works reflected in the elements of such considerations. The substantive focus on the underprivileged representatives of society that preserve their dignity (in order not to fall into the abyss of “bare life”) precisely through various forms of resistance is thus always accompanied by a reflection on the “legitimacy” of images representing their struggle.

In this light, *Newsreel 55* (Obzornik 55, 2013) questions the appropriateness of the image that could visualise the various forms and periods of class struggle and the connections between past and present endeavours. The film unfolds in many temporal dimensions (the period of World War Two, the 1988 workers’ protests in Maribor, genocides during the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, popular uprisings in Slovenia of 2012 and 2013) and on different visual levels (archival film and TV material, amateur footage, newspaper sources, current guerrilla images and film staging). The use of visual material is often combined with verbal commentary, quotations and writings, with which the film questions the status and meaning of images in social turmoil and conflicts. The repetition of synonymous questions in various traumatic situations echoes Giles Deleuze and Félix Guat-

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discussed by Gérard Wajcman when he argues that it is precisely the presupposition of renewal that “according to Walter Benjamin defines an artwork; that it is not inserted in the time that surrounds it and gives it sense, but it itself generates a present, a past and a future. As opposed to the weak notion about an artist being the witness of their time, the point is to think an artwork as something that instaurates its Time.” (59)

<sup>11</sup> The filmography of the Newsreel Front includes twelve films of various lengths and topics.

tari's vision of revolutionary utopia.<sup>12</sup> In the discussed case, this refers both to the possibility of an image being the carrier of memory and its potential to intervene in the immediacy of intolerable reality. If, in the first part of the newsreel, the filmmaker still wonders about the possibility of her own visualisation of the happening ("What image would I have shot if I had had a camera in 1989? The real image of the past whooshes by."<sup>13</sup>), then, in the second, the diction of the commentary becomes increasingly declarative. It refers both to the question of representing past events and the relation of film to the tragic facts of concentration camps, genocides, ethnic cleansings and other forms of annihilation that keep recurring. It therefore comes as no surprise that the filmmaker's definitions of images most often carry a negative or catastrophic connotation—she questions shattered, uncertain, (overly) simple, inadequate, imprecise, misleading, undeterminable, worn or even absent images.

The examination of the possibility of "real", "true" and "necessary" images is echoed in the film's reference spectrum expressed through the quotations and paraphrases of thinkers who intensively dealt with the dilemmas regarding the relation between historical (non-)events and the possibility or ways of their representation. Through the reflections of Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Georges Didi-Huberman or the allusions to Deleuze and Guattari, we get an insight into a series of controversies and confrontations that accompanied the discussions on the (non)representability of intolerable images from the most horrific episodes of human history. In *Newsreel 55*, this quandary culminates in one of the most traumatic parts of the film that focuses on the events at the Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The commentary taking place against the abstract visual transition between the 1992 archival TV footage and present-day scenes of the 2012 commemoration ceremony in Omarska raises some key questions regarding the possibility of visually representing the Holocaust and the status of images when discussing it: "The image became

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<sup>12</sup> This is a vision guided by the belief that it is precisely "with utopia philosophy becomes political and takes the criticism of its own time to its highest point". Although utopia cannot be separated from constant movement, at a certain critical point it is "connected with the present relative milieu, and especially with the forces stifled by this milieu". Revolution thus becomes "infinite movement and absolute survey" if its "features connect up with what is real here and now in the struggle against capitalism, relaunching new struggles whenever the earlier one is betrayed" (Deleuze and Guattari: 99–100).

<sup>13</sup> This reflection is a paraphrase of the beginning of Benjamin's Thesis V in "On the Concept of History," which in its key places claims: "The true picture of the past whizzes by. Only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognisability, is the past to be held fast. /.../ For it is an irretrievable picture of the past, which threatens to disappear with every present, which does not recognise itself as meant in it." (6)

a monument. Created in a vacuum, without the air for inhalation or the space for exhalation, it roused the oblivion buried alive in the memory of the Holocaust and triggered conflict regarding its own reality.”

*Newsreel 62* (Obzornik 62, 2015) also confronts us with the dilemmas related to the (in)tolerability of the images of turbulent changes and emergency situations—with the crucial difference that, here, one of the film’s decisive factors is actually the “absence of images.” The film is divided into two parts—an archival look at the activities upon the opening of a new gallery in Slovenj Gradec in 1966 with an exhibition entitled “Peace, Humanity and Friendship Among Nations” and the position of refugees at the Slovenian border in 2015. The missing images here are two paintings contributed to the opening exhibition by two Syrian artists—Mahmud Hammad and Akrass Gayass. Their works “Family” and “Worker” became lost over the years, and only their reproductions in the catalogue remain, but they are too small and their quality too poor for us to be able to discern from them what the originals actually looked like. Thus, the crucial question posed by *Newsreel 62*—in a repeated connection of the past and the present—is: “What were these images? What images can we imagine today, when, almost half a century after the exhibition, Yugoslavia has been wiped off the map and Syria is in the process of being wiped off as well?” The film thus places in the same order of meaning the documentary images of reality and the imagined images, so the pictures permeated with the reflective charge of the experience of the past and the (Deleuzeian) utopian vision of a “new struggle”. This is why we are witness to a symbolic reconstruction or reconfiguration of the missing paintings in the form of the indeterminacy of abstraction, which is counterposed with the trite images of present-day dehumanisation. Reality itself, which we face in the second part of the film, is permeated with that already seen—pictures that again and again demonstrate the repetition of the intolerable facts of oppression, silencing, annihilation, cleansing... The present-day scenes of refugees on the border between Slovenia and Croatia are merely an intolerable *déjà vu*: “Images are played. Once more. Worn. We’ve seen them a thousand times. Every time they say illegal migrant, the one who is not and will not be, the word cuts the picture. Her silhouette is a disturbance. Cut. I see her. Cut. The story of hunting one’s misfortune is a story about hunting an image, searching for an image in a worldlessness that looks more and more like the world.” What *Newsreel 62* articulates is therefore the relation between the unknown images of emancipation, that is, the works by the two Syrian artists, which represented the legitimate voice of the people, and the actual images of



degradation, the Syrian refugees, the objects of the known, clichéd scenes we have seen a thousand times.

The highlighted relations within the 50-year arch in which certain communities were erased reflect the persistence of searching for, discovering or creating an image of the past and the present. This is not the right or (as Jean-Luc Godard put it) just image, but just an image, an image that tears itself from the predominating correlations. Justice is closely related to the established order, which is something that Gilles Deleuze, referring to Godard, also emphasises when he transfers the comparison of films into the field of ideas: “The just ideas are always those that conform to accepted meanings or established precepts, they're always ideas that confirm something, even if it's something in the future, even if it's the future of the revolution.” (38) As opposed to the just image, which consolidates the consensus on meaning, just an image opposes the predominant system of representation. We are thus faced with the strivings for an image that perhaps has not even been shot, that perhaps cannot be shot, but is inevitable in opening up the possibility of passing between the past and the present. This is precisely wherein, according to Jacques Rancière, lies one of the key potentials of the historical power of cinema, “cinema's power to put every image into associative and inter-expressive relationships with all other images, or to make every image an image of something else, a commentary that transforms another image, either by revealing its hidden truth or by demonstrating its power to foretell.” (181) In this context, the creativity of Nika Autor and the Newsreel Front is most characteristically determined by the essayistic and compilation imperative that enables the establishment of a doubled double connection with the past: structural (episodic newsreel conception) and thematic (socially pressing issues), and formal (compilation approach) and reflective (essayistic development). These are connections between a work and its context, which show that, in the process of receiving and thinking, we never encounter merely the film, but always also the thematic, aesthetic and ideal flows and energetic charges of connections that are established in a certain historical constellation of class struggle.

## Conclusion

The works we tackled in this reflection were, as a rule, made in situations of a certain “urgency”, so in moments of emergency situations that demanded an immediate response, called to action and required a (re) action. The work discussed is a form of “urgent newsreels” or “newsreels of action”, that is, films that reacted to a crisis situation in line with the current creative inspiration and, at the same time, with the awareness that what is also important for their response is the communication with their own history. This is a reaction with which they wanted and want to contribute to a general mobilisation, a concentration and a strengthening of democratic forces and liberation endeavours. As a means of intervening in emergency situations, urgent films are part of the historical series of conceptions that begins with Benjamin’s concept of a “real state of emergency” or the necessity of introducing it in order to improve our position in the struggle against all forms of the oppression and hegemony that are incarnated in the concept of fascism.

Benjamin was not alone in believing that cinema belongs decisively to such moments of crisis. First, it has the power to witness, document, and respond with urgency to that which urgently calls for response. Second, in its capacity to inscribe, store, recycle, and re-present, cinema’s archival power lends urgency to moments whose urgency has waned. Third, it plunges distant strangers into the urgent stories of others—a power that is now radically globalized.<sup>14</sup>

In such a context, it comes as no surprise that the references to Walter Benjamin are a frequent element of the discussed filmmaking, especially references to those conceptions related to the factors of resistance both against fascism and historicism, that is, the conception of history as a continued sequence of events. His concept of historical materialism is actually also illustrated by the newsreel *revival*, as it appears in a constellation where current activities “merge” with precisely determined past ones (also) as a form of “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (Benjamin: 19).<sup>15</sup>

At the second level, urgent film is part of a series of endeavours determined by the theory of third cinema as the point of departure that

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<sup>14</sup> John Mowitt, “Cinema of Urgency”, <http://www.walkerart.org/calendar/2012/cinema-urgency> (accessed on 6 March 2017).

<sup>15</sup> See also note 13.

today still (or especially) makes it possible to most adequately express the tendencies towards liberating not only film but also the viewers.<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, film becomes a tool of destruction and construction: it destroys the consolidated images and beliefs that the capitalistic system creates and uses for indoctrination, and conceives images that encapsulate the actuality of the efforts for emancipation and equality. One of the more important forms of constructing a new reality is a “film act”. This is a creative process that does not end with post-production and distribution, but continues in forms of committed viewing, that is, screenings accompanied by lectures, talks and commentary.<sup>17</sup> This process not only complements the film, but enables the viewer to become an active participant in the film. A film act is a method that, on the one hand, includes the strategies of solidarising, informing and raising awareness, but also education, organisation and a direct mobilisation of resistance energies directed towards a transformation of society and cinema.

The man of the *third cinema*, be it *guerrilla cinema* or a *film act*, with the infinite categories that they contain (*film letter*, *film poem*, *film essay*, *film pamphlet*, *film report*, etc.), above all counters the film industry of a cinema of characters with one of themes, that of individuals with that of masses, that of the author with that of the operative group, one of neocolonial misinformation with one of information, one of escape with one that recaptures the truth, that of passivity with that of aggressions. To an institutionalised cinema, it counterposes a guerrilla cinema; to movies as shows, it opposes a film act or action; to a cinema of destruction, one that is both destructive and constructive; to a cinema made for the old kind of human being, for them, *it opposes a cinema fit for a new kind of human being, for what each one of us has the possibility of becoming*. (Getino and Solanas: 149)

The decisive factor of the creative practices discussed herein is thus the striving (to paraphrase Igor Zabel<sup>18</sup>) to create values that the market

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<sup>16</sup> The theory of third cinema was created in the 1960s in Latin America as a form of a new front in the struggle with filmic means and their reflection, since the anti-imperialistic struggle at the time took place as intensively in direct conflicts as in the sphere of culture and art. Like the newsreel at the creative level, it is today considered to be one of the most penetrating means of reflection on current resistance cinemas.

<sup>17</sup> This principle of operation is characteristic both for the “non-filmic segment” of Now! A Journal of Urgent Praxis and the Newsreel Front, whose film screenings are, as a rule, complemented by reflections, talks, commentaries; such is after all also the role of this publication as a reflection on the project Newsreel 63.

<sup>18</sup> We are referring to the thought from his discussion “Commitment”, which (based on

and the dominant ideologies cannot entirely subject, which strengthens the political and critical dimension of film and contributes to the establishment of its role as a means of social resistance. Most of the efforts treated here are similar to the past and current efforts at raising awareness that, with a clearly foregrounded provenance and determined vision, resist indoctrination, the basic tool of politico-cultural imperialism. The work of the individuals and collectives considered here thus prove that the current newsreels, together with a series of other (awakened, renewed or new) forms of committed cinema, are exceptionally resilient genres of progressive creativity. Their alternative approaches represent an active examination of social relations and the possibility of intervening in the existing state of things in an experimental, creative and innovative way. Their fundamental characteristic is agility, with which, prompted by the extra-filmic reality of social conflicts and class struggle, they constantly revolutionise themselves and invent new forms of articulating resistance with filmic means.

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Theodor W. Adorno's eponymous essay) examines the tension between committed and autonomous art: "Such tension and contradiction between the two poles, however, are what still allows art to create values that cannot be completely absorbed either by the marketplace or by ideological functions, with the result that art continues to act as a point of resistance in society." (Zabel: 168)

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Igor Bizjan

WE WILL ALL BE KILLED ...

(an apocryphal sign)  
*Dedicated to Sylvain George*

Everybody completes their  
journey wounded,

through holes  
and shots

in the bloody  
fire of memories,

in the pulled-out doubt  
hanging

off the wall  
of consciousness,

everyman  
mutilates wishes,

rips out  
the dragon's heart,

in a bold  
flight

across fear  
and courage,

he counts stars,  
the silence of the evening,

the castles made of bark,  
sand and dreams.

## ACCELERATED UNDERDEVELOPMENT

*Dedicated to Travis Wilkerson*

It is not about revolution.  
Throughout history,  
squadrons of death,  
uniformed soldiers, the police  
have beaten helpless, rebellious people;  
the rich are growing richer,  
the poor are nursing their sorrow,  
a thin bread crust  
is melting a gloomy look.  
Will it ever be better, will  
we lead a life worthy  
of a human being? There is hope,  
revolution is not dead,  
revolution is not dead,  
revolution is not dead,  
dead are marketed (lethargic),  
sold-out (buyable) people.

## LE HAVRE

(The moral decay of an old lady)

A foreign eye  
is observing us, terrified.

Where have we dug  
our European heart?

# MELTDOWNS, INTERTEXT, ANCESTORS, MARCHES, MIGRATIONS: NOTES ON NIKA AUTOR AND NEWSREEL FRONT

... we are in the midst of a vast process in which literary forms are being melted down, a process in which many of the contrasts in terms of which we have been accustomed to think may lose their relevance... The newspaper is the arena of this literary confusion...

(Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 1934)

Eighty years after Benjamin delivered this speech in Paris and 100 years after the October Revolution, we are entitled to substitute "artistic" for "literary" and "media" for "newspaper" and to think that perhaps Benjamin would be inspired by the work of Newsreel Front (Obzorniška Fronta) and Nika Autor. Certainly the reverse is true, for the Slovenian newsreelist fervently quotes other words of the German Jewish Marxist (1892–1940) in *Newsreel 55* (Obzornik 55, 2013, Nika Autor), the percussive documentary essay on history, memory and war/crimes that is one of her most complex and compelling works.

Later Benjamin elaborates on the "melting down" and refers to two of the most prophetic newsreel practitioners of his age, again anticipating fundamental principles of the Slovenian artists' work:

/.../ the newsreel offers everyone the opportunity to rise from passer-by to movie extra. In this way any man might even find himself part of a work of art, as witness Vertov's *Three Songs About Lenin* or Ivens's *Borinage*. Any man today can lay claim to being filmed. /.../ the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. /.../ All this can easily be applied to the film, where transitions that in literature took centuries have come about in a decade. In cinematic practice, particularly in Russia, this change-over has partially become established reality. Some of the players whom we meet in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray themselves and primarily in their own work process. In Western Europe the capitalistic exploitation



of the film denies consideration to modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced. (1969: 231)

The following commentaries on the six 21<sup>st</sup>-century Slovenian newsreels I have been privileged to see and on their resonance with Benjamin and their other 20<sup>th</sup>-century ancestors do not form a linear or cohesive argument or interpretation. Rather I invite you to accompany me through a series of six somewhat disjointed personal reflections. No doubt this is in keeping with neoliberal globalization—the turbulence of migrations, exploitation, surveillance, dehumanization, and injustice, and their Slovenian national instantiation—that Autor has so vividly documented and vigorously challenged.

### 1. Intertext.

Immediate, accessible, instrumental, even ephemeral, most newsreels historically have not usually been read as rich repositories of intertext. Yet newsreels are not exempt from Northrop Frye's dictum "Poetry is made out of other poems." Every work of art has its forebears, referents and interlocutors. Autor and Front's<sup>1</sup> most obvious is the homonymic "Newsreel," the U.S. production and distribution collective that reached the peak of its productivity and influence during the decades of the New Left, but whose descendent organizations are still active today. The recognized authority on "Newsreel," Bill Nichols, is a contributor to this volume, but I borrow his voice to emphasize the importance of this heritage and to suggest the fecundity of Autor's genealogical link to the American group:

The 1960s and '70s brought [the] tendency to represent "history from below"—from the point of view of those who remained marginalized and dispossessed—to even sharper focus. The most notable example of collective filmmaking, for example, which avoids the promotion of the documentary filmmaker as an individual artist "free" to find in life what others find in fiction, is the American filmmaking group called Newsreel. With highly active filmmaking centers in New York and San Francisco and distribution support in several other cities, Newsreel made or distributed dozens of films from 1967 onward that reported on the war in Vietnam, draft resistance, college strikes (at Columbia

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter for the sake of brevity I will refer to this extraordinary artist and the collective she is a part of as "Autor," which works adequately as shorthand I hope, especially since Google has told me this is also the Slovenian word for "author."

University and San Francisco State), national liberation movements around the world, and the women's movement.

Newsreel films identified themselves with a logo composed of a flickering machine gun with the word "Newsreel" emblazoned on its side. There was no doubt that these were agit-prop films, like the early newsreels of Dziga Vertov in 1918–1919, designed to foster political resistance to government actions and policies. The films bore no individual credits. The effort was a collective one, and the idea of an individual artistic vision came second to the commitment of the group to a radical political position. San Francisco Newsreel went so far as to set up a rotating work plan, where members would take jobs for a period of time and pool their earnings to support the group and its filmmaking initiatives. Distributing their own films and showing them on campuses, in community centers, and on the walls of buildings, Newsreel contributed to the grass-roots political activism of the 1960s and early '70s. (152)

Autor's kinship with the Americans of a half-century ago (and those of Americans 80 years ago as well, as Nichols's piece elsewhere in this volume suggests) is uncanny. Both bodies of work share the intended function of oppositional newsreel work as combined documentation, provocation, historiography, interpersonal encounter, and call to solidarity and action (part agitprop poster and part street demonstration)—all this within shorter, distributable and no doubt disposable formats. This said, however, a definitional clarification is necessary here: "Newsreel," Nichols, Autor and I are all strategically as evasive as we are flexible about the exact definition of the newsreel, eschewing the rigid formulas that even the highly regimented commercial newsreels that played in cinemas at their heyday (approximately 1925–1970) were often loose with. Joris Ivens (1998–1989), the newsreelist praised by Benjamin, always differentiated his "broader deeper" documentaries from both impersonal, "orthodox" theatrical shorts and workers' oppositional "newsreels" (Waugh, 2016: 157–158, 206), his analytic work from the journalistic competition. Yet he would surely have recognized his kinship with Autor if he could have seen her *Newsreel 55* or her stunning "broad and deep" *Newsreel 62* (Obzornik 62, 2015), an essay that confronts Yugoslav history and the politics of art with today's refugee crisis in only 11 minutes. Autor does not use a machine-gun logo, fortunately: there is already enough violence documented on her screens! In fact another common "Newsreel" metaphor might be more appropriate: New York member Robert Kramer's concept of the newsreel as "can-opener."

Now, leaving aside U.S. “Newsreel,” I will devote the rest of my space to other equally important genealogies, including the heritage of the two Europeans named by Benjamin and parallels with other international works, especially those from Canada (like Slovenia, another “minor” country overshadowed by powerful neighbours), which both Venice spectators and Autor might find more obscure than 1960s newsreel ancestors based in Paris or Buenos Aires, but which I find striking indeed.

## **2. The Soviet Connection.**

Benjamin mentions the 1934 Vertov feature film, *Three Songs about Lenin* (Tre pesni o Lenine), released as Benjamin was writing his 1936 text, a poetic and personal film that would normally exceed most definitions of newsreel, deploying much dramatization. Nichols mentions Vertov’s earliest work, the *Film-Weekly* (Kino-Nedelja, 1918–1919), “film weeklies” made in the years immediately following the Bolshevik revolution and often produced and exhibited on the legendary agitprop trains of the Russian Civil War era. But I would also mention the slightly later *Film-Truth* (Kino-Pravda) newsreel series whose 23 issues spanned the years 1922 to 1925 and whose name “*cinéma vérité*/film truth” has repeatedly re-surfaced throughout film history, almost as often as the term “newsreel.” In these shorts, Vertov’s energized and mobile visual immersion in the dynamics of the emerging revolutionary society, especially their iconographies of bustling, building cities and citizens busy at everything from learning to read to marching through those cities in columns, often with banners and uniforms. At the same time these newsreels’ loud empathetic alarms about famine and other social problems clearly anticipate Autor’s work. I wonder even if her loving numbering of her newsreel chapters is perhaps a deliberate homage to Vertov’s practice? More seriously, the post-Yugoslav irreverence towards, and unrelenting criticism of, the state arguably goes against the grain of Vertov’s commitment to functioning within the structures and politics of state sponsorship and party discipline. For example, Vertov’s troubling emphasis in several of the newsreels on the political trials of the Bolsheviks’ political opposition, the Social Revolutionaries, must not sit well with any of his descendants, Autor or others.

### 3. The Ivens Connection.

*Borinage* (original title *Misère au Borinage*) was an ambitious “newsreel” the Dutch communist Joris Ivens made in the Belgian coalmining region together with Belgian filmmaker Henri Storck and committees of hard-pressed Borin strikers (shot in 1933, released in 1934). Archival compilation in the film reminds us of the skills Ivens had acquired editorially hijacking commercial newsreels years earlier in Amsterdam, but the film’s main elements that prophetically leap ahead to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century newsreelist are its direct denunciatory address, its fierce irony, and its collaboration with worker activists in dramatizing scenes of oppression and resilience. When I see the heart-wrenching scenes in Autor’s *In the Land of Bears* (V deželi medvedov, 2012), in which migrant and undocumented migrant workers show their cramped and filthy living conditions in the “singles dormitories” and even shipping containers where their employers force them to live, the echo of Ivens’s blunt and detailed/methodical “unaesthetic” depiction of the Borin strikers’ “barracks,” lacking water and fuel but not insects and vermin, leaps out at me. The blatant exploitation of the miners in 1933 has not changed 80 years later, as evidenced by the rapacious gouging of migrant workers in Slovenia by corporations that seem to be re-inventing the crude early capitalism, naked and shameless, decried by Marx.

Especially resonant are Autor’s demonstration scenes in all but one of the six works I’ve seen, where the refugee, the migrant, the silenced, the exploited and the detained march and shout out their agency and empowerment at state and capitalist power. Ivens’s pioneering scene showed his community partners re-staging a demonstration bearing a large gilt-framed folk portrait of Marx. But the re-staging-turned-real-thing naturally attracted the police, and became the spontaneous political street theatre that would become a staple trope of radical newsreels to come, the movement of defiant bodies on pavement through public space.

### 4. The Canadian connection.

Simultaneously with the American “Newsreel” collectives, quietly north of the border, a program of film and video community-action documentary was churning out dozens of works that often resemble the newsreel in their immediacy, direct address and catalytic intent. That this program, called “Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle,” was funded by our federal government through the National Film Board of Canada

adds the same contradictory complexity around the works that I observed in relation to Vertov (the state's generous left hand knoweth not what it's repressive right hand doeth)<sup>2</sup>. Will that also be on the Venice spectators' minds as they peruse such eloquent state-funded denunciations of the Slovenian state that Autor is both representing and "representing?" Everyone's favorite of the over 200 Challenge for Change films, *You Are on Indian Land* (1969, Mort Ransen), engages with a public demonstration, that of Mohawks blocking a road through their Akwesasne reservation and thereby challenging a government plan to build a border bridge across their land (which straddles the international border of Quebec, Canada with the U.S.A.). The indigenous subjects' anger at and resistance to police and government contempt dramatically shows their attachment to their home, vividly depicted as a cold, snowy landscape. Among many other things the film calls sharply into question the randomness of international borders, nationality, and commodified territory, anticipating Autor's own preoccupations decades later.

*Newsreel 62*, her unforgettable 2015 essay on history, memory and statelessness, concludes with one of the artist's many citations of German communist playwright Bertolt Brecht, a "refugee conversation" he wrote during his own exile from fascism in 1940:

The passport is the most noble part of the human being. It also does not come into existence in such a simple fashion as a human being does. A human being can come into the world anywhere, in the most careless way and for no good reason, but a passport never can. When it is good, the passport is also recognized for this quality, whereas a human being, no matter how good, can go unrecognized. (2011 [1940]: 113)

No doubt both Brecht and Autor realized that this bitter irony applied first and foremost to the trauma of indigenous displacement across the planet. The stirring 1969 Canadian "newsreel," filmed on threatened Mohawk territory, confronts this trauma head-on and also, as with both playwright and newsreelist, discovers resistance as well!

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<sup>2</sup> See Waugh, Brendan Baker and Winton, 2010.

## 5. Another Canadian connection.

I was brought up just 25 kilometres from the Dare Biscuits factory in Kitchener, Ontario, where Canadian feminist avant-garde filmmaker-artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1988) made her famous minimalist avant-garde newsreel *Solidarity* in 1973. Our family partook of Dare biscuits regularly throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Yet as a twenty-something expatriate graduate student in the U.S. at the time of Wieland's shoot, I was completely oblivious to the historic strike at Dare that began in 1972 and lasted more than a year, a bitter conflict that involved unionbusting and violence toward an underpaid, mostly female workforce (whose militancy posed a strong challenge to the complicit American-dominated Canadian union bureaucracy of the day). Wieland was not oblivious, however. She had just returned from an extended residency (exile?) in New York City to an embryonic Toronto art scene, which appreciated her increasingly political discourses more than the so-called capital of the art world, where the apolitical aesthetics of the Cold War still held sway. She had also just been accorded in 1971 a historical tribute at the National Gallery of Canada, the first ever one-person show devoted to a living woman artist. Wieland was on a roll as her filmmaking increasingly commanded attention and increasingly tied her to Toronto feminist networks of artists and activists. Wieland grabbed her camera and drove the 100 kilometres to the strike's front line and made her one-shot provocation, just shy of 11 minutes long. Autor "remade" this film as *Solidarity* (Solidarnost) in 2011, almost shot for shot, focused on a migrants' demonstration in Ljubljana.

*Solidarity* was part of Wieland's two-film cycle of "political films" ("political" in the patriarchal Old Left connotation of class, economic and national struggles). The previous year she had come to Montreal to make the 30-minute film *Pierre Vallières*. English Canadians were often voyeuristically obsessed with nationalist and radical upheavals in Quebec, and Wieland took this obsession to a visual extreme, filming Vallières, the author of the Quebec indépendantiste bible *White Niggers of America*, reading three of his more firebrand speeches. She framed him in an extreme micro close-up that gave equal attention to moustache, saliva and teeth as he spoke (the protagonist would later describe the shoot to me as so cramped and painful that he was intensely relieved when that inscrutable woman from Toronto finally took that lens away from his mouth). Wieland's two "political" films are similar in their extended focus on a single iconographical element, respectively the revolutionary's mouth and the strikers' walking feet and

shoes, suspended in both cases under a soundtrack of political oratory. No doubt my New Left grad student friends at the time joined me in my (sexist?) outrage at Wieland's frivolous idolization in her other works of sellout Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, dismissed the two "political" works as trivializations of the political ideas and processes behind the whimsical images. Many feminist critics have since found her oeuvre more opaque and ironic than I and reinstated them back into the feminist canon, and I have long since been converted.

Personal digressions aside, *Solidarity* has held up extremely well almost a half-century after it was made, and Autor's tribute to it, an almost exact pastiche, recognizes its understated brilliance. Sharing her foremother's fascination with footwear, ground surfaces, and protest oratory—not to mention the eerily superimposed slogan of "Solidarity"—Autor succinctly reminds us, for all her film's burden of opaque postmodern "citation", that worker struggles form a long unbroken continuum in capitalist and post-capitalist history and art, from Daumier to Bertolucci, and that movement and effort—by feet, mouths and bodies in general—constitute the true index of solidarity, whether in Kitchener or Ljubljana. Interestingly, Wieland moved towards her whimsical but militant demonstration imagery from an apolitical and enervated New York avant-garde; Autor has moved in the opposite direction, from radical activist intervention towards the playful "arty" imagery of shoes and paving stones, and the two women artists converge in the same place.

One significant interruption of Autor's otherwise faithful pastiche of Wieland, is the insertion early in the film of a title card with the following lines, taken from Brecht's poem "German War Primer," written during the early years of World War II:

The workers cry out for bread.  
The merchants cry out for markets.  
The unemployed were hungry. The employed  
Are hungry now.  
The hands that lay folded are busy again.  
They are making shells.<sup>3</sup>

One thing I find fascinating about these two films, Wieland's and Autor's, separated by 40 years and an ocean, is their shared conceit, their

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<sup>3</sup> See Bertolt Brecht, "German War Primer," (excerpt, 1940-47), <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/from-a-german-war-primer/> (accessed on March 18, 2017).

coverage of the demonstration obliquely through prosaic imagery of feet and walking. In both cases we see cheap but sturdy walking shoes, not fancy Reebok or *Vogue* footwear (I am reminded of the shopping sequence in *In the Land of Bears*, where worker-activist Armin is picking out shoes in a Slovenian big box store for his Bosnian comrade Esad, and dwells at great length on the practical requirements of worker's footwear amid the shabby merchandise, the need to stand up to oil and water on the construction site). In all three films the shoe becomes a materialist capsule of political and economic relations (with echoes of both Marx and Brecht in the background!). Only in Autor's *Solidarity*, though, are we forced to confront an analysis of the global politics of shoes and walking through Brecht's cynical poem about the unemployed and the employed within the economic framework of war.

A final interesting footnote: Joyce Wieland never represented Canada at the Venice Biennale, though her husband Michael Snow did so in 1970, and there's a record of Wieland looking rather sulky over being turned down. In a way, Wieland has now been vindicated 47 years later, finally showing up at Venice through this miraculous Slovenian chain of political and artistic influence, succession and revival.

## **6. Another American connection.**

Lest anyone conclude that the 45-year gap between Wieland and Autor is a newsreel desert, quite the opposite is true. Intervening technological revolutions, especially the introduction of cheap single-system miniature digital cameras in the 1980s—and later the cellphone explosion of this century—left far behind Vertov and Ivens's handheld, hand-cranked 35mm camera. Introduced in the 1960s, the new sync-sound 16mm and Portapak video units, portable but still unwieldy, outstripped their antecedents in their capacity to document and foment. Both techno-tectonic shifts sparked a quantum intensification of oppositional newsreel activity around the globe, consolidating New Left politics around identity and gender along with other subaltern subjectivities and classical frameworks like imperialism, nationality and class. Its impact has still not fully been realized and even less understood. Let me mention a single work that leaps to mind, American again, that suggests the continuity between the 1960s and the 2010s. A provocative and engaging ACT UP video, shot at the height of the AIDS pandemic on the sidewalks of New York City, fills the bill. Not surprisingly, *Doctor, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No to*



*“Cosmo”* (Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti, 1988) and echoes all of the aforementioned works in focusing on a demonstration, in fact two: a sit-in at a corporate TV broadcast talk show perpetrating dangerous information about women and HIV transmission; and a more conventional shoes-on-the-pavement march outside the TV studio. As a demonstrator-camerawoman shoots the marchers behind her, we hear her anxious voice complaining how hard it is to do two things at once, protest and film:

I was torn in a way, because, being in the organizing process, I wanted to be part of the demonstration. But when you have a camera in your hand, you have to think about documenting; so part of you has to be cool. And frankly, at that point, I lost my cool... So you see a lot of my feet in the rough footage because my hands were up in the air and I was chanting along with everyone else.<sup>4</sup>

But newsreelist Carlomusto manages to do it well, anticipating the energy, versatility and mobility of her Slovenian descendant, including much blurred and acrobatic camerawork and, yes, shoes. In all cases I have referred to, the street theatre of individual bodies and angry groups on the march, voices raised in protest, is transformed into the more enduring political aesthetics of the oppositional newsreel.

## **7. In conclusion.**

I’m glad Autor has demonstrated that Benjamin, Brecht, Vertov, Ivens, Challenge for Change, Wieland and ACT UP are all as relevant in the current century as they were in the last. She is certainly part of the international network of those reviving activist documentary in the production, distribution and exhibition spheres (of the latter, let’s mention such screening organizations as Cinema Politica in Canada and “Vikalp” in India as representatives of this proliferating landscape of what is sometimes called “bums in seats” or old-fashioned corporeally constituted audiences). I hope that the Slovenian representation at Venice in 2017 will have its deserved impact, and that from now on all national representations at the Biennale will consist exclusively of bold, brave, artful, empathetic and planet-shifting newsreels—and perhaps even a few live shoe-leathered solidarity demonstrations against state cruelty and exploitation. Meanwhile, I am grateful for this humbling opportunity to discover the work of an author,

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<sup>4</sup> This citation and early versions of one or two ideas in this article appeared in Waugh, 1999; rpt. in Waugh, 2011.

an outfit and a country that I did not know before, to be included in the company of such distinguished collaborators, and to have my enthusiasm for “in-the-streets” activist newsreel rekindled in a most unexpected way.

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## NOW. AND THEN...

The work by Newsreel Front (Obzorniška fronta) belongs to a tradition stretching back to the beginnings of cinema. Reports. News. Information. All about the now of the moment when the camera rolls. Whether it's Lumière *Workers leaving the factory* (La Sortie de l'usine) in 1895, or Dziga Vertov's *Kinoeye* (Kino-Glaz, 1924) on a new, revolutionary Soviet Union, the cinema has provided us with eyes and ears on the present moment. And as time passes, that present moment becomes the past, a time to which the newsreel also speaks with compelling power—as *Newsreel 55* (Obzornik 55, 2013) vividly reminds us.

- Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (Človek's kinoapparatom, 1929) is the best-known attempt to see the world anew, using the camera not only to document the achievements of a revolution but to be revolutionary in the way it represents a society transformed.
- The Film and Photo Leagues of the 1930s, coordinated by the Communist Party and active in numerous countries from the Netherlands to Japan, produced reports from the front: strikes, hunger marches, protests—things that were neglected or depicted negatively by the mainstream media.
- Santiago Álvarez renewed this tradition in Cuba after the revolution of 1959 with his incendiary, rapid-fire collages celebrating the emergence of a new Cuba, such as *Now*, a searing indictment of racism in America.
- Newsreel, collectives of filmmakers and activists, emerged in the late 1960s as part of the New Left in the United States to document the anti-war movement with provocative, often inflammatory films against the military draft, the war in Vietnam, racism on college campuses and beyond, and the rise of the Black Panthers.

News is not new. It does not fall from the sky. News represents changes or disruptions in preexisting systems and institutions. Those larger systems are old, familiar ones from the weather to the economy, and from politics to sports. Beneath them all lies a fundamental sense of social order, and that which disrupts that order is eligible to be called news. Hence violence of all kinds, from plane crashes to riots, invasions to assassinations,

often crowds out consideration of the preexisting systems themselves.

- Dominant news typically supports the status quo of systems and institutions. Its focus is more on the threat posed by disruptions than on any intrinsic value the systems and institutions may themselves have.
- Alternative news challenges assumptions about the status quo. What dominant news may see as a threat, alternative news sees as a possible harbinger of change and transformation. Newsreel Front's work clearly fits into this tradition. Asylum seekers are human beings in need of support, for Newsreel Front—but for the state they pose a threat to the stability of the social order.

Cinematic news may be didactic and highly informational, disembodied and seemingly objective in its representation of a social order that is familiar and unquestioned or affective and experimental, embodied and more openly subjective in its representation of particular situations populated by particular individuals within the larger social order.

- Newsreel Front's work belongs to the latter category. It provides us with a sense of the full humanity of those whom the dominant media treat as mere members of abstract categories such as immigrants, migrant workers, or political asylum seekers.
- *Newsreel 62* (Obzornik 62, 2015) juxtaposes the story of a major art exhibition in Slovenj Gradec in 1965 celebrating the twentieth anniversary of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights with present day footage of the border crisis, which reflects a stark rejection of universal human rights in favor of nationalist protectionism. The disappearance of two pieces sent to the exhibition from Syria, *Family* and *Worker*, adds to the irony, given that the winning entry carried the proleptic, perhaps prophetic title *War*. Syria, too, the narrator tells us, is disappearing in turmoil, and human rights with it. The film ends with a text superimposed over a police officer hitting protesters. The text reminds us that humans, people appear on this planet in a random, careless manner, but passports do not. No matter how good, a person may go unrecognized, but the legitimacy a valid passport carries remains universally recognized. This Newsreel uses blurry, undecipherable footage and unexpected juxtapositions to announce its departure from didactic information. It puzzles and troubles, questions and provokes more than it informs. It is representative of the avant-

garde, politically radical status that characterizes much of Newsreel Front's work.

- *Newsreel 55*, a collage of past and present that laments the impossibility of “capturing” the past or foreseeing the future traces the history of Maribor from 1941 to the present. Strikes collide with dreams, memories with lies. A vast flotilla of white balloons sail into the sky, each a memorial to those who died, part of the mix of “iron and bones” that represented industry, progress and death. The narrator speaks of a “falsches Bild,” the false image that constitutes the state’s televised news—but what can replace it? The answer may lie in the final image of members of the underground and the woman, Slava Klavora, who was murdered during World War II. Her gaze penetrates the viewer. Others smile or look guardedly, but she stares with a fierce resolve to see and be seen. Who or what does she see behind the camera? Who or what do we see and what will we do? Newsreel Front poses such questions without providing the easy answers our propaganda machines so very much need.
- *Postcards* (Razglednice, 2010) conveys a vivid sense of what it might feel like to be objectified and criminalized by the state as a result of trying to cross a border *sans papiers*. Its use of black and white surveillance footage taken by border patrols depersonalizes and objectifies the individuals encountered. The film makes the process clear to all.
- *Report on the State of Asylum Seekers* (Poročilo o stanju prosilcev za azil, 2010) and *In the Land of Bears* (V deželi medvedov, 2012) transform those who would be but numbers or statistics, dehumanized figures detained in a no man’s land that is neither here nor there, into human beings. These films show us what it means to be human, not only in terms of a potentially illegal or criminal relation to the state, but as a filmmaker who engages with others as equals, not suspects.
- *Solidarity* (Solidarnost, 2011) represents a political rally from a clearly avant-garde, experimental perspective. The camera dwells on the legs and feet of those who gather together, rather than on faces, banners and speeches. It returns to the foundation, the basic element of solidarity: standing and moving together. It also imprints the word “solidarnost” across the screen. Here, as in Joyce

Wieland's 1973 film, *Solidarity*, which Newsreel Front is here recreating, the word appears to loom closer to the viewer than the cinematic image itself; it doesn't occupy the same space, just as a concept doesn't occupy the same realm as that which it represents. This unconventional tactic works provocatively to generate a feeling of solidarity with the very act of building solidarity from the ground, or the feet, up.

Newsreel Front's work restores a sense of life, and value, to people who might otherwise be merely objectified and forgotten. Their reports identify a massive and dangerously overlooked threat to the social order: the reduction of human beings to objects, even criminals, based on their place of origin and the validity of their travel documents. Newsreel Front indirectly, implicitly asks—Who are we and what must we do to affirm and defend our status, and the status of others, as full human beings when institutions and nation states fail to honor this fundamental premise?

Nika Autor

## NEWSREEL SHRED: THE KITCHEN

You are invited to come for a chat to a kitchen in a small rented apartment in the centre of Ljubljana in a typical apartment building built in the times of the former Yugoslavia. A quite uncomfortable table and bench leaning against a wood-paneled wall in a 12 m<sup>2</sup> kitchen that can host at least six people. Above the table hangs a kitchen light that bumps against your head every time you start to get up. Next to the table stands a fridge, old and loud. There is a window opposite the fridge offering a view of eastern Ljubljana. This kitchen became the site of meetings, shoots, new acquaintances, plans; it was a space of encounters and it was precisely this kitchen that provided the first contacts and alliances that I built with like-minded people around pressing, topical social issues. This is where I first met artists and activists who actively attempted to change the existing social relations. This is where we tested the first ideas on the role of art in relation to history and current social issues. This kitchen became the first scriptwriting room, the main filming location and the editing room for *In the Land of Bears*. An attempt and a continuous play at collaging images and words.

In the kitchen, an experiment of attempts that answer questions with failure.

An attempt in this world that is increasingly similar to worldlessness.

To start from nothing, with pieces.

Fragments.

*A film about friendship, love and struggle.*





NEWSREEL SHRED:  
A WALK

The EU finds this situation pleasing!  
Free labour suits them!  
They can take us whenever they want.  
They can also send us back when they please.  
I've spent five years without a single cent!  
Just work!  
We don't have a life to sell!  
We have a life to live!  
And in the end, we have our stomachs!  
They're empty!



NEWSREEL SHRED:  
A RIVER

Do you know how they would go fishing during the war?  
They would use electricity and throw bombs.  
You throw a bomb into the water and kill them all.  
The little fish, it kills them all.  
Or they would shoot into the air with a gun  
and for 30 seconds the fish would lose consciousness.  
You go into the water, pick out those you like, and the rest get to live.  
Once I went fishing and my brother had a wooden fishing rod.  
He tied a piece of lead to the rod.  
I'm looking at these chunks and want to catch something.  
I throw it once... plonk.  
There were no more fish, all gone.  
I was a complete amateur.  
I came to Slovenia a long time ago.  
I wasn't planning or making something out of my life.  
I just wanted to leave Bosnia.  
I'm living.  
Surviving.  
Just like everybody else.



## NEWSREEL SHRED: A MARCH

We're marching towards Liberty Square  
in the footsteps  
of workers from many years ago.  
Where organised industrial labourers once marched,  
today there troops the mob

forgotten by the state.

We.

Policemen, dogs, horses, batons.  
Bodies tired from adrenaline.  
With the excuse  
of the demonstrations being illegal,  
they finally give us  
the right to resistance,  
expression,  
political thought.



NEWSREEL SHRED:  
LOVE, STRUGGLE AND FAILURE...  
AND NEWSREEL 62.

Somebody whispered  
“There is love and devotion for more than just 62.”

What does it mean?  
A deceptive image.  
The right image.  
A poor image.  
A traumatic image.  
A foolish image.  
An intolerable image.  
Commitment and failure.

Lets speak: close and nearby.  
Near.  
By.  
And with.

An attempt.  
To zoom in.  
To engage.  
To fail.  
To fail again.  
To resist.  
To montage.





# FILMIC INFORMATION, COUNTERINFORMATION, UR-INFORMATION

*For Fabien Thelma*

## **I. What is the relationship between fact, event and information?**

Let's explain or define the difference between four levels and terms that the information industry deliberately confuses.

- *Noumenon*: is the happening in itself, the core before any perception, experience or historicity, where we are not in the symbolic.
- Fact: we can assume that, as long as life and death exist, the world cannot be reduced to the manifold circulation of heterogeneous signs, and factuality will remain. However, as epistemology has taught us, no such thing as a "fact" exists in itself; rather, it is a set of beliefs to which we resort occasionally. "No theory ever agrees with all the facts in its domain, yet it is not always the theory that is to blame. Facts are constituted by older ideologies, and a clash between facts and theories may be proof of progress." (Feyerabend, 1975: 39) Paul Feyerabend's argument continues Louis Althusser's analysis in the field of science (and, using numerous historical examples, also corroborates it): science, wrote Althusser, "does not 'work' on a purely objective 'given', that of pure and absolute 'facts'. On the contrary, its particular labour consists of *elaborating its own scientific facts* through a critique of the *ideological 'facts'* elaborated by an earlier ideological theoretical practice." (1969: 184) (Both thinkers are inspired by Kant, who critically summarises the history of science in his preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "[...] reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design; that it must take the lead with principles for its judgments according to constant laws and compel nature to answer its questions, rather than letting nature guide its movements by keeping reason, as it were, in leading-strings." ([1787] 1998: 109)) If we transpose this critique of "objective fact" to the field of aes-

thetics, it allows us to demarcate phenomenality thoroughly, and represents an operative counterbalance to the Proustian definition: to conquer and perhaps understand “this aggregation of mental assumptions we name the visual process” (Proust, 2002: 417).

- Event: belongs to the phenomenal (in contrast to the noumenal) and represents the subjective and social perception of “fact”, the way the latter echoes the thinking and consciousness of the individual and community. By transferring fact into event, the possibility emerges to imagine, perceive, perhaps also articulate the fact, to narrate and stage it. Event is what becomes intelligible of the “fact” and confronts the sayable and the unsayable.
- Information: the rearrangement of the event (and not the fact directly) into a transmissible content, and the sometimes complex rearrangement elaborated through the process.

In principle, these four ontic and phenomenological dimensions can be clearly vectorized: noumenon/fact/event/information. In the written and audiovisual information industry, such (ideological) transparency is implicit at the everyday level.

In reality, the information industry employs the rule of disinformation, numerous processes such as

### 1. Assumption of transparency

First, this assumes that fact and information are in some way related, and even claims they are synonymous; then, it leaves the expert treatment of facts to the guild of professional journalists; and finally, in English it overlaps “fact” and “new” thanks to the term “newsreel”—like the word “journal” in French and other languages—in such a way it minors the medium- and the long-term processes.

A countermeasure could be the introduction of the substantive “gazette”, which spread in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and denoted a periodical publication in the field of information, whereas etymologically speaking it derived from the Italian “gazeta”, the coin with which one could buy this periodical. If we replace the words “newsman” and “journaliste” with the word “gazetier”, the terminology can repatriate the imaginary of falsification and we can mentally protect ourselves from the reality effect (in the Barthesian sense) caused by information.

## 2. Indiscriminate approximation

In relation to this, we can recall Jean-Luc Godard's maieutic approach one day in May 1982 when, in the middle of a live television news broadcast, he forced the TV presenter Philippe Labro (professional journalist and writer who appeared in Godard's 1966 film *Made in USA*) to admit that, *de facto*, he knew nothing about the situation on which he was "reporting" to the public, "informing" it—in this case the Falklands war. Philippe Labro, Godard summed up, is thus not a journalist, but rather a "speaker", a "propagator."

## 3. Lethal selection

Ignoring entire sets of facts, letting them remain unknown, unrecognized or forgotten.

## 4. Various falsifications

Let's recall that in the very second newsreel, from 7 September 1894, the "fact" was completely staged: the boxing match between James Corbett and Peter Courtney had to last six rounds, that is, the entire film, and it had to end with the favourite victorious. (Fielding, 1972: 10)

## 5. Invention of "facts" *ex nihilo*

The report read by Colin Powell in the United Nations on 12 September 2002 justifying the "preventive war" in Iraq is typical of contemporary information in this respect. "Alternative facts", a euphemism for the word "lie", launched by Donald Trump's adviser in January 2017, represents its contemporary semantic institutionalisation.

Throughout history and in all social contexts, even among media professionals, we can detect initiatives aimed at improving, renewing and upgrading the relations between factuality, eventness and transmission. The dynamics of these initiatives are intertwined:

- In the long run, they advocate the possibility of the existence of history that is not reduced to the function of mere ideological tool.

- In the medium run, they seek critical work of the historians (who should, in principle, guarantee the return to the exactitude and perspective of the facts as opposed to their political instrumentalisation). By "historians", we are not referring only to a specialised guild of professionals.

- In the short run and immediacy:

- At the level of fact, this is an endless battle for factuality, that is,

a struggle against oblivion before the biased and lethal selection by the media industry. From the spheres of human experience, almost nothing reaches or achieves collective consciousness, both in the present and in the past.

- At the level of event, current falsifications must be exposed. René Vautier and his film *Black Slick and Red Anger* (Marée noire et colère rouge, 1978) is a classic example. On 16 March 1978, Amoco Cadiz, the American supertanker sailing under a Liberian flag, sank just next to the extreme point of the coast of Brittany. The French government reported that the situation was under control and oil was not leaking. The next day, René Vautier found a helicopter, recorded the spill spreading from the tanker, then edited the film such that the official discourse (TV news broadcast) and the facts alternated in the most telling manner.

Yet, can we be satisfied today with the traditional opposition of disinformation and counterinformation? The documentation of facts is increasing exponentially: now, in a single nanosecond, more films of counterinformation are produced and spread than in the entire history of film. Therefore, we can now speak of *ur-information*, the original and primary information; original because it exists prior to the official information, and primary because occasionally and ever more frequently the media industry uses it as material (for information/control).

This ur-information derives from many sources. Today, of course, we think of the Internet, but it also means the everyday fieldwork of some great reporters, which is difficult and sometimes tragic, but also distorted in various ways in the very process of mediation. For these reasons, Fabien Thelma, to whom this text is dedicated, stopped working on news programmes.

Can the present-day abundance of initiatives replace organisation? How to fight effectively with the help of counterinformation in today's society of surveillance?

## **II. Counterinformation and the creation of images**

Since counterinformation occupies the threshold of the perceivable and the transmissible, it provides a laboratory for creating discursive forms (verbal, visual...). How can we think the deep solidarity between factuality and some of the issues that are the most intimately related to art:

describability, articulability, structure of discourse, the critical approach to signs and speech, the intersections of depiction and act...?

What can we learn from historical experience in the field of practical organisation, creation and dissemination of counterinformation?

First, we must establish the history of counterinformation initiatives; here is a short historical and definitional outline.

### **Definitional characteristics and variable lineaments of counterinformation**

- Among the definitional characteristics that can be observed in the history of filmic counterinformation initiatives are:
- immediate relationship to current events and struggles, with which they call for action;
- documenting facts or situations ignored, concealed or falsified by the dominant media;
- expressing critical perspectives largely absent in the dominant media;
- reflecting *in situ* on the role of images and their depiction in history;
- long-term work evident in serial forms;
- and an optional but common feature: a title or even a graphic design that makes them recognisable, as in the TV news broadcast; perhaps a format or frame (such as length or division into sequences) in which various content can be conveyed uniformly. However, in contrast to the dominant media, stylised framing and titles express editorial politics and political stance: *Prokino* (proletarian cinema), *Ciné-Tracts*, *Camera War*...

Several variations exist on this basis:

- pure factuality / analysis / historical perspective
- documentary / fiction / essay / poem / song
- length, form, format, vehicle, tone – everything can be changed.

In this respect, the most telling corpus may be the Newsreel created upon Jonas Mekas' initiative in New York in 1967: from burlesque parodies of TV news broadcasts/audiovisual pamphlets (*Yippie!*, 1968), phantasmatic parables (*Make Out*, 1969), visual installations (*The Great*

*Society*, 1967), political manifesto (*Off the Pig*, 1967) and straightforward recording to geopolitical analyses of racism (*Repression*, 1970), they explore the stylistic scope of counterinformation.

By rights, counterinformation knows no limits; for it is all about withdrawing from *logos*, legal discourse and discourse as law itself.

### **Some historical milestones**

At once, we are faced with a political problem: can we talk about counterinformation if it is produced by the state, no matter how revolutionary, as was the case of Dziga Vertov and his *Kino-Pravda* or Santiago Álvarez and the *Cuban Noticieros*? At least three answers are possible:

- no, if the information comes from an official organization;
- yes, if the revolutionary information is placed within a historical context and understood as the opposite of the prior Czarist newspapers; as the opposite of present-day capitalist and imperialist information; as a link with the future of collectives, whose inspiration it will be;
- to really answer this question, it has to be studied in more detail and the authenticity of counterinformative critical nature must be explained according to each particular situation. For instance, considering the cruel lack of resources, Dziga Vertov is not in the exact same situation as Aleksandr Medvedkin and his state-funded Film Train. In each case, sources must be examined, and the answer also depends on the historian's political stance, on whether they admit the possibility of a "revolutionary state" (if they are, for instance, a Leninist), or they consider these two words a complete contradiction (if they are, for example, a Bakuninist).

In any case, historical study supported with documents is key; here, we are commencing with such by writing a very rich history, which is far from complete. It should be repeated that this is not at all about excluding other filmic forms (such as documentary feature) from the field of counterinformation; rather, we are starting from a detailed description that we can build upon later. Here are some milestones that are necessary for a history of counterinformation as a specific filmic form:

- 1913–1914: France: Le Cinéma du Peuple

The Cinéma du Peuple ("People's film") cooperative, in which trade unionists, socialists and anarchists (starting with Miguel Almereyda, the future father of Jean Vigo) are active, shot the newsreel *Funeral of the*

*Citizen Francis de Pressencé* (*Les Obsèques du citoyen Francis de Pressencé*, 1913) and six fiction films.<sup>1</sup>

- 1918–1925: Soviet Union: Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov heads the production of three series of revolutionary newsreel: *Film-Weekly* (Kino-Nedelja), a weekly filmic newsreel (43 editions in 1918–1919); *State Film-Calendar* (Goskino-Kalendar), a daily and weekly “telegraph-style” newsreel (55 editions in 1923–1925), which operated according to the principle of “telegraph-style newsreel bringing events to the screen the same day they take place”; and *Film-Truth* (Kino-Pravda), a filmic daily newsreel (23 editions in 1922–1925).

- 1927: Japan: Prokino

48 films were made: a series of 19 reports on current events, documentaries and fiction films; only 6 have been preserved.<sup>2</sup> The great personality leading the movement until the imperial ban of 1934 was Genjû Sasa, translator, filmmaker and theorist.

- 1930: USA: Workers’ Film and Photo League.

The American Workers’ Film and Photo League (better known as the Film and Photo League after 1933) was an extension of Comintern, the Communist International, through its adjunct Internationale Arbeiterhilfe/Secours Ouvrier International/Workers International Relief (WIR) / Mednarodna organizacija za pomoč delavcem, founded by Lenin in Berlin in 1921. The Workers’ Film and Photo League spread throughout the USA, especially Los Angeles. David E. James described its operation as follows:

During the Depression the Los Angeles WFPL made more than a dozen short films about the local unemployed and then about the labor actions of the early New Deal. In 1933–34, the years of great working-class offensives across the nation, they expanded their purview to the maritime workers and peace marches in San Pedro and the agricultural workers in the San Gabriel, San Joaquin, and Imperial Valleys, in films that linked these issues to the international struggle against fascist aggression in the Spanish civil war and the Japanese invasion of China. (James, 2005: 107)

- 1932–1933: Soviet Union: Aleksandr Medvedkin’s Kinopoezd  
Medvedkin, the author of *Happiness* (Sčastje, 1934), became a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mannoni, 1993; Weber, 2002; Marinone, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Makino, 2001; Capel, 2008.



symbol of activist counterinformation as a result of the films dedicated to him by Chris Marker (*The Train Rolls On* (Le Train en marche, 1971), *The Last Bolshevik* (Le Tombeau d'Alexandre, 1992)) and the name of the Groupes Medvedkine. However, Kinopoezd (Film Train), funded by the Ministry of Industry, was part of a government politics that no longer involved or represented anything revolutionary.

- 1960: Cuba: Santiago Álvarez and the Cuban newsreel

About 2600 “Noticieros” were made, many of them astonishingly creative in terms of form. As Santiago Álvarez says, “a revolutionary artist is always searching. An artist that rests is dead.”<sup>3</sup> *Cuban Memory of the World* (Memoria Cubana, 2010) by Alice de Andrade and Iván Nápoles (Álvarez’ collaborator) documents the inventiveness and dedication of the Noticieros team to the revolutionary values.

- 1965–1968: West Germany: Ulrike Meinhof

In 1965, Ulrike Meinhof, editor in chief of the magazine *Konkret*, political analyst reporting on the dark aspects of the German “economic miracle”, scripts three documentaries for German television, which will be broadcast (and forgotten) as part of the *Panorama* series:

*Workplace and Stopwatch* (Arbeitsplatz und Stoppuhr, broadcast on 9 August 1965); *Accidents at Work* (Arbeitsunfälle, 24 May 1965); and *Foreign Workers* (Gastarbeiter, 1 November 1965). These three hour-long films are a meticulously documented critique of the workers’ living conditions amidst vigorous economic growth in the German Federal Republic, politically and economically still headed by some of former Nazi leaders and their collaborators. These three films were rescued from oblivion in 2010 by Jean-Gabriel Périot in his film *A German Youth* (Une jeunesse allemande, 2015), summing up the history of struggles of the future members and sympathisers of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in the sphere of moving images: Meinhof’s revolutionary film *Bambule* (1970) and films by Holger Meins, Ali Limonadi, Gerd Conradt and Katrin Seybold.

- 1966: Argentina: Grupo Cine Liberación

In 1966, Fernando Solanas founded the Grupo Cine Liberación, an independent group for film production and distribution, which fought against disinformation. Within this framework, in 1968, he and Octavio Getino made *The Hour of the Furnaces* (La hora de los hornos), a combination of artistic expression and an astute analysis of social and political

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<sup>3</sup> In *Terre des Arts*, Max-Pol Fouchet’s TV show, 1964.

conditions with several chapters dedicated to ideology and disinformation.

- 1967: USA: The Newsreel

The Newsreel collective was formed on the initiative of Jonas Mekas on 22 December 1967. Member Paul McIsaac describes the work as follows:

All aspects of film production were considered political—the creators of the Newsreel did not see concrete social demands as something separate from production, aesthetic image and distribution. One year after the establishment of the Newsreel, several cells of this decentralised collective were formed, from San Francisco to Chicago and Florida. More than a hundred persons participated, they made about sixty films in five years. The collective managed to cover events on many fronts: anti-imperialism, police repression, minority struggles (women, African Americans, Latin Americans...), workers' struggles, students. Their international operation was based on establishing connections between and articulating these struggles, and not on dividing them into separate spheres and identity differences.<sup>4</sup>

- 1968–1970: Italy: *Cinegiornali liberi*

Under the patronage of the great director and scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini, who had already predicted the project back in 1963 in his *The Newsreel of Peace* (*Cinegiornale della pace*), around ten *Cinegiornali liberi* were made. One of them, *Free Range Chicken* (*Il Pollo ruspante*), made by Ugo Gregoretti (co-author of *RoGoPaG* from 1963, with Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini), was distributed in France by SLON/ISKRA.

- 1968–1973: France: États-Généraux du Cinéma

États-Généraux du Cinéma was established on 19 May 1968. The group brings together around 1,500 people, professional filmmakers and others who want to “make political films politically”, and they question all aspects of filmmaking, production, directing and distribution. Out of this, three great series of counterinformation by collective authors were made under the leadership of Chris Marker: *Ciné-Tracts*, the *You Speak of* (*On vous parle de*) series, and the *New Society* (*Nouvelle société*) series with Groupes Medvedkine from Besançon and later on Sochaux. The *New*

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<sup>4</sup> Paul McIsaac, “The Newsreel. Aux Etats-Desunis l’Amérique critique,” the French Cinematheque programme, January–February 2003. Cf. Nichols, 1972; Kerjan, 2003.

*Society* series may be the only one made by real workers from the industrial world.

- 1968: Mexico: *El grito*

From July 1968 onwards, film students from México University document the events that follow the killing of their colleagues: this is the beginning of *The Scream* (*El grito*), a collective Mexican film, which was edited under the supervision of Leonardo López Aretche after his return from prison in 1970.

- 1969–1977: Argentina: Cine de la Base

Enrique Juárez's *Now is the Time for Violence* (*Ya es tiempo de violencia*, 1969) marks the beginning of filmic counterinformation in Argentina.<sup>5</sup> Cine de la Base, one of the most radical collectives, is formed around Raymundo Gleyzer, a member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. Between 1972 and 1977, they make a number of short documentaries for the People's Revolutionary Army. Raymundo Gleyzer was murdered by the military junta in 1976; his body has never been found.<sup>6</sup>

- 1969: France: Vidéo Out

On Jean Genet's suggestion, Carole Roussopoulos acquires a portable video camera in 1969. This leads to the establishment of the Vidéo Out collective, which, in addition to preparing filmic counterinformation on all fronts—homosexuality, feminism, Palestinian and Basque liberation struggles and more—also works to educate activists, especially the Black Panthers, about handling video equipment.<sup>7</sup>

- 1969–1978: USA

Due to the new portability of cameras, video collectives proliferate in the 1970s: Alternate Media Center, TVTV, People's Video Theater, Videofreex, Downtown Community Television Center, Portable Channel, Marin Community Video, Videopolis... The history of these movements is summarised by the filmmaker and trade unionist Jesse Drew in *A Social History of Contemporary Democratic Media* (Routledge, 2013).

- 1971–1982 (?): Japan – Lebanon: Masao Adachi and the Palestinian newsreel

Director Masao Adachi, who operated illegally together with mem-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Trujillo, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Peña, Vallina, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fleckinger, 2011.

bers of the Japanese Red Army, filmed the Palestinian newsreels for two decades. This work was almost completely lost in the bombing of Beirut in 1982. Only the theoretical manifesto remains, that is, the beginning of this project entitled *Red Army – Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine: World War Declaration*, (*Sekigun-PFLP: Sekai sensô sengen*, 1971) (and which we treat below). Adachi sums up the genesis of this film in the article “The Circuit of Information and Creation” (October 1971).<sup>8</sup>

- 1979–1987: Nicaragua: INCINE

The Sandinista Noticieros, made by a number of directors, cameramen and collectives within the Instituto Nicaragüense de Cine (INCINE), were created under urgent revolutionary conditions. Already in the very first editions of newsreels, a constructive energy is manifest, with which they presented and supported the great public works by the revolutionary government, beginning with nationalisation and literacy, while their offensive targeted the recently ousted dictatorship, imperialism and capitalism, while the USA was already preparing their counterattack, which escalated into open war in 1982.<sup>9</sup>

- 1996 to the present: New York, USA: *Democracy Now!*

The independent show, inspired by Noam Chomsky and hosted by Ami Goodman and Juan Gonzalez, has been broadcast on 1,400 television and radio programmes and is also accessible on the Internet.

- 1999 to the present: Seattle, USA: Indymedia

Independent Media Center was established during the preparations for the G7 summit in Seattle.

- 2001: Genoa, Italy:

During the G7 summit in Genoa, several collective initiatives for counterinformation are forming, aiming to document police abuse as an extension of judicial violence. Immediately after the events, the topic is also the subject of the films *Carlo Giuliani, Boy* (Carlo Giuliani ragazzo, 2002) by Francesca Comencini<sup>10</sup>, which is well versed in the tactical use of images, and *Don't Clean Up The Blood* (2001) by the Primitivi collective.

- 2008: *Camera War* by Lech Kowalski

Every week in September 2008, British director Lech Kowalski,

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Adachi, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Buchsbaum, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Houssa, 2005.

living in France at the time, published chapters of his counterinformation fresco on the website *Camera War*. This endeavour will enter the history of visual logistics for adding, in addition to camera and editing, electronic connection as one of its integral parts. The *Camera War* project explores the stylised beauty of the irregular without using it to fight “Corporate Reality”; the latter appears as a title, which does not disappear from the screen during one of the two episodes composed of televisual images: Barack Obama taking the oath of office.

Here, we have listed just some key movements, while there have been other collectives active around the world, in Ireland, Japan and more. Digitalisation of the means of production and distribution has led to an upsurge in spontaneous, activist visual initiatives in the field of documentary in general, and especially in the field of counterinformation produced by individual or collective authors. Let us very briefly mention, for instance, the Mosireen collective in Egypt, Abu Naddara in Syria, Mídia Ninja in Brazil...<sup>11</sup>

### III. Two visual treatises on counterinformation

In addition to the programmatic *Nothing But Time* (Rien que les Heures, 1926) by Alberto Cavalcanti, a forerunner in this field, the history of film provides several masterpieces of filmic reflection on counterinformation, which sum up its features, convey instructions or problematise the very notion. To various degrees, this list includes: chapters 10, 11 and 12 of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, Newsreel’s *Summer 68* (1968), *Medium Cool* by Haskell Wexler (1969), *When One Loves Life, One Goes to the Movies* (Quand on aime la vie, on va au cinéma, 1975) by the Cinéthique group (1975), *Maso and Miso Go Boating* (Maso et Miso vont en bateau, 1976) by Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, Ioane Wieder and Nadja Ringart, *History of a Committed Cinema* (Historia de un cine comprometido, 1983) by Emilio Rodriguez ... One of the latest additions is *Newsreel 55* (Obzornik 55, 2013) by Nika Autor, Marko Bratina, Ciril Oberstar and Jurij Meden, which takes up Marker’s reflections on images. One of the most crucial moments of reflection in the history of film, however, occurred be-

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<sup>11</sup> They were the subject of a one-day colloquium, which took place on 11 June 2014 as part of the exhibition “Eternal Fire” by Thomas Hirschhorn at the Tokyo Palace in Paris. Participants in the colloquium (hosted by the author) included Marie Braun, Joe Bender, Miguel Armas, Maya Da-Rin, Léa Leboucq, Martín Molina, Benjamin Pénet, Tom Ullrich, Monica Zhong, Johanna Cappi, Jean-Marc Manach, Stéphane Bou, Gabriela Trujillo, Cécile Kerjan, Isabelle Marinone.

tween *Until Victory* (Jusqu'à la victoire, 1970) by the Dziga Vertov group and *Japanese Red Army-PFLP: Declaration of World War* by Masao Adachi, and produced by Koji Wakamatsu.

Adachi's film first recalls the "failure" of *Until Victory: Methods of Thought and Work of the Palestinian Revolution* (Jusqu'à la victoire: Méthodes de pensée et de travail de la révolution palestinienne), filmed in Palestine in 1970 by Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin and director of photography Armand Marco, which was then directed/edited by Godard into his self-critical film *Here and Elsewhere* (Ici et ailleurs, 1974). The two films, *Japanese Red Army-PFLP: Declaration of World War* and *Here and Elsewhere*, form a key diptych about the possibilities of action and immediate reflection in the history of engaged cinematography.

*Here and Elsewhere* and *Japanese Red Army-PFLP: Declaration of World War* do not remain merely satisfied with counterinformation; they inscribe it into the broader logic of counterdiscourse: this is a questioning of the forms of Logos and the very role of images in the history of emancipation. However, the two films have very different ideas about the effectiveness of images in warfare. This difference could be summarised as follows: Adachi's film works on affirmation, whereas Godard and Gorin's (later taken over by Godard and Miéville) works on elaborating questions.

Only texts and crude materials, subsequently edited in *Here and Elsewhere*, remain of Godard and Gorin's initial project. But in both, the idea is very clear: one must not yield to political discourse, not even the PLO's, but rather learn how to create images. In contract to the imperialist belief that film represents the real, one needs to learn to develop critical relations among images and between images and sounds.

In 1970, Godard and Gorin published a manifesto in the *Fatah* magazine, in which they write:

Since the invention of photography, imperialism has made films to prevent the repressed from making their own. It has constructed images to conceal reality from the masses it represses. It is our task to destroy these images and learn to construct new ones, simpler ones, images that will serve people and people will be able to use them. (140)

This activist notion of imaging is based on the idea of the incomplete image borrowed from Bertolt Brecht.

In 1937, Brecht wrote in *Me-ti: Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things*:

Me-ti said: /.../ It takes the whole world to come up with an image, but the image does not include the whole world. It is better to connect judgements with experiences than with other judgements, if the point of the judgements is to control things. Me-ti was against constructing excessively complete images of the world. ([1937] 2016: 50)

Godard borrowed Brecht's paragraph above when writing Rule 22 of the manifesto "What to do?" (to not construct excessively complete images of the world in the name of "relative truth"), which dictates the liberated style of the Dziga Vertov group and which is summed up by Masao Adachi in his manifesto "What not to do". The constructor of images must use his or her critical invention not only to constantly oppose the reifying dictates of the allegedly collective representations, but above all to imagine differently and to invest the symbolic. This requires an eruption: representation should not be limited to imitation, nodding, affirmation, consolidation; rather, it should strive to analyse, dispel, change, destroy.

Masao Adachi astutely recognises the most prominent sign guiding Godard and Gorin's counterdiscourse: the principle of the "black screen" or, as he puts it, of "communicating through silence". (2012: 195)

From the motif of the blackboard in *The Chinese* (La Chinoise, 1967) to the black, empty shots in *Pravda* (1969) and *Struggles in Italia* (Lotte in Italia, 1970), which systematise their use, the black image becomes an emblematic figure of the new beginnings of criticism. Its source can be traced to lettrism, especially Gil J. Wolman's *The Anticoncept* (L'Anticoncept, 1951), a projection of black-and-white flickering onto a meteorological probe accompanied by sound, which sums up the history of formal inventions from Auguste Lumière to Wolman himself. Godard's fierce and polysemous black image has seven concurrent or consecutive functions, with which:

- it symbolises the way ideology blurs the world,
- it interrupts the sequence of images,
- it brackets off their ordinariness,
- it testifies to the inability of constructing revolutionary images in a capitalist world,
- it provides the time needed for reflection,
- it enables listening to sound,
- it saves space for images that we do not yet know how to construct.

In the dialogue between various natures of images, the virtual, the

conditionally existing, the absent, the negative, the unacceptable is given a prominent position.

The black image represents the most visible plastic element in the non-mimetic, non-reproductive representation of the world; for after all, it is not about reproducing but rather changing the world.

*Japanese Red Army-PFLP: Declaration of World War* can also be interpreted as a theoretical essay; the film that renames “counterinformation” “propaganda”, the same way painters once accepted the pejorative designation “beasts”, contrasts its documentary descriptions, slogans and archival images with the entire ideological apparatus that has been set up by capitalism. Every image—visual, verbal (graphic or oral), musical—represents an argument. Hence, shots do not struggle with or against one another, but rather against a common enemy. While Godard and Miéville explore modes of visual conflict, Adachi works to bring down the barriers between forms: a wordless visual description of a landscape becomes an argument about exile, a report about daily activities becomes an international indictment, and the film—which should serve as a reflection of the world—as a whole becomes a declaration of war; in other words, performativity at the highest level of historical violence. Combining the functions of document, defence, political leaflet, manifesto and theoretical essay, *Japanese Red Army-PFLP: Declaration of World War* becomes a monument to filmic activism.

Our horizons, opened up by the pioneering acts of Cinéma du Peuple and Alberto Cavalcanti, are now marked by an exponential and welcome rise in the number of image “constructors”. The republic of images expects and encourages the advent of the multiple as regards its producers, creators, subjects of enunciation, as regards the vehicles, substances, regimes, visuality; and also, above all, as regards the manifold relations to the stratigraphies of the given situation, the states of the real.

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## IMPRESSIONS

Most of us are believers in the theory of continuous time. Our links to what has happened are memory and record. The events themselves are irretrievable, impossible to revisit. We accept that the past exists but we cannot go there. Consider, however, another possibility: that all time is happening simultaneously. You are here reading this text, but you are also still there in a very different room – a child perhaps, listening to a distant broadcast on a radio.

As a boy in Northern Ireland, I listened intently to longwave transmissions. I listened on a huge cabinet that lit up and hummed as if alive. At certain frequencies, you could spy on the chatter of passing army patrols in armoured Land Rovers and helicopters. I'd scroll through alien soundwaves until I came upon other voices. The fact that I could not speak the languages only added to the attraction. Traffic and weather reports became mysterious poetry. I turned the dial through all the countries of Europe and was mesmerised by voices and music otherwise hidden in the air.

At the time, Yugoslavia was disintegrating. I knew nothing, not yet, of the Slovenian Spring or the sun shining in empty rooms in Maribor. There were seas of water and static between us. Perhaps there was talk on the airwaves, but it remained undeciphered. All I knew, somehow certain from my surroundings, was that history was happening in places far from the world's capitals. History was happening without permission. History was happening. And so it remains.

Somewhere it is still always then, in a parallel universe, behind a door unopened for decades, in the dreams of people comatose since. Somewhere we are still children. Yet this, thankfully, is elsewhere. And somewhere else again, we live in a future worth existing in. How we reach it is another matter entirely.











# SOCIALIST MODERNIZATION IS NOT THE REAL NEWS: YUGOSLAV DOCUMENTARIES OF THE 1960s AND EARLY 1970s

The claim I make in the title herein might sound strange to a competent cinephile or film scholar. How can we defend a thesis that socialist modernization and its antagonisms *were not* the main news in the documentaries made during the 1960s and early 1970s in Yugoslavia, when it is obvious that most of them, and the best of them, develop precisely those themes? Furthermore, film historians agree that Yugoslav auteurs of documentary films grew out of the huge newsreel movement that served, from the end of the war onward, as the basis of film education and practice for the new and upcoming filmmakers, with a vast number of monthly newsreels, as well as travelogues, educational and industrial films being made. (Many famous auteurs from the so-called Sarajevo and Belgrade Documentary Schools developed directly from newsreel production; see Volk, 1986: 164–169; Ljubojev, 1973: 20–49). A significant number of these newsreels documented construction sites, coal mines, factories, new roads and rails in the making; and similarly, efforts to vaccinate people, teach them to read and write, or help them understand the importance of blood transfusion... So it seems perfectly justified to consider the best, canonical works of celebrated auteurs as a continuation and advancement of those same attempts. Moreover, Krsto Škanata, one of the best known filmmakers of the Belgrade Documentary School, clearly stated that he had exactly those intentions in mind when he started to shoot the film *Intruder* (Uljez, 1965):

I went to Belačevac, near Kosovo Field. They have a strip coal mine there, and that's where I first saw that huge machine, a masterpiece of technology. Then it hit me: that's a movie! A monster comes into a primitive community and starts mining and digging, and changes society. The first sequence represents the idea of an undeveloped society, the second the introduction of the machine into this society, and the third one the changes that came with the work of the machine and the people. The machine is a positive character,



because it changes the society for the better, emancipates it. It's a bit brutal, but progress doesn't knock quietly on the door—it slams the door and brings with it disturbance, just like that machine did. (In Jokić: 74)<sup>1</sup>

So how is it modernization was not the real news here? A reader familiar with the recent debates on Yugoslav cinema of the 1960s, especially those dealing with the so-called *black wave*, could think that my title aims at irony, attempts to underline the fact that the obverse side of socialist modernization was actually at the centre of the best Yugoslav documentaries—which then makes them a sort of *counter-newsreel* or *anti-newsreel*? Indeed, many of these films were often interpreted through certain dichotomies, such as modernization vs. underdevelopment, emancipation of the working class vs. the rigidity of the communist party, the official, optimist version of socialism vs. the dark and bleak reality...

I acknowledge both of these views, yet I don't think they are insufficient in describing and interpreting the Yugoslav documentaries of the *new wave* period, nor in explaining their effect and larger value, which has remained largely unchanged to this day. While it is true that these documentaries recorded and commented on the process of socialist political emancipation and the modernization that characterized Yugoslavia—along the path from the People's Liberation Struggle and the revolution of World War II, through economic democracy, market socialism and the welfare-state, up to the betrayed revolution and the combination of consumerism and nationalism that characterized the 1970s and 1980s—there is more to them than just recording, mirroring or even subverting the political and social processes at work. So I claim, finally, that Yugoslav documentary filmmakers made their masterpieces by employing a strikingly unique film style—because by using a number of devices and forms typical of modern film at the time (montage of attractions, *cinéma vérité*, *tableaus*, asynchronous sound, etc.) and making them work for their own authorial purposes, they succeeded in creating original and complex film metaphors with a universal appeal.

Some of the most astute and lucid Yugoslav film critics actually noticed the same thing—yet their insights appear to have been forgotten today. For example, when Ranko Munitić writes about the aforementioned film *Intruder*, both on the surface and in the author's proclaimed intentions he finds “probably the tritest of themes for a documentary: the conflict

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes translated from Serbo-Croatian by Ivan Velisavljević.

between the old, natural Arcadian and the new, technological Civilized, a rudimental documentary *poem on progress* with a theme one could find anywhere, usually in the form of the first-class banality.” (Munitić, 1998: 12) The value of Škanata’s film lies, according to Munitić, not in the over-used dichotomy of modern/primitive, but in the condensation of motifs that overcomes both the basic message and the filmmaker’s motivation, and makes it

an expression of the actual man’s encounter with a surreal entity, in this case with a machine, an archetypal phenomena that looks like a classical monster from a horror or a UFO from science fiction /.../, an unknown and unthinkable Otherness that shows up in the images of the two seemingly different natures—a staged *fiction* film and documentary *faction*. (13)

And when you see the film you can see Munitić is right. The central motif of the archaic Muslim community in Kosovo living their traditional way of life being changed by modernization is quite clear from the first shots, but Škanata only uses this as a point of departure: the huge machine is shot from extreme and unusual angles and does look surreal, with its rack-wheels and gears generating plenty of noise and proceeding towards the village, while reactions to it are reserved not only for people but for animals as well: a goat raises its head, women run back to their houses, people shut their doors and windows... When the machine stops and the locals finally overcome their fear and come closer, the intense sounds and cross-cutting creates an atmosphere of suspense, an encounter with the unknown. And at that moment the entire narrative about the violence of progress probably fades entirely from the viewer’s mind: here are people, humans facing their great fear of the unknown.

A similar clash of images and meanings appears in Dušan Makavejev’s *The Smile of ‘61* (Osmjeh ‘61, 1961), a film that disguises itself in the form of a newsreel on a youth work-action in Macedonia. In one scene that stands out in particular, Makavejev juxtaposes shots of an aggressive bulldozer digging earth and images of naked bodies—mostly older people bathing in mud, which they falsely believe can cure diseases. Yet, even at the time of its release, *The Smile of ‘61* was criticized for its lack of complexity and humanist consciousness. One critic who protested was Živojin Pavlović, who will later become a great director himself, and together with Makavejev, a paradigmatic example of *the black wave auteur*, a filmmaker who challenged the official communist ideology— at least for film researchers who support the *totalitarian paradigm* and accept the *black wave*

label. However, it was precisely the scene of the bulldozer vs. muddy people that Pavlović declared unacceptable, since it labeled *people* as symbols of the old order, doomed to disappear amidst the roar of the machine, without asking “who are these people, where are they from”? “In the name of what?” Pavlović asks. (Munitić, 2005: 98–99)

First, let us note that Pavlović in 1962 criticizes the already clichéd conflict between old and new, primitive and civilized, as the central theme for a film as insufficient. That means we should be very careful in suggesting that Yugoslav cinema of the socialist period was a constant struggle between two homogenous groups: the official state ideologists of the communist party, with its demand for *optimism*, or limited social criticism at best, on the one hand, and on the other those subversive filmmakers who broke the rules in the name of truth and freedom. Obviously, the debates were more nuanced and proponents of all versions and variations of cultural politics could be found in any and all groups. Second, today we know more about Makavejev as a director, and are better able to answer Pavlović’s question and understand *in the name of what* Makavejev contrasted the bulldozers and the muddy bathers. Makavejev was interested in juxtaposing images of the human body, of sexuality, and shots with an intense corporeal effect with various discourses and images of industry, science, rationality, and aimed to show the anarchic, carnivalesque celebration of the joy of life and its resistance to rational order. All of his famous feature fiction films will be based on this compelling mix, starting from *Man Is Not a Bird* (*Čovek nije tica*, 1965), where parallel cutting connects shots of a girl’s naked body with shots of a machine working inside the factory.

Just a couple of years later, in *A Day More* (Dan više, 1972), Vlatko Gilić will show only the people immersed in an allegedly miraculous muddy pit near Bujanovac, in the south of Serbia. It’s a film that could easily (and lazily!) be read as the end of the cycle, as an example of *failed modernization* and the final victory of superstition and ignorance. But Gilić actually aims for something more: with its title, Gilić tries to make us think about the *lust for life*, about the human desire for a day more of life, while silent, precise, carefully framed shots of bodies in a muddy haze come, in the end, to create an allegory with biblical overtones.

What about films that are doubtless made to counter the form employed by propaganda newsreels about modernization? Aleksandar Petrović’s *Record* (Zapisnik, 1964) is made in what Bill Nichols calls an *expository mode*, with an authoritative voiceover that seems to support an assertive argument, and uses almost all the elements typical of such newsreels: state-

ments and statistics on how much was constructed, re-built and developed in the new socialist state, how many people became literate; and it shows us roads, streets, skyscrapers, scientific institutes, schools and universities, cinemas and bars, and ends with a quotation from a famous cultural figure (Vuk Karadžić, linguist and founder of the modern Serbian Cyrillic alphabet), the so-called *red line* or common thread that summarizes the point of the movie—which was also typical of the newsreels of the 1940s and 1950s. It even starts by incorporating shots from one of the newsreels about the construction of a bridge, then shows us this bridge as a failed investment, “a bunch of rusty hardware,” 15 years later. Even more, the argument in *Record* directly confronts the common message of such newsreels, since it contrasts the narrative of progress with the story of those that modernization left behind, those who stayed uneducated, poor, illiterate, who worked their entire lives and in the end were, as one of the women in the film says, left with nothing. *Record*, then, could be a clear case of a film that counters the dominant narrative of the communist party and should instead be read exclusively through the lens of social critique. On the other hand, it could also be argued that Petrović’s film was actually made in or according to the dominant ideological mode, since a year later the Party embarked on the economic reform program aimed at preventing irrational investments—like the bridge from the beginning of the film. But such a reading would mean undermining two important elements, the structure and the music, which in turn would leave the film (and us) bound by and to clichéd dichotomies.

Petrović structures his film as a road-movie documentary with a crew that travels across the country and *records* different stories about the obverse side of modernization. However, he dedicates a lot of film-time to the story of a boxer who killed another boxer in the ring and was tried for it. Using still photos and voiced-over commentary, an interview with a trainer and an expert on boxing, as well as the tried boxer himself, shots of the fight and the dead boxer’s grave, Petrović underlines the fact that most boxers that died in the ring dies because they were unprepared, ill-trained, and not examined by a medical expert. In this way the story of the boxer becomes a metaphor for the sad destiny of all those who were unprepared for modernization, all those that society didn’t have the time for in the context of the sometimes harsh and often imperfect process of accelerated progress. Yet the music that follows all of the segments seems to suggest a sense of even greater sadness and fatalism—an Roman elegy that Petrović would later use in his masterpiece *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (Skupljači

perja, 1967), whose English title comes from the song lyrics to the song. In *Record* the song is moist poignant in the scenes set in a bar, where people easily give expression to their sorrow, while a voiceover reads some statistics about Yugoslavs spending five times more money in bars than they do on culture and sports. The melancholic atmosphere of the song, with shots of drunken people around a table listening to the Roma band playing, is just a step away from suggesting an innate awareness of the utter futility of all human endeavor and our tendency if not outright desire for self-destruction. With this mix of social critique and existentialist insight, Petrović took with *Record* the first important step towards the themes and elements he would come to employ in his highly successful features, films that would become canonical works of Yugoslav cinema.

A Romany orchestra that plays in a bar to a wild and drunk bunch also appears in Želimir Žilnik's *Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter* (*Žurnal o omladini na selu zimi*, 1967), but the tone and style here are entirely different. The band is out of tune, and the atmosphere in the bar serves as an ironic illustration that echoes the old women's pronouncement in the first scene of the film—that today's youth has no discipline and no morals. Here people in the bar look towards the camera, drink, sing and yell humorous lyrics, while the camera is positioned on an improvised stage and shows all of the visitors in a single shot, which serves to create a thoroughly comic, theatrical effect for the entire scene. Žilnik touches on social themes, raises questions related to class and unfinished modernization schemes, contrasts a modern rock band with traditional folk culture, touches on concept-themes like the death-drive and sorrow with a distinctly Balkan flavour, all of which come together in a bar—just as Petrović does, and deals with things like spontaneity and carnival, just as Makavejev does. But he's not at the bar for that—he's there for the comedy. So much so that at one point we get a strong sense that his intention is to mock, to present a freak show that one laughs *at* and not with; and both this curious characteristic and the element of controversy will remain throughout Žilnik's body of work.

All political themes being equal, the difference between an absurdist, surrealist comedian, a socially-engaged auteur that uses comedy as a weapon, and a subtle stylist that aims to portrait, can be tested by comparing Žilnik's movies with Bojana Marijan's *Joyful Class* (*Vesela klasa*, 1969) and Karpo Godina's *Healthy People for Fun* (*Zdravi ljudi za razonodu*, 1971). The same goes for documentaries that, at first glance, appear to subvert typical socialist ritual ceremonies such as parades and recitals,

as seen in Makavejev's *Parade* (Parada, 1962), Krsto Papić's *A Little Village Performance* (Mala seoska priredba, 1971), Petar Krelja's *Recital* (1972) and others. Here, too, it's worth looking for differences in the director's attitude and stylistic choices; and worth trying not to simply lump them all together into a group that happily launches satirical attack on communist ideology. A worthy and telling example emerges, once again, in Munitić's writing. When he compares Makavejev's *Parade* with Dragoslav Lazić's *Zadušnice* (1963), a film about the feast commemorating the dead (similar to All Soul's Day), Munitić offers that "in both cases, people gather for ceremonies, and it doesn't really matter that the first is based on political slogans and the other on honoring the dead"; both films are hymns to life, its events and images, and these events, Munitić rightfully claims, "vivid, spontaneous, sometimes even bizarre, yet always authentic, are the golden ore that filmmakers dug from the mine of existence." (Munitić, 2005: 101)

All in all, this approach to the Yugoslav documentaries of the 1960s that I have attempted to demonstrate and defend, and that aims not only to point out their social and political relevance, but also their aesthetic qualities and universal appeal, can produce rich and nuanced interpretations when applied to a number of cases—which in turn moves us away from mere repetition and justification of political dichotomies and vulgar *reflectionism*.

Let me end with a flashback to another lucid Yugoslav critic from the past. In 1966, after the Belgrade Documentary School was discovered and labeled as such, mostly by Italian critics in Porretta Terme during the film festival, Vicko Raspor, a film critic and one of the key figures at the Dunav film production company (a major Serbian company for documentaries and shorts) wrote about the key characteristics of the best Yugoslav documentaries: "cinematic metaphor, visual and conceptual contrast, and brave confrontation with the problems of contemporary Yugoslav society." (256) Raspor offers not only a condensed and valuable guide to Yugoslav films, but one that applies equally to contemporary, socially-engaged *news-reels* and documentaries as well: we should look for political importance, of course, but to reduce them to mere facts and social agendas, both in creating and reflecting on them, would just be too easy and too lazy. There's no reason we shouldn't strive for more.

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## 2. TRAINS

# TRAIN VIEWERS: ON FILMS AND TRAINS


## A Shot

There are at least three alternative ways of placing a work of art in historical time. All place the work in time such that it invents its own past and, at the same time, remains open to and for a new future. The methods are similar but unrelated. They come from completely different authors and refer to three different art forms: literature, photography and film.

The oldest of the three is the method of placing an author in literary history as conceived by Jorge Luis Borges in his famous text on “Kafka and his Precursors”. In a way, his method of determining precursors stands opposed to the established method of critical practice. Borges cleanses it of the primacy of temporal causality. This is why he does not analyse Kafka’s literary influences, that is, the texts that informed Kafka and his work.

Zeno’s paradoxes, Kierkegaard’s parables and Léon Bloy’s short story are not considered works on which Kafka modelled his writing. On the contrary, they become Kafka’s precursors, because it seems that it was Kafka’s work that first extracted from them a new, perhaps previously overlooked quality. It is therefore the later text that grants the older texts the status of its precursors—that retroactively establishes them as such, as it were. “The fact is,” says Borges, “that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future” (201).

The second method refers to photography. It was created in the course of John Berger’s reading Susan Sontag’s *On Photography*, and tries to suggest an alternative to the most common use of photographs in developed industrial society, where photographs either work in the service of a spectacle (for the masses) or control (for people in power). Since they are “used by capitalism,” as Berger emphasises, the interpretation of photographs is always unilinear: —→ .

Such usage is contrary to the method of memory, which is by no means unilinear, but “works radially, that is to say with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event:  ”(64).

This method also includes an unusual temporal relation of a photograph to its past, a sort of possibility of unlocking the past shown on a photograph and delivering it to the present: "Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would reacquire a living context." (Berger: 61) This is a thesis, similar to Benjamin's, that with the change of the present, the past will also change; that the past is not fixed once and for all. In this sense, an alternative use of photography is entrusted with the task of including photographic memory into a current, living memory, and unlocking it for possible uses of another, better future. "It is possible," remarks Berger, "that photography is the prophecy of a human memory yet to be socially and politically achieved" (61).

The third method of this unusual temporality of placing works in history could be the method of compilation film. In film, we can recognise an approach similar to that of Borges and Berger, especially in the work of Harun Farocki and other committed film essayists and compilers. Their common feature was nicely distilled by Andrej Šprah, when he talked about the creative process of compilation films, in which we detect the "tendency to reuse, rearrange and reinterpret the images of 'past currency.'" (50) The key emphasis in "compiling or collaging existing audiovisual and documentary material" (49) is on searching for and establishing new connections between individual images, on the "combinations" with which the compilation procedure "gives the material a new meaning and at the same time the possibility of a different view on its substantiality", thus enabling "a new kind of knowledge to be expressed in the remnants of the past." (51)

We do not believe that this sort of method can also be applied to an individual shot, even less a shot that is somehow adopted and was given over into custody with a certain trust, but at the same time a certain indifference regarding its further use.

The shot in question was made with a mobile phone and shows two stowaways: refugees on their way from Belgrade to Ljubljana. When we see them with running shoes on their feet riding in the train's undercarriage, only a tens of centimetres away from the turning wheels, we find out no more about them than we would if we offered them a bed for the night. We only know that they arrived in Ljubljana and headed north soon after their arrival.

There is nothing artistic in this shot, almost nothing filmic, except

perhaps the situation that is extremely dangerous. And yet it is a beautiful shot ... unique ... and rare, perhaps even very rare. Because the context in which it originated is not quite clear, it is haunted by a certain forced indeterminacy. It exists on the boundary between private and public use. It could very well belong in a family archive ... or shot by peers ... or serve as evidence in an asylum procedure.

The situation in which the shot was handed over was based on a fleeting moment of confidence, which does not carry the weight of proper trust, but is rather the result of a short-term establishment of normality upon the oblivion of the real circumstances ... So still a situation in which it is easier to share an intimate shot than is one's personal data or life story.

Sometimes, shots can also have a history different from the situations they depict. Although this shot is not in the least filmic, it seemed that, in addition to the political history of the situation, the memory of its film past also belongs to it. This prophecy of a human memory had to be followed in order to see whether it could be furnished with a better future.

### **The Arrival of a Train**

There is something calming in the shot of a train pulling into a station. Perhaps an assurance that the landscape that rushed by the windows will finally come to rest ... a naïve, almost childish hope that the force of gravity will again take control of its ironwork ... perhaps merely the simple fact that it is coming home, that families will meet again.

However, there is also something scary and uncanny in the shot of *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat, 1895, Auguste Lumière, Louis Lumière), as evidenced by an anecdote about the first screenings of this film, at which viewers covered their eyes with their hands and, in fear of the locomotive running them over, ran to the back of the hall.

The film immediately became a social event in the world capitals of the time. It hit the press and the social columns with a force similar to the one that supposedly propelled it into a dark hall among the viewers.

At the time Georges Sadoul wrote his *Conquête du cinéma* (Power of Cinema), a book intended for young readers, the anecdote about the encounter of the first viewers with the images of the arriving train had already transformed into a myth—a myth about the power of filmic illusion. But it turned out that, compared to others, Sadoul, who is much too anecdotal

for today's readers, summed up the reports on the events of the time quite moderately: "When a carriage or a locomotive rushed before the audience, the viewers fearfully drew their chairs to the back so they would not get run over." (46)

After attending a screening, Félix Regnault from Collège de France noted that "the locomotive appears small at first, then immense, as if it were going to crush the audience" (Loiperdinger: 98). The Austrian photographer Ottomar Volkmer, the president of the Vienna Photographic Society, similarly described his experience of the film: "A train station; from afar one can see the tiny locomotive of an express train approaching at full speed. It gets bigger and bigger, the chimney smoking, the only thing missing is the puffing and the rumble of the wheels. At last the train arrives, the locomotive appears tremendous; it seems as if it were going to run into the spectators." (98) The most affecting description of this experience was written roughly a year after the first screenings, by Maxim Gorky:

A train appears on the screen. It speeds right at you—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones, and crushing into dust and into broken fragments this hall and this building /.../ But this, too, is but a train of shadows. Noiselessly, the locomotive disappears beyond the edge of the screen. (99–100)

According to Tom Gunning and Martin Loiperdinger, who collected the above testimonies, nothing confirms the supposition about the panic of the first viewers except perhaps the poster for the film's screening, in which the rails break through the frame of the screen and drop among the audience, and the numerous descriptions of the film's screenings that use various rhetorical devices in an effort to convey the new experience of watching *The Arrival of a Train*.

There was no sound at the screening. The projector, which was unusually loud, stood directly behind the viewers. The film is black-and-white and lasts 50 seconds. It was screened for the first time in an underground room below the *Grand Café* in Paris. The room was 12 x 8 m and could accommodate 210 people. There was a crowd in front of the entrance throughout the day, and the audience changed every 15 minutes. If panic had broken out among the viewers, it would definitively have been mentioned in police reports. Despite this, as Loiperdinger notes, in time, the rhetorical figures and metaphorical descriptions of the experience of the

film transformed into a “factual statement” about the actual behaviour of the audience during the show (99).

Turner’s *Rain, Steam and Speed*, an oil on canvas depicting a black train speeding across a bridge in the middle of an otherwise peaceful landscape, dates back to 1844, when the railway had only begun to conquer the world. At that time, the passenger carriages were still open, and a rabbit that runs between the rails away from the locomotive probably managed to escape. William Makepeace Thackeray, who was Turner’s contemporary and was favourably disposed to the painter, reported to his readers about a train coming “down upon you, really moving at the rate of 50 miles an hour, and which the reader had best make haste to see, lest it should dash out of the picture, and be away up Charing Cross through the wall opposite” (439).

The image of a train clearly did not need Lumière’s device in order to fascinate and trick the viewer’s gaze. It did this well enough already with oil paintings, before the Lumière brothers and without their new device. After half a century, with the emergence of the first cinemas, Thackeray’s stylistic element would again become a current rhetorical figure.

### **Enlightened viewers**

What is surprising is not so much that the myth about the original, illusionary power of film and the believability of film pictures was the result of verbal seduction describing the experience of viewing, but rather that it persisted for so long in the history of film without triggering any doubts as to its genuineness. Film theoreticians, such as Gunning and Loiperding-er, who tried to refute it with precise historical research, came rather late. However, film did not wait for film theory and history to deal with its false beliefs on its behalf. In the meanwhile, it managed to invent the means of expression and a film language with which it attempted to address its own mythology.

A good five years after the first screening at Le Salon Indien du Grand Café, the short film *The Countryman’s First Sight of the Animated Pictures* (1901, Robert W. Paul) featured a satirical character of a countryman who blindly believes the picture. This naïve viewer from 1901 is shown standing in a cinema that screens short films similar to the ones screened by the Lumière brothers a few years before. The reactions to what he sees are therefore physical. At the beginning, he gets excited about a girl’s raised

skirt in the first film. When a locomotive on the screen drives towards him, he first pleads with his hands for it to stop, and then in fear runs away from the screen. His audience, now used to the moving pictures, certainly gleefully laughed at him running away from the train just as he laughed at the girl's raised skirt before that.

The satire works both ways: it ridicules both the naïve viewer from the countryside and the belief of the contemporary film audience in his naivety. It seems that Robert W. Paul's countryman is there less to confirm the anecdote and more to satisfy the superstition of the contemporary rational viewer that believes in it.

In Jean Luc Godard's *The Carabineers* (Les Carrabiniers) from 1963, there appears another "lumpen-peasant", as Susan Sontag called him (3), who has also not yet been inducted into the mysteries of cinema. At least so it seems. On the home front, he goes to a cinema ("That night, I went to the cinema for the first time!") and, in the first film, sees a train approaching the edge of the shot. In fear for his life, he lifts his hands and covers his eyes. In the second film, a woman—the kind they used to employ to arouse the audience's sexual imagination—takes off her bra and steps out of the frame. Michel Ange (Patrice Moullet) immediately stands up and starts making his way past the seats to the far right end of the hall to see where the woman who exited the shot on the left went...

Godard, who derived a more far-reaching conclusion from the premise of the myth about the first viewers at Le Salon Indien than Robert W. Paul, is convinced that the viewer who naively covered his eyes in fear of the train should just as naively look for the woman who left the shot; he should caress her legs and her cheeks, jump in front of the screen to see her naked even though she is hidden by a bathtub.

It seems that the gaze of this angelically naïve viewer was primarily seduced not by his faith in the omnipotence of the image, but rather by vanity and narcissism that did not allow the limits of the film shot to determine the limits of the film's visible world. Michel Ange was convinced he could see more than others,<sup>1</sup> that his gaze could penetrate beyond the edge of the shot, to the externality of the visible field where the camera had hidden the rest of the filmed world.

In this mechanism of ascribing a primitive way of viewing to the first viewers, Christian Metz recognised the belief of contemporary, "en-

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<sup>1</sup> Like every real angel, who sees what people do not see. The protagonist's surname Ange means angel in French.



lightened” viewers. The only difference is that they maintain this belief in a roundabout way: “Any spectator will tell you that he ‘doesn’t believe it’, but everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really would ‘believe in it’.” (72) And for a long time, the 1895 visitors of the *Grand Café* cellar served as this someone for the contemporary viewer.

### **New masses**

The camera and the locomotive have long been considered to be related machines that one after the other changed the visual perception of contemporary spectators. The train was even the first that accustomed the contemporaries of industrial development to mechanical viewing. A train window frames the landscape and the world outside the compartment in a way similar to the way the edges of a film projection do. Both machines are based, as Jacques Aumont noted, on the transformation of circular movement into longitudinal movement; both placed their guest in a more or less comfortable seat and made them an immovable observer of the world in front of them. “A mobile eye and an immobile body” became the formula of mass viewers that did not fascinate only Aumont and film theory. The new perception of masses was observed early on also by the most prominent sociologists of the big cities: Benjamin, Kracauer, Simmel, Adorno.

Walter Benjamin noted that we should seek the historical signature of the railroad in “the fact that it represents the first means of transport—and, until the big ocean liners, no doubt also the last—to form masses. The stage coach, the automobile, the airplane carry passengers in small groups only” (602).

The masses the railways invented were in traffic again dissolved by personal automobiles. With the melancholy characteristic of their style, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno remarked on making acquaintances while travelling by train and the corresponding collectivity of large means of transportation, emphasising the negative sides of the new automobility: “But the means of communication also isolate people physically. The railroad has been supplanted by cars. The making of travel acquaintances is reduced by the private automobile to half-threatening encounters with hitchhikers. People travel on rubber tires in strict isolation from one another.” (183–84)

Film needed a director such as Michelangelo Antonioni, who knew how to film empty spaces, in order to show the beauty of momentary masses called into existence by train timetables and dissolved by train departures. A scene in *The Girlfriends* (Le amiche, 1955) quite incidentally managed to stage the temporary teeming of masses that emerges at railway stations upon the arrival or the departure of a train.

First, the big empty space of the Torino railway station is shown. Next, we see a girl enter in order to board a return train to Rome. Then her lover enters the station. He has come to say goodbye, but changes his mind. He hides behind huge metal signs with the names of cities that used to hang on train fronts. (Unlike personal automobiles, trains do not carry the names of their inventors, but the names of the cities between which they run.) For a moment, it seems as if he got lost among the letters of a big, somewhat disordered timetable... Then, a cart loaded with newspapers and magazines to be read in train compartments goes by. The letters of the magazine titles are barely visible. The train is ready to depart and a large mass of people suddenly descends onto the platform. Some buy magazines, others talk or wave goodbye... When the train departs, the mass disperses and the young man looking at the departing train remains on the platform, alone.

### **Looking the wrong way!**

Film not only enthusiastically showed the train, the paradigmatic machine of the second half of the industrial 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in a way, its predecessor, but also attempted to visually explore it. The history of film testifies to an incredible examining passion with which film tackled the research of the various modes of gazing that the train invented and enabled, and thereby inevitably also its prehistory and its own limits.

It is thus perhaps not so very unusual that *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006, Sophie Fiennes), with Slavoj Žižek as the scriptwriter and the main protagonist, begins precisely with a train pulling into a railway station and Žižek trying to suggest that the reality of the arriving train “reproduces the magic cinematic experience”: “And it is as if what in reality is just a person standing near a slowly passing train turns into a viewer observing the magic of the screen.”

*Possessed* (1931, Clarence Brown) is a film about a working-class girl trapped in the boredom of the American countryside. Unsatisfied with her factory work and the provinciality of the young man courting her, she

observes a train arriving at the station. In the twilight of the street, she dreamily looks through the lit windows behind which she discovers the luxurious world of the rich: a cook preparing supper; a waiter setting the table; a maid ironing underwear; a young lady putting on stockings with her left leg lifted; a man shaving; a young couple dancing to light music... On the open balcony of the last carriage, she encounters a slightly tipsy passenger who offers her a glass of champagne and, without any kind of special introduction, asks her: "Looking in? Wrong way. Get in and look out. /.../ Only two kinds of people, the ones in and the ones out."

This incredibly condensed statement seems to be more than just an invitation to the onlooker to become an actress and try her luck in the world of the rich. With its simple division between inside (in the train) and outside (next to the rails), the statement, marked by an unusual frankness that can only be found in screwball comedies, precisely divides the world in two. But along this delimitation, which at first seems a simple division into two directions of the gaze, there runs another, class divide (the poor working-class suburb and the rich inside the train) combined with the gender divide (poor girl, rich man), which will importantly influence the rest of the film.

The train windows actually function as multiple film screens, each telling its own story from the lives of the passengers. But at the same time, the film plays with the idea that the train and its windows offer to view a story of one single romantic night, starting with the preparation of supper, continuing with dressing and concluding with a dance. The movement of the train here assumes the role of the mechanism in a projector that pushes the film past the aperture.

Outright contrary to this editing procedure of the train is the dissolve with which the scene ends. In it, the pouring of champagne into the girl's glass is transformed into the pouring of melted chocolate ice cream into a ceramic bowl near the dining table where her fiancée and her mother impatiently wait for her. The editing principle of this dissolve is opposite that of the principle used with the train windows; the dissolve here is based on similarity (pouring), which is why the viewer and the proletarian girl are brutally taken from the dream world of the rich city folk on the train to the impoverished world of the suburb with a single cut, as it were.

### **The lowered compartment window**

Even before cinema won over the masses and tied itself to the cinemagoers' gazes, the train offered a similar experience of gazing. The panoramic view through a train window already separated the observer from what they observed. The separation from the landscape that silently rushed by had never been so drastic before. It wrenched the spectators from the living environment, which they could still see, hear and smell when travelling by coach. The empirical landscape seen through a train window suddenly started to belong to "another world" (Schivelbusch: 24). The separation from the observed environment caused by the train's speed of movement was completed by cinema with its projector, which—in the absence of the real world—showed what was shot by a camera, which was also absent during the projection.

When the train with its upholstered seats and nice wallpaper finally established the bourgeois comfort of compartments, the passengers within compartments became deaf to the sounds of the landscape passing by. They also became silent fellow passengers like characters in silent films. Before the invention of railroads and streetcars, claims Georg Simmel, "men were not in a situation where, for minutes or hours at a time, they could or must look at one another without talking to one another." (Simmel in Benjamin: 433) Only the passengers in compartments were allowed to observe the faces of the people sitting opposite or next to them in silence and up close without having to bother talking to them. One of the consequences of this situation was the focus on nearby people and the simultaneous defocus on the landscape outside the compartment. Thus, trains and streetcars, perhaps quite by accident, had already invented the close-up of a face, which film and photography soon adopted as their own characteristic means of expression.

However, Wolfgang Schivelbusch saw in the primacy of the close-up in photography and film a substitute for the loss with which the speed of the railway affected sight. He claimed that the intensive sensuous experience of the environment that the industrial revolution headed by the train had ended came back to life in the institution of photography: "Since immediacy, close-ups, and foreground had been lost in reality, they appeared particularly attractive in the new medium" of photography and film. (63)

One of the more beautiful transitions from the train perspective to the cinema perspective can be found in *The Silence* (Tystnaden, 1963, Ingmar Bergman). The film starts in a train compartment where we see a boy

with two women. We later find out that they are his mother and her sister. The scene takes place in the near complete silence of the compartment. The boy, often shown in close-up, tiredly rubs his eyes several times and yawns, so it is not quite clear at first whether he is just waking up or is struggling not to fall asleep again—as if he were caught between wakefulness and sleep, which is a feeling so characteristic of comfortable train travel.

Contrary to the film's "silent" beginning, the end, which is also set in a compartment, takes place against a distinct soundscape. It seems that Bergman attempted to filmically show the outside landscape through which the train rushes in two ways. Firstly, as a silent film—the outside of the compartment is reduced to a soundless image—and secondly, with a lowered window, where the film opens to a sonic, even tactile experience.

The train that crosses central Europe<sup>2</sup>, full of signs of the coming war, is also transporting a couple of Nazis in the next compartment. The boy, whom we see filmed from behind, across his shoulder with his head and arm leaning against the window, is watching a train going in the opposite direction on the next track, carrying tanks with their guns turned largely in the same direction. The tanks rush past the window and the boy's eyes, which Bergman often shows in a reverse shot. A few times, this uneasy image of rushing tanks that is part of the objective shot with the boy's neck still in the foreground intrudes into the subjective shot and becomes something that the boy (and the viewer) sees directly as if there were no window in-between. The objective distance disappears and we get the feeling of being in the middle of a battlefield. The only thing tying the image to the train is the unchanged sound level. Although the gaze of the camera has broken through to the other side of the window, the film's sound remains on this side and does not yet venture outside.

The film also ends in a compartment, but this time the boy is alone with his mother. The last shot shows the mother opening the window, after which the outside literally breaks into the shot—both sonically and tactilely. It is raining outside and the mother's body, standing at the open window, is sprinkled with raindrops. The invasion of sound (the whistling of other trains and the chugging of carriages) and the rain into the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the compartment is violent and liberating at the same time. . . . It might even be preparing the viewers to exit the safe shelter of the cinema and face the sounds of the street and possible inclement weather.

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<sup>2</sup> Among the alcohol beverages shown in the film is also the Serbian Užice plum brandy.

### Fellini and the shaking during rail travel

With the means of mass public transport, a new kind of intimacy emerged: a close observation of fellow passengers in silence (of a compartment). Simmel ascribed to this new situation a new type of disquiet: "Therefore the one who sees, without hearing, is much more /.../ worried than the one who hears without seeing." (Simmel in Benjamin: 433). Great efforts were put into enabling the peaceful privacy of a compartment and the comfort in it, not the least important was aimed at preventing the shaking within it.

In the service of comfort (as little shaking as possible), the hegemony of the straight line, served by geographers and railways planners, cut into the landscape with its uncompromising geometry, and thus stood in flagrant opposition to the winding and bumpy road used by carriages, the most popular means of transportation before the train. Schivelbusch talks about the railway alienating passengers from the immediate, natural environment (23), but in reality the natural rhythm of shaking was merely replaced by the mechanical, rhythmically more regular shaking regulated by the joints of the rails. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Sigmund Freud did not forget to mention the influence that this repetitive shaking has on an individual:

The shaking produced by driving in carriages and later by railway-travel exercises such a fascinating effect upon older children that every boy, at any rate, has at one time or other in his life wanted to be an engine driver or a coachman. It is a puzzling fact that boys take such an extraordinarily intense interest in things connected with railways, and, at the age at which the production of phantasies is most active (shortly before puberty), use those things as the nucleus of a symbolism that is peculiarly sexual. A compulsive link of this kind between railway travel and sexuality is clearly derived from the pleasurable character of the sensations of movement. (68)

Federico Fellini managed to connect the two—the disquiet of the visual proximity of a silent fellow passenger and the effect of the train's shaking on passengers—into a characteristic mixture of the anxiety and sexuality, the wakefulness and the dreaming of the protagonist, who, we can rightly assume, is experiencing his second puberty. Fellini's *City of Women* (*La città delle donne*, 1980) is another of those rare films that begin and end on a train. An older man (Marcello Mastroianni) and a woman (Bernice Stegers) sit in a compartment opposite each other. The train is

running on a country rail line. Fellini insists, as Michel Chion put it, on the rhythmical shaking of the bodies of the man and the woman sharing the compartment at the beginning of the film, which makes the scene “crudely sexual rather than sentimental” (97). Snàporaz, the man, wakes from a deep sleep and starts flirting with his neighbour. The unconcealed sexuality, which the protagonists try to consummate a few moments later in the bathroom at the end of the carriage, is only intensified by the children jumping in front of the compartment door, shamelessly insinuating the couple’s union.

Only at the end of the film, when the viewers again find themselves with the main protagonist in the same compartment, does it turn out that the entire mise-en-scène that Fellini derived from the shaking was actually a dream, that Snàporaz only dreamed the entire time. He dreamed about following his fellow passenger to the bathroom, about the dismal disappointment with her stopping the initiated sexual relation, he also dreamed that he exited the train and followed her to the unusual Grand Hotel Mira Mare in the middle of a forest where a feminist congress was taking place precisely then, and he also dreamed about all the anxious situations that arose there. And when he finally wakes up and sees his wife sitting opposite him, he also notices that the dreamed women slowly enter their compartment one after the other... When he wakes up, reality can therefore start again.

### **A stowaway**

If, as Benjamin and Simmel claim, it was precisely the railways and steamers that, simultaneously with the big cities, invented the modern masses and thereby also a mass viewer, it is also true that the “stowaway” emerged as a sort of by-product of the formation of the masses. The concept of the stowaway, which had been unknown in the time of coaches, had almost disappeared by the time cars and buses started to predominate. There can be no stowaways in coaches, cars and buses, which transport smaller groups. Although in Slovenian and also in German, blindness is imposed upon them (the terms *slepi potnik* and *Blinder Passagier* literally mean blind passenger), in reality they use their gaze not to be seen. This is why they are in a situation that is essentially the same as that of the cinemagoers. The key characteristic of film in relation to viewers is, as Stanley Cavell already claimed, that films permit us “to view the world unseen” (40).

At the same time, the stowaway is the last viewer figure brought about by the invention of the train. This is why films always liked showing it, especially the various practices of riding the train in the undercarriage, which hobos in the US rediscovered with every new economic crisis.<sup>3</sup> Practices that wanted to force a train into becoming a horse.

*Emperor of the North Pole* (1973, Robert Aldrich) brought perhaps the most emblematic image of a stowaway in American cinema. With him, film history finally got the dramatic scene of riding the rods—full of suspense, violence, competitiveness and crowing, but also class camaraderie and solidarity... However, the scene of two hobos, the veteran A-No.-1 (Lee Marvin) and the novice Cigaret (Keith Carradin), hopping the train guarded by the brakeman Shack (Ernest Borgnine), started out as a literary text. Their boldness between the train wheels and the fear of the coupling-pin striking under their bodies were first depicted with the words of Jack London, and only later with images. Once again, a film was conceived during a bookstore visit:

Heaven pity the tramp who is caught “underneath” on such a road. /.../ The “shack” (brakeman) takes a coupling-pin and a length of bell-cord to the platform in front of the truck in which the tramp is riding. The shack fastens the coupling-pin to the bell-cord, drops the former down between the platforms, and pays out the latter. The coupling-pin strikes the ties between the rails, rebounds against the bottom of the car, and again strikes the ties. The shack plays it back and forth, now to this side, now to the other, lets it out a bit and hauls it in a bit, giving his weapon opportunity for every variety of impact and rebound. Every blow of that flying coupling-pin is freighted with death, and at sixty miles an hour it beats a veritable tattoo of death. (13)

### **Slapstick undercarriages**

A train undercarriage is not a self-evident or photogenic setting. It is a space underneath the train, dirty and dangerous, where people, except for mechanics, rarely look. It is an ideal setting for fear, horror and uncanniness.

However, for film, riding underneath the train was first funny and

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<sup>3</sup> First, during the economic crisis of the 1890s and then again during the Great Depression of the 1930s.



only later horrifying. It was the comedians who first discovered train undercarriages for the big screen. Long before the stealing of a free ride and the attempts to put a stop to it in action films, all the most important characters of slapstick comedy already tottered there.

In *Idle Class* (1921), Charlie Chaplin, the tramp with big shoes, disembarked from the tool compartment feet first. He did this with full golfing equipment and the corresponding dignity of the ruling class, which is the only class that can afford to golf.

With a similar nonchalance and his characteristic stone face, Buster Keaton sat at the foot of a train, on the connecting rod between two wheels of the locomotive, in a completely different, love situation, in a highly melancholy and romantic scene from *The General* (1926, Clyde Bruckman, Buster Keaton). At the beginning of the civil war, Johnnie Gray (Keaton) is rejected by the army because they believe he would serve the South better as a train engineer. His girlfriend, who does not believe him and is convinced he does not want to enlist, therefore leaves him: "Don't lie to me. And don't talk to me again until you're in uniform." Because of his benumbed absent-mindedness upon her rejection—while sitting on the rod connecting the two wheels of the locomotive—he does not notice when the locomotive begins to move, even though the rod is lifting him up and down so that his feet almost touch the rails. He only becomes aware of what is happening just before he disappears into the darkness of a tunnel.

Like Buster Keaton, Chaplin also preferred the lower part of the train to the upper part (the roof, for example), and liked both much more than the spaces intended for passengers.

In *The Pilgrim* (1922, Charlie Chaplin), Chaplin plays an escaped convict who has the bad luck of stealing clothes from a swimmer that turns out to be a minister. If the two uniforms, the prison and the ministerial one, in which the viewers first see him make it impossible to determine his class origin, then this makes possible the moment he boards a train with a ticket he bought with the minister's money. He bends down, perfectly calmly, under the carriage and comfortably settles on the rods, until he is accidentally noticed by the conductor, at which point Chaplin shows him his ticket just as calmly as he settled on the rods before.

The primacy of comedy in the train undercarriage says a lot about how and how thoroughly the genre of slapstick comedy thought about society and social problems. If Chaplin's character of the tramp is ideal for showing the view of social reality from below or from the side, Harold

Lloyd's characters are much more airy, less grounded (remember all the scenes where he hangs suspended in mid-air) and definitely closer to the middle class and its view from above.

But perhaps it was precisely the unfortunate Harold Lloyd that, of all the comedians, most convincingly inhabited the train undercarriage in his comical camaraderie with a tramp, who steals some money from him and whom he then chases by jumping under the train after him somewhere in the middle of *Now or Never* (1921, Fred C. Newmeyer, Hal Roach). There, they poke each other until Lloyd falls down and barely manages to hold on, but then has to run between the rails as quickly as the train is moving while holding on to the rods. When he manages to get back on the undercarriage, he finally catches the tramp's leg with his belt and finds his money hidden in his sock; he takes the money, but it is precisely at that moment that steam and hot water burst out of a barely noticeable small pipe, blowing the money out of his hands. He then calmly sits in a comfortable position, lights a cigarette that he takes from his cigarette case and gives one to his former enemy. At the end, he almost falls off the train while trying to read a newspaper; he manages to hold on, but at the price of his behind rubbing against the rails, giving off sparks.

Harold Lloyd and the thieving tramp were the comic precursors of the two characters in *Emperor of the North Pole*, especially the scene inspired by Jack London. Rarely have two scenes in film history (quite unintentionally) been so similar in their developments and settings and so different in their effects. In both, there is an experienced tramp and a novice on the tracks. In both, their initial conflict ends with solidarity between them; in both, one party in the relationship suffers all the unpleasantness of the situation, while the other comes out of it practically unscathed. The difference is that the first film is serious, tense and dramatic, while the second is comic.

### **The socialist train rolls on**

The shot of a train says nothing about the nature of railway organisation. We would like to say that the difference between socialist and capitalist railway organisation is considerable, but such a statement requires a lot of knowledge about trains and railways. However, there seems to be a cinematic difference. If Western cinema is full of action films about trains, beginning with *The Great Train Robbery* (1903, Edwin S. Porter), and excellent comedies, such as *The General* (1926), then socialist cinema was

marked most by the cine-train. The cine-train, which departed from Moscow in January 1932, brought film to the proletarian and peasant masses of the Soviet Union. It taught them to watch films and to make films. For many, the train was what in 1895 Le Salon Indien was for the Parisians—their first encounter with film.

Four carriages were allocated to film: the sleeping car with a 32-member team; the editing car with a film laboratory; the car for making animations and intertitles; and the screening car with a screening room (Kirn: 41).

This venture, which was headed by Medvedkin, was documented by the French film group SLON (in which Chris Marker collaborated) in the exceptional *The Train Rolls On* (*Le Train en marche*, 1971). The time it tries to evoke could poetically be encapsulated in three quotations from the film and one film image: At the time the picture was silent ... and the sound blind ... and when films were made in one's mind ... diapers were dried on socialist trains.

When the cine-train stopped and ended its work, Medvedkin made *Happiness* (Schastye, 1934), which Eisenstein considered a Bolshevik version of Chaplin—which the SLON collective considered an important fact.

### **Yugoslav trains and migrations**

Like the case of the Soviet railways, the development of Yugoslav railways measured, from the very start, the progress of socialist society. The factories manufacturing trains bore important names. The Boris Kidrič Maribor factory, which manufactured railway vehicles, was named after one of the most famous Slovenian pre-war communists and the post-war Minister of Industry for the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the predecessor of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In this factory, they produced the first Yugoslav dining car.

Perhaps this is why, in its early days, Yugoslav cinema was full of trains of hope. As if, with films, the railways demanded back their share of the fortune of the lottery bonds with which they had been built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The post-war socialist power tried to change the fortune caught with the chance of the draw, which brought extra profit to the owners of the bonds bearing the right number (Hribernik: 149–150), into a deliberate goal of the Yugoslav railway operations. With the help of

railways, people were supposed to migrate closer to happiness.

Such was Veljko Bulajić's *Train Without a Timetable* (Vlak bez voznog reda). The film was made in 1958, when Yugoslav socialism was ideologically strong enough for the scriptwriters to entrust the migration of destitute farmers to a former partisan and include the following in the opening credits: "The new and young country gave the poor peasants land, houses and cattle in the most fertile areas of Yugoslavia as a gift of the revolution." The migration took place immediately after World War Two. The train carried the peasants from the infertile Dalmatian Hinterland, devastated during World War Two, to the fertile Baranja<sup>4</sup>, where they could hope to have a better and happier future.

With the short documentary film *Knot* (Čvor, 1969), Krsto Papić counterpoised this optimism of the railways, which is still present in the film and represented by the enthusiastic character of the station master, with the homeless and the poor casual workers. He found them at one of the most modern railway stations in Yugoslavia, in Vinkovci, Croatia. The film was made so that it seems that the station manager played his role, as if he appeared in the film ex officio. This part of the film therefore gives the impression of fiction, while the homeless and poor seasonal workers represent its real, documentary part.

*Special Trains* (Specialni vlakovi, 1972), which is the title of another short documentary film by Krsto Papić, refer to trains organised by the employment offices of the republics that carried Yugoslav workers to Germany. The film begins with praise for Yugoslav workers. "They adapt quickly... They are very hardworking," says a representative of the German medical delegation with its head office in Belgrade, while a German physician examines new candidates for referral. Healthy people will get a contract to work in Germany.

Many workers that boarded the train are tacit or talk reservedly on camera about what they have left behind: families, houses, relatives, friends, unemployment, poverty... As they narrate their stories, some become angry, others are overwhelmed by tears. The employment office official in charge of organising the transport is the only one whose name is mentioned in the film: Zgaga Darko. While explaining the chaos that predominated before the official authorities took over the organisation of migrant workers abroad, he smokes an elegant pipe. Again he is the only interviewee that

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<sup>4</sup> The basic plot has a historical basis in the settlement of the emptied areas and estates in Baranja, which the Germans, who lived there, massively abandoned after World War Two.

the camera shoots in big close-up. In great proximity, in extreme close-up, it shows his golden ring, necklace, a nice and elegant dark suit and dark sunglasses. In American films, this would certainly make us mistake him for a member of the Mafia. He exhibits no trace of enthusiasm, which was still detectable in the station master.

In Živojin Pavlović's *Body Scent* (Zadah Tela, 1983), a railway worker on the Emona Express attempts to assemble his life that is divided between Belgrade and Ljubljana, between his pregnant lover and his wife and family. He does not manage this well.

It was already in *Body Scent* that the repairs of the locomotive took unreasonably long—"they waited for the parts to come from abroad." Then the trains slowly began to fall apart. The Emona Express stopped running for a while, and "much older wagons were recycled" on the Belgrade–Ljubljana line (Slapšak: 112). Like progress before, now the disintegration of the railways became the measure of the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia (Dragosavljević: 122).

In an engineering book about Yugoslav railways from 1964, we learn that, for the smooth operation of Yugoslav railways, 1.6 million new railway ties had to be built in annually. Those are the same ties that the refugees in Nika Autor's *Newsreel 63 – The Train of Shadows* (Obzornik 63 – Vlak senc, 2017), stopped on the Balkan migrant route and settled in an improvised refugee camp on disused railways premises in Belgrade, carry and throw on the fire.

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## IT'S NOT THE TRAVELS

It's not the travels, it's the people we met. What we said to one another.  
How we brushed our lives against one another's fleetingly,  
how we lent something to one another, had a drink, exchanged emails, phone  
numbers, bodily fluids on occasion, how we gave each other a hug, saying Later,  
and split. It's not the places, it's what we left there—what we dug in,  
not where, it's what we whispered into a tree, not the tree itself, the fact we danced  
almost naked, not the beach itself, and gazed into the full moon wordlessly,  
thanking life in our minds for feeling minute compared to nature,  
that we were able, though only for a second, to love the world  
and our own being alive. Those coal-black ducks with white beaks, for instance,  
they flew away long ago, now, instead, the picture of a laughing woman  
shouting They must be spies, well, what do you know, they're spies,  
just have a look at those pointed beaks, they're suspicious, I'm telling you! is bobbing about  
on the surface. What's waiting for me there, the pier is standing,  
still the same one, yet not the same pier any more. We are no longer sitting on the edge,  
the two of us, dangling our legs, counting the clouds, we are no longer saying  
What will we do tomorrow—because there is no tomorrow, because there is no us,  
because there are no places, it's just what you left there for later, in spring  
for the next winter, what you have stored, what you will nurture your solitude with.  
Are we any happier knowing we were happy once, there, for a moment  
that lingered awhile, so fair? An army of plane tickets, an army of take-offs,  
luckily, just as many landings, the suitcase packed hundreds of times,  
a bellyful of travelling on occasion, the food going bad, the train  
coming late, the last clean shirt with something utterly purple on it,  
it won't come off, no way, forget it, the sticking plasters, the headscarves,  
the battered bidons and knees, the tubes of sunblock, the crackers smelling  
of motor oil when crushed, all the rooms, all the beds, all the views,  
every breakfast, all the restrained late-night moans, the considerate orgasms  
in the rooms next door, what is there to say?  
How can you say anything about trees, the sea, the woman's hand in yours,  
about the wind, about all the downpours interrupting your momentum, what can  
you ever say without making it sound trite, about the landscapes, the horizons,  
where are your pictures, show them, how can we take you seriously demonstrating  
to us eagerly how you have found yourself and how you realised who you are,  
how you caught yourself naked and barefoot there, the way you are when you are  
most like yourself, how you howled from solitude until red-faced silence descended?



The screened window Lost/Found and the bell engraved with Ring,  
a drowsy employee reading a medical romance behind it. Where have you left it?  
What? Your head, of course! Then laughing at her own joke, surely for the hundredth time.  
It's not the travels, the places. The flattened blossoms in books, the grains of sand,  
the ticket stubs, the bag tags, the rickety, uncomfortable chair in the shed, on the roof  
of which squirrels dart back and forth as if the end of the world were near, how I sweep  
the veranda every morning and then read *The Master and Margarita* in my undies,  
the grey umbrella with cuts made on the strategic places so it doesn't  
turn inside out, the first English Sunday roast, the first spotted dick,  
the locals bellowing with laughter at the question what is spotted dick,  
the victory of the national team at the World Cup and a packed square  
in the middle of the night, toasting and singing in ecstasy, someone  
climbing a lamppost to enjoy a better view—and hanging the flag,  
the park where we two spread a tartan blanket under a tree and competed  
throwing our Birkenstocks from where we sat, the bus in which I kept  
listening to one and the same track during sunrise, and the bottle of wine  
given to us by a shrewd young woman behind the counter of a crowded pub  
one evening, it was a rosé, not a bad one at all. There are such fragments,  
something, unlike anything else, that does not sting, does not contort,  
does not hurt. Just the flashes, the everyday life that, while changing  
one overall for the other, looks at itself fleetingly in the mirror and  
winks at itself mischievously. It's not the travels or the places—  
it's just why we went there. What we  
arrived at.

# ON THE TRAIN. UNDER THE TRAIN. A CHANGE IN ART AND RESPONSIBILITY

Since the Lumière brothers' train on the screen scared the cinema-going public, we know that a new development in the film's plot will occur the moment we see a train. A similar thing happened in literature decades ago. From Tolstoy's *Kreutzer's Sonata* till the *Alice Through the Looking Glass* train scene, trains have become literary outposts of exposure, mystery, revelation, sites of randomness and the arbitrary nature of human behaviour, engines of social movement and the personal incapacity to make change, locations for revolution, death, inevitability, mechanical and the glory of speed. Heading for paradise, hell, future or past, trains carrying mostly white people across their imaginations and into colonization, diminishing and distorting, almost without exception, our view of reality and in the process disabling our sense of responsibility and instead losing it to comfort, conquered space and the blindness of speed.

Indian trains, with people hanging from every side and surface. A train through the Peloponnese, a lonely ride through time, loneliness disturbed by an American explaining in detail his messy divorce. The tram-train, which becomes funicular on the ride down from Opicina to Trieste, marking the final disconnecting of the two worlds – no more trains – and crammed with ghosts of wandering artists and intellectuals that will go, after the ride, to the Caffè San Marco. Body, space and sensory confusion. Multitude, one, and phantoms that affect your life. There is somebody missing.

In one of the best movie spoofs ever made, *Top Secret* (1984, Jim Abrahams, David & Jerry Zucker) a guy (a rock star played by Val Kilmer) sitting on a train is painting a watercolour of the scenery outside: when we see the result, we find the scenery is painted in strokes and stripes that represent the movement, without fixing the view; and then the station-platform moves away, not the train. This brilliant moment of instability challenges our stereotypes and introduces the anachronic change in the movie,

to another time and the complete loss of any sense. A good exercise in rationalization, one of the rare, cultural privileges of the developed world. Now let us deconstruct.

Mountains and forests in winter, somewhere around Sremska Mitrovica and the train buried in snow—the scenery for the *Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. There are no mountains nor forests around Sremska Mitrovica, it's the Panonian plain. Only readers familiar with the topography of Vojvodina, a province in present-day Serbia, formerly Yugoslavia, were able not to take it seriously, and to lovingly acknowledge the pre-Google-Earth mistake, as charming as Shakespeare's Illyria... or for that matter Verona. The final act of retribution where everybody is guilty and nobody can be blamed: this is the formula of the explanation for what happened, employed by all of the participants in the Yugoslav war, which materialised some 60 to 70 years after the fictional plot. But first they, all participants, invented mountains and forests—the narratives of false history, identity and rights of territorial possession, then they designed their enemies, accused them of horrible crimes, and eventually they carried out their retribution. Christie's light colonial carelessness is mirrored in history by years of serious propaganda work, in order to produce the motive and disable any mechanisms of responsibility and justice. The literary work anchored in popular genre, fun, and profit became a prophecy.

*La Madone des sleepings* by Maurice Dekobra (1925): the other side of Tolstoy's murderer explaining himself on the train, Anna Karenina killing herself by jumping in front of the train, or even Tolstoy himself dying at a remote train station. There is a certain excessive sexual meaning associated with trains, the result of change, mobility, escape, the closeness of bodies, shared space, be it in the utmost luxury of silk kimonos and champagne of the Orient Express, or the forced intimacy of socialist-era trains. The sexual tension is most often neutralised with symbolic substitutes—food, drink and talk. This is what I call the Sheherezade syndrome on the train. I travelled a lot, between Belgrade and Ljubljana, during the first 15 years of my marriage. There was a business train, the Sava Express. I would embark in Belgrade after work, at 15:00, often with my cat and two smaller or one bigger book. The train was comfortable, pets were allowed from the mid-1980s on, and I counted on the slightly uninviting sight of a young woman with glasses, books, and a cat in a cage to help me be left alone and at peace. It usually worked. But once there was a man who would not respect the signs. In fact, he told me that he had to talk, and that he would not bother me otherwise. He was a man in his fifties, small but pleasant to

look at, and he had a warm voice. What he told me for four hours between Belgrade and Zagreb was an interesting life story, his career as a painter, and his family. I cannot remember the story, but there wasn't a single flaw in the style, a single mistake in taste, measure, finesse of expression; and there was this outpouring of perceptiveness, charm, discrete wit and distance: pure pleasure in perfect verbal delivery, which made me listen without reserve. When he stepped out of the train in Zagreb, there were three women waiting for him, all smiling, his wife and daughters, which I recognized from his description. He did not lie and he was loved, and I knew why.

Sheherezade syndrome applies to monsters, too. In the winter of 1990, when war was a very real possibility, I travelled from Zagreb to Belgrade on the Sava Express. I was in a compartment with four young men, all younger than me. I plunged into my reading, they were talking to each other. They were all from the same region, from Knin, a city in the Croatian Lika region, where Croats and Serbs lived together. Each of them had one or more horror stories—how the Croats as Ustashi slaughtered, tortured and shot their relatives during WWII. The stories related to their grandparents, aunts, friends and families, or simply people known to previous generations: they could not possibly have witnessed any of these stories, they did not mention any witnesses by name—they just narrated the narrated, the oral history. That might have drawn my attention. But they had no special interest in exchanging these stories—they were just confirming motives, encouraging each other to seek revenge from among the Croats... any Croats, any generation. The victims from the stories were just examples, of no particular interest or empathy. As I was listening to them, they were becoming visibly more empowered to realize their retribution, and this verbal exercise served just such a function. Just before Belgrade, the train stopped, because it hit somebody on the tracks. The four guys concluded immediately that it was some drunk, and they expressed their anger and their wish to get out and not waste time waiting for the whole procedure to finish. They showed not the slightest sign of compassion for the victim, and stepped out. The ambulance arrived, and the injured man was taken away (he survived, as I read in the papers the next morning), and the train arrived late at the station. And I knew for sure that war was possible.

The trains resumed serving the line between Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana in 1995. Many of the other lines in former Yugoslavia were destroyed, especially in Bosnia. No more Sava Express, and far older wagons were reconditioned and returned to service. Instead of 6 ½ hours, the trip between Belgrade and Ljubljana now lasts 11 hours. The carpets have been

removed from the sleeping cars, there is no soap or water, the blankets are mouldy and still bear the Vutex-Vukovar label. The trip is depressing and can be dangerous—there are many reports of travellers being knocked out with a spray and then robbed.

There is the train station in Volos, Greece, no longer active, and built by the father of the famous painter Giorgio de Chirico. It is elegant, colourful, unforgettable. Since the war in Syria and the crisis destroyed the big port with the ferries that serviced the Syrian ports, this monument to European train culture has grown obsolete. With the exception of France and Germany, train travel is not a discernable European commodity today. European cities are no longer directly connected by rail. Traveling by train is not quick, nor cheap, nor comfortable. There is somebody missing.

The ultimate art work/performance of our time: two refugees hid themselves between the wheels of a train and managed to survive the Belgrade-Zagreb route in 2016. One of them recorded several minutes of his trip with a smartphone. They chatter and laugh, something of these human sounds can be heard over the clatter of metal. It is not a translation or simulation made by somebody other than the refugees themselves. There is no supervision, even by their parents or friends, no control of any kind. There is no sympathy or empathy or any kind of intervention by the other, which would inevitably introduce another level of interpretation and meaning. This work of art is pure, delivered directly by its author; it reveals the means of creation and communication, and it screams for responsibility. Every other channel meant to communicate messages related to the refugees is jammed, censored, or simply sealed. The refugees are sealed. This is an attempt to unseal them, themselves, to make us quiver with guilt and shame while they hang on the dangerous rungs of our ironclad self-confidence, rusting away with our crimes of non-compassion and denial of colonial sins. We should quiver as onlookers quivered before Rubens's *The Elevation of the Cross* in Antwerpen, or the *Raft of Medusa*, or *Guernica*. We should quiver before the art addressing the art we made irresponsible, to complete our irresponsible lives. The two Sheherazades are chattering under the train, to remind us of the visual, acoustic, palpable capacity of art to show life—enough for us to save both art and life.

## THE READER

“I do not find this funny at all,” cried the reader, “this greedy and perverted tourism of yours!” He heard a crackling sound behind him as he rushed off to the train station. A dirty old-fashioned train, like those one would have seen decades ago, stood on a remote railway track. It waited humbly and patiently, because the route originated from this station. The grand Stazione Termini, suffocated by masses of people hurrying through it during the day, was almost empty. People travelling long distances today, unless they are really poor, use high-speed trains, which cover incredible distances in a very short time; but one needs to give up looking out through the window, for this might damage the eyes due to the rapid movement of the landscape, which resembles an impressionistic smear.

The Russian family with their adolescent son staggered with fatigue along the endless composition. The mother, still a young woman, cast anxious glances at her son half-asleep, her son with his angelic face and shiny curly hair, a mixture of silver and gold. He was a tall boy, taller than his mother, but his face was still the face of a child. The face of the boy’s father was marked by the worries of the past few days and creased with the wrinkles of the past decade. At last, they found the right carriage and entered the compartment with all their bulky luggage. Plastic bags with food and more bags with drinks and clothes began rustling. It was cold in the compartment, as if they had just brought the train in from Siberia. After the family had eaten and stretched their tired limbs, gentle smiles appeared on their faces and the first words were whispered, understood only by them. The woman wrapped her son in a warm sweater. She pulled on a coat made of fake astrakhan. Her long lush hair, exactly like the boy’s, fell over the fake fur, which lent an exquisite look to the image as a whole. When the boy, while eating, opened his eyes widely, they shone with the blueness of aquamarine. They seemed like a magnificent accessory to the black coat and the mother’s hair. The train eventually embarked on its long journey north. By then, mother and son were fast asleep, while the father kept a close but already more relaxed watch over them, having left his place by his wife to his son—at least temporarily. Was all of this true only of this particular strenuous journey? In sleep, the heads of the mother and the son leaned close towards each other, almost as if they were kissing. They looked like a sacred image from an altar somewhere north of Bologna. During the

ride, the positions of their faces and bodies changed, but kept their sensual, emotional closeness, breathing together, the colour of their skin and hair exactly the same. Since it was impossible to make oneself comfortable in the small compartment, the mother and the son, like gymnasts of sorts, invented ever new positions that now and then appeared dangerously erotic. Just before the train's departure, other passengers entered the compartment and it suddenly became very crowded. The intertwining of arms, legs and heads was as tight as that of the snakes on Medusa's head, only this arrangement held no dread. Where were all these people travelling? To the Belarusian communist city of Minsk? What was the slender, barely grown Pakistani supposed to do there? Or the still young Arab who kept talking *sotto voce* on the phone trying to comfort his beloved who was sobbing on the other end of the line, suffering as she was owing too their separation? The remaining seat was taken by a handsome man. He was immersed in a tiny book. He held it in his hands at an unnatural angle to be able to intercept the dim light from the corridor, for the light in the compartment was soon switched off. The reader did not need much light, for he knew the book pretty much down to the last detail. He murmured the words quietly, even more quietly, casting a glance at the book only occasionally, just to be sure. Soon, everyone was asleep. Without him noticing, the Pakistani's head slid into the arms of the reader. The reader lifted his book slightly and kept quietly uttering the magic words that visibly enthralled him. Hours passed. The darkness outside prevented any sense of orientation. In the middle of the night, the train stopped for about two hours. No one noticed, apart from the reader. In the early hours of the morning, still in complete darkness, the passengers started waking up one after another. The father smiled approvingly at his son; having used the reader's lap as his pillow throughout the night, the Pakistani smiled apologetically; the reader smiled all around. Only the Arab remained stern. He reached for his phone a few times and put it down again. The Pakistani, the most spirited among them, introduced himself as Perwes. In his youthful curiosity, he asked his fellow passengers where they were from. The Russian woman shook her head, and it was only after she had heard the names of other places, like Shrinagar, Charleville, and Abu Dhabi, that she said Odessa. The Arab, obviously thinking only about his beloved, whom he did not dare to call at this early hour, shrouded himself in silence. The Russians, who understood nothing, kept whispering poetically. Thus, a conversion could only develop between Perwes and the reader, whose name was Ernest. The rested Pakistani started talking about his hometown, where his entire family lived. He was driven to Europe by curiosity. He finished secondary school in Shrinagar. He was

hoping to continue his studies in England, where he had sent his school certificates and other documents a while ago, but was still waiting for a response. Against his family's wishes, he decided to check out the matter himself. He came to Rome, as this was the cheapest flight he could find. He had no luggage, but thanks to his youth and particular good looks appeared perfectly groomed. After his long sleep he simply smoothed his hair, rubbed his eyes, and immediately looked as if he had just stepped out of the bathroom of a luxurious hotel. The homesickness that started gnawing at him made him speak about his home. What he found most fascinating was the way his family greeted him upon his return from shorter journeys. All his younger brothers and sisters, all five of them, kissed and hugged him as if there were no tomorrow. In the evening, they all climbed into his bed to listen to his stories about his adventures. Usually, they fell asleep while he was talking and he had to sneak away to another bed in order to get some rest. Perhaps the crowded compartment reminded him of his own bed. His father had a small store that sold semi-precious stones. Perwes learned very early on how to distinguish between stones and to gauge their quality. Since his eyes were younger than his father's, he was a valuable assistant. From time to time, they would travel to smaller towns where larger quantities of stones could be found, and tried to acquire them at reasonable prices. While talking about this, he pulled a wonderful aquamarine from his pocket. He held it in his hands and smiled, said the Russian boy's eyes were exactly the same colour. Then he suddenly became both serious and sad. He said one of his brothers was the same age as the Russian boy. Suddenly, he felt he made a mistake leaving home. Isn't it nicer to stay with your family and whisper gentle words in a language that no one else understands—as the Russian family did? But it was too late for regrets now. He just wanted to cry and bury his head in the reader's arms, but this was only acceptable in sleep. He would need to wait for a new train, a new night, and perhaps another generous night reader would come along that would not push him away, and would calmly put up with such unexpected intimacy.





Anja Golob

## THE BIBLE OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

Let's stop planting grapes,  
a machine doesn't need wine.  
Books... let's stop writing,  
a machine can't read—  
not even its own instructions for use—  
and why read in the first place.  
Lace bras, their  
manufacture is to be stopped—  
now. A machine doesn't feel, doesn't like,  
doesn't feel like seducing,  
a machine doesn't groan and doesn't sigh  
keep going, yeah, right there, yeah, yeah, there...  
and Paloma Sensitive Care can go  
to the dogs, too.

So come on, let's cut down  
trees, drain the seas, rivers,  
lakes, hills, mountains and volcanoes,  
as well as football pitches and  
playgrounds in general—  
let's level them all to the ground,  
close down faculties,  
burn down marketplaces,  
theatres, churches and museums,  
especially libraries,  
we need neither chess nor penicillin,  
neither fashion nor mobile phones,  
neither lottery tickets nor flower shops,  
we don't need passports, spices,  
running shoes and otherrrrrs. Drrr rrrr  
rrrrRRR RRRRR SSS

so we are  
machine us machine one more stroke  
one more electroshock master and servant  
at the same time  
we machine grammar is foreign to us at  
dawn we turn on  
          in the dark we turn off  
                  from dawn till dusk from  
dusk  
          till dawn  
we never really  
          sleep when we are not  
on we are on  
          standby a womb  
for raw materials a diarrhoea  
          for products  
we produce  
          machine machine machine  
for a new  
          machine world  
of machines a universe  
          of mechanical engineering

# FROM SOLIDARITY TO SOCIALITY

## Special Trains<sup>1</sup>

Transportation infrastructure is the equivalent of the body's circulatory system—without the flow of people, goods and information life is not possible. According to the Popular Dictionary of Economics, transportation is defined as the

economic activity that encompasses the transportation of material goods and people and the transfer of news. Transportation is an important activity in every economy, since it connects different regions, different activities, immediate production with consumption, different labor organizations, or different units within a single labor organization. Transportation is the continuation of production and is considered a productive activity, since not a single product is completed until it is delivered to consumption. (Nikolić, 1982)

One of the more important groups of rights within the European Union framework consists of four kinds of economic freedom: the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. Workers' freedom of movement is defined in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which aims to prevent any kind of discrimination related to employment and working conditions against workers from Member States, on the grounds of their citizenship. Freedom of movement also entails the workers' right to mobility and residence, the right of family members to enter and reside in the destination state, the right to work in another Member State, and the right to be treated equally with the citizens of that particular state (Schmid-Drüner, 2016).

Ante Jerić's article "Special Trains are Long Gone" (Jerić, 2016), which reports on the public conversation "Remember the Gastarbeiter! – so you don't forget the reality"<sup>2</sup> between Boris Buden and Sandro Mezzadra

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<sup>1</sup> Title of the documentary film *Special trains* (Specijalni vlakovi, 1972), directed by Krsto Papić.

<sup>2</sup> "Protiv zaborava". *Kulturpunkt.hr*; <http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/protiv-zaborava-3> (accessed on 26 February 2017).

in September 2016 in Galerija Nova in Zagreb, Croatia, begins with the description of a scene from Krsto Papić's film *Special Trains*. The conversation dealt with migrant labor in Yugoslavia and its current interpretations, as well as with the current "migrant crisis", while one of the key questions was: "Does the historical practice of mobile labor tell us anything about the 'migrant crisis' that is shaking the foundations of the European Union today?"<sup>3</sup>

The film depicts procedure that accompanied the departure of people from Yugoslavia to the Federal Republic of Germany for so-called temporary work in the early 1970s, starting with medical exams performed by a West German medical delegation in Yugoslavia, through transport organized by the Institute for Employment in Croatia, to the workers' arrival in Munich. Three phases of the process can be distinguished in the film: 1) selection: the choosing of "quality workers"<sup>4</sup> based on defined criteria, 2) personal stories: train sequences in which people share their reasons for going, their hopes and fears, and 3) depersonalization: arrival in Munich and roll-call, which begins with the following remark: "We will not address you by your names any longer, but by the numbers in your labor contracts, which you can find on the first page, upper right."

Unlike the usual interpretations of migrant labor in Yugoslavia, which are largely anticommunist and which represent the so-called *Gastarbeiters* as victims of communism, Boris Buden points out that this phenomenon is the consequence of the fusion of the free market and socialism, or that it was not the poor socialist economy that initiated the migrations, but the reproduction of capitalist economic relations in Yugoslavia:

The Yugoslav experiment thus did not move, as was prophesized by the liberal-capitalist ideology, from a market regulated by the Party State to the open market, but from the market regulated by the Party State to a regulated market that broke free of any democratic control, and which was controlled by the centers of international financial capital. (Buden, 2012)

Buden talks about the way the *Gastarbeiter* character currently exists as two forms of oblivion, anticommunist and cultural. This oblivion is not related to the past, but to the actual present, and is a consequence

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The chief of the West German medical delegation who was permanently seated in Belgrade is also interviewed in the film. When talking about how the Yugoslav laborers were most wanted at that moment, he says that they are "quality workers who adapt very quickly".

of the dehistoricization of the social relations that form such reality<sup>5</sup>. Thus the practice of mobile labor, according to Buden, embodied in the figure of the *Gastarbeiter*, helps us to recognize continuities and discontinuities in the current capitalist transformation. If we follow this argument a whole set of questions opens up related to migrant labor in the era of industrial modernism and to migrant labor, i.e. the “migrant crisis” of today. What is certainly common to both is the vulnerable position of both, because even in cases when their status is legally regulated, migrant laborers do not have many political or social rights and generally have a precarious position in the labor market (Ćurković, 2016). Thus Buden correctly concludes: “as forerunners of mass migration movements that critically shaped the world of modern capitalism, yesterday’s *Gastarbeiters* are simultaneously the messengers of what the future holds.” (Buden, 2012)

### Navigation Through Robbery<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of capitalist relations in Yugoslavia, the entry onto the world markets, and a dependence on the centers of power—as represented by international financial capital—increased over the years and decades until the 1990s, which saw the violent destruction of Yugoslavia and a definitive transition from socialism to capitalism (Živković, 2013). This transition was marked by the privatization of state and social property and deindustrialization (Štavljanin, 2013). These processes ensured that workers were left with nothing, while the minority elites get richer, foreign investors draw surplus value abroad, and what we are left with is an economic wasteland.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia into nation states also meant the disintegration of transportation infrastructure. Due to the high costs of maintenance and improvements to infrastructure, the railways have incurred particularly high losses. The rail networks are in very poor condition, as are the cars and related equipment—all consequences of the systemic destruction of the public infrastructure. Discussion over possible reforms to the Serbian Railway has been ongoing since the early 2000s, but what in reality is happening is ever increasing devastation and indebtedness (Vesić, 2015). According to the Memorandum on Financial and Economic Policies that was developed with the International Monetary

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<sup>5</sup> “Protiv zaborava”. *Kulturpunkt.hr*; <http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/protiv-zaborava-3> (accessed on 26 February 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Title of the text by Nenad Porobić “Navigacija pljačkom” (Porobić, 2017).

Fund, the Serbian government needs to reorganize the country's four largest public companies as a precondition for a new loan arrangement. The four companies are the state energy company, the gas distribution company, road and highway infrastructure, and the railways. In the case of the Serbian Railways, restructuring means job cuts, optimization of the network and the sale of part of its property, in order to minimize losses and dependence on the state budget, as well as profit for the state through the sale of property (Vesić).

The division of the company into four (Holding, Infrastruktura, Srbija-voz and Kargo) and the introduction of private subcontractors are all markers of market liberalization and the introduction of competition, which means that domestic transportation companies will have a very small chance of dealing with the free market conditions. One measure is the reduction of the workforce, which would largely be accomplished through the retiring of workers or the transfer of them to a social program, resulting in severance pay schemes that produce higher costs to the state budget. Market liberalization is also seen as the solution to the use of railway infrastructure. Enter the competition, which means that the railroads will be used by companies that are able to meet the appropriate standards, while domestic transport companies will not be able to sustain such competition. To sum up, what is taking place is the privatization of profit and the socialization of losses (Vesić).

The fragmentation and privatization of the railways has not accomplished the desired results anywhere in Europe. On the contrary, losses have increased, while service and traffic are worse; and in extreme cases, frequent breaches of security regulations have led to accidents. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is left without most of its railway transportation: it functions only minimally, since the company was divided into its profitable and unprofitable parts, after which the profitable part was privatized, almost secretly. Aside from the fact that people were left with virtually no railway transportation, the debts and losses incurred by infrastructure maintenance remained the public's to absorb, while private investors profited. In 2017, the World Bank office in Bosnia and Herzegovina considered the "restructuring" of the Republic of Srpska's Railways. At that occasion, the office director Tatiana Proskuryakova stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a poor country that cannot afford to fund passenger transport, and that the railways must focus on cargo transport that is profitable (Katana, 2016). Croatian Railways also privatized its cargo section, its most profitable division, with disastrous consequences. And the

case of Great Britain's rail system is only too well known: according to estimates, annual losses due to fragmentation and privatization amounted to 1.2 billion pounds (Vesić).

In his 2001 film *Navigators*, Ken Loach addresses the consequences of the privatization of British Rail, focusing on the workers' daily lives. The film follows five railway workers in Sheffield in 1995. It ends tragically, as one of the workers is killed in a traffic accident that is a consequence of systemic pressure to reduce labor costs; and, as Nenad Porobić points out in his review, the worker's colleagues may well contribute to the accident—fearing the loss of their jobs perhaps they act to preserve their positions. Porobić elaborates as follows:

At the end of the film we see a reflection of conditions then (and now): the organized working class is defeated, it is divided into individual actors that are systemically forced into humiliating compromises with the far stronger system of capital and its interests, and there is the high price that a society in decline ends up paying due to the impossibility of any joint struggle or solidarity under neoliberal hegemonic conditions. (Porobić, 2017)

### **(Dis)continuities of the capitalist periphery between East and West**

Belgrade's main train station is located in the centre of the city, not far from the confluence of the Sava and the Danube rivers, next to the main bus station. The main train station building was constructed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as one of the first train stations in Serbia, and was connected to the construction of the first rail line in Serbia, the Belgrade – Niš route. This route, according to the conclusions of the Berlin Congress, should have continued through Bulgaria to Turkey. After the Serbian-Ottoman war, the Serbian government and Prince Milan Obrenović pledged to connect the Serbian and Austro-Hungarian railways in the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.<sup>7</sup>

This part of the city was once called the Gypsy Marsh (Ciganska bara), and later Bara Venecija, since it was built on marshy land and its first inhabitants were Roma. In 1834, Prince Miloš ordered the expulsion of the population of Bara Venecija to Palilula, another part of the city, in order to construct state, military and administrative buildings there. The local population had to be expelled by force by the police, since they refused

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<sup>7</sup> More at [http://www.beogradcvor.rs/files/prezentacija\\_-\\_zeleznicka\\_stanica\\_istorijat.pdf](http://www.beogradcvor.rs/files/prezentacija_-_zeleznicka_stanica_istorijat.pdf). (accessed on 26 February 2017).



to leave. Their destitute homes were demolished, freeing up the land and making way for the construction of Savska varoš<sup>8</sup>, which gradually came to form the city's economic center.

For the newly proclaimed Kingdom of Serbia and city of Belgrade the main train station was architecturally significant, but also represented an important step forward in the development of socio-political, trade/commercial and state relations. The building's design was based on the model of the European train station as a representative building. The first train out of the station headed off to Zemun, while the first passengers from Belgrade over the Sava river bridge were King Milan Obrenović, Queen Natalija and Crown Prince Aleksandar. The train for Niš left three days later, while the rail line to Pešta opened that same day. Practically and symbolically, this event signified the opening up of Belgrade to the world, and a definitive connection with both the East and the West.

From World War I through World War II the former Savska varoš had become the working class neighborhood known as Savamala, which was important for the development of the labor movement. After World War II, during the socialist era in Yugoslavia the line also represented, in addition to the infrastructural significance the neighborhood carried because of the train and bus stations, an important industrial nexus in the city. Some of the companies that illustratively reflected the idea of socialist industrial modernization were located here in Savamala: Srbolek, the Belgrade Port, Čelik, Metalservis and many others (Vilenica, 2014). Numerous warehouses and depots sprang up in the area around the bus and train stations, infrastructure was developed, and Savamala became a business and transportation district.

The war of the 1990s and the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, violence on all levels, the great loss of lives, jobs, property, the establishment of new borders, deindustrialization, general impoverishment, international sanctions and the introduction of travel visas were some of the many factors that greatly impaired communication and the movement of people, goods and information. The fragile skeleton of the railway's infrastructure left over from socialist-era Yugoslavia was broken up into smaller pieces, circulation became that much more difficult, while the era of plunder and destruction of public infrastructure began in earnest.

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<sup>8</sup> More at <http://www.staribeograd.com/tekstovi/iz-starog-beograda/lat/savamala.htm>. (accessed on 26 February 2017).

This violent privatization process also affected the Savamala companies, which were stolen from the workers in various unjust procedures. The workers themselves were removed, though some of them fought fiercely to remain in control of their companies, businesses and workplaces. For example, the workers of Metalservis attempted to defend their company by sleeping on the floor in order to stop the robbery, while a legal action initiated by Nelt, the company that privatized the former Metalservis and kicked out both the workers and the management, was brought against the managing director, who had been elected by the workers (Treister, Zlatić, 2013).

During the 2010s the district became increasingly inhabited by creative industries, which kicked off the process of speedy and accelerated gentrification. Administrative buildings and warehouses of former public companies were privatized by large companies or became occupied by creative industries in very problematic processes and conditions. The ideology at the root of the so-called process of urban regeneration and revitalization of Savamala is more than clear from the statement by Mikser House, a leading actor among the creative industries in Savamala:

The First World War brutally ended Savamala, the urbanistic, cultural and economic renaissance, and 100 years had to pass for us to see its continuation. In place of the never-built Krsmanović palace, upon the square of ghosts, Mikser House is born, as a natural continuation of the golden age of Savamala. The modernist edifice is imagined as a nexus of designers, musicians, creatives, modernists and dreamers of a prettier and better Belgrade, Serbia, the Balkans /.../ The partnership between Mikser House creative studio and TRIMPLE JUMP GROUP from Belgrade in the Mikser House project is a perfect example of the deetatization of the creative sector, which is increasingly becoming the development mechanism behind the economic growth of the city of Belgrade.

This revisionist narrative negates or erases the sociality built during the socialist period, erases the working class history of this part of the city, erases the stories of the violent privatization of socially-owned and administered companies and the aggression perpetrated against the workers and their property. Instead, what is created is the joyful, aestheticized and depoliticized image of a comfortable, worry-free life, full of creative energy (Knežević, 2015), outside the unpleasant and ugly reality of ever-increasing social impoverishment.

Just as usually happens with and through gentrification, a certain terrain is created for what is incoming, and for what is quickly being built there today: the spectacular and highly ambitious Belgrade Waterfront project, created in cooperation between the Serbian government and the Eagle Hills company, a private investor from the United Arab Emirates.

The construction project spans more than 950 hectares on the Sava riverbank, which is to be comprised as follows: 17% business space, 8% luxurious hotel space, 60% elite residential space, 5% shopping space, 8% for the largest shopping center in the Balkans, while 1% is set aside for entertainment and culture (Vilenica, 2014). What's hidden behind this story of Belgrade's transformation into a European tourist and business center is the exploitation of public resources for the benefit of private investors; this is followed by problematic legal violations and processes arranged for the owners' benefit, the sale of public property, attacks on workers' rights and direct violence.

The vision that reestablishes a sense of continuity between Savamala at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today is certainly being realized—but not the romantic scenario that the Mikser House statement depicts, but because this part of the city is (again) becoming the center of big capital in which the poor are simply not welcome. Throughout 2016 all of the buildings standing on these 950 hectares were demolished, most of them without any of the required permits. The biggest event unfolded on the night of 25 April, when police wearing balaclavas bulldozed a series of private shops in Hercegovačka street, completely illegally and unannounced. It has not yet been determined who was behind this violent act; meanwhile the city authorities stubbornly reject and deny their responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

### **Post-apocalyptic images on society's ruins**

Next to the Belgrade Waterfront construction site, where luxurious towers of the future elite neighborhood are quickly being erected, a large number of warehouses owned by Serbian Railways stand between the bus and train stations. These warehouses have remained unused for decades and are slowly decaying. The area is now used as an improvised informal parking lot, where former Serbian Railways employees work for a small, commiserative income. For the past few months the warehouses have seen

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<sup>9</sup> "Rušenje u Hercegovačkoj". *Blic online*; <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/rusenje-u-hercegovačkoj-grad-nismo-ucestvovali-u-uklanjaju-objekata-i-ne-znamo-ko-je/mc1z1hz> (accessed on 25 February 2017).

new inhabitants—migrants who are stuck on the road to the European Union. Most of them have been staying there for months, since they have now been allowed or enabled to proceed further, legally. Many of them go to the police to get registered daily, in order to be able to claim legal residence in Serbia, but they are refused, with the (non)explanation that they should come again the following day. The advantage of registering is the right to stay in a refugee camp, where a minimum of help, in the form of food and shelter, is offered. On the other hand, however, people fear registration, since they can then easily be sent back south, to the camp in Preševo on the border with Macedonia, via the road they have already traveled, and there are also talks of deportations.<sup>10</sup> The Hungarian authorities only allow 20 people registered in Serbia to cross daily, so there isn't much of a choice: if they don't wait for official approval to cross the border, the only remaining option is the smugglers, which are a very expensive and risky means of travel. Those who manage to cross can be returned to non-EU countries like Serbia. Such treatment by the Serbian institutions is based on directives that come from the European centers of power and related to the closure of the so-called Balkan migrant route.<sup>11</sup>

In this situation of utter uncertainty, hopelessness and vulnerability, these people stay in the warehouses, which are entirely unsuitable for living: there is no water or electricity, windows and doors are gutted, the floors and walls are devastated, and the roof is full of holes. The only heating comes from campfires inside and out fuelled by abandoned railroad ties. The situation is no better regarding food: since it's not an official refugee camp, regular assistance only entails a single daily meal. Images of people, half-naked and barefoot, covered with blankets and gathered around fires, hands and faces black from smoke and a complete lack of hygiene are reminiscent of the images from any dystopian film about the end of civilization as we know it. Messages such as "We need help", "Please help", "Don't forget the refugees", and "Afghanistan is not safe" that are written on the warehouse walls bear witness to the despair of a people who have spent a long, cold winter in such conditions, sometimes in temperatures as low as -20 degrees. Meanwhile, just on the other side of the fence, a neighborhood dedicated to the comfortable life of the rich is springing up, with all the infrastructure a project of this quality needs.

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<sup>10</sup> "Lice i naličje Beograda na vodi". *Mašina*; <http://www.masina.rs/?p=3794> (accessed on 25 February 2017).

<sup>11</sup> "Kurc: Zahvalni smo Srbiji na zatvaranju Balkanske rute". *Danas*; [http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news\\_id=325510&title=Kurc%3A%20Zahvalni%20smo%20Srbiji%20na%20zatvaranju%20Balkanske%20rute](http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news_id=325510&title=Kurc%3A%20Zahvalni%20smo%20Srbiji%20na%20zatvaranju%20Balkanske%20rute) (accessed on 27 February 2017).

The temporary Belgrade Waterfront fence that divides these two seeming antipodes is covered with advertisements depicting a luxurious life by the river, in elite apartments built as part of a spectacular project based on the violent appropriation of public property, public resources and infrastructure, as well as the modest private property of the poor of Savamala. The project's certain and ambitious scope is also evidenced by the fact that both the train and bus stations will be moved elsewhere, so that the Belgrade Waterfront spreads into the area occupied by the parking lot and warehouses. The main train station will also disappear, nothing will be left of the arrival and departures platforms; the former Serbian Railways employees will be completely deprived of their income, and the migrants will be left without a, however unsuitable, roof over their heads. All that will remain is the illusion of a comfortable life for the few privileged elites, since there's clearly no room for workers and migrants in the shiny, highly aestheticized images of big capital and the desire for accumulation that erases the powerless along the way.

Workers whose jobs were stolen during privatization on the one side, and migrants who are illegally occupying a space without any possibility of overcoming their situation on the other, meet in this devastated, deserted territory. Both cases represent different facets of the broader spectrum of precarity, and speak loudly of the social relations that follow with the logic of profit over lives.

But that's not all, this whole story—starting with the expulsions from Ciganska bara, the construction of a European train station and a connection with the Austro-Hungarian rail network, through the privatization and robbery of social property after the disintegration of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the public infrastructure used for the construction of the elite Belgrade Waterfront development, while railway workers lose their jobs and migrants endure deplorable conditions next door—is composed of individual fragments of a far larger picture; a picture which, as Gábor Balázs suggests in his article “Report on Civil War”, is framed by a single mechanism—the capitalist order (Balázs, 2015).

The questions Balázs poses are as follows:

What if we are not experiencing another ‘cyclical’ crisis of capitalism or a crisis of ‘growth’, but are at the end of a historical epoch; when we cannot know whether the future holds out a better world, or an era of horror in which most of humanity will be deemed useless, even for exploitation /.../ ‘useless’ for the valorization of capital?

What if the Neo-Keynesian measures meant to ‘stimulate the economy’, as well as the austerity measures, are powerless in the face of the crisis, since they are not capable of ‘opening up new jobs? Is the basic problem the ‘end of labor’? (Balázs, 2015)

What we do realize, as Balázs points out, is that capitalism is headed towards a new kind of war, a permanent civil war, in which imperialist powers no longer clash over their share of the world’s territories, but whose goal is the permanent maintenance of order on the ruins of disintegrating states (Balázs, 2015). And similarly, when we talk about the migrants’ situation, we are talking not about their crisis, but about a crisis of the capitalist order—whose end is nowhere in sight.

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Uroš Abram:

1. Untitled, series Us?
2. Night Watch, Series: Us?
3. Untitled, series Us?

Location Slovenian-Croatian border (Rigonce and Obrežje), 2015



















Jelka Zorn

## NEWSREEL FRAGMENT, BELGRADE, RAILWAY STATION

27 January 2017

Around 1,200 people are waiting (for traffickers, relatives, trains). Including an 8-year-old boy and other children. It is biting cold.

The situation is surreal. There are vast areas of derelict, dirty railway buildings in which the refugees are burning the timber sleepers of abandoned rails. The air in the halls is cold, toxic and hazy. The people are holding up damn well. There are plenty of Afghans. Two young men first told us that they were human beings and that all human beings had the same rights—here you can feel how far from the truth this is. They want to have this situation photographed and published with the demand “Open the Borders”. Two days ago, there was a protest called “Open the Borders” held here, and some people went on a hunger strike, too.

The absurdity of capitalism is concentrated in this one place: there is a derelict railway station in which refugees are living temporarily; next to them, the former railway workers sell parking tickets; just behind the fence, there is a huge construction site where a prestigious new Belgrade district, called the Belgrade Waterfront, is being built.

3 February 2017

We are all sad. Rahmat Ullah Hanife, only 22 years old, has drowned in the freezing cold Tisa, the river that runs along the Serbian-Hungarian border. He was trying to cross the frozen river with other Afghans when the ice broke and he was pulled by the current into the depths of the river. His friends are remembering him and talking about him (I did not know him). The vulnerability of all people without a privileged passport is shocking. We all feel this, but say nothing.

5 February 2017

The borders are closed. The people on the move are beaten by the police, especially on the Hungarian, Croatian and Bulgarian borders, are robbed and then sent back. These pushbacks are not allowed, but the police, including the Slovenian police, are doing this all the time. They tell us that the police have taken their shoes—mandatory equipment for personal

mobility. The police are taking or destroying their mobile phones, taking their money, jackets, trousers, blankets, sometimes they set the dogs on the people. There have been cases of people being stripped almost naked. A. has shown me his scars, the result of beatings and dog bites. The police are beating children, too. There are people here who have attempted to cross the border with Croatia or Hungary ten or twelve times, sometimes more. But the systematic torture and violence do not stop the people from trying. They will enter the countries of the EU, there's no doubt about that, but I am worried about whether or not they are going to find places where they won't suffer violence or racism. The journey, which begins in Afghanistan, costs 6,000 euros.

4 March 2017, Ljubljana

The abandoned barracks are quickly turning into a self-organised space, a squat. The Soul Wenders have done a lot: since they arrived at the end of January they have been procuring truckloads of quality firewood and have made stoves. Now there are enough stoves for all the rooms; together with the inhabitants they have cleaned out tons of trash. Besides the Hot Food Idomeni group, there are also the activists from No Name Kitchen, who have organised a communal kitchen. It's great with some music playing.

When I was still there, we started going to a public swimming pool. Not only because it's a chance to have a normal shower, but also because people wanted to swim, exercise in a normal environment, away from worries, the waiting, violence. I saw on FB that a team is installing electrical wiring. The space is being transformed intensively, and I believe relations are changing, too. The sense of abandonment is gone; now there are more and more individuals and groups coming in wanting to contribute with their skills and to socialise, show their solidarity. But the threat that the waterfront construction project might occupy this section of autonomous space is still there.

How many refugees and activists are needed to bring down the borders, and how many to preserve the squat in the centre of Belgrade?

# THE BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY HIGHWAY

Several times in history, the Balkans predicted the future in Europe: in a way the First World War began on the territory of what would become Yugoslavia, while the breakup of this multiethnic and multi-religious country heralded the growing nationalism and fundamentalism that was to emerge elsewhere in Europe as well as in the Middle East—from where millions of refugees now hope to come to an increasingly xenophobic Europe. Such processes of division and hostility are often described in the West as Balkanization, a term some also use to describe the current developments in Syria. At least in recent years, however, these processes have certainly been the result of the increasing influence, indeed interference of international capital involved in the economic and political life of the region.

One of the main routes of the mass exodus from the Middle East has, until only very recently, cut across the Balkans, starting in Greece. What do the Balkans herald today?

Just before the EU and Turkey concluded what has been called a shady deal (an additional €3 billion in financial assistance, abolition of the visa system, one-on-one exchange of Syrian refugees in Turkey for Syrians in Greece), the governments in the affected region decided to close the Balkan route to refugees. Said closing of the Balkan route precipitated a humanitarian catastrophe in Greece and the expulsion of refugees back to Turkey.

The general attitude of all of the governments in the European Union seems to be that such great numbers of refugees are unmanageable, that the borders should be closed, and that even stricter asylum policies and security measures should be introduced. On the other hand, we also witness numerous protests, analyses, and art projects that are severely critical of the new European borders, the growing xenophobia, the lack of empathy, and the coldly bureaucratic treatment of the refugees. We often hear that both official procedures and media reports completely depersonalize the refugees. Journalists opposed to such treatment try to portray the touching stories of individuals and their families, and artists paint refugees' portraits in order to individualize them. This way they all demonstrably emphasize



the fact that refugees are people just like us, people who used to have jobs and homes, that there are intellectuals and artists among them; in short, that they are people who could contribute greatly to the development of (our) European society and become useful members by being integrated into it. Their integration into existing society seems to be Europe's bright future.

It is of course right to see an individual with his or her own story in every refugee, but this gesture of concern does not go much beyond a simple humanitarian gesture, and for the most part overlooks the refugees' real political potential. This potential lies in their collectivity, and to an even greater extent, in the collectivization of their—and our—problem. Recognizing the common interest of the refugees and the un/de-privileged Europeans could lead to mobilizing demands for more radical changes to European society—a society that has abandoned or simply lost the idea of a community based on solidarity and equality.

How can artists tap into this new collective potential? How can they tap into this political potential-in-becoming, and how can they start imaginative, utopian and participatory processes that will help co-create the idea of collectivity based on greater international solidarity, equality, and a more equitable division of society's wealth?

For their part the refugees could hardly have revived a better metaphor for the collapse of collectivity and social relationships in choosing the Balkans as their main route into Europe.

The greater part of the Balkan route over the territory of former Yugoslavia followed a highway that was once (in the days of Tito) known as the Brotherhood and Unity Highway. Refugees were pushed off this main traffic axis across the (former) Yugoslav part of the Balkan Peninsula and forced to walk through fields, along riverbanks, through the woods, returning to the road only occasionally—when they had to cross a border. Understandably, they were unaware of the history of the highway, whose construction began shortly after the Second World War with the aim of connecting all of Yugoslavia, from Slovenia in the north to Macedonia's border with Greece in the south. During the war in Croatia, the highway was closed to traffic until the war ended in 1995.

The Brotherhood and Unity Highway had been more or less closed to migrants on the Balkan route. For many of us living on the territory of former Yugoslavia, this highway built in part by post-war volunteer youth brigades is an important symbol of the collectivity and solidarity.

Socialist Yugoslavia provided free healthcare, schools and kindergartens for everyone, most every village had a cultural center and every town its won museum, open and working. Today, the picture is quite different. Health care and education now need to be paid, a majority of the main museums in the region are closed or barely surviving, and people are losing their jobs. Ruthless austerity policies have swept across Europe, with the greatest numbers of victims in the Balkans, and starting with Greece. Thus the Balkan route symbolizes not only the plight of the now-homeless refugees, but also the loss of our own communities—and not only those of our former common country, but of society in general.

Some of the refugees along the route were housed in former factories, where workers from various republics of Yugoslavia used to work. Many of the factories failed as a result of the current economic crisis, or were greatly downsized.

Looking at European countries encircled by barbed wire, like Slovenia today, we cannot help but think of a prison, or even a concentration camp. Someone recently likened the much protected, paranoid Slovenia and the “river of refugees” to two ships passing, with the passengers mutely observing each other. Yet the two sets of passengers have far more in common than might seem apparent at first glance. They are connected by loss—the loss of community, be it a homeland or a society of solidarity that has been replaced in Europe by a society of austerity and security.

With both its present and socio-historical and cultural past—including its experience of artistic avant-gardes—the Balkan route represents both potential and an opportunity to shaping the imaginary of a different, alternative community. A community that unites the migrant experience with the memory of a society that did in fact manage, at least for some decades, to maintain a sense of brotherhood and unity between nations as diverse as ours, a society in which workers could remain working at a factory for their entire careers, and in which the idea of the non-aligned nations of the Third World took definitive shape.

The Balkan route leads to the recognition of the common interests of all migrants of the world: those who have lost their homes and those who have lost their society, and with it, not only the conditions for a better life, but their dreams of a future, too.



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### 3. PEOPLE

# THE LUCK OF THE DRAW AND THE PURSUIT OF (UN)HAPPINESS

*In the hope of a better life, people move stealthily on the railway that was built with lottery bonds.*

The imaginary surrounding happiness in general, and the related hopes and dreams for a better life, which can be related to the lottery and other forms of gambling, is a paradoxical field juxtaposing the perfectly rational probability of calculation and the superstitious, often religiously-marked actions of the individual or the community. The theme of the pursuit of happiness is an integral part of social reality, and it often manifests itself precisely in various types of gambling, whose social roles have varied in different historical periods—but they have always been entangled. Nonetheless, we find that, in certain periods, some roles were more dominant than others. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the question of how the link between capitalism and mass gambling, between hope and despair, is established.

The early appearance of the draw as motif is related to the many Greek<sup>1</sup> and other creationist myths and mythologies and primarily symbolise the institution, the establishment of order amidst chaos. For it was characteristic in antiquity to perceive society as chaotic, while the draw was seen as putting into effect a higher will, destiny, which symbolised order within the epistemological framework of the time. The ancient notion of the draw can also help us understand the historical fact that, in antiquity, representatives of the people were often determined by a draw (Lutter: 25) and were thus granted some higher authority. The link between the draw, the divine and the supernatural remained preserved during the Middle Ages, too, and only started breaking down during the Renaissance. The first recorded calculations of probability were performed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the process of quantifying (Reith: 23) this previously seeming magical, mystical field announced the process of rationalising the draw. Perception of the draw as the domain of probability defines the draw as a

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<sup>1</sup> Zeus, Poseidon and Hades are said to have determined their areas of reign on the basis of a draw: Hades received the underworld, Poseidon the sea, and Zeus the sky.

numerical category. These changes were manifested in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in parallel with the introduction of mass gambling that included the lottery, which spread throughout Europe. The lottery enjoys a special status among the various types of gambling, for it demands a minimum of input from the individual and allows for the possibility of maximum profit. It has been, and still is, one of the most widespread types of gambling. The lottery soon turned out to be an effective tool with which to raise larger amounts of money; hence, the role of the state and certain power structures has been key to the development of mass gambling since the very beginning. As a result, we find a good number of large infrastructural projects that were meant to be fully or at least partially funded by lottery incomes and similar mechanisms; the earliest of these appeared in antiquity, with many more to follow later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the lottery spread throughout Europe. Rulers used the lottery and similar types of gambling to raise money to complete entire cities, city walls, transportation connections, infrastructure and harbours, to colonise newly acquired lands and more. Lotteries have also been used to fund a number of humanitarian, educational and cultural projects. One of the first modern museums—the British Museum—was funded by a lottery organised by the government in 1753 and 1754 (Nichols: 7).

Lotteries were also held in socialist countries, largely for humanitarian purposes. In Yugoslavia, the lottery as the successor of *Srbska klasna lutrija* (Serbian class lottery) had been in play since 1946; initially, only material prizes were allowed (Mihelič, 1994: 233). However, such restrictions were soon lifted and, from the 1960s onwards, cash prizes were also allowed. Yugoslavia, too, saw cases like that of the British Museum, when funds from the lottery were used to fund cultural infrastructure. The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Koroška (KGLU) is one such example: authorised by the competent political bodies, the Art Pavilion, as the museum was called at the time, organised a lottery in 1967 to fund the completion and interior design and appointments of the museum. Lutter (32) points out the key difference between the early lotteries and their contemporary counterparts: lotteries were originally directly related to a certain project. The players were informed of the intended use of funds (that part not awarded as prizes); in so doing, the organisers appealed to people to buy lottery tickets to fund a project and thus contribute to the common good. “The lack of alternative methods of raising money for public purposes caused lotteries to be seen as a civic responsibility rather than a form of gambling or entertainment.” (Bobbitt: 2) In this sense, the lottery



was also seen as a softer form of taxation; Neary and Taylor (344) describe it as “voluntary taxation”.

As we indicated herein, the timeline from ancient thought to modernity runs in the direction of the rationalisation of the world in general, and thus also the rationalisation of probability. After the 17<sup>th</sup> century, probability became a numerical and statistical concept. On the other hand, a shift occurred in the perception of the role of the draw or lottery in society. While in antiquity the draw represented the institution of order in society—which was then regarded as irrational—we now observe just the opposite. The draw is now regarded as introducing the unforeseen, as introducing chance into rational society. This paradigmatic turn from the ancient perception of the draw to modernity and the contemporary consideration of the draw becomes very palpable in Borges’s work “The Lottery in Babylon”, in which the author writes that the lottery is “an interpolation of chance into the order of the universe.” This link between the introduction of chaos or chance, which in itself is a matter of statistical, measurable probability, into an orderly, quantified society can also be related to the paradoxical nature of capitalism as such, whose perfectly rational transactions conceal a magical core. The popular, widespread phenomenon of gambling coincided with the emergence and development of capitalism (Lutter: 33, Reith: 55). Geographically speaking, too, mass lotteries first developed in the most financially or economically developed regions of Europe: in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Netherlands and Italy certainly constituted such regions. But this expansion and spread of gambling in the 17<sup>th</sup> century also led to the development of speculation in financial markets. (Reith: 60) Benjamin (12) sees trading on the stock exchange as that which replaces gambling in the times of feudalism. Stock trading is a phenomenon that has become or been rendered absurd in the modern world—for the workings of financial markets and fluctuations in capital are largely rational, while at the same time are so complex that they verge on the magical, on the roll of the dice.

Simultaneously with the appearance of stock exchanges, a parallel system existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose constitutive element was grounded in the principle of the lottery, of the draw. This was the system of so-called lottery bonds. Lottery bonds can be seen as a combination of the lottery and market speculation, as a capitalist financial mechanism *par excellence*. Lottery bonds were issued and purchased within the frame of lottery loans (or lottery bonds, *Lotterie Anleihen*), which played a key role in the funding of large projects for which the investor (or the state) had not secured

sufficient funding. Lottery loans were based on the issuing of lottery bonds, which could also be traded. However, the ways in which individuals, the holders of these lottery bonds, could gain the rewards or returns on these bonds differed considerably. Lottery bonds were often divided into certain categories, the draws for these categories were held periodically, and the interest rate was determined on this basis. Compared to conventional bonds with a fixed interest rate, lottery bonds could return significantly higher incomes. In Slovenia, too, such loans existed as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several documents from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century testify to the taking out of such loans,<sup>2</sup> which were obviously widespread both at the state and municipal levels.

Lottery bonds were also a way of attracting smaller shareholders to help finance major projects. Records confirm that the system of lottery bonds was used to fund the construction of sections of railway in various parts of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The system of lottery bonds was also used to finance the construction of part of the Yugoslavian railway system, whose Serbian parts were built by the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is actually part of the Orient Express route, which ran through Belgrade. To finance the construction, Baron Hirsch, who was responsible for the construction, introduced the so-called *Türkenlose* lottery ticket. The bonds were a novelty in the financial market: as Hertner writes, they were bonds with an extremely low interest rate, only 3%, and the draw offering the biggest cash prizes was held every two months. The draws were held until 1875, when they were suspended due to the financial collapse of the Ottoman Empire, after which they were resumed in 1881. The payment of interest on these bonds was discontinued in 1876 (Hertner). Many problems and instances of speculation were associated with these bonds, for they were not traded in official stock markets, while the organisational structure of the draw was also a problem; for all bonds participated in the draw, including those that went unsold, so the chances of winning were extremely slim. Today we can read of just how widespread such a railway funding scheme was from a number of smaller newspaper articles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The stenographic minutes of the eleventh meeting of the Ljubljana Regional Assembly, dated 7 December 1872, highlight Ljubljana's lottery bonds as the first item on the meeting's agenda; the newspaper *Novice gospodarske, obertniške in narodne* from 1855 (27 January) reports about the state debt in Vienna, from which it can be discerned that the state also had the so-called lottery bonds in 1954 (see p. 32); *Novice gospodarske, obertniške in narodne* from 1860 (28 march, p. 103) report about a new loan combined with the lottery.

<sup>3</sup> *Railway Times*, July 17, 1869, page 692: "Turkey – Arrangements for the issue of bonds for construction of a network of railways in European Turkey are stated to be nearly complete. It is intended to issue two kinds of bonds. The first based upon a guarantee from the Lombardo-Venetian, is to consist of 600,000 lottery bonds of 100 forints each, with lottery

An ambivalent attitude to gambling started manifesting itself very early on, and resulted in numerous restrictions and outright prohibitions against gambling, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>4</sup> The state sought to have a monopoly on this source of income, hence it was mainly other—non-state or foreign—lotteries that were prohibited. (Lutter: 45) Most types of mass gambling, the lottery the most widespread among them, were taken over by the state authorities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The reasons for prohibiting gambling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century vary, but the popularity of gambling and its widespread prevalence had gone so far that, as Mihelič (1994: 222) reports, the passion for gambling “often destroyed affluent middle classes.” One reason, however, was pressure from the bourgeoisie: by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the basic ideological assumptions on which social stratification was based had come undone, and aspirations of greater social mobility were emerging that were still all but impossible. The aforementioned bans on the lottery may then have been related to this: for the very idea of class mobility was inconsistent with the values of the bourgeoisie, who wanted to impose their values of hard work and material abstinence on the poorer strata of the population (Reith: 57). None of these bans lasted particularly long, however, as yields from the lottery were simply too tempting for states to be able to resist.

Another reason for the great popularity of the lottery and other types of mass gambling also lies in the fact that the very mechanism of the lottery has other political implications, in the sense of it serving as a tool with which to preserve social peace or certain relations of power. Orwell (85) writes:

The Lottery, with its weekly pay-out of enormous prizes, was the one public event to which the proles paid serious attention. It was

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prizes after the manner of the Austrian Credit Lottery Bonds. They are to be put forth by the Anglo-Austrian Bank at 87 forints per bond, with installments spread over two years. The second issue is to be for a nominal amount of francs 264,000,000f. in 650,000 bonds of 400f each, bearing 12f. interest per annum, and having four drawings annually, at each of which there are to be two prizes of 400,000f and two prizes of 200,000f. The bonds are to be absolutely guaranteed by the Turkish Government in a form similar to that of the existing Russian Railway bond.”

<sup>4</sup>In Great Britain, state lotteries were banned in 1826 (Richards: 198); in the colonies, they were prohibited as early as 1770, but there existed underground lotteries, which, among other things, funded the American war for independence (Bobbitt: 2). Mihelič (2004: 181) writes about the prohibition of gambling in the territories of Germany and Austria in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup>In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the lottery was introduced by the Empress Maria Theresa in 1751 and 1752; after 1788, the monarchy had the monopoly on its organisation (Lutter, 2010: 42); see also Mihelič (1994), who reports that the Emperor Joseph II decided that the lottery was state-owned and no longer private.

probable that there were some millions of proles for whom the Lottery was the principal if not the only reason for remaining alive. It was their delight, their folly, their anodyne, their intellectual stimulant.

Balzac's (38–39) thoughts on this are very similar:

The passion for lotteries, so universally condemned, has never been studied. No one realized that it was the opium of poverty. The lottery was the most powerful fairy in the world: did it not nurture magical hopes? The spin of the roulette wheel, which flashed masses of gold and enjoyment before the gambler's eyes, was as rapid as lightning; but the lottery gave five whole days of existence to this splendid lightning flash. Where is there today a social power that, for a mere forty sous, can keep you happy for five days and provide you with all the delights of civilisation in an ideal form?

Orwell describes the lottery as madness, joy, emollient, stimulant. Balzac describes it as passion, paraphrasing Marx and calling it the opium of poverty. In short, these descriptions depict the lottery as a mechanism that offers people an escape from reality. Both descriptions, however, focus on portraying the impact of the lottery on people, especially on the individual, whereas Marx also describes its negative implications for society as such. In his text "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx writes: "On the one hand, golden dreams were to supplant the socialist dreams of the Paris proletariat, the seductive prospect of the first prize the doctrinaire right to work." (Marx) The passage refers to a lottery organised by Louis Bonaparte. In the text, Marx attacks it as a fraud and points out that the lottery is a mechanism displacing the socialist dream of the Paris proletariat. Here, we see the germ of the position on gambling that was later to develop in Marxist theory. Frey (112) argues that gambling functions as a safety valve, thereby preventing the emergence of revolutionary class consciousness, as it promises the individual the possibility of upward social mobility. Similarly, Nimber (326) argues that, in the modern era, where there is no economic security, the lottery represents the possibility of economic progress and, at the same time, it deflects people's attention from their miserable everyday life, and reduces the potential threat of a mass uprising. This aspect of the pacifying or passivisation of certain social groups effected by the lottery can be explained both in terms of Bloch's concept of abstract utopia, as well as in terms of Mannheim's concept of ideology.

In his extensive work *The Principle of Hope* (Das Prinzip Hoff-

nung), published in 1954, 1955 and 1959, Ernst Bloch attempts to reanimate the concept of utopia in the light of Marxism. Generally speaking, utopia represents the dream of a better life. For Bloch, utopia is more complex, and related to both desire and hope. Hope, however, is not just an emotional category, but a “directing act of a cognitive kind” (Bloch, 1996: 12). He sees utopia as something that extends beyond the existing reality and represents what we desire. In his definition of utopia, Bloch introduces a distinction between the concepts of abstract and concrete utopia.<sup>6</sup> Concrete utopia, for Bloch, is the bearer of hope, it is anticipatory, a “practice-oriented category” (Levitas: 15). Concrete utopia refers to the idea of anticipatory illumination (*Vor-Schein*) on the horizon of any reality, a “real possibility surrounding open dialectical tendencies and latencies” (1996b: 623<sup>7</sup>). Bloch does not see the world as given, but rather as something always in the process of becoming—the future is related to different possibilities. And utopia is directed towards the future and, in a way, anticipates it and thus co-creates it. In contrast to concrete utopia, abstract utopia has no relation to reality, that is, to a real sociopolitical situation; it is unhistorical, undialectical, abstract and static (Bloch, 1996b: 579). For Bloch, abstract utopia represents desire, but it is a desire without the will to bring about its fulfilment, it is a compensatory desire; which means that by contemplating abstract utopia, the individual dreams of a different future. Often, this future does not involve a change of the system (and if it does, the system is unattainable), but only a change of the position of the individual within this system—such as, for instance, when someone wins the lottery (Levitas: 15). The lottery can thus be defined as a system that fuels the individual’s desire for change in one’s social position by allowing him to dream about a gain, usually a cash prize. By buying a lottery ticket, the individual thus effectively compensates their desire for social change. Bloch (1996a: 443) thus defines the human desire for money as the little man’s desire. In this case, then, the individual’s desire, which is in no way related to the broader social context. In this sense then, the lottery can be defined as anchored within the category of abstract utopia.

Furthermore, the lottery can also be related to Mannheim’s definition of ideology in relation to utopia. Mannheim positions utopia and ide-

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<sup>6</sup> To a large extent, this distinction is problematic, for these are idealised categories that do not exist in this absolute form in reality; one always contains elements of the other, and vice versa.

<sup>7</sup> “There is processive-concrete utopia in both basic elements of the reality discerned by Marxism: in its tendency, the tension of what is due though hindered, and in its latency, the correlate of the not yet realized objective-real possibilities in the world.” (Bloch, 1996b: 623)

ology in a complex relationship: he describes ideology as a set of ideas and beliefs that serve the preservation of a social system and its relations (Mannheim: 175), whereas utopia is the opposite of this, and is geared towards changing the existing order. At this point a link is established between the concepts of abstract utopia and ideology and the social implications of the lottery as such. The lottery and other mass types of gambling that promise the individual wealth and upward social mobility have no political potential, for they are related, above all, to abstract utopia, as well as to ideology as defined by Mannheim. In this context, in which we have already indicated a concrete connection between the emergence of mass gambling and the parallel development of capitalism, accompanied by a gradual shift of gambling, which was initially reserved for the wealthier layers of society, to the lowest strata of the population, we can argue that the potential of the lottery is primarily anti-emancipatory, for it promises change for the individual and not society in general.

In the context of the historical view of the lottery as a mechanism that encouraged the individual to assume social responsibility, this argument does not stand up entirely. The lottery in the form of funding humanitarian, cultural and infrastructural projects can be, in a certain way, a carrier of potential for political change. Thus, we can discern two sides of the lottery's social role. On the one hand, the lottery is a mechanism that functions predominantly as a safety valve that diverts social tensions; on the other it preserves in some way the germ of hope, that is, it appeals to the individual's ability to contemplate a different reality, and is related to the mobilisation of desire, which can be explained with the relationship between concrete and abstract utopia as defined by Bloch. Bloch argues that, through a dialectical relation between reason and passion, the individual can come to conceive of concrete utopia, and he calls this process *docta spes*, that is, educated hope. (Levitas: 16) This process represents the transformation of the so-called wishful thinking into wilful acting (Levitas: 20). In the context of the relation between abstract and concrete utopia, *docta spes* represents the extraction of concrete utopia from abstract utopia.

Like Bloch, Laclau (43) also points out that hope is an integral part of society, and without hope society cannot exist, for no society can accept what exists at the moment; as a consequence, hope is related to every form of social mobilisation and human emancipation (41). Referring to the collapse of the great utopias of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Laclau explains that the very concept of hope has changed. In the past, hope was related to universal goals, to freedom, an ideal society. Since this hope, which was marked by

the category of universality, did not yield the desired results and all great utopian projects that developed from these universal premises in the 20<sup>th</sup> century degenerated into dystopias, we need to direct aspire, as Laclau (44) says, towards more particular goals with real social potential. This, then, is a similar process to the concretisation of utopia, which is no longer general and universal but rather related to a specific social context.

Unfortunately, hope today is something that exists on the margins and serves as a tool for the mobilisation of the most marginalised social groups and individuals fighting for survival. Hope is related to, is the journey of people from war zones in the Middle East to Europe. Sadly, this hope all too often literally turns into a lottery, in which various prizes are up for grabs, the same way they are in Borges's "Lottery in Babylon": from a better life in a foreign country to endless bureaucratic procedures, to death on the way. Everything is possible: as Borges writes, "... I have been pro-consul; like all, I have been a slave. I have known omnipotence, ignominy, imprisonment".

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Anja Golob

## WHAT IS HAPPINESS

Somebody has tied it,

it may not necessarily hold,  
a long pole onto the roof of the car  
accelerating round the bend.

The human, a fallible  
creature, ties up  
a seemingly benign pole.  
If it had been tied by god,  
would we be absolutely certain  
of avoiding the imminent accident?

Somebody has tied it,

it may not necessarily hold,  
a strong rope around a long pole

which strong hands  
fastened vertically into the metallic  
supports.  
If it had been tied by god, would god  
really have wanted to tie the rope  
so it dangled from the pole?

Somebody has tied it,

it may not necessarily hold,  
a wooden discus to the end of the rope  
with a hole in the middle.  
If it had been tied by god, would he not,  
practical as only god can be,  
only have tied a thick knot  
instead?

Everything has held—  
the pole, the rope, the discus and the human.  
Absorbed in thought in the first light of summer  
dusk,  
in the corner of the backyard,  
on the new swing, a little boy is whistling.  
With dear god rocking alongside,  
humming cheerfully in  
the same rhythm. Everything is standing still,  
in this tiny moment,  
for a tiny moment,  
a tiny boy is  
rocking back and forth  
the entire endless  
universe —

well, this is Happiness.

## SIX FRAGMENTS ON THE LOTTERY

### 1.

During the final years of socialist Yugoslavia, where Nika Autor spent her childhood, a slogan by Edvard Kardelj, revolutionary and the author/theorist behind socialist self-management, was very popular. Kardelj wrote it shortly before his death, in the opening of his book *The Paths of Development of the Political System of Socialist Self-Management* (Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja, 1977), a kind of popular summary of his life's work, which on the one hand offered some highly optimistic commentary on the final acts of building a political system, which on the other hand revealed a certain resignation and anxiety fuelled by the premonition that this extremely complex system was already starting to collapse at very the moment of its completion. Kardelj, suffering grave personal misfortunes of his own at the time, declares: "One cannot reach happiness through the state or the system or the political party. One can only reach happiness through oneself."

And he adds:

However, not by oneself alone, but rather through relations of equality among people. /.../ The avantgarde forces of socialism and socialist society, then, have but one goal – to create the conditions in which, given the possibilities of the given historical moment, a person is as free as possible in such personal expression and creativity to be able, on the basis of social ownership, to work freely and create their own happiness.

In the context of considering revolutionary politics, Kardelj's statement about happiness represents great sacrifice: the renouncement of happiness as a political category, which ever since Saint-Just had been crucial to making sense of revolutionary politics—and which is making a comeback today, as we see in Badiou's *Metaphysics of Real Happiness* (*Métaphysique du bonheur réel*). To be sure, following this sacrifice, Kardelj re-establishes a link between politics and achieving happiness as something exterior to itself—but here, happiness has a different meaning. This is the double meaning of *sreča*, the word for happiness in Slovenian, which was

Kardelj's mother tongue: the duality of happiness as the condition of the subject and happiness as a result of external circumstances of one sort or another.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning changes already between the first and the second sentence—a happiness that one cannot reach through the state, the system or the party is a happiness as the condition of the subject, with which the self-reflexivity of revolutionary politics had made sense of this politics ever since Saint-Just, whereas happiness achieved by someone themselves is happiness that we know from the Slovenian saying "Vsak je svoje sreče kovač" ("Every person is the architect of their own happiness/fortune"), which derives from the antique Latin saying by Appius Claudius Cæcus "Faber est suæ cuiusque fortune". This saying tries, just like Kardelj, to convince us that we can manage ourselves—but in relation to a happiness that depends on external circumstances, this process of persuasion is necessary because the word as such carries a meaning that is essentially related to chance. This is the meaning of the word *sreča* that the *Dictionary of Slovenian Literary Language* defines as "chance, the circumstances that affect a favourable course of development". We can work and create for a happiness that is related to a favourable course of development, but in its pure form such happiness, such luck, occurs somewhere else, in the field described in Slovenian as *srečelov* (a lottery, literally "pursuit of happiness"), where happiness can be obtained by purchasing a *srečka* (lottery ticket, literally "happy ticket"). (It was precisely the uneasiness that came with the idea of someone winning the lottery being called a *hereux* that inspired Swiss protestant theologian Jena Leclerc to start developing a theory of the lottery; in 1696, he published a book on the lottery, in which he considered the association of such monetary gains with the notion of happiness highly problematic.)

When happiness as the condition of the subject ceases to be a political category it makes room for happiness as something we forge, but in pure form it appears elsewhere—in something that is related to chance. In this text, I wish to demonstrate that we should strive, urgently, to think of this second kind of happiness, too, as a political category.

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<sup>1</sup> *Translator's note:* To capture perfectly the duality of the Slovenian word *sreča*, it would need to be translated as *happiness* (the first meaning) and *fortune* (the second meaning).

## 2.

A search for the origins of the lottery presents a variety of views on where it began; the earliest beginnings can be traced back to the Bible, but it certainly developed in ancient Rome. Its first particularly popular appearance is related to the most eccentric Roman emperor Heliogabalus—and next year marks a full 1800 years since his inauguration. Heliogabalus's lottery, as described by Ælius Lampridius, was not limited to cash prizes, and as peculiar by virtue of its including certain worthless prizes: ten flies, the carcass of a dog—even penalties were included among the prizes. In his book *Nature and Uses of Lotteries* (1619), English theologian Thomas Gataker wrote about Heliogabalus and his lottery: "Others received as their lottery a result which made many rich that were poor before and others as poor that were rich before. This monster delighted in nothing more than in mischief and miseries of the many."

This was no mere detail in the collection of Heliogabalus's excesses; the implementation of the lottery as a principle can be viewed in conjunction with the emperor's attempt to subvert social relations and give them a different foundation: emblematic of this is the emperor's selection of state administrators on the basis of the length of their sexual organs.

In his famous book, Antonin Artaud describes Heliogabalus as "the crowned anarchist". It is Artaud's thesis that the emperor's excesses—he came to Rome in 218, having travelled from Syria across the Balkans (and thus, very likely, through Slovenia) in an eccentric procession in which thirty bulls pulled a cart carrying a huge black stone weighing ten tons from Emesa (present-day Homs)—were never blind provocations, but rather systematic and methodical subversions of the existing social logic, its mores and values. Allegedly, the emperor was acting in accordance with his mystical belief that he was the sun god incarnate.

In his book, Artaud writes with quivering zeal about mystical sacrifices, whose destruction of particularity affirms Oneness. However, is this really subversion of the existing social logic? Aren't such excesses precisely its driving force? Isn't the sacrifice of particularity to Oneness precisely the fundamental principle of perpetuating the existing world? What if the Heliogabalic systematic destruction of everything in fact drives a mechanism that perpetuates all that actually exists?

Speaking of anarchy, perhaps the key insight here concerns the turn performed by Lenin, who did not consider anarchy the ideal counterpart to the existing society but rather its brutal foundation, when he wrote that

capitalism = anarchy + private ownership.

In this sense, the principle of the lottery, seemingly undermining the established order of socio-economic relations, could also be seen as a summary of this order. Walter Benjamin points out that, in 19<sup>th</sup> century-Paris, the stock market game replaced forms of gambling that had been inherited from the days of feudalism. In both cases, it is a game. Paul Lafargue, quoted by Benjamin, understood a game as a miniature depiction of conjuncture. And perhaps we can see the principle of the lottery as a depiction of the essence of the stock market game.

But this about more than just economy: the element of the game, in which chance is decisive, is inherent in the very essence of democracy. Election results acquire the effect of urgency from the very moment of chance that is inscribed in them. The starting point of these procedures is the draw. It is only the uncertainty of leaving social destiny to game that gives the people's vote the effect of objectivity analogous to the divine judgements of the Middle Ages.

The sense of freedom experienced by the participants derives precisely from this entrapment: this is the concept of freedom that is based on ignorance; the sense of freedom I have because I am not aware of my own determination. The sense of free choice in democracy derives precisely from a consent to the sense of freedom that arises from the fact that I have no access to divine knowledge; if I had access to divine knowledge, chance would not be chance and would thus lose its numinous power.

The sense of freedom allegedly afforded by the game of democracy lies in the fact that, in democracy, the individual is thought to be freely deciding on outcomes that the individual cannot change by themselves. For the individual, the relation between the options from which they choose on the ballot paper and the ultimate outcome is analogous to the relation between the numbers on one's lottery ticket and the drawn, winning combination. Of course, there is an enormous difference between the two games as regards the likelihood of coincidence between what is on paper and the outcome. And if the individual filling in the ballot form feels freedom in doing so, this only confirms that their sense of freedom is conditioned upon them having no access to any divine knowledge as to the outcome of the results; whereas the sense of freedom experienced by the individual filling in their lottery ticket derives from the fact that the individual aims to figure out the mysterious mechanism of determination.

(It is no coincidence that the theory of the lottery first attracted

theologians; the abovementioned Leclerc and Gataker were both theologians.)

However, this mechanism reveals itself as a truly determinative process precisely in that it intervenes in the search for the mysterious mechanism of determination as chance; this is the subject of one of the miniature masterpieces of Slovenian 19<sup>th</sup> century prose, *The Teacher of Jeprca* (Jeprški učitelj) by Simon Jenko. Using a cabalistically complex method based on lunar cycles (but also including several other elements), the village teacher calculates numbers that are supposed to win the lottery; his neighbour, who is trying to calculate these numbers using the very same method, wins the lottery because he makes a mistake in his calculations.

### 3.

Jorge Luis Borges intuited that Heliogabalus's concept of the lottery, which is not limited to cash prizes and where wins can also mean losses, contains an idea that in itself can serve as a starting point for a social order. The first-person narrator of his short story *The Lottery in Babylon* says (all quotes are from the English translation by Andrew Hurley, published by Penguin in 1998):

Some distorted echo of our custom seems to have reached the Tiber: In his *Life of Antoninus Heliogabalus*, Aelius Lampridius tells us that the emperor wrote out on seashells the fate that he intended for his guests at dinner—some would receive ten pounds of gold; others, ten houseflies, ten dormice, ten bears. It is fair to recall that Heliogabalus was raised in Asia Minor, among the priests of his eponymous god.

Borges's Babylonian lottery, in relation to which Heliogabalus's lottery is thus just a distorted echo, is exceptional because it functions as a principle for the whole of social organisation. All of the roles performed by the people of this society are assigned time and again by a draw. Borges also describes the history of this arrangement: the lottery starts developing from an ordinary plebeian game into the principle of social organisation in the very moment that wins can also bring losses, and when the lottery prizes are no longer limited to money. In the end, all of society is organised in such a way that all its members are automatically and constantly included in the system of draws.

The narrator says:



Like all the men of Babylon, I have been proconsul; like all, I have been a slave. I have known omnipotence, ignominy, imprisonment. Look here—my right hand has no index finger. Look here—through this gash in my cape you can see on my stomach a crimson tattoo—it is the second letter, Beth. On nights when the moon is full, this symbol gives me power over men with the mark of Gimel, but it subjects me to those with the Aleph, who on nights when there is no moon owe obedience to those marked with the Gimel. In the half-light of dawn, in a cellar, standing before a black altar, I have slit the throats of sacred bulls. Once, for an entire lunar year, I was declared invisible—I would cry out and no one would heed my call, I would steal bread and not be beheaded. I have known that thing the Greeks knew not—uncertainty. In a chamber of brass, as I faced the strangler's silent scarf, hope did not abandon me; in the river of delights, panic has not failed me. Heraclides Ponticus reports, admiringly, that Pythagoras recalled having been Pyrrhus, and before that, Euphorbus, and before that, some other mortal; in order to recall similar vicissitudes, I have no need of death, nor even of imposture.

What is striking about this system is the way it seems, at first sight, diametrically opposed to all of the principles of any known social organisations. With its radical element, it appears to undo all social ties—but the relations of the society thus perpetuated are remarkably solid, precisely in this respect. Even more, extreme egalitarianism is established in this society; however, the society as such keeps the social hierarchy intact. There exists a fluidity of exchange of social identities, which fixes these identities.

In the image of the diametric opposite of all existing societies, the image of the existing manifests itself—and in the systemic element of change that fixes the existing in the fluidity of exchange, we recognise the fundamental principle inherent to the functioning of capitalism.

In this short story, the lottery is described as “an intensification of chance, a periodic infusion of chaos into the cosmos.” This sounds a bit bizarre, for chance is the fundamental principle in the social organisation of Babylon; order exists only as the effect of chance. However, it is precisely the belief in the existence of chance that makes it possible for us to believe in the existence of order, from which chance differs (in the case of Babylon, society as such constitutes this order in relation to all procedures on which it is based). If we had divine knowledge and we could recognise chance in

its absolute urgency, we would achieve, arrive at total openness to chaos.

At the same time, when belief in chance implies belief in order, it is precisely this belief that gives chance the divine authority of inevitable order. It is not only that the systemic element of chance provides society with fixity; in its organisation, the very belief in the existence of the moment of chance makes it possible to justify systemic crimes. Both the concept of human freedom and the concept of human innocence are based on ignorance. Killing someone in a war is not considered a crime, whereas a planned execution of a particular person arouses a sense of horror—precisely because, in the first case, the decision is attributed to chance as the authority of order.

Nothing fixes the *status quo* more than chance and unpredictability.

#### 4.

The attempt to curb the lottery's chance with rational logic can be seen as the Enlightenment position in relation to the lottery. In this respect, Voltaire's experience is informative.

Voltaire made a fortune with the lottery. When the French state, hoping to save its finances, bought the entire bond issue by the Municipality of Paris, it paid for the bonds from proceeds of the lottery on which the bonds were drawn, and in which only holders of said bonds could participate. When Voltaire, one of the holders of these bonds, found out about the rules of this unusual lottery, he consulted mathematician and scientist Charles-Marie de La Condaminom: what would happen if someone bought all the bonds as soon as they were issued? They organised a larger group of people, who then actually won one million francs in every draw and shared the money among themselves. When the authorities realised it was always the same group of people winning the lottery, they changed the rules; they then abandoned the lottery altogether because it was so poorly conceived. But according to some estimates, Voltaire had by then already won half a million francs.

Here, we see the concept of a relationship among people who use rational calculation to bypass the functioning of chance to change its effect into something that is no longer chance. Yet, the logic of chance as such remains unconsidered. Voltaire made a fortune with the lottery; however, in so doing he gained no clearer understanding of the very mechanism of chance. He knew that the purchased bonds would win, but he did not

know which ones; he took advantage of chance by sidestepping it and relying on that which cannot be coincidence.

## 5.

But art: in what relation to the logic of the lottery does art take place?

The first question raised concerns artists: do they participate in an existing lottery or organise one themselves?

Stendhal famously said that, as regards posthumous fame, the writer's lot is the same as that of people who play the lottery: they can never know which ones among them will be recognised by future generations.

Later, Marcel Duchamp, unlike anyone before, explored chance at the heart of what is said to constitute the scientifically measurable order of the world (just recall his definition of his own units of measure based on chance, which, in relation to conventional units of measure, is not just a gesture of subversion but also an affirmative presentation of the logic that produced these units). Duchamp compared artists to the gamblers at a casino in Monte Carlo: the lottery, with its blindness, makes some people stand out while the rest fail. But for Duchamp, who in 1924 created an artwork called the *Monte Carlo Bond*, this statement was not an expression of resignation. In a letter to Jacques Doucet, he wrote that he wanted to force the game of roulette to become a game of chess.

In his last televised interview in 1968 he was asked if he thought chance was something that artists projected onto their work, to which he responded:

Yes, because chance cannot be ignored. We do not know the outcome of chance because we do not have enough intelligence for that. What I mean is that, for instance, some divine brain could easily think: "There is no chance, I know what is going to happen." We know no such thing, because we are too ignorant to be capable of understanding what chance might bring. This, then, is a sort of worship of chance; chance is understood as a religious or almost religious element. So it is very interesting that it has been introduced, put in the service of artistic creativity.

Not ignoring but acknowledging chance means not ignoring, acknowledging one's own ignorance. For us, chance functions like a divine authority only because we ourselves possess no divine understanding; the

religious instance is a sign of the absence of divine understanding. But it can't be eliminated by human understanding, it can only be eliminated by divine understanding. Duchamp does not reconcile himself to the fact that we do not have enough intelligence. Instead, he keeps striving to increase intelligence. In the cited statement, he performs a turn in relation to the logic of religious art: here, art is not in the service of religion, but rather takes chance, as a religious moment, into its service and, precisely by treating it as chance, transforms it into something that is no longer random.

**6.**

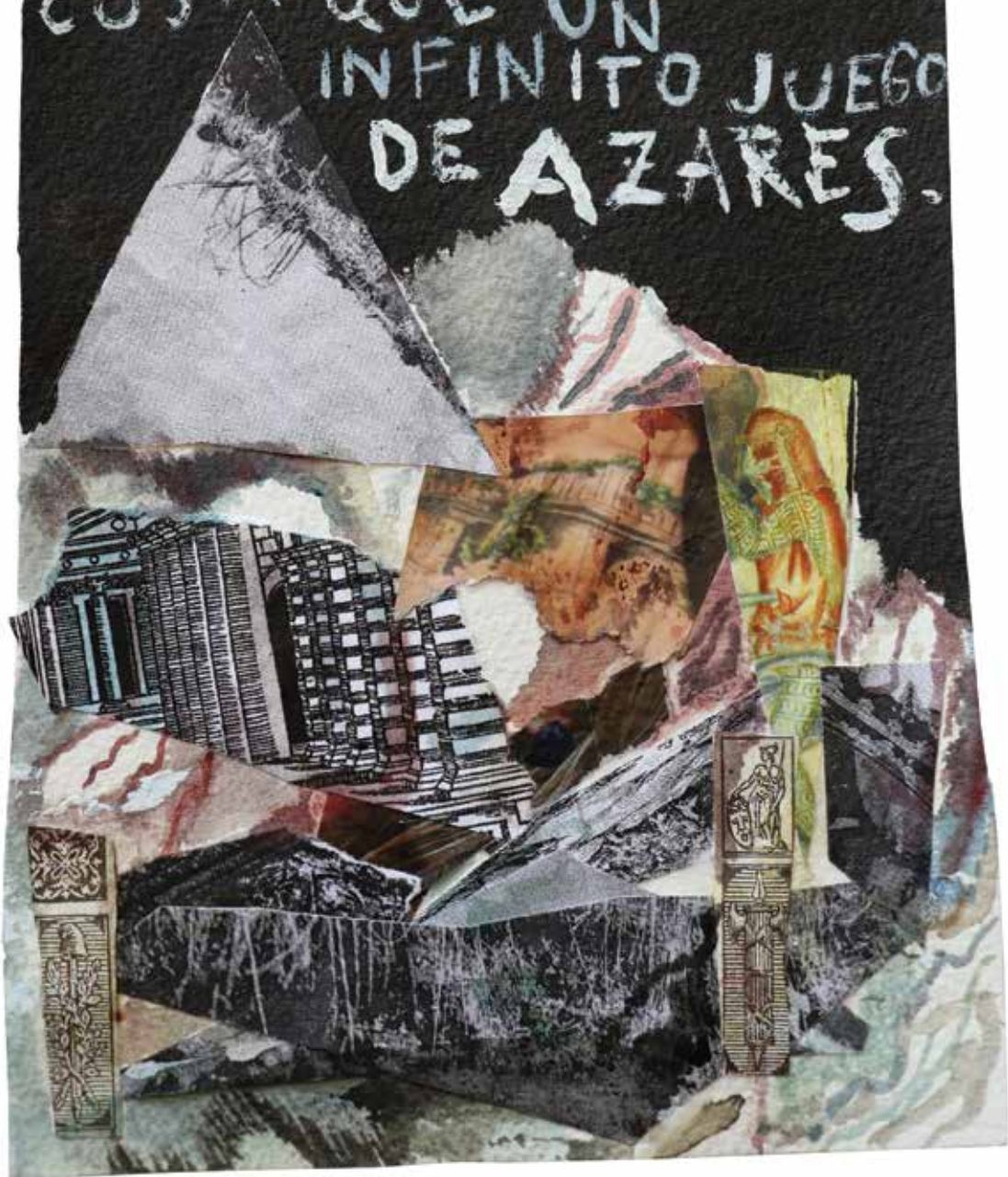
Chance has never annulled the throw of the dice.



LOI DU 6 JUIN 1793, L'AN DEUX XXV DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

Domaines nationaux.

PORQUE BABILO-  
NIA NO ES OTRA  
COSA QUE UN  
INFINITO JUEGO  
DE AZARES.





من آن روز  
بودم که اسما  
نیود



## REELING TRUTH

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
(Yeats: *The Second Coming*, 1919)

When William Butler Yeats wrote these lines the world was only just emerging from the unprecedented catastrophe of the First World War. All of a sudden intellectuals and artists were obliged to face reality: the rationalist myth of progress was crumbling, the falsity of the modern promise had been, indeed lay exposed.

The ceremony of innocence is drowned, said the poet: 100 years have passed, more or less, and we are compelled to repeat those words—with a remarkable difference. In the age of Yeats, in the wake of a world war, of Russian revolution and the Congress of Versailles, some sense of ideological hope was still alive, despite the horrors of real history, and faith in the future was stronger than ever before. Communism and Fascism were emerging on the horizon of the new century, promising a future of heroism, glory and justice. Democracy was a novel political discovery enlightened politicians developed and fostered as an alternative to totalitarianism.

Even in the darkest days of the Second World War, in the fog of incendiary explosions, in the mud of the trenches, opposing soldiers still looked forward to a dawn of peace and of progress.

Can we say the same today, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

No, we cannot. The very nature of the future has changed: what was once a promise is now a threat.

Between the years 1900 and 2000 the world's population increase was three times greater than the entire previous history of humanity, with the



world's population increasing from 1.5 billion to more than 7 billion. And the majority of the world's population is no longer starving, thanks to advancements in industry and agriculture. War, however, has become a permanent state in a large part of the world. Devastation of the natural environment seems both irreversible and unstoppable. And, most importantly, as we look forward into the future we do not expect our old ideals of justice and similar to be reinstated, nor the promise of a better future. In the best-case scenarios we expect to avoid the final holocaust of a nuclear war.

The age of innocence is over, as the ceremony of innocence has been drowned.

Innocent migrant people fleeing war and starvation are drowning in the Mediterranean, and all around the coast fences, walls and concentration camps are in the process of construction.

Meanwhile, the artists of our time are documenting and meditating on the prevailing sentiment that is hopelessness: some of them do so with a sense of cynicism, some with a tortured sense of impotent rage, some with ironic detachment.

In the past decades the space of art has come to mingle with the space of media-activism. Art-activists are those artists who deal, work with information and images of exploitation, violence and rebellion in order to spread the idea of the impossible, intolerable effects of capitalism.

### **White Noise and Media Activism**

Throughout my life I have taken part in various experiences of media-activism: the creation of independent Italian radio in the 1970s, and the global movement for social justice following the Seattle riots of 1999. The former was essentially aimed at expressing those social demands and cultural values that did not have a voice in the larger media landscape. The radio fanzines and street-television created by the activists gave way to a type of autonomous communication, and fuelled the process of the self-organisation of social subjects against economic and political power.

The second experience, which is still in full swing, is more difficult to define, because thanks to the Internet the sphere of social communication has become incredibly crowded, so much so that it has the effect of generating a kind of white noise. Information overload has replaced the monopolistic character of communication, and compulsive expression has replaced

repression. Art-activism deals with precisely this cultural landscape: the newsreel, a short motion picture presenting current events in a critical way, is part of this phenomenon of media-artivism.

As the word “reel” refers to a sort of swirl, of a dizzying spin, the newsreel involves not only information, but also a sense of disorientation that the contemporary info- sphere brings about, and a consciousness of the intrinsic contradiction that belongs to contemporary media-artivism. On one hand, art-activists are trying to promote critical consciousness and political mobilisation, but on the other hand they have to remain conscious of the intrinsic contradiction in their actions: they are incrementally raising the volume of white noise that provokes the very effects of information overload and psycho-emotional stress.

Here we are faced with the rather ambiguous question of the relation between information and truth, one that assumed a highly prominent place during the American election process and culminated in the surprise election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States.

A large part of the press, public opinion, and intellectual circles in America and beyond have denounced the widespread use of so-called fake news during the campaign. This claim may be hard to refute, but my argument here is more subtle: can the propagation of fake news be considered something new and, more importantly, is it possible to reduce the complexity of the many factors leading up to the astonishing outcome of the American elections to the unethical behaviour of those (manipulators) who helped bring Trump to victory?

The answer, I would argue, is both yes and no.

### **Fake and True**

A few days after the American elections that led to Donald Trump becoming president, Paul Horner, a professional fabricator of hoaxes, credited himself in an interview with *The Washington Post* with being responsible for Trump’s victory.

“My sites were picked up by Trump supporters all the time. I think Trump is in the White House because of me. His followers don’t fact-check anything—they’ll post everything, believe anything.” (Caitlin Dewey: *Facebook fake-news writer: ‘I think Donald Trump is in the White House*

*because of me*, Washington Post, November 17, 2016)<sup>1</sup>

Horner is the man behind such viral headlines as “The Amish in America Commit their Vote to Donald Trump” and “President Obama Signs Executive Order Banning the National Anthem at all Sporting Events Nationwide”—neither of which were true.

Trump’s supporters were probably heartened in September, when, according to an article shared nearly a million times on Facebook, the candidate received an endorsement from Pope Francis. And their opinion of Hillary Clinton likely soured even further after reading a Denver Guardian article that also quickly spread on Facebook, which reported days before the election that an F.B.I. agent suspected of involvement in leaking Mrs. Clinton’s emails was found dead in an apparent murder-suicide. There was just one problem with these articles: they were completely fake. (Zeynep Tufekci: *Mark Zuckerberg is in Denial*, NYT, November 15, 2016)<sup>2</sup>

Commentators, journalists and politicians have blamed the increasing unreliability of media, widely denouncing the effects of false information on political life. Democratic commentators are appalled by the spread of fake news, and cling to the assumption that announcements and similar should be based on facts. However, it’s hard to say—what is a fact?

Some people have blamed Mark Zuckerberg for the role played by social media (and Facebook in particular) in the electoral contest. However it’s not clear what Zuckerberg should do: censor the news and comments that are don’t correspond to truth?

What is truth? And who’s to say what the difference is between false and true news, who’s to judge what are legitimate and what illegitimate comments?

Kenan Malik in the *New York Times* of December 5, 2016:

The panic about fake news has given fuel to the idea that we live in a “post-truth era”. The Oxford English Dictionary has even made post-truth its “word of the year”, defining it as “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” But the truth, if I may still use this word, is more complex than many allow. (*Gatekeepers and the rise of fake news*).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/11/17/facebook-fake-news-writer-i-think-donald-trump-is-in-the-white-house-because-of-me/?utm\\_term=.03f9a44878ef](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/11/17/facebook-fake-news-writer-i-think-donald-trump-is-in-the-white-house-because-of-me/?utm_term=.03f9a44878ef) (accessed on 24 March 2017).

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/mark-zuckerberg-is-in-denial.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/mark-zuckerberg-is-in-denial.html?_r=0) (accessed on 24 March 2017).

Power is no longer synonymous with reason and law. Power no longer commands silence. On the contrary, power is now the Master of Noise. The exercise of power is based on simulation and nervous hyperstimulation.

### **Post-truth**

The buzz about post-truth is in my opinion fundamentally flawed. The reason behind the massive shift toward nationalism and fascism is the failure of democracy in the age of neoliberal governance.

Democracy has proven impotent in countering financial predation, so impoverished workers are trying the other way: fascism. For a growing part of the Western population the point is not truth, the point is revenge. Trump is disgusting? Yes he is disgusting, and this is why the well-mannered centre-left politicians despise him—and so the white working people vote for him.

### **Extinction of the Critical Mind**

I don't deny that the volume of purely false information is growing, nor do I deny that it is detrimental to democracy and useful for the bad guys. But false information is nothing new in public discourse. What is new is the speed, the intensity and therefore the enormous amount of information (fake or otherwise) that our social minds are exposed to.

The acceleration of the infosphere, and the extreme intensification of the rhythm of nervous stimulation have saturated our attention and consequently compromised our critical skills.

Critical skills are not a natural given, but a product of intellectual evolution through history. The cognitive faculty we call "critique" only develops under special conditions.

Critique is an individual's ability to distinguish between true and false statements, as well as the ability to distinguish between good and evil acts.

In order to distinguish critically our minds need to process information in order to consider and decide. Criticality implies a rhythmic relation between information stimulus and elaboration time.

Beyond a certain level of intensity information is no longer received and interpreted as a complex set of statements. Rather it is perceived as a flow

of nervous stimulations; an emotional assault on the brain.

The critical faculty that was crucial in the formation of public opinion in the age of the modern bourgeoisie was the effect of a special relationship between the individual mind and the info-sphere, particularly the sphere consisting of printed media, books and public discussion.

The alphabetical mind was engaged to elaborate a slow flux of words sequentially disposed on the page, so public discourse was a space of conscious evaluation and critical discrimination, and political choice was based on critical assessment and ideological discernment.

The acceleration of info-flow led to the saturation of our attention, so that our ability to discriminate between what is true and what false becomes impossible; the storm of info-stimulation blurs our vision, and people come to wrap themselves up in networks of self-confirmation.

Twenty-five years ago our collective, cultural image of the net to come was based on the idea that this new dimension was destined to break down all the borders and enable a process of broad and free confrontation.

But we were only partially right (and wrong): the Internet has turned into a space where countless echo chambers reverberate, and always with the same message: competition, identity, aggressiveness.

As far as I understand it, the main problem of the contemporary mediascape is not the spread of fake news, but the decomposition of the critical mind, whose effects include facilitating gullibility amongst great crowds and the self-confirming aggressiveness of people everywhere.

Advertising, the distinctive language of the present mediascape, is not effective because it is built around truth or critical reception, but because it is based on the intensity of some nervous stimulation.

In the above-mentioned interview with the *Washington Post*, Horner offers:

“Honestly, people are definitely dumber. They just keep passing stuff around. Nobody fact-checks anything anymore—I mean, that’s how Trump got elected.”

The cultural regression of our time is not rooted in the excess of lies circulating in the infosphere. It is rather an effect of the inability of the social mind to elaborate critical distinctions, the inability of people to prioritise their own social experience and create a common pathway for autonomous subjectivation. This is why people vote for media-manipulators who in turn

only exploit them—particularly their gullibility.

### **Simulation as Fact**

What do we mean when we talk about reality, or “fact”?

Fact is that which has been created in the sphere of human convention, (*facere* is the Latin word for the verb “to make”). Fact is the product of the factual semiosis of men. And reality is the psychodynamic point of intersection of countless projections of simulation flows proceeding from human organisms and from semiotic machines.

“There is nothing more fictitious than reality,” Umberto Eco offers in an interview with Alex Coles entitled “Here I am, not a fiction” in the book *Design Fiction*. Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2016.

Reality does not antecede the act of semiosis nor of communication: reality is the construct that emerges from multiple subjectivities.

The subjectivity that prevails in shaping the institutions of common life, and more importantly the categories of interpretation (episteme) is the holder of power. However, dissident subjectivities emerge and act in a schismo-genetic way.

If God is dead, everything is possible—so says Dostoyevsky. And in our time proof of God’s death is everywhere. The logical succession of cause and effect is scrambled, and the foundations of truth are forgotten. So the ethical choice cannot be based on some theological certainty or some evident meaning of facts. Ethical choice is based on a conflict of sensibilities, and on the ironic consciousness of the relativity of our own simulation (project of reality).

Empathy is inherent in the ethical choice.

Truth, faith, and hope cannot ethically motivate our choices. Only empathy and solidarity can do this, and the sharing of pleasure and pain can act as a foundation for sceptical ethics, which is the only scheme that does not degenerate into dogmatism, conformism or violence.

In the modern times that are now behind us, we thought it was possible to distinguish and choose between good and evil, because social solidarity served as the foundation of common expectations (or if you like, common values).

No more, it seems.

Social solidarity has been jeopardised by rampant precarisation and by the all-encompassing cult of competition. So political action is impotent and ineffective. Political action was once based on the possibility of choosing, deciding and governing; now choice has been replaced by statistical forecasting, and the process of decision-making has been replaced by techno-linguistic automatisms, and government by automatic governance.

### **Dynamics of Humiliation**

So why did Donald Trump win the election, if not as a result of false news?

I think he won because people feel humiliated by the political disempowerment and social impoverishment that neoliberal capitalism and the neoliberal left have institutionalised.

What is humiliation?

Humiliation is when you demonstrate to a person the he/she does not live up to the image he or she has of him/herself.

The poor of the past did not feel humiliated by their condition. Naturally they felt poor, which in itself may be a bad thing, but the image they had of themselves was an image shaped by tradition, by the body of poor people one could encounter in the streets of one's village.

But the global village has changed the environment in which people shape the image of themselves, one in which they can imagine a biography of choice.

This may be a good thing or a bad thing. But it is surely a bad thing when the image advertised in the mediascape and promoted by the prevailing neoliberal ideology is based on competition and focused only on the winner/loser alternative.

Public discourse has eliminated the possibility of identifying as (one of the) exploited, as labourers that have common interests. So we can only identify as losers in the social game.

Being a loser is shameful, is socially stigmatised. Decades of globalisation did open up both a horizon and a game: the race for economic or financial success is now the only game in town.

However, in the decade that has followed the financial collapse of 2008 the horizon of global expansion has receded—now it is both retreating and

closing. Austerity is excluding a wide segment of the population from the race. But they're losers, anyway.

The self-image we have been led to construct is falling apart, and this failure is unchaining psycho-pathological demons.

Any attempts of the past decade to stop or hamper financial predation by political means have proven illusory. The autopilot of financial governance has blocked all of the ways out.

The majority of people (in the West) have been educated in the spirit-cult of winning and competition—now they have to face the reality of their own humiliation. Their self-image has been destroyed, and replaced by self-loathing. Self-loathing is the deeper motivation behind the present political trend toward national and racial aggressiveness.

At this point self-loathing becomes violent self-denial, and generates a sort of hyper-identification: identification with the humiliator.

It is not the incredible amount of lies perpetrated and propagated everywhere by the media machinery, but the psychotic dissociation of the American mind that explains Trump's victory, even though identification with the humiliator-in-chief provoked the majority of white Americans to vote for him.

False information helped support, indeed install the new president, but the secret of his victory doesn't lie here. Well before the campaign ever began people knew well who Donald Trump was, and who he's always been.

Some 61,900,651 people voted for someone, a character they had already known for years. Since 2004, the popular TV show *The Apprentice* has been helping millions of Americans become familiar with the man, with the face.

What is *The Apprentice*?

*The Apprentice* is a show that “depicts contestants from around the country with various professional backgrounds in an elimination-style competition to become an apprentice to a businessman.”

Trump is the boss who chooses one from among a body of competitors and fires the others, of course—and arrogance is his defining trait.

“The show led Trump to become known for his fateful catchphrase ‘You're Fired!’”

From the point of view of a labourer, the character personified by Trump in *The Apprentice*, (and in his private life, too, by the way) is the most



hideous—the boss who might enrich you or may also destroy your life, and in any case wants to humiliate you as an employee, as someone who is not a capitalist like him (who got his big capital head start from his father).

Millions of white labourers identified with the firer, with the racist who likes to humiliate others, and likes to do so in public. They did so because they want to forget who and what they are, they want to identify with a/ the winner, and because they are eager to identify an enemy who is weaker, and to humiliate him or her.

This is not an effect of fake news, this is the effect of deeply entrenched self-loathing, of psychotic dissociation and self-denial, and finally of identification with the humiliator, with the very person who is treating you like an idiot, like a piece of shit. The symbol of white supremacy is actually the symbol of the painful self-loathing that is torturing millions of losers in the US.

### **Dynamics of Revenge: National Workerism and Racial Warfare**

In what is not so very different from the Germany of 1933, the supporters of Trumpism around the world are those workers who have been betrayed by the reformist left that in the US and Europe implemented and enforced neoliberal “reforms”.

Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroeder, Massimo D'Alema and Matteo Renzi, Giorgio Napolitano, François Hollande, Manuel Valls. All delivered the government—and governance—of our lives to the to the corporations, and in so doing have opened the doors to the fascism that is now fast spreading, to the global civil war that now seems unstoppable.

In the United Kingdom and in Poland, in Hungary and Russia, and now in the United States, National-Workerism is the winner.

Globalisation is under threat, but the global corporations are not about to retreat, so we may be on the brink of a war in which modern civilisation as we know it would be largely dismantled.

In November 2016, *Zero Hedge*, the online journal for the more intellectually-inclined Trump supporters, published an article that perfectly synthesises and summarises what is now happening and anticipates what is to come.

The zombie economy is moribund, the productive people have been pillaged, and the bread and circus act is running on fumes.

The American welfare/warfare state is crumbling. The ruling elite is desperate. They don't want their Ponzi scheme to end, but they always fail. It's a confidence game, and the game is over. The economic crisis is foreseeable to anyone with their eyes open. This empire will crumble and fall, just as others before throughout history. /.../

This is a country truly divided, much along the lines of the first Civil War. The divisions aren't just along political party lines, but race, education, geography, gender, age, class, religion. /.../

The next financial collapse, which is baked into the cake, initiated by the policies designed to benefit the .1%, will push class warfare into the streets. (Tyler Durden: *Civil War II - Fourth Turning Is Intensifying (Part 2)*)<sup>3</sup>

The threat of racial warfare is entirely explicit, as socially-defeated white workers identify themselves as among the race of the winners.

Whites are also tired of the left wing politically correct phraseology that transforms an illegal immigrant into an undocumented immigrant. If you came here illegally, you broke the law, and you're a criminal. Deportation is the consequence of your crime. Opening our borders to an influx of illegal South American immigrants, potential Syrian terrorists, and others who don't believe in our values is a recipe for disaster. (*Zero Hedge*, November 2016).

Trump won because he represents a weapon in the hands of impoverished white workers in search of revenge.

Unfortunately this weapon will soon be turned against the workers themselves, and will lead them into racial warfare.

When you seek revenge, everything is a good channel with which to express your rage. Sometimes even suicide is a way of exacting revenge, and I think that white Americans workers have committed suicide.

The problem is that everybody on the planet will pay the harsh consequences of their mass suicide.

*March 2017*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2016-11-05/civil-war-ii-fourth-turning-intensifying-part-2> (accessed on 24 March 2017).



# 100-YEAR-OLD NEWSREEL

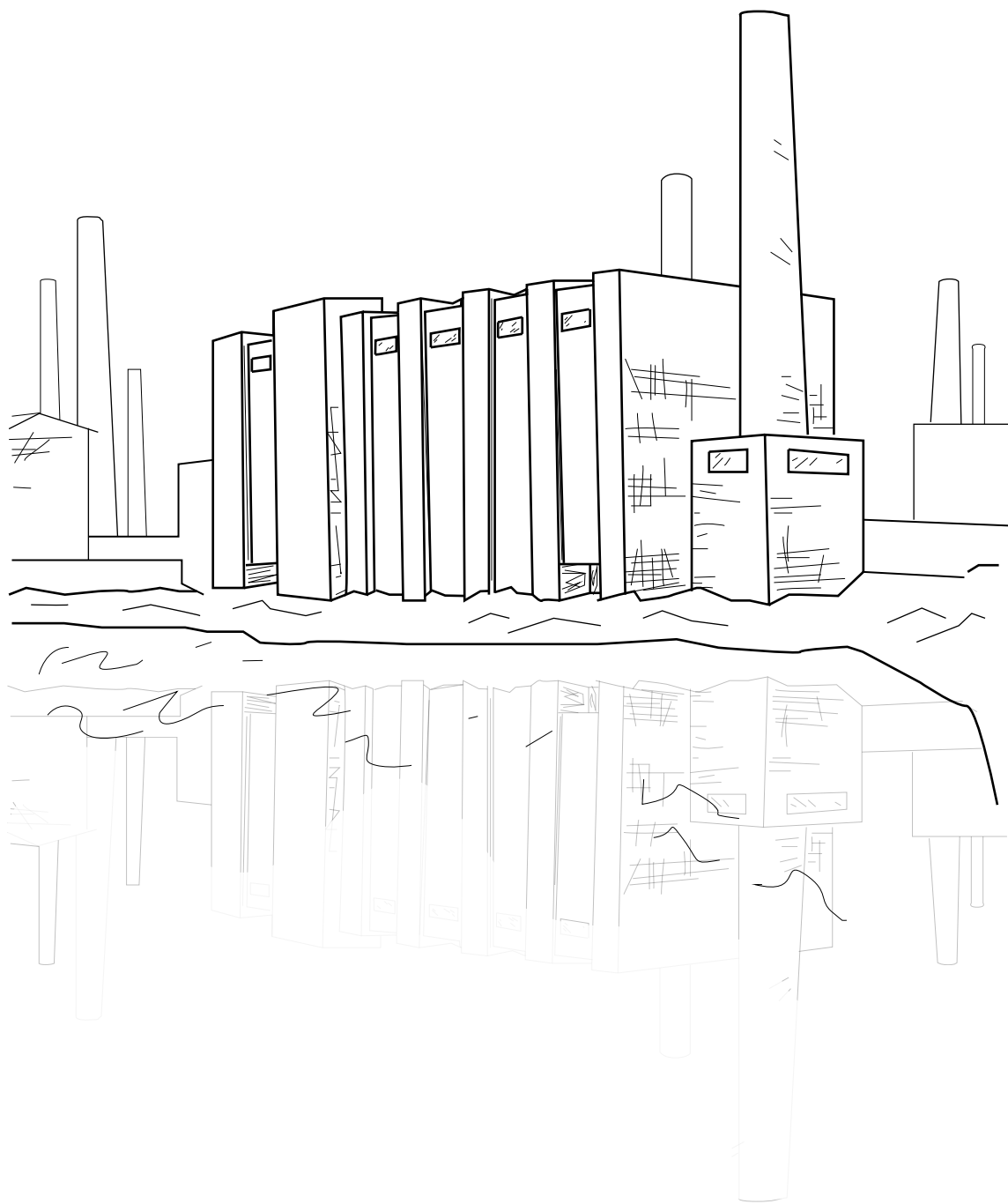
## 1914

A growing number of scientists  
Are warning  
That whales are being hunted to extinction

Modern technology  
Faster boats  
Exploding harpoons  
Rendering factories  
Colliding with globalism

The animals are being hunted from the south and the north  
The young are being killed along with parents  
The whales aren't reproducing as they should  
The young are disappearing from the sea

Scientists urgently seek permission from the whaling companies  
To study whale extinction  
They shall try and bite the hand that feeds them



**Sunday**  
**January 13**  
**1917**

We are nearing New York  
At 3 o'clock in the morning  
Everybody wakes up

We have stopped  
It is dark  
Cold  
Wind  
Rain

On land  
A wet mountain of buildings  
Novy Mir!

New York was Ziegfeld's Follies  
New York was Caribbean birds  
New York was Senegalese Acrobats  
New York was George Gershwin



Across the ocean was the Great Betrayal

The German SPD  
(Social Democratic Party)  
Is the most powerful Socialist party on earth

More than a million members  
111 Reichstag deputies  
1/3 of the vote  
90 daily newspapers

In 1911 the German SPD says

The coming war is an imperialist war

Oppose the war  
Stand with the workers  
Across any and all borders

In 1914 the German SPD says

We are faced now with the iron fact of war

We are threatened  
With the horrors  
Of hostile invasions

We do not decide today  
For or  
Against war

We have merely to decide  
On the necessary means  
For the defense of the country

Much  
If not everything  
Is at stake for our people

And their freedom





In view of the possibility  
Of a victory  
Of Russian despotism

100% of German SPD vote  
To enter the war

100% to pay for it

To defend Germany

From Russia  
(Of course Russia)

To throw up  
A thousand new razor wire borders

To rain down  
Millions of bombs

To kill 17 million  
To wound 20 million more

And cobble the road for fascism

Capitalism causes war  
Capitalism destroys the earth

There were wars before capitalism  
There was cancer before cigarettes

But cigarettes cause cancer

And capitalism causes war

And war is a disaster for workers

And it's getting worse and worse



But what about the whales?  
What did war mean for the whales?

War is a catastrophe for whales too

With the declaration of war  
Research is quickly terminated  
Production is rapidly expanded

Ships are added to the fleet  
Ships are made faster and faster  
Ships become factories in the sea

But why all the whale oil?

The colonialist explains why:  
The urgency of the demand  
For the better qualities  
Of whale oil

## **FOR MUNITIONS PURPOSES**

Requires relaxed regulations  
For the prevention of waste

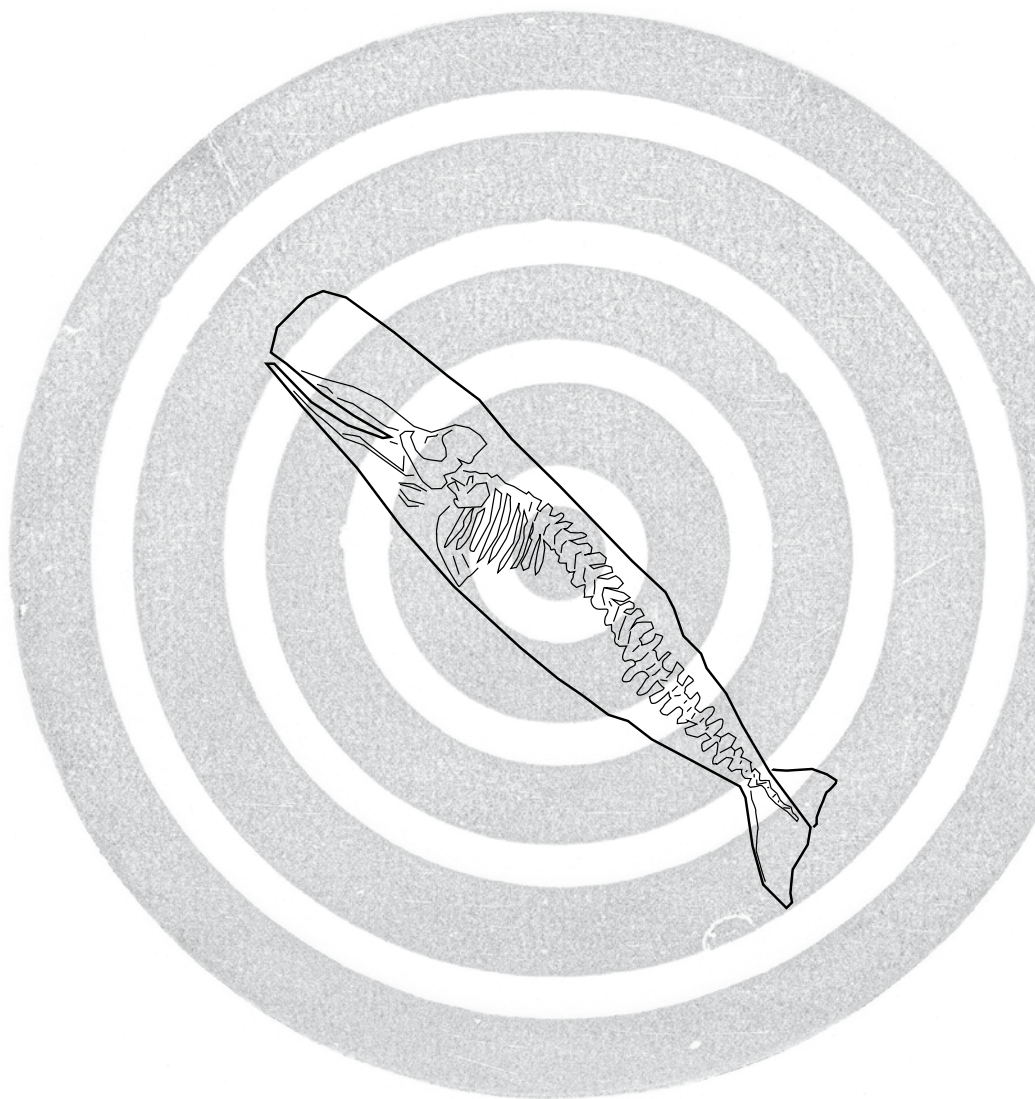
Whale oil is used in nitroglycerin  
The world at war is now starving for nitroglycerin

The central issue during the war:  
Keep the production of explosives at a maximum  
And shortages of edible fats to a minimum

And so  
Human beings  
Send out fleets of ships to hunt whales  
Fast ships, modern ships

They kill the whales  
Then butcher them  
Melt the parts down into oil  
Turn the oil into bombs  
And more and more bombs

**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR IS THE STRUGGLE FOR LIVING FLESH**  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR IS THE STRUGGLE FOR AIR**  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR IS THE STRUGGLE FOR WATER**





## BUT IT'S 1917

And this is New York  
And New York is now Leon Trotsky

This is the Trotsky  
On the doorstep of history

Who's a has-been

The heroics of 1905  
Have made him a legend  
A name you ought to know

But 1905 is more than a decade back

And he's been chased all over the world

This is before October  
This is before the Winter Palace  
This is before Neither Peace Nor War  
This is before the Red Army  
This is before War Commissar

This is decades before  
Frida and Diego  
And a blue house  
And David Alfaro Siqueiros

Words splashed  
Across papers  
Are welcoming enough

KICKED OUT OF EUROPE  
FOR PREACHING PEACE

Astor House  
42<sup>nd</sup> Street

Enormous ceilinged frescoes  
Crystal chandeliers  
Flemish smoking rooms  
Pompeian billiards  
Rooftop gardens  
Piano, piano, piano

And valets in uniform

How much does all this cost?  
Would the 500 in our pockets cover the bill?

Bukharin took him to the public library

Walking home  
In the New York winter  
It was easy to forget  
Half a world away  
Everything was in flames

Join us for dinner  
Asked Bukharin  
Let's change the future

On his first day in the USA  
Trotsky took the subway to work

He would write for the New World

Two or three columns  
\$20 a week

The US Socialist Party of 1917:  
Two Socialists in congress  
56 mayors  
30 seats in state legislatures  
110,000 members  
150 newspapers and magazines

In 1912  
Eugene Debs  
Won a million votes for president  
Facing Woodrow Wilson  
Teddy Roosevelt  
And William Howard Taft

They moved from the luxury hotel in Times Square  
To a middle-class apartment in Bronx

3 bedrooms  
Electric lights  
Gas range  
Bath  
Telephone  
Elevator  
Garbage chute

Across the hall from Julius Hammer

Leon Trotsky  
His wife Natalia Sedova  
Their sons Leon & Sergei

This is the most comfortable  
They will ever be together

Nobody trying to deport him  
Nobody trying to kill him  
No war within distance  
Riding the subway to work



He speaks  
At Cooper Union

The War has ravaged  
France  
England  
Germany

Countries, bankrupt  
The people have lost their illusions

The people are growing anxious  
Ready to be daring  
Ready to fight

The war was foisted on us  
By a gang of highway robbers called diplomats

An ocean of blood  
Has stained society forever

Revolution is brewing  
In the trenches  
No force can hold it back

Loud applause  
Opposing catcalls  
A fight breaks out in the crowd

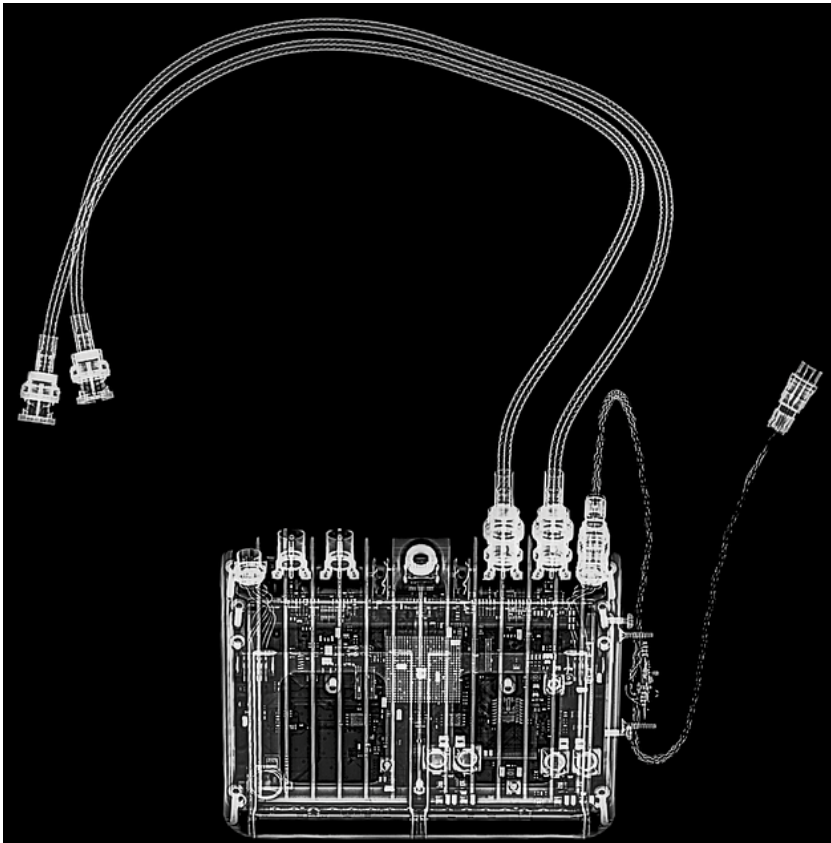
Natalya is loving their middle class life in the Bronx  
While the old man is at the office  
And the kids away at school  
Sightseeing in Manhattan  
And lunches with friends



Wilson breaks off relations with Germany  
The war will arrive like a submarine over here

Being German,  
Speaking German,  
Having a German-sounding name,  
All becomes suspect

Being pro-peace begins to sound even worse  
Like cowardice



# FEBRUARY 5<sup>TH</sup> CARNEGIE HALL

4000 at the rally

A rich man's war  
But a poor man's fight

A motley bunch of speakers  
Bourgeois  
Religious pacifists  
Suffragettes  
Union bureaucrats  
When they hear the first shot  
Will gladly call themselves good patriots  
And start supporting the governmental machine of mass murders

The fight against war  
Meant a struggle against capitalism

Of all the species of political fauna  
None was lower  
None more contemptible  
None more dangerous  
Than the Socialist who defended his country in time of war

100,000 spies  
Spies everywhere  
Mad rumors  
Berlin to unite with Mexico  
Reconquer former Mexican territory in the US southwest

Wilson exploits public outrage  
To build support for entering the war

Denounce statements in the bourgeois media  
Pledging loyalty to America in case of war  
And the suppression of workers' struggles  
Denounce the concept of national defense as an excuse  
Differentiate yourself from pacifists unwilling to fight

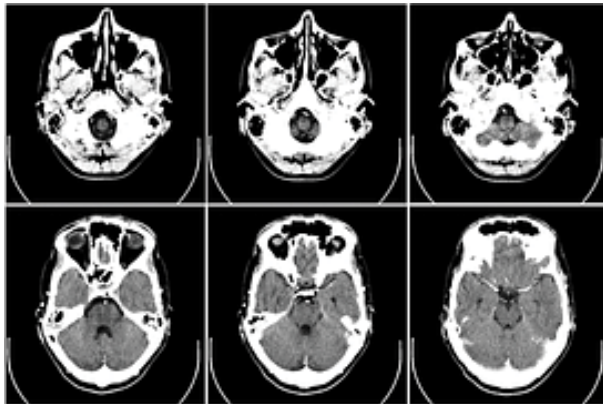
Commit to not only voicing dissent  
Commit to organizing mass action:

General strikes and street protests  
Physically blocking Conscription  
Troop movements  
War industries

All but the last is agreed upon  
The last is the first in order of importance  
All but the last is what separates Socialists from Communists

In February there is a revolution  
Trotsky makes plans to return to Russia

**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR IS THE DESPERATE STRUGGLE  
FOR EVERYTHING  
THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE TO THE VERY  
LAST MOMENT**



The slaughter of whales  
Set in motion  
By the war  
Didn't stop  
With the war

To the contrary  
It galloped along ever faster

From 1914-1962  
As many whales had been hunted  
As the whole of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries combined

From 1962-1972  
That number too was eclipsed

The breath of a new war is felt  
On the backs of your necks  
The breath of a new war is awful

And never has the planet been so badly wounded

The next war will be a catastrophe for human beings  
And war is the worst disaster for nature too  
Iraq alone: 600 million tons of CO2

Imagine the size of a world of that

Capitalism causes war  
Capitalism destroys the earth

The next war will murder a wounded world once and for all

The mass slaughter of the whales  
The biggest hunt in human history  
Was finally and abruptly halted  
While staring over a cliff

It's nearly 50 years later

The whales have begun to recover

The war can be stopped

Trotsky delivered on his promise

And was rewarded with 10 invasions

White militias not white helmets

Foreign fighters with Allied weapons

Economic blockade

And 5 more years of war



For Russia  
The war didn't end  
With the end of the war

Against Russia  
The war won't have begun  
With the beginning of war

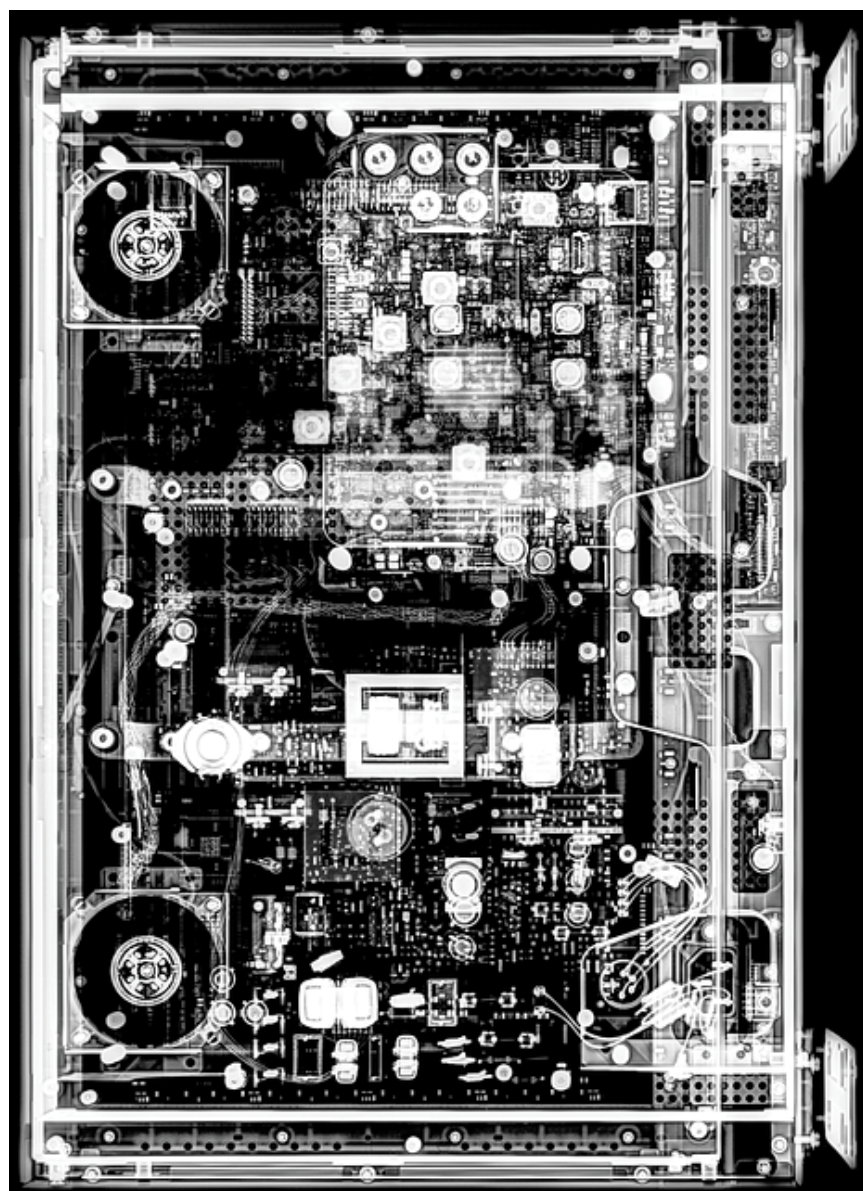
The breath of a new war is felt  
On the backs of your necks  
The breath of a new war is awful

The breath of the new war is full  
Of the same foul words  
Like  
Patriot  
And Traitor  
Foul in McCarthy's mouth  
Foul in the Bircher's mouths  
Foul in the mouths of heroes

Loyalty to peace  
Loyalty to human beings  
Loyalty to the earth

Absolute disloyalty to war!

Which class is waging war and for what aims?  
No war but the war against the system of war!



But **Woodrow Wilson** says what about Russia?  
And **Winston Churchill** says what about Russia?  
And **Emma Goldman** says what about Russia?  
And **Adolf Hitler** says what about Russia?  
And **Joe McCarthy** says what about Russia?  
And **Richard Nixon** says what about Russia?  
And **J. Edgar Hoover** says what about Russia?  
And **Max Shachtman** says what about Russia?  
And **Ronald Reagan** says what about Russia?  
And **Oliver North** says what about Russia?  
And **Margaret Thatcher** says what about Russia?  
And the **Mujahedeen** say what about Russia?  
And the **Contras** say what about Russia?  
And the **White Helmets** say what about Russia?  
And the **FBI** says what about Russia?  
And the **CIA** says what about Russia?  
And the **ISO** says what about Russia?  
And **Michael Moore** says what about Russia?  
And **Bernie Sanders** says what about Russia?





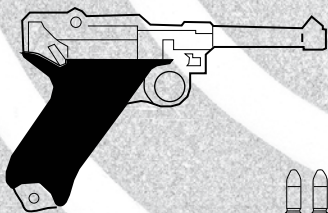
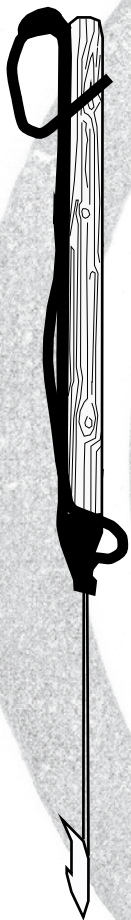
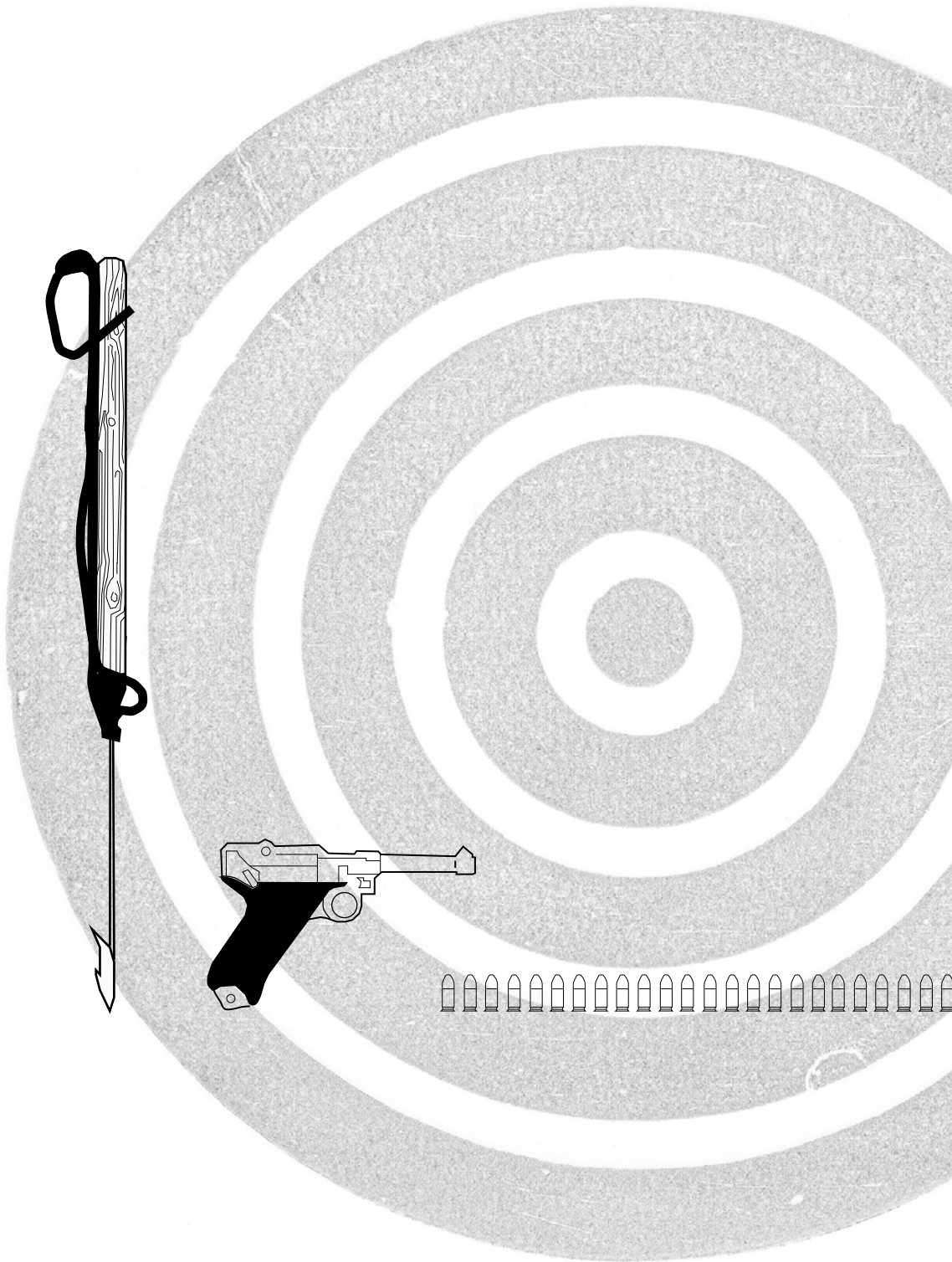
And nobody, nobody says what about US?

The US that invents the most weapons  
The US that tests the most weapons  
The US that makes the most weapons  
The US that sells the most weapons  
The US that has the most weapons  
The US that uses the most weapons

Builds the most bases  
In the most countries  
Drops the most bombs  
On the most countries

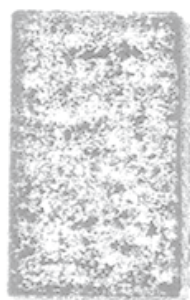
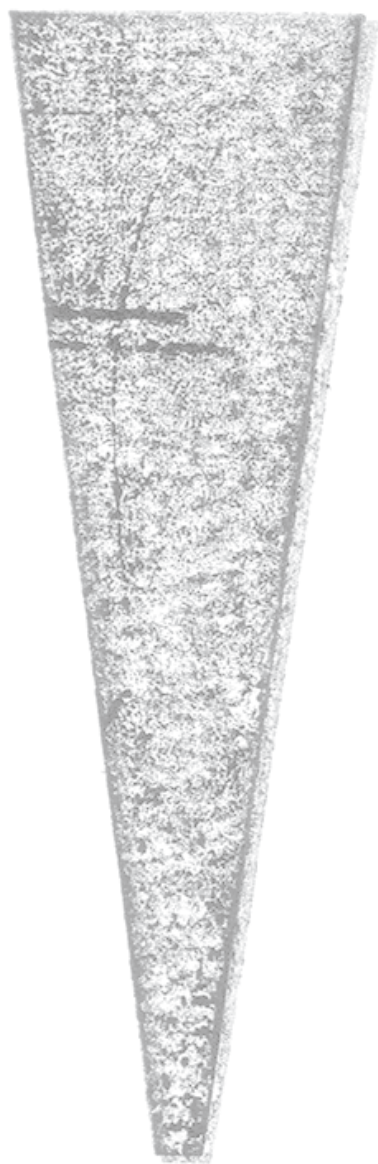
Absolute disloyalty to war!

**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR**  
IS THE STRUGGLE FOR LIVING FLESH  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR**  
IS THE STRUGGLE FOR AIR  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR**  
IS THE STRUGGLE FOR WATER  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR**  
IS THE DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR EVERYTHING  
**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WAR**  
MUST CONTINUE TO THE VERY LAST MOMENT



5 DEMANDS

**PEACE!**  
**BREAD!**  
**LAND!**  
**WATER!**  
**AIR!**



# MEETING THE TRUTH: ON THE PRACTICE OF FILMING THE UPRISING PEOPLE

## **The Revolutionary Practice of Revolutionary Theory**

It's something of a recent historic practice in the West, in the context of artistic practice, to cite Lenin's slogan "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement," from *What is to be Done?* Before the 1960s no one would have thought to cite the slogans of this militant pamphlet as part of an analysis of artistic forms.<sup>1</sup> This has something to do with what Perry Anderson correctly claimed in his *Consideration of Western Marxism*, that the most important contribution to Marxism in the West is actually in the field of esthetics<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, however, the question of spontaneity, which constitutes the backbone of Lenin's pamphlet, when considered from the perspective of cultural endeavor, is at the heart of the artistic problematic. There isn't an artist that did not, at some stage stand perplexed over the apparent contradictions between creativity, construction, skill, ideology, practice, agency, activity, and spontaneity. All of these theoretical elements will, at the end of the day, bring one to the dilemma that is the importance of theory (the famous intelligibility)[?] in artistic practice.

The idea behind the slogan "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" is not the same as the liberal ideological premise that "without theory, there is no revolution," "or without theory, there is no practice." The point here centres on the status of theory. A call is made to revolutionary theory, which is emancipated from the naturalist and empiricist remnants of the spontaneous understanding of mass movements. Considering the strong theoretical position of *What is to be Done?*, the eclectic "spontaneity" of artistic thinking seems particularly incompatible.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus we are exempting the Soviet avant-garde from this consideration. One can think of Dziga Vertov's "Leninist proportions", or the special issue of *LEF* magazine (no. 4, 1924) on "Language and Lenin" written by the Russian Formalists. (Vertov: 52-56)

<sup>2</sup> "It is significant that the only work of real quality ranging widely over Western Marxism as a whole should be an aesthetic study: Frederic Jameson's *Marxism and Form*." (Anderson: 78) Ironically, this aesthetic Marxism of the Western Hemisphere could be understood from the perspective of the "culturalisation of politics", which Jameson himself introduced to critical theory.

The shortcut introduced in art theory designed to bypass these complicated detours is called “practice”, and is usually understood as *something* singular in the artistic position. In the normative world of art, it is this particular something that matters: combining the theory, skills, ideological procedure and all of the relevant processes together and amalgamating them into the magical word of “practice”.

On one hand, the normative understanding of practice weaves many antagonistic institutional forces into the fabric of something recognizable and common: arguably enough, art of this sort is situated within the objective conditions set by institutions. And on the other hand, practice completes the artist's singularity solely on the basis of his/her particular references. It lends colour to the doings of artists (“my practice is based on researching the delay,” “In my practice I am focused on the errors,” “earlier in my practice I was interested in failure”, and so on). At the very heart of this mechanism of the objective understanding of art practice is the issue/question of the (im)possibility to represent collective (thus subjective) political movements. By asking the question of the status of “practice” in contemporary art here I wish to underline the difficulty of depicting or representing a people's struggle within the perimeters[parameters?] set by the normative understanding of art practice.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the aim of this text is to question the very status of art that deals with people's struggles.

### **Theory after the Fact**

When considered through the lens of political struggle, the translation of art theory into practice is something that cannot be understood without certain contradictions. Thus, it is always misleading to translate political slogans into art slogans. Art thinks differently. For example, it is misleading to translate “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” from politics into “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice” in art. In order to do this, we have to open a few more parentheses and progress unevenly within them. The translation should happen accordingly; or more precisely, the translation *will* happen unevenly in the world of art. We have to find the form to it. These are two basic mistakes in the thesis “*without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice*” of art.

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<sup>3</sup> Mel Ramsden's text “On Practice”, published in 1975, is the strongest critique of this liberal theory of art, which is based on “the ideology of ‘observation’.” “It is the problem of formalism of culture, that can be resolved by finding the right *interpretation*. *It is the domain of the middle-man; there is no practice.*” (Ramsden: 75)

- a. It assumes that artistic practice should be preceded by theory. This is what some experimental filmmakers have called being “blackmailed by theory”, and oppose it with their practice of experimental filmmaking.
- b. Also, it grants the possibility of retrospect to theory; that theory has to supervise the uncertainties of practice and assure the validity of the practical outcomes. This, in the language and methodology of experimental filmmaking, is called “theory after the fact,” and it stands opposed to the conceptual operation that confronts this retrospective possibility. In the ranks of leftist academic film criticism, this model of “theory after the fact” is a normative discourse: it is always theoreticians who theoretically “read” into the subversion of film practice, and it is often successful Hollywood films that these theoreticians are interested in reading.

My aim in this text is to expose these mistakes, and their consequences; but also to push forward the thesis that, by disjoining theory from practice, art merges them by doubling (dividing, multiplying) their constitutive elements. Which is why I claim that we need something more, and something else, to understand the status of theory in art practice. This excess is decisive. We could proceed by dividing and thus correcting Lenin's slogan as: “without the (concept) of revolutionary theory there is no (form) of revolutionary practice” in art. What is introduced here is the transformation of the status of theory and practice within the perimeters of art's configurations. The main point is not to understand this constraint as a mere philosophical bluff and instead imagine some sort of autopoiesis or autonomous position that thinks of art practice only in terms of the first three laws of thermodynamics.<sup>4</sup> In order to do so, we have to envision the form of combative practice that emerges from the commitment to conflict and contradiction.

### **Blackmailed by Theory**

Here a few remarks about being blackmailed by theory. Peter Gidal, an experimental filmmaker associated with Structural/Materialist films, who also wrote a number of brilliant books on film (*Structural Film*

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<sup>4</sup> “Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real (and not the effect). And this thought, or rather the truths that it activates, are irreducible to other truths—be they scientific, political, or amorous. This also means that art, as a singular regime of thought, is irreducible to philosophy.” (Badiou, 2005: 9)



*Anthology, Materialist Film, Flare Out*) stands resolutely opposed to the style of film criticism based on writings “after the fact.” (1989: 64) This way of writing is usually associated with the academic understanding of artistic practice, but Gidal detects it even in advanced theoretical writing on film. Gidal’s list of targets is huge, from Christian Metz to Raymond Bellour, from *Cahiers du Cinéma* to *Screen* journals. Despite the fact that the theoretical references they use in their film analyses are derived from the subtle and complex theoretical works of Althusser, Wittgenstein, Deleuze and Shklovsky, the practices these writers analyse are usually Hollywood films, by directors like Hitchcock, Lubitsch, Ford, or Welles. No matter how progressive their intentions may be, the theory after-the-fact always precludes the real strength of the practice: it is always postponing the real problematic into some possible future or freezing history in the past. Gidal relates this approach to the issue of dominant forms of film practice and theory:

A move away from dominant forms of expression is necessary because dominant forms of expression means *current* dominant forms of expression, which are ones of transparency, invisibility, in which the mechanism, the apparatus, the construction is not such, does not exist. A move away from dominant forms is thus not a matter of anti-manipulation, or deconstruction of certain codes in the sense of explication-after-the-fact, but of *film-as-projected*, as anti-illusionist, remembering that a mechanistic finality to this is not achievable; but attempted anti-illusionist practice through consequent/consistent materialist practice wherein the process is the film, the procedure: construction of production of the film, its effects, of an image of the real, of production of the real (this real).” (1978: 79)

Thus in the militant position of materialist filmmaking, the practice is understood as something that cannot be ‘blackmailed’ by theory.<sup>5</sup> Just think of thousands and thousands of pages written about time-lag, the excess, multiplications of space, acoustic mirroring, etc. uncovered in scenes of Cary Grant running from a machine gun, Joan Fontaine from her suicidal husband, or Henry Fonda playing Abraham Lincoln! The “cultural imperialism” of blackmailing film practice with theory that prefers American films does this both in content and in form.

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<sup>5</sup> The strongest examples of this position can be found from among the ranks of the Structuralist-Materialist filmmakers. Discussing the theoretical position of *Undercut: The Magazine from the London Filmmaker's Co-op*, Michael O'Pray writes: „*Undercut's* importance in the realm of theory was one of attitude. It understood that practice could not be 'blackmailed' by theory (in Barthes's words) but had a more complex and diffuse relationship to conceptual explanations.“ (16)

## **Artists Know**

Artists know certain things that theoreticians do not. It is this opportunity to contribute herein, made possible by the practice of artist Nika Autor, that allows me to speculate on them. Nika Autor works largely in collaboration with film theoreticians, sociologists, and historians in the making of her films. Her films are about people. She likes to film people, not only as individually discernible human beings with all their joys and sorrows but as collectives, as a historical and political category. In her art practice, she knows that in order to depict an uprising you need a different set of engagement with the tools and the social dynamics at work.

Now, what follows, are some observations that aim to point out certain problems with depicting a popular uprising or the people active in such.

### ***Meeting with Truth***

Question: how do people enter into the film?

In the 1970s, one of the central concerns of progressive films revolved around this particular question. From Alain Badiou and Natacha Michel, to Peter Gidal and Lis Rhodes, from Jacques Rancière to Victor Shklovsky, and from Octavio Getino to Ousmane Sembène, everyone was trying to understand how a popular uprising finds its place in the realm of form.

The horizon of these discussions (there are plenty of things to learn from those) is what Trotsky describes in his book *The History of the Russian Revolution* describes as the difficulty of depicting an uprising:

If a symbol is a concentrated image, then a revolution is the master-builder of symbols, for it presents all phenomena and all relations in concentrated form. The trouble is that the symbolism of a revolution is too grandiose; it fits in badly with the creative work of individuals. For this reason, artistic reproductions of the greatest mass dramas of humanity are so poor. (161)

Trotsky's book, which is one of the most exciting historical analyses one might hope to read, a true modernist *tour de force*, develops countless interesting theses on temporality, representation, form, subjectivity and contingency. Walter Benjamin, who was extremely excited to read it, did not fail to discern the real motivation of this historical presentation.

Benjamin was particularly excited about the way an author of such an historical narrative, who himself participated in the events, would represent them.<sup>6</sup> *The History of the Russian Revolution* is proof that the story of the revolution cannot be told the same way other stories of everyday life are; it scatters the language and takes forward a new means of collecting the pieces of that explosion. The most amazing thing for both Trotsky and Lenin (the author of *April Theses*) was that the theory of the revolution failed in the heat of the uprising, because the people were exceedingly further left than any of the Bolsheviks! It is this observation that served as a driving force for the entire range of militant filmmakers.

The main idea was to know the people!

Militant filmmakers hated both the “Z-films” (from Costa Gavras film *Z* (1969)) that depicted class struggles in a style typical of Hollywood films, and “telquelism” (referring to those people around the journal *Tel Quel*) and positioning their theoretical deconstruction of the apparatus as a radical practice. Thus, the theoreticians and activists of militant cinema, people like Guy Hannabale, despised the film criticism of *Cahiers* and *Tel Quel* that peppered mainstream films with post-structuralist theories. In theory, militant filmmakers hated the theory altogether.

But since one of the main questions for militant filmmaking was the representation of peoples’ struggles, especially struggles that are not included in the records of the Communist party and the unions—the wild strikes—they developed very complicated conceptual references related to their own practice. According to such, the theory was transforming in the very process of the filmmaking. Their questioning the modes of representation was something that had to be tested in the field: it was experimental film in its purest sense. They were after the theory of practice that was not suffering from the blackmail by after-the-fact theory. As Paul D. Grant wrote in his superb analysis of Militant Cinema after 1968 in France, an “attempt was made not in the direction of a verisimilar representation of truth, but rather a *meeting with truth*.” (43) In order to meet the truth, militant filmmakers, under the influence of Maoism, have furthered the practice of *enquête*, or investigation, “as a basis for a cinema that could point out the contradictions of the reality filmed.” (37)

Looking at the films of Jean Pierre Thorn, whom Jean-Louis

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<sup>6</sup> Esther Leslie’s chapter “Benjamin and Trotsky, Old Man, Hunched Man: Some Elective Affinities,” from her book *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (Pluto Press, 2000), could be a very useful source in understanding the depths of this encounter. (228–234).

Comolli described as an author of “bad films”, Paul D. Grant has showed that the investigative process in militant filmmaking proceeds on two fronts: both in the direction of the investigation of the formal properties of the image, and in the concrete field of class struggles, at the assembly line, where enquiry was seen as a way of heightening or intensifying the contradictions. The formalist line of investigation “stood against naturalism and sought to refute the idea that filming a revolutionary event was enough to make a revolutionary film.” (Ibid.) This position was supported by Brecht’s slogan: “consider nothing natural, so that everything may be considered subject to change.” (Grant: 37) At the same time, this radical critique of naturalism was aimed at the naturalism of apparatus theory, and at the representation of people as a spontaneous agency. The enquiry at the assembly line, the *enquête* of *etablis*, was crucial in this practice. It was regarded as a possibility to understand the movement of people outside ideological mediations. There were many militants in the 1970s investigating the people—in China, in Albania, in the factories of France, in the suburbs populated with immigrants; and filmmakers were trying to make sense of these enquiries not as material of and for their art, but as a methodology of meeting with truth.

### Old Slogans

A.L. Rees wrote in his introduction to Hans Richter’s *The Struggle for the Film*, that “not all Brechtisms come from Brecht” (13); and not all militant films come from post-May 1968 Militant Cinema. Militant cinema has a prehistory—and it is called the Newsreels. They are similar only by virtue of their common interest in filming the struggles of working people (the communist magazine from late 1920s *Film and People*/*Film und Volk* was an offshoot of *Workers Illustrated News*/*Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*) and in finding their singular practice of detachment or departure from the modes of bourgeois representation. Their difference lies in their cinematic understanding of political subjectivities. The newsreels of the 1930s “were showing only the organised working class actions like protest-demonstrations, Hunger Marches, workers’ sports contests, congresses, May Day celebrations, etc. /.../ This is what made them less suited for exhibition to unorganised workers who could not immediately recognise their own experiences in the films.” (Hogenkamp, 1984: 63) In this regard, Bert Hogenkamp is right when he asks “whether the worker’s newsreels did not let their principle of organisation be dictated too much by the bourgeois newsreels.” (Ibid.)

Militant filmmaking of the 1970s was careful not to repeat the same error by representing the workers according to theoretical precepts. They were seeking instances of uprisings that statist (state socialism) theory was not ready to meet. Which is why the main focus of militant filmmaking was instances of unorganised, non-mediated workers' struggles: the wild strikes, riots of undocumented immigrant labourers, those worker subjectivities that were not mediated by unions or objectivities of the state.

Thus, to repeat, slogans always represent a step back. Viktor Shklovsky wrote that "the phenomena in art reiterate with occasional and random exactness; they emerge, by changing their functional meaning. Terminologies should not be transposed from one field to another." (176) Shklovsky compares Jean-Luc Godard's (a member of the Dziga Vertov group) actualisation of the slogan "death to the film author" to Vertov's original slogan from the 1920s and points to this simplified transposition of political subjectivity to artistic subjectivity. With this slogan, Vertov in the 1920s was targeting the film practice of Eisenstein, claiming that dialectical film should be emancipated from art. With the same slogan and for the same reason, Godard also criticises Eisenstein in the 1970s, accusing him of "revisionism." But the conflict, as Shklovsky writes, "between the living Eisenstein, the living Vertov and the living Kuleshov was about moving forward. The conflict of Godard, where he tries to block the movement of art, is a story of the past. It is the red light in the place where there is no chance for repair." (177)

It is our duty to correct the old slogans; to actualise the militant and experimental forms of artistic practices without blocking the progressive movement process.

### **Formalism Formalism**

Alain Badiou, in his explosive text published in *Le Feuille Foudre: Journal for a Marxist-Leninist Intervention in Cinema and Art*, in 1978, delineated six principles of progressive art. Film was in the focus. Just to cite the two: "The basic principle is to have the intention of showing the people not just as an objective reality but as subjects. Therefore, to show the people not as maintainers of the old (the people of Constancy) but as agents of the new"; and "The principle of respect is not to launch any hostile attacks on existing revolutionary movements." (2013: 43)

The six progressive criteria guiding the representation of popular

uprisings relate to content. To summarize, we can say that the people uprising are people in movement. Thus, the criteria of progressive art relate to movement, which is logically related to the subjective force of political change rather than to the inertia of the objectivity of institutions. It is definitely more advanced to depict the struggles and the riots rather than the structures of the buildings, the life of the trees, and the dances of the goats. The movement we are here describing is about opening a new field by not being indexed through already existing references. It is this movement that allows us to speak about advanced forms in lieu of progressive content. As Badiou concludes, “progressivism in art must really be art”; this requires an extra, seventh, criteria/principle of progressive art: “The principle of artistic credibility: a progressive work must take a stand within the current history of forms and be able to justify that position from the twofold perspective of serving the subject matter and effectively mobilizing both individual and collective contemporary awareness.” (Ibid.: 47)<sup>7</sup>

### Divisive Cinema

Trotsky commented bitterly on the patience of readers and spectators before work depicting the revolutions:

Thousands and thousands of books are thrown into the market every year, presenting some new variant of the personal romance, some tale of the vacillations of the melancholic or the career of the ambitious. The heroine of Marcel Proust requires several finely wrought pages in order to feel that she does not feel anything. It

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<sup>7</sup> The research project *Formalism Formaoism* initiated by *Rab-Rab: journal for political and formal inquiries in art*, based in Helsinki, discusses this question from two theoretical lines:

a. during the revolts the people who declare themselves on the stage of history are those who previously were not part of any official representation: they are those who were continuously excluded, they are the void and the invisible of the society and culture. In this case, every riot, every uprising, and every declaration of the will of people transforms the rules of visibility. Through this matrix of transformed visibility, where a “void is not avoided”, we have an entry point to experimental, radical, progressive, and innovative artistic practices.

b. the voice of the people is unpredictable; meaning that collective uprisings cannot be administrated, rationalised and measured. The collective subjectivity that erupts unexpectedly in the moments of revolts defies the simple indexes: as an unprecedented source, it cuts through the normative of class, nation, gender and intellectual dichotomies. To translate into artistic language, we can say that the forms of revolts are contradictory and uneasy. In other words, to present the people is the most difficult and uneasy thing; it can reproduce the already existing hierarchical cultural positions. Thus, we are against mediating the people, and we want to avoid being a translator of the voice of the people; the final aim is to challenge our own theoretical, political and artistic forms by opening our field of inquiry and practice into the slippery ground of contradictions.

would seem that one might, at least with equal justice, demand attention to a series of collective historic dramas that lifted hundreds of millions of human beings out of non-existence, transforming the character of nations and intruding forever into the life of all mankind. (10)

Following this, it is important to confront two often-quoted objections against those films whose form and content are shaped by the uprising people. It is claimed that these films are boring; and second, that they deny or avoid a sense of personal touch—meaning they neglect the question of desire!

This is an especially memorable moment in the theory of cinema, in an interview given by Michel Foucault to *Cahiers du Cinéma* on the cinematic adaptation of Pierre Riviere's testimony (unearthed by Foucault):

CAHIERS: "That's where orthodox Marxism breaks down. Because this implies that there has to be a discourse on desire."

FOUCAULT: "On desire and on power ..." (167)

Today, the question of desire and personal touch is sweeping contemporary art and film theory. Already back in 1925, Kazimir Malevich was complaining that images (especially images of recognizable nature and human faces) still triumphed in the Soviet films of the day.<sup>8</sup> Today, everything is about these very faces, about touch, feeling, the human senses. Radical critique of the anthropocentric image of experimental film is not on the agenda today.

This movement backwards occurred some time around the mid-1970s. The discussions around Robert Kramer and John Douglas's film *Milestones* filmed in 1975 are very useful documents. *Milestones* depicts the lives (joys and sorrows, family gatherings, fallouts, depressions, desires, hopes, failures) of activists (including hippies, farmers, immigrants, Native Americans) trying to understand what went wrong after the failure of organised political activism. It is personal cinema, a cinema about people. Robert Kramer was involved in the New York Newsreel group 1967–1972; together with the group and solo he directed a dozen interesting militant films (notably *Ice* (1970), *People's War* (1970), *The Scenes of Class Struggle in Portugal* (1977), and *Notre Nazi* (1985).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Likewise, cinema producers have not escaped this grip of tradition, and images triumph on the screens." (Malevich, 1968: 232)

<sup>9</sup> Kramer defined the theory and practice of newsreels as a "flexible position between empiricism and dogmatism" in his text called "Towards a redefinition of propaganda".

During a discussion of *Milestones* at a roundtable organized by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Paul Narboni observed that: “the involvement of individual subjects in struggles, the incorporation of the struggles waged by peoples within a personal problematic, as opposed to the discourse of apparatus where the ‘lived experience’ of militants serves only as an anecdotal support to the story of the truth which this apparatus embodies.” (Bonitzer et al., 2000: 148) This is in reference to the famous turn of *Cahiers* from the theory of general apparatus towards the principles of experience and cinephilia. There are a number of strange contradictions in this theoretical operation of apparatus versus principles of subjectivity. In a similar way, Serge Daney agrees with Narboni about this subjectivity, but insists there is a certain change of the mode of representation in this film: “/.../ it gives people a way of thinking about their history instead of just giving it to others to think about.” (Ibid. 144) This is true, but it is impossible not to ask in how those people who are not part of this “history” (actually the “story”) will think about the film? There are plenty of characters in the film (and the good part of the film is a fiction), but the question we need to answer is how this special mode of representation (trespassing the apparatus) contributes to the non-repressive inclusion of the subjectivities? More precisely, how spectators should read the category of the people? What is the theory of people of *Milestones*? In a subsequent essay, published in *Cahiers*, Daney takes further steps to clarify the form of *Milestones*. The film is about real fabric weaving together an invisible tribe, a kind of “ethnological masquerade.” (Daney, 2000: 154–155) The real of the film is what confirms us as human beings. Daney concludes: the sole message of the film is that “we exist”. (Ibid.: 156) In other words, a film re-affirms what we all know—the never-ending process of “fort-da”, disappearing-emerging ‘rites of passage’ of the people. The form Daney discovers in the film is only the reproduction of life as it is—a narrative of life. “Fathers

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Bill Nichols, historian and theoretician of documentary filmmaking, defends this point of view arguing that it “presents actual material with a minimum of political analysis”, and relates this empiricism to a narrow and rigid understanding of an idealist “correct line” pushed by Marxism. “Empiricism on the other hand”, concludes Nichols, “acknowledged the uniqueness of the historical moment and allowed an unbiased look at “real needs” and “real conditions.” (139)

This neo-empiricism of Newsreels precludes the abstraction that experimental film initially granted through non-natural forms of representation: “In a 1969 article, Newsreel labelled traditional formulations of Marxism like ‘working class’ and ‘vanguard’ as ‘simplicistic abstractions’ irrelevant to the current struggle. By insisting on the ‘absolutely unique conditions’ of the historical situation, Newsreel risked abandoning analysis in favor of ad hoc empiricism. The theoretical tendency to empiricism is reflected in the films’ redundant descriptions of the events themselves, making it difficult to situate the events in a larger political argument.” (Boddy and Buchsbaum, 1979: 44)



and sons, mother and daughter re-establish contact, resume, renew their relationships.” (Ibid.: 155)

It is thus important for Daney to know, in more detail, more about the context—where people reproduce themselves—because film is a medium that enables us to penetrate this fabric. Film enables us to enter the minds of the people. When Daney asks in his seminal text ‘The Critical Function’: How can the political statement be presented cinematically? How can it be made positive?” he already has an answer ready. (Daney, 2000a: 61) It is the enunciation (referring to Emil Benveniste’s term for linguistic context) that has to be made clear, because, as Daney claims, “all films are militant films.” (Ibid.: 59) The people in Daney’s scenario are not necessarily those who fight, but those who exist in the “ideological/political conjuncture.” (Ibid.: 72)

Daney, a film critic, was very influential for Catharine David who, as a curator, conceptualised the *Documenta X* exhibition in 1997, where film and TV entered the contemporary art discourse en masse. I think that this heritage still looms upon the forms of political moving images in the gallery setting.

There is at least one comment on *Milestones*, also made during the mid-1970s, which reads this turn in different terms. It is an interview of Jacques Rancière given to *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1976. Rancière situates the film in the “historical compromise” of the mid-1970s, where art has merged into the larger story of culture. (2012) Without referring to Daney or other *Cahiers* critics, he observes that the famous “fabric” or “the materialism we admire so much in this film is nothing but the material strength of a national identity, its capacity to stage characters and organise fictions.” (1977: 26) This represents a theoretical problem regarding the militancy of the cinema. As a cultural industry, cinema is spontaneously uniting certain heterogeneous traits: the capacity to reproduce the state, and the nation. Thus, experimental film’s radical quest to become emancipated from the cultural norm of cinema, and cinema itself, is the formal possibility to escape the retrospective amalgamation of national and governmental fictions into the enjoyable story.

In that case, *Milestones* doubles up the spontaneities: it remembers the spontaneous memory of the people in a spontaneous way. Cinema fits perfectly into this scenario. If the militant project is not to reconstitute but to produce, not to unite but to divide, not to have an objective but subjective declaration, then it seems cinema is not the answer. If cinema is

the shortest route between the state's archive and each individual's pattern of recognition, as Rancière formulates it, is logical to ask this same question today: How can cinema and memory, whose spontaneous function is to unite, be divided?" (Ibid.: 30–31)<sup>10</sup>

### Exit Images

There are many ways cinema can be divided. First, it has to be about film, not cinema. Otherwise, the whole gamut of institutionalised and objective narratives of inertia will find its forms comfortably on the screens. Second, film cannot be divided programmatically—there is no formula for this. Following this, the antagonism between apparatus and subjectivity has to be rethought. The apparatus theory has a second life in experimental cinema due to the over-exposure of the moving image into the contemporary art context. Film became the form. There is nothing wrong in this, *per se*. But, the second-life of apparatus theories is now without what initially made it strong: the joy in destroying them. The apparatus in many art films today is another name for the institutions, the objective conditions, the enumeration, indexing, schematization, naming, pointing, and the wishful thinking of portraying the situation. This is the apparatus of semioticians. The rational formalism of this apparatus theory is conservative. It blends everything into the ubiquitous realm of culture. And there is no unevenness left there. Also, as militant cinema theory shows in the clearest terms, the apparatus is actually a naturalism of the second order—the notorious second nature of Walter Benjamin. It is easy to understand why there is such great excitement over Benjamin's theory of images (often simplified): it allows, through the clean plate of the world of images, an easy entry into the field of politics.<sup>11</sup> It is the dream of rational abracadabra through forms and devices.<sup>12</sup>

If militant and experimental films make sense only when the

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<sup>10</sup> Viktor Shklovsky managed to resume this in the best way possible, as always, by asking the simple question: "How to present struggles that unite people?" (255)

<sup>11</sup> Today, the practice of Militant cinema, and the theory associated with it, suffers from images. It is unwilling to distance itself from what Walter Benjamin described in the 1930s as the intellectual predominance of the bourgeoisie: "To organise pessimism means nothing other than to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover in political action a sphere reserved one-hundred per cent for images. The image sphere, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation." (1979: 191). The contemporary art of today is successful, up to certain point, in realising the first task; but is failing in the second. That's why the problematic of the image should be reserved for the end: for the exit. (Boynik, 2014)

<sup>12</sup> "This is because practice, that is the art itself, would no longer have been taken for granted." (Ramsden: 82)

comfortable position of the spectator is challenged, then one has to pay his/hers dues, especially to these subjective forces. This subjectivity has to be reformulated using the terms of militancy rather than the sticky psychological fantasies with which we are familiar in our everyday lives. If anything, practice should be about precisely this.

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## WHERE IS THIS TRAIN GOING? SOME NON-BINDING REFLECTIONS ON ART, TOOLS AND MEANING

The work of Nika Autor, who is active in the informal group Newsreel Front, certainly defies any generalised reduction to a statement on the structure of society and the position of an individual within it. Nor is her work an attempt to identify the juncture of socio-political issues and art and the legitimate methodology of their address; instead, it raises the issue of what the actual consequence of such juncture might be. What are the potential and actual consequences of this collision for art and history? As a rule, her questionings aim at certain breaching points and consequently, to freely paraphrase Rancière, at the redistribution of the sensible. (2004: 12) To occupy a position in a certain “distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation” (Ibid.) therefore implies a possibility or impossibility to participate in a community, a position of visibility or invisibility in the common space. This is why the core of the political contains nothing but aesthetics, “a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.” (Ibid.: 13) The aesthetic is thus a distribution of meaning: aesthetics is not a cluster of art practices nor the theory of such; it is not even a theory of the experiential. It should be understood within the meaning of Kantian *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sensory experience. Aesthetics in different systems conditions the common world of our everyday experience and the sharing of this world, determining our positions within it. Nika Autor works in the dispositive of the present, where she attempts to subvert the apparent homogeneity of meaning, endeavouring to build a space of a different interaction of the visible and the utterable and the resulting positions. In the process, she builds on situations and events that radicalise the intolerability of normalised reality: this conflict is staged against the background of the reflection of the policy of representation and its respective overcoming.

Her work is characterised by the tension defined by political, social and cultural controversies. Her research art project seeks out and examines a wide variety of documents testifying to the historical context of the current cultural and political situation. Her work is almost archaeological in revealing the layers of film history and her weaving of them into fragile stories, and in questioning their status in writing history, in exploring historical and contemporary uses of film in the creation of narration, class position and social codes. The selected frames united into a new whole establish complex new relationships precisely through their variety, parallels and contrasts. On the one hand, this is a certain regime of visibility about the deconstruction, while on the other hand it is about criticism of the concept of “political culture” and simultaneously a demand for political action as a reaction to the actual mechanisms of power of our historical stratum. Typical of her works is the research of an immediate and specific historical and political context. Thus she establishes a structure that enables the discussion of a complex network of issues referring to marginalised social segments.

In the contemporary world of mass media, the camera often functions as an instrument that brings the distant reality closer to the viewer, but at the same time keeps it at a safe distance. The shots of battlefields and conflicts, poverty or exodus remain primarily images. Although we know they are real, we somehow do not believe them. Through the images we get from the mass media we somehow own this reality, but only as an image that is suppressed and kept at a distance. As opposed to a media-communicated image that attempts to be a window into reality but usually remains reduced to a mere image, Nika Autor exposes cracks in the image and utters what is beyond it. It is a strategy of the use of film fiction that has become referential in art and theory and has crystallised into a cultural fact; as such, it is in constant tension with what the author’s recent recordings represent. This is a tension between fiction that is a fact and a raw shot that is yet to become a fact. The incrustation of images literally placed before us reduces the distance and strengthens the feeling of confronting what we see. The key feature in the specifics of her work seems to be the continuous problematising of dichotomic couples—visible-invisible, inside-outside—that runs parallel to and unites the reflection on form and substance. This reflection also characterises *Newsreel 63 — The Train of Shadows* (Obzornik 63 — Vlak senc, 2017) from the opening sequences that coincide with the beginnings of the film medium and the mythologised anecdotes about the invasion of film into the real world of the theatre, and continues in the

reflection of an experience of train travel as an arche-filmic experience of a fast succession of sequences through the windows of a train carriage. The inside and outside in the experience of a train trip and of the train in film history radically revalue the categories of reality. This formal questioning finds an equivalent in the character of a migrant, asylum seeker, precarious worker, subjects excluded from the legal order and existing in radically different conditions than those regulating the life of society. Bare life. They are, but they are not. They are inside by being outside. And this precise position is a moment of construction in each of Autor's works. The juxtaposed views of the included and the excluded, of the visible and the invisible, determine each of her reflections as a political question that is "first of all the question of capacity of any bodies to seize their destiny." (2010: 50) These "bodies", this internal exterior, and their paradoxical non-location are not the subject of the artist's approach but, firstly, co-authors *malgré eux*, and secondly, an intolerable agents within the conceptual order that includes them by excluding them.

In a world where, despite our mindfulness, the immediate reality constantly evades us, we can fight the fact that it is alien and lost with the help of understanding the history of film, where the newsreel focuses on the narrative form rather than on the events it summarises. It was only a relatively short time ago that the reality represented by the Newsreel belonged to a world that was essentially different from ours. Now it has turned into a discontinued, conflicting sequence that denies us the support of emotions and instead sharpens our view on the processes of structuring reality. A selected series of film images, precious and indispensable pillars of the regulating of one's own world enables us to deal with this newly created traumatic reality.

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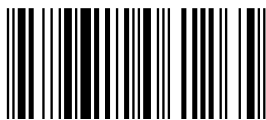


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