MAKING FILMS NEGATIVELY: GODARD'S POLITICAL AESTHETICS

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To break with the Hollywood System induces a radical change of aesthetics.

— JEAN-LUC GODARD, *British Sounds*

This essay discusses films Jean-Luc Godard made collaboratively with Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Henri Roger as the Dziga-Vertov Group. Such films as *Vent d'est* (*East Wind*, 1969), *British Sounds* (1969), *Pravda* (1969) and *Lotte in Italia* (*Struggle in Italy*, 1971) were politically and theoretically engaged and employed modernist techniques and strategies.[1] These films exemplified a "counter-cinema" for Peter Wollen, which through their radical approaches to aesthetics and politics embodied the intellectual configuration or formation that Sylvia Harvey in her 1982 essay "Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties" named as "political modernism."[2] A theory of political modernism worked with and transformed the formulations of Brechtian theory and practice and assumed that the techniques and procedures developed in early modernism and the historical avant-gardes were political. The critique of realism that political modernism entailed was underpinned by an ambitious and coherent theoretical construct developed in the British film journal *Screen* that combined Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis with the semiology of Christian Metz, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva to open an intellectual space for the political analysis of film. Godard's counter-cinema was within and continued the modernism of Brecht in its emphasis upon 'a new attitude that would be distanced, thoughtful, experimental, the reverse of illusory empathy and identification'.[3] Authors such as T. J. Clark writing in *Screen*, and more contemporaneously, Jacques Rancière have challenged the political effectivity of this aesthetic practice and intellectual formation. Clark's analysis of Clement Greenberg's early essays on art and culture written for the Trotskyist journal *Partisan Review* and Clark's exploration of the unhappy discursive encounter of French art criticism and Édouard Manet's scandalous painting of a prostitute *Olympia* (1863) consider the political implications and consequences of avant-garde

negativity. Clark's writing on modernism of the early 1980s reflects upon the relation of radical aesthetics and politics to question whether the techniques and procedures of the avant-garde matter politically as well as artistically. Godard's collaborations and film-making as the Dziga Vertov Group continues the resolute negativity that Clark identifies in the avant-garde, however, the political or tactical effectivity of this practice and the wider formation of political modernism cannot be assumed given the convincing nature of Clark's critique.

Clark and Rancière raise questions of the form radical art should take, the political consequences and effectivity of those forms, and of political commitment as such. Adorno, writing in response to the German translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's 1948 manifesto *What is Literature?* reconsidered the question of commitment or engagement to affirm modernist autonomy as a politically valid alternative to the committed practices of Sartre and Brecht. For Adorno, art should "resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads."[4] He considers divided opinions of committed and autonomous artworks: autonomous art is complacent; its rejection of political engagement is itself deeply political; it is disengaged from the struggle for socialism upon which the survival of culture as such depends. For the defenders of autonomous art, committed practices embody the death of culture which the committed warn against: committed art surrenders the specific values and duties of art as practice and object. Adorno is unconvinced by this antithesis: committed art cancels the difference between art and reality whereas autonomous art denies art's connection with reality, which is the original ground for the claim of autonomy. He qualifies these alternatives: for example, realism is equally amenable to the left and right. The conservative form of Sartre's plays and novels is acceptable to and easily appropriated by the culture industry. For Adorno, the most important artists realise that it is "in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it."[5] He writes that even radical modernism is trapped within and surrenders to an *aporia*: victims are used to create artworks which will be consumed by the world which had destroyed them: the artistic representation of suffering has the power to elicit enjoyment out of suffering: the aesthetic principle gives suffering and the violence of the oppressors meaning; in the transfiguration of suffering into the artistic, Adorno argues, "something of its horror is removed."[6] If committed art can end up affirming the society against which it protests,

Adorno writes more favourably of autonomous works of art (his example his Picasso's *Guernica* (1937)) that "firmly negate empirical reality, destroy the destroyer, that which merely exists and, by merely existing, endlessly reiterates guilt."[7]

The modernism to which the Dziga Vertov Group's practice is compared was self-reflective and "a-causal" and, for Kristeva, part of a "crisis of finitudes" of modern societies.[8] This modernism dissolves coherent or realistic narrative and in association with the rhythmic and acoustic registers of music challenges the identity or cohesion of the sign. Their films were understood in relation to modern or avant-garde art and literature that recognised creative possibilities in the dislocation of the sign and emphasised the radical implications of semiology. This entailed recognising and emphasising the differences through which a signifier is established rather than a theory of signification in which the sign is a fixed relation of signifier and signified.[9] However, the formal innovations that defined and differentiated avant-garde cinema which emphasised the signifier can seem difficult to reconcile with the essayistic and documentary film-making developed by the Dziga Vertov Group which was always concerned with social and historical meaning.[10] The Dziga Vertov Group belonged to modernism's avant-garde sector; the group's film-making demonstrated the impact of modernism on the cinema. It is a kind of practice that emphasises the material character of the sign the significance of which is determined by interrogating its own constitutive codes or by an 'internal dialogue."[11] Modernism, then, emphasises the "physical nature of the signifying material' which does not strain towards a final signified.[12] It was an evolving tradition defined by reflexivity and ontological exploration but for Wollen, it is the historical avant-garde's prolonging and deepening of the semiotic rupture of Cubism that is key to explaining political modernism and the possibilities of a counter-cinema.[13] The discoveries and innovations of Picasso's and Braque's Cubism had implications beyond the history of painting, influencing other arts, and representing a changed concept of the sign which involved the disjunction of signifier and signified within the sign. Cubism represented "a critical semiotic shift, a changed concept and practice of the sign and signification."[14] The developments of abstract painting that followed Cubism more radically suppressed the signified altogether to become "an art of pure signifiers detached from meaning as much as reference."[15] However, the avant-garde tradition to which Godard's collaborative practice belongs draws upon early Soviet cinema, which while recognising that the new

society demanded innovative formal devices, a new film language or cinematic expression, it was still a cinema of signified. However, although informed by film-makers like Vertov and Eisenstein, Godard worked with the dislocation of signifier and signified, rather than taking the signifier as a means of expression. Godard introduced conflict between different cinematic codes that becomes "an art of negativity, a splitting apart of an apparently natural unity, a disjunction of signifier and signified."[16] He challenges the naturalness of bourgeois communication but was not indifferent to the signified in that his collaborative practice was political and part of Marxist culture.

Marx and Engels did not formulate a methodology for cultural analysis or a systematic aesthetics. However, the highly literary account of French history and politics between 1848 and 1851 in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) implies an aesthetic that in its emphases evokes avant-garde negativity. Marx argues that in periods of revolutionary transformation men and women appropriate the languages and the images of the historical past. The bourgeois revolution presents itself in classical costumes to conceal the prosaic content of its own historical tasks.[17] The resurrection and imitation of the dead was necessary for the bourgeoisie — the "class of urban property-owners, with its own distinctive moral and cultural order"[18] — to establish a new but unheroic social formation absorbed in the production of wealth as its primary aim. Marx differentiates different forms or phases of resurrection and the appropriation of classical language and imagery. If the original phase is historically necessary, its repetition is glamorous, grotesque and farcical and is comparable to fascism's tendency to aestheticize politics discussed by Walter Benjamin's through his example of Marinetti's Futurism. These aesthetic repetitions, whether historically necessary or purely ideological, contrast with "the social revolution of the nineteenth century" that sloughs of any "superstitious regard of the past" to discover an imagery from the future: "without recourse to myth, and […] clear concerning its content."[19] The "antique models" of the bourgeoisie are unable to contain the excessive content of *social* revolution which therefore must abandon aesthetics. If heroic and beautiful myths or the "phrase" transcended a prosaic or mediocre content, "here the content transcends the phrase."[20]

In its abandonment of myth and in its critical nature, the social revolution echoes the "gestures of renunciation" of the avant-garde: its project was a "demonic" improvisation of new socially critical forms. Art becomes negation in the nineteenth century and "a

project of total subversion"; the "nihilistic gaiety" of Berlin Dada completely discordant with the "illusory revolts" of the post-war avant-garde.[21] Clark explores avant-garde negativity in a 1981 essay on the art critic Clement Greenberg's cultural analysis of the emergence and function of a cultural avant-garde — the defence and continuation of a valuable culture within the 'ideological confusion and violence' of bourgeois societies.[22] Greenberg's object is the tendency in art towards self-reference: the avant-garde found adequate forms for bourgeois societies without succumbing to their ideological divisions while opposing the tendencies to refuse the arts be their own justification.[23] In part, this was an opposition to the fake art produced for mass consumption in bourgeois societies; in response to the popularity of kitsch and ideological confusions and uncertainties, the avant-garde pursued purity, which for Greenberg, was the acceptance of the actual conditions and limitations of medium.

Clark recasts Greenberg's account of modernism's formal logic to include kinds of practices that it omits: practices of negation are "the very form of the practices of purity" Greenberg extols.[24] Clark identifies an active dialectical tension between aesthetic and social values, so, modernism's recovery of the literal flatness of the picture surface that Greenberg identified metaphorically signifies values derived from social life rather those of an autonomous aesthetic sphere. "Flatness" is the determining specific limit and condition of the medium of painting but it could analogise the "popular" or signify "modernity", or "truth." Avant-garde practices insisted upon a concept of medium which frequently appeared as a kind of estrangement: there is an emphasis upon its limits and conditions but its consistency was constantly negated. Greenberg is dismissive of the negativity that is actually inseparable from modernism's work of self-definition; recognising but disdaining its negative rhetoric which appears in his own descriptions of American culture, of Jackson Pollock's "emphatic surfaces" in their "violence, exasperation and stridency."[25] For Clark, modernist practice

> is extraordinary and desperate […] a work of interminable and absolute decomposition, a work which is always pushing "medium" to its limits — to its ending — to the point where it breaks or evaporates or turns back into mere unworked material. That is the form in which medium is retrieved or reinvented: the fact of art, in modernism, is the fact of negation.[26]

An unstated assumption of Greenberg's cultural analysis is that ruling classes had once possessed recognisable and distinctive cultures of their own that had clarified and enacted their experiences and values, responding to their demands and assumptions. In the later nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie began to dismantle this focussed and distinctive cultural identity for the sake of maintaining social control, revoking its claim to the absolutes of the aristocracy it had displaced. The fact or "dance of negation" begins with the loss of a social basis for art production in ruling elites; modernism's "negative cast" was determined by meanings becoming disputable, a culture in which "meanings have become muddy and stale." The profitable industrial product and "ersatz culture" of kitsch is a symptom of the abandonment of the severe cultural absolutes of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie destroyed its own cultural forms as it entrenched and defended its power through a kind of invisibility that came from its involvement in, its celebration of, mass culture. Clark's argument follows Barthes's notion of the bourgeoisie as "a constant flickering in and out of social visibility, a permanent, endlessly inventive *société anonyme*."[27] In this context, the avant-garde found useable forms of expression: an aristocratic account of experience and its modes would be preserved through the density of avant-garde practices. An emergent and ultimately defensive avant-garde embodied and continued aristocratic cultural values in a society that had accepted kitsch as dominant cultural form.

It is arguable that Godard continued the resolute negativity of the avant-garde in art and literature. For Clark, negativity was an all-encompassing and uncontrollable form, embodied in "the black square, the hardly differentiated field of sound, the infinitely flimsy skein of spectral colour, speech stuttering and petering out into etcetera's or excuses."[28] Negation involved the deliberate avoidance or the parody of previously established skills once taken as essential to serious art making. However, the political effectivity of artistic negativity could not be taken for granted: Clark identifies another kind of 'empty negation' in modernism, another aspect or face of modernist art: "comfortably ineffable, a vacuity, a vagueness, a mere mysticism of sight."[29] Clark follows Adorno's argument that works which abandon coherent meaning risk aesthetic failure and a loss seriousness: "Such works drift to the brink of indifference, degenerate insensibly into mere hobbies, into idle repetition of formulas now abandoned in other art forms, into trivial patterns."[30]

The different opposed modes of negativity play an important part in his analysis of Manet's *Olympia.* For Clark, the painting's disruptions of different signifying systems were politically insignificant because they were not rooted in the struggles to control and position the female body politically and ideologically. There is a difference between "an allowed, arbitrary and harmless play of the signifier" and kinds of semiotic play that function to disrupt the smooth functioning of ideology.[31] The defining social function of all ideology is the constitution of concrete individuals as subjects through acts of recognition that Althusser calls "interpellation." *Olympia* did not succumb to modernity willingly or embrace it enthusiastically but although the failure to situate a woman (the naked body of a prostitute in the painting) in the fetishized space of male fantasy is admirable it was still compatible with situating her within our public and familiar world. The "ruthlessness of negation" is what Clark admires most and what he feels is still usable in modern art.[32] It is a ruthlessness that describes *Olympia's* refusal to signify "according to the established codings for the nude" so she will take her expected place in the Imaginary.[33] But the picture is not given an elliptical but readable position within "the code of classes" — in the social world which actually produces and reproduces the Imaginary. For the picture to disrupt the smooth functioning of ideologies it would actually have to be readable "within the actual conflict of images and ideologies surrounding the practice of prostitution in 1865."[34] *Olympia* finds its meanings in negation and the refusal of dominant ideologies rather than in the repressed alternative meanings or culture of the dominated.

So, for Clark, *Olympia's* unfixed texture of signs was ultimately unreadable and so "empty," unable, therefore, to do critical work. Modernism was an open, disparate, unfinished, and contradictory practice and despite the risk of vagueness he did not wish to see it displaced for the certainties — the closure and simplicity — of realism. He says this in reply to Wollen, who had accused Clark of effectively rejecting the "whole modernist movement, including its radical avant-garde sector" in his "confused" exegesis of Manet's painting.[35] Clark had attempted to "undermine the whole paradigm of modernism and, specifically, the aesthetics of its radical avant-garde sector" — which would mean Godard's cinema. Instead, Clark basically wanted an unambiguous and consistent representations of class division and class struggle whereas *Olympia* is duplicitously inconsistent. However, Clark's objection was not to formal negativity as

Wollen claims but its disconnection from political struggles and occupying therefore "an unenviable limbo."[36] Brecht's remark that "a vanguard can lead the way along a retreat or into an abyss" expresses something of what Clark means.[37] Clark argues that to distinguish "harmless formal play" from a "harmful unsettling of categories" was always integral to modernist practice: modernism "was compelled […] to exceed its normal terms of reference and sketch out others, in preliminary form."[38] For Wollen, Brecht represents an alternative to the "vacuous" modernism enshrined in Greenberg's theory of art (Clark calls this kind of modernism *Olympia's* "progeny"). However, Clark also recognises Brecht's political modernism; Clark's argument respects the search for determinacy in modernist practices that is continued by the Dziga Vertov Group. It is arguable that its films do not merely involve an insignificant semiotic play in a kind of nihilistic refusal to signify and, in their documentary form, are rooted in actual forms of social life in ways that Clark argues *Olympia* was not. Although for Wollen, Clark's target was *Screen's* commitment to the avant-garde art and culture that Godard exemplified. If Clark's argument could be reconciled with *Screen's* enthusiasm for "dis-identificatory practices" then their failure, their degeneration into a mere refusal to signify could equally describe Godard's cinema in relation to the established codes of the mainstream.

In employing strategies and techniques pioneered by or characteristic of avant-garde art, the films of the Dziga Vertov Group were separate from rather than in advance of commercial cinema, which was Godard's own background. The collective's counter-cinema re-examined and re-worked an aesthetic that respected and imitated the spatial and temporal continuities of the physical or natural world. In both its form and in its intended subjective effects, counter-cinema challenged the naturalism of orthodox commercial cinema. Godard experimented with the traditions and conventions of commercial or mainstream cinema early in his career. Borrowing from literature, Godard divided his *Vivre sa vie* (1962), scripted and directed by Godard and starring Anna Karina as Nana Kleinfrankenheim, into twelve separate titled chapters and title sequence of *Une femme mariée* (1964) tells us that we are watching "fragments of a film shot in 1964 in black and white." Godard breaks with what Wollen calls the tradition of "narrative transitivity" of commercial cinema, that is, a logically caused sequence or chain of events in which each "event" is usually psychologically motivated and follows coherently a preceding one. Godard's strategies weaken film's coherence and intelligibility and in the

collaborations of the Dziga Vertov Group narrative progression is not just weakened but entirely broken or destroyed by digressions, repetitions and kinds of reflexive modernist strategies. The strategy of interrupting or breaking of narrative is explained in voice over of *Lotte in Italia,* co-directed by Godard and Gorin and scripted by the Dziga Vertov Group. The film is intended as a dissection and analysis of the life of Paola Taviani (Cristiana Tullio-Altan), an Italian student activist and Marxist. We only learn her name through her interpellation, when it is spoken in reply to different figures who hold authority: she answers to a policeman who demands to see her identity card as she sells a Maoist newspaper in the street and to her university professor. The way the film interrupts narrative transitivity is explained politically and theoretically, the explanation drawing upon the materialist theory of ideology developed by Althusser. The film separates and analyses different reflections of her life and her experience within what Althusser named as the "ideological state apparatuses": she is a bourgeois university student and mathematics teacher to a young worker; she lives in her family home and appears as a typical teenager; she is a consumer and a political activist. These aspects of her life are divided from each other by black and red screens or monochromatic fields, her life and the film as articulated successive shots are equally fragmented — or the fragmentation is explicitly foregrounded. The voice-over addresses Paola Taviani explaining to her and the audience that we have seen reflections or imaginary fragments of her life separated by black images.

For most film makers, cinematic discourse is the simple articulation of successive shots; if two consecutive images appear as "autonomous cells" then their articulation can occur through either "an extra cinematic element" or by something common to both images. In either case, the formation of the syntagm makes the signifieds of the images redundant and therefore a substantial loss of information occurs and the opening of a fissure between this chain of articulated material images and an anchoring or determining signified. In the cinematic form of Godard's cinema mutually articulated images are independent of or they exist in relation to other "excessive elements." Its techniques and devices exasperate the instances of cinematic articulation which seems to bracket or downplay the importance of the signified and what is "above" it, the imaginary field.[39] Neither is it naively assumed that a film is simply the reproduction of an image or reflection; the reflections that are described in voiceover in *Lotte in Italia* are ideological.

An ideology is a system and practice of representation possessing relative autonomy, which means we are shown not only Paola Taviani's lived or real relation to the world or to her conditions of existence but the imaginary relation to those conditions. In ideology, and this is Godard and Gorin's object, a real and imaginary relation co-exist, there is an overdetermined unity of the real and the imaginary relation of men and women to their conditions of existence in such a way that the real relation becomes meaningful and expressive.[40] It is worth emphasising the materiality of the imaginary relation in ideology that Althusser identifies, which

> is itself real, which means not simply that the individuals live it as such (the mode of illusion, the inverted image) but that it is effectively, practically, the reality of their concrete existence, the term of their subject positions, the basis of their activity, in a given social order.[41]

The black screens interrupt the reflections and later in the film we learn that they are displaced images of capitalist relations of production. We learn that Paola Taviani understands the social roles she plays and identities she possesses when they are understood as contradictory and determined by, existing within, those relations.

Lotte in Italia, through these visual interruptions and by voiced over descriptions of a following sequence or event, destroys narrative transitivity of the flow of the narrative of orthodox cinema and which was still recognisable in Godard's films of the early 1960s. Godard employs various devices to make identification in terms of suspended belief or with the star or character practically impossible. His cinema foregrounds the processes of film production rather than producing a transparent window on the world. It employs multiple diegesis — heterogeneous worlds exist within a single film — and allusions to and direct quotations from other films, art and literature (*Lotte in Italia* begins with Paola Taviani quoting from Mao's essay 'On Contradiction' (1937)). Godard's films are characterised by kinds of pastiche and parody that Wollen describes as a "genuine polyphony" of different speaking literary, historical and political voices.[42] This multiplicity, which becomes a kind of formal conflict, a splitting part of the natural unity of sound and image and the disjunction or separation of the signifier and the signified, is an "act of negativity."[43]

In watching films made by the Dziga Vertov Group we made aware of images being chosen and used by the film-makers. For example, the footage of everyday life in socialist Czechoslovakia in *Pravda* (1969), co-directed with Paul Bourron and Jean-Henri Roger and scripted by the Dziga Vertov Group, and filmed a year after the Prague Spring, is raw and naturalistic. But the commentary that describes the footage of the impressions of the journey through the country — we are told what the camera shows us — has the effect that we see not the reality of contemporary life in Czechoslovakia but the reality of images as material signs. As spectators, we are never really allowed to confuse the signifier with the signified and we take on, therefore, a critical attitude towards these images. The voice over is a dialogue between "Vladimir" and "Rosa" — he explains to her that the images – the evidence of the nature of Czechoslovakian socialism — must be analysed through the editing of the sounds and images of the film differently. The avant-garde form of the film in the relation between images and sounds is employed for the critical analysis of the social and political situation in Czechoslovakia and the health of its socialism. There is a sense of dislocation and fragmentation — the relative health or sickness of the society is figured by a symbolic red rose shown trodden into the mud — but it is directed and political. Godard's films separate out or disjoint images and sounds, although not entirely applicable to the first two parts of *Pravda,* in the third part of the film, Rosa quotes at length from Mao's condemnation of Khrushchev's revisionism taken from "Quotations from Mao Tse Tung" (1966).

Sounds — speech and music — and kinds of writing, titles, captions, posters and Dada like collages are part of the montage, criticise, interpret, and transform sequences of images. *British Sounds* (1969) was co-directed and scripted with Jean-Henri Roger, and commissioned by London Weekend Television. In a similar way to *Pravda* it is a documentary of six sequences that analyses the images and sounds of contemporary British capitalism, social and gender relations, which via voice over are contextualised historically. The documentary begins by "rewriting" a line from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848): "In a word, the bourgeoisie creates a world in its image. Comrades! We must destroy that image! […] Sometimes the class struggle is also the struggle of one image against another image, of one sound against another sound […] in a film, this struggle is between images and sounds." The relation between sounds and images is conflictual, ironizing, and mutually undermining. *British Sounds'* first sequence

is a long, continuous tracking shot of workers building sports cars interrupted by two hand-written placards alluding to the October Revolution and work; the deafening sound of the factory superimposed upon the image is shrill and screeching (and appears reused in the later *Lotte in Italia*). The voices of an adult and child read out and repeat altered passages from Marx's writings and moments in the history of class struggle in the country. This sequence vividly denies the unity of sound and image privileged in modern cinema and therefore the cohesion of the pro-filmic reality, undermining its necessity and assumed naturalness.

In their appropriations and references, in *Pravda,* we see shots of an opened copy of Mao's *Little Red Book* wedged in and above the camera lens, the films made as the Dziga Vertov Group demonstrate Godard's commitment to the ideology of Maoism rather than other kinds of revolutionary thought, such as Trotskyism or anarchism, which participated in May 1968. His commitment to Maoism waned after 1972. Maoism was a complex phenomenon; the split between Russia and China became a fact in the early 1960s following the crisis of Stalinism. The Chinese castigated the Soviet bureaucracy as revisionist and "bourgeois." In its support for national liberation struggles Maoism portrayed the world fundamentally divided between developed and underdeveloped countries; the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence was a form of imperialism in which the Russians had connived with the United States to split the world into spheres of influence. In response to American military escalation in Vietnam, an article in the Chinese journal *Red Flag* argued that countries in the socialist camp or the base areas of world revolution should help those countries who have not yet won victory against imperialism. "The socialist countries should serve as base areas for the world revolution and as the main force in combatting imperialist aggression."[44] This analysis was supported in classical Marxism through the concept of the emergence of a "labour aristocracy" that Lenin elaborated developing Engels' recognition of a privileged and respectable minority of the British working class who identified with the bourgeoisie and benefited from its position in capitalist societies. (The cover of a French translation of Lenin's 1916 "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism" that discusses the relationship of imperialism and the opportunism of labour movement appears as part of a montage in *Pravda.*)

From the mid-1960s, Chinese Maoism had declared that degeneration in the USSR had led to a restoration of capitalism which followed the death of Stalin in 1953 and

Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU of February 1956 that openly condemned Stalin's "self-glorification" and cult of individuality. Maoism defended Stalin's regime and branded the USSR under Khrushchev and Brezhnev as capitalist: market relations, consumerism, and material incentives were symptomatic of the restoration of capitalism; a new bourgeois stratum had crystallised which exploited Soviet workers primarily through forms of corruption. Although it could be pointed out that social differentiation and wage differentials had characterised Soviet society of the 1920s and 1930s, Maoism condemned contemporary disparities of wealth and the authoritarianism of Soviet society. The Maoists critique of existing socialist societies in terms of their degeneration was largely subjective — pointing to a moral and ideological back sliding — rather than dealing with deeper and primarily economic social processes. There was a critique of bourgeois life styles, the access to middle-class luxuries and perks, and therefore a stress on the personal and subjective. As such, a new political space emerges: the class struggle takes place in the intimate being of the individual in the form of a conflict between personal and collective interests. Mao tried to revivify Leninist politics by drawing on ideas of self-criticism; the individual was to be understood as a series of contradictions rather than as a fixed essence; this understanding of subjectivity and self-criticism informs the portrayal of Paola Taviani's lived experience and the roles she plays and the formal structure of *Lotte in Italia.* The Maoist concept and political experience of cultural revolution, for Alain Badiou, a sequence that runs from November 1965 to July 1968 which is caused by series of divisions with the Chinese Communist Party that has held power since 1949. Its target was "those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road" and resulted from the recognition in Lenin's last writings that the political seizure of state institutions and the economic reorganisation of the relations of production were not enough to abolish class hierarchies and struggles. The emphasis on personal and ideological struggle — the "struggle of the proletariat against the old ideas, culture, customs and habits" aligned with a commitment to the Third World determined Maoism and the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" as appropriate forms or imagery for the critique of consumer society of Godard's *Weekend* (1967) and *Tout va Bien* (1972).[45]

In a 1969 interview published in the film journal *Cinéthique* with Gérard Leblanc, the editors of the literary journal *Tel Quel,* Jean Thibaudeau and Marcelin Pleynet explored

political cinema. In terms of his montage practice indebted to Soviet cinema of the 1920s Godard had confronted cinema's ideological nature but in asserting his personal "anarchist" ideology, his cinema provided only "agitational dissent."[46] For Pleynet, a political cinema did not necessarily need to represent politics as its signified. *La chinoise* (1967), written and directed by Godard and featuring Anne Wiazemsky, Jean-Pierre Léaud, and Juliet Berto, was "splashed" with the politics of Maoism. The film, which tells the story of a group of Parisian Maoist students, was generally taken to be a satire on Maoism on its release in that Godard represents the students and their revolutionary discourse ironically, as (sympathetic) caricatures, but it prefigures the events of May '68. The character of Guillaume (Léaud) lectures on the relationships between the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam understood in terms of a Maoist critique of Soviet revisionism intercut with ridiculous dramatizations of the war in Vietnam using children's toys.

Films were commodities, but they were also ideological; they were political in so far as they were ideologically determined; cinema reproduced ideology but the relationship between film and ideology was not the same in every case. Defining the field of study and theoretical methodologies of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni identified different categories of film based on their different relations to ideology: cinema was political because it is ideological determined and reproduces ideology; if the majority of films were the unconscious instruments of the dominant ideology, another category resisted their ideological assimilation by dealing with a "directly political subject," operating critically, therefore, on the level of the signified. This was the problem with films like *La chinoise* in the *Cinéthique* discussion: the representation of politics did not involve a thorough critique of cinematic form; there need to be a struggle on two fronts — on the levels of signifier and signified. But films which attacked ideology by the signified — films which therefore presupposed a theoretical activity *and* avant-garde cinema that emphasised the signifier both constituted what was "essential in the cinema."[47] The conclusion was that militant or revolutionary cinema had employed conservative or traditional aesthetics to reach a wide or popular audience but it was argued that it should possess a political dimension of its own as film. Raising the problems of film-making is as political as the political arguments that take place within them. Political film which adopted the language and imagery of the dominant ideology was more likely to be caught

within the system it opposed; the task of critics was to differentiate these different relations of film and ideology to consider the political effectivity of film.

Jacques Rancière takes a critical position on the Brechtian paradigm for political art focusing upon the portrayal of the spectator, questioning biases and effectivity. In its foregrounding of processes and mechanisms, Brecht's epic theatre is anti-illusionist, analytical, and self-conscious as a signifying practice. Its difference to Aristotelian theatre derive from techniques and devices of distanciation: it does not assume a spectator's passive empathy and appeals to his or reason. The spectator's experience will be neither inspiring or cathartic but educational and political; it expects a different attitude and relationship. The strategies of Epic theatre were intended to "liberate the viewer from the state of being captured by [the] illusions of art which encourage passive identification with fictional worlds."[48] In its Brechtian mode, Godard's cinema also repositions the spectator, demanding a different more active kind of viewing and foregrounds the processes through which sounds and images are produced. Rancière criticises radical practices and theories that understood the spectator to be captive — a passive and ignorant bystander to an enthralling image. And for Brecht, spectators of traditional theatre were mesmerised: "somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition […]. They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers […] these people seem relieved of activity and like men to whom something is being done."[49] Spectators were without mastery for Pleynet and for Baudry, spectators were ignorant of their captivity in the dark and enclosed space of the cinema auditorium. Viewing is the opposite of knowing and the spectator is ignorant of how appearances are produced and the reality they conceal; spectating is the opposite of acting; the spectator is merely a passive voyeur of seductive images, possessing an illusory mastery over the spectacle. We need art that educates rather than seduces for participants in the processes of signification rather than "passive voyeurs."[50]

Social emancipation, for Rancière, involves challenging the opposition between viewing and acting which is structured in terms of domination and subjection; viewing is not subordinate to acting: the "spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares [and] interprets," she is creative and participates in the performance; she is an active interpreter of the theatrical or cinematic spectacle.[51] An implication of this argument is that the category of mainstream films that are unconscious instruments of

ideology are not necessarily reactionary; they can be creatively refashioned. Rancière suggests a different idea of subjective emancipation than that of the Brechtian paradigm or mode; emancipation involves the blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure, acting and looking. Rancière relates the politics of aesthetics to artefacts that possess the properties of art not through their technical perfection but because they belong a "specific sensorium" or "specific form of sensory apprehension." These are heterogeneous sensory forms which belong to "the aesthetic regime of art," which, in experiencing them, promise new distributions of the sensible that Rancière describes in terms of appearance and Schiller's concept of play. This is an activity that is autotelic and uninterested in gaining power over others; play suspends oppositions of activity and passivity and appearance and reality, to undermine the power of an educated elite over the unrefined senses of the masses, of the domination of one humanity by another. The artefacts that come to be defined as art in the modern period are those that adhere to a different sensorium to that of domination. Or, a specifically political aesthetics is the suspension of domination through an autonomous aesthetic experience. As such, social emancipation as it relates to the connection between art and politics is primarily concerned with the body and its introduction into a new configuration of the sensible in which its capacities and incapacities, its function and destination, were no longer predetermined or fixed by that body's — the body of a worker — position within the social relations of production. Rancière describes a carpenter laying a parquet floor, resting from his work, and looking out through a window onto a garden and acquiring therefore an aesthetic and distracted gaze incompatible with the prescribed task for which he is paid. This "aesthetic rupture" through which a different experience and configuration of the body occurs is the ruination of one distribution of the sensible and the beginning of a new one. This political aesthetics is not the same as kinds of critical art which aims to produce new perceptions of the world through its alienation so that it can be transformed: Rancière names Heartfield, Brecht, Godard, and Martha Rosler as exponents of critical of art intended to "mobilize bodies through the presentation of a strangeness."[52] Rancière doubts the actual effectiveness of critical art based on montage and other "denunciatory techniques" and considers it contradictory regards its aim to combine "aesthetic separation and ethical continuity," to fuse the shocking strangeness of montage and "political mobilisation." Rancière sees no necessary continuity and recalling Clark's critique of Manet's *Olympia* he argues that the

disassociation of or rupture within kinds of sense or "patterns of intelligibility" lead nowhere — it either normalizes how the world is, it is supported by the world it aims to condemn and transform, or says self-evident things.[53]

The question of the signifier rather than the signified focusses discussion of revolutionary art and relationship to ideology; as Adorno writes of Brecht's modernism, the transformation of straightforwardly given events and experiences into alien phenomena was primarily a question of form. The collaborative films made by the Dziga Vertov Group are a modernist practice that employ strategies of estrangement with the expectation of changing the spectator's position within ideology; strategies and a mode of political art criticised by Rancière. For Adorno, modernism is not a consciously political practice committed to the cause of socialism but through its inherent "uncalculating autonomy" it can achieve political effects, which, like Clark are understood in terms of the negation of empirical reality and "total dislocation," for Rancière, a kind of "resistant form." In Wollen and Clark's exchange that appeared in *Screen,* the main point of contention is whether the negativity of the avant-garde actually matters politically or whether the refusal to signify according to the dominant codes in representation is actually a mere, harmless play; the form avant-garde art takes is explained in relation to the dislocation of the sign initiated by Wollen by Cubism and therefore the radicalism of the avant-garde is understood through the lens of the more radical implications of semiology. This is semiology as a "critical science" that operated "a ceaseless destruction of the whole ideology of representation," especially that of this alternative mode of revolutionary art, realism.[54] More contemporaneously, Rancière elaborates an aesthetic alternative to the model for political art that demands the transformation of the spectator who must take a different attitude to their lived experience and is therefore opposed to the Brechtian mode which was continued and developed in Godard's post-1968 collaborative practices of cinema.

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1. Godard commented that "The group name is to indicate a programme, to raise a flag, not just to emphasise one person." See Kent E. Carroll, "Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group," in *Focus on Godard,* ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 50.

2. See Sylvia Harvey, "Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties," *Screen* 23:1 (May/June 1982): 45-59.

3. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 182.

4. *Ibid*., 180.

5. *Ibid*., 188.

6. *Ibid*., 189.

7. *Ibid*., 190.

8. Julia Kristeva, "Signifying Practice and Mode of Production," *Edinburgh '76 Magazine* (Edinburgh Film Festival, 1976): 65.

9. Rosalind Coward, "Class, 'Culture' and the Social Formation," *Screen* 18:1 (Spring 1977): 77.

10. Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde Histories and Theories," *Screen* 19:3 (Autumn 1978): 121.

11. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan/British Film Institute, 2013), 139.

12. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Writing, Fiction, Ideology," *Afterimage* 5 (Spring 1974): 24, 26.

13. See Wollen, "Photography and Aesthetics," *Screen* 17:4 (1978): 27.

14. Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Edinburgh '76 Magazine* 1, "Psycho-Analysis/Cinema/Avant-Garde" (Edinburgh Film Festival, 1976): 79.

15. *Ibid*.

16. *Ibid*., 82

17. See Stanley Mitchell, "'The Eighteenth Brumaire' and the Construction of a Marxist Aesthetics," in *1848: The Sociology of Literature,* ed. Francis Barker *et al.* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1978), 22.

18. T. J. Clark, "A Bourgeois Dance of Death: Max Buchon on Courbet – 1," *The Burlington Magazine* 111:793 (April 1969): 208.

19. Fred Orton, "Action, Revolution and Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 14:2 (1991): 9.

20. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Surveys from Exile,* ed. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 149.

21. The English Section of the Situationist International [Tim Clark, Christopher Gray, Charles Radcliffe and Donald Nicholson-Smith], *The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution* (London: Chronos Publications, 2003), 3-5.

22. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 8.

23. Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in *Clement Greenberg The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 28.

24. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate,* ed. Francis Frascina (London: Routledge, 2000), 78.

25. Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," in *Clement Greenberg The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 166.

26. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," 82.

27. Clark, "Origins of the Present Crisis," *New Left Review* (March/April 2000): 92.

28. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," 83.

29. *Ibid*.

30. Adorno, "Commitment," 191.

31. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865," *Screen* 20:1 (1980): 38

32. Clark, "Arguments About Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate,* ed. Francis Frascina (London: Routledge, 2000), 103.

33. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865," 39.

34. *Ibid*.

35. Peter Wollen, "Manet: Modernism and Avant-Garde," *Screen* 21:2 (1980): 15

36. Clark, "A Note in Reply to Peter Wollen," *Screen* 21:3 (1980): 99.

37. Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács," *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 72.

38. Clark, "A Note in Reply to Peter Wollen," 100.

39. Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," *Screen* 18:4 (Winter 1977/78): 36-37.

40. Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996), 233.

41. Stephen Heath, "On Screen, In Frame: Film and Ideology," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1:3 (1976): 254.

42. Wollen, "Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 126.

43. Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes": 82.

44. Lo Jui-ch'ing quoted by Livio Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China: A Marxist Interpretation of the Cultural Revolution and its Aftermath,* trans. Gregor Benton and Marie Collitti (London: NLB, 1976), 75.

45. See Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 57.

46. Marcelin Pleynet, "Economic – Ideological – Formal," in Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture,* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 150.

47. Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (1)," *Screen Reader 1: Cinema/Ideology/Politics* (Glasgow: The Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977), 6.

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49. Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964), 187.

50. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 4

51. ibid., 13.

52. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics,* ed. Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2010), 143.

53. *Ibid*.

54. Heath, "Introduction: Questions of Emphasis," *Screen* 14:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1973): 18.