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What does political film-making mean?

Vrääth Öhner

Translated by Aileen Derieg

The cinema is not a simple instrument of representation, but rather, as Jean-Luc Godard remarks at the end of his "Histoire(s) du cinéma", a "form that thinks", i.e. it is - and we can also extend this definition to other "time-crystallizing engines" such as television or video - a spiritual automaton. This definition is based on another one that states, according to Gilles Deleuze, that we stand with the cinema before an exposition of the world, in which the image is absolutely identical with the movement: "image = movement", as Deleuze writes. As an image, this image-movement is not part of the sphere of consciousness or intentionality, just as it does not represent a characteristic of the material world as movement. In other words, at the level of immanence, the level of the "image per se", the movement-image eludes the logic of representation. Its model would not be natural perception, but rather a "state of things that is constantly changing, a stream of material, in which no anchoring point or center of reference could be indicated" (Deleuze 1989:86)

This aspect of a universal mutability could be called the science fiction aspect in the cinema philosophy of Deleuze as well as in the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson, on which this model is based.

Posing universal mutability as a model of the movement-image seems contra-intuitive in many respects: it contradicts not only the logic of representation, depiction and imagining, but also *the* history as well as *every possible* history of film or cinema. The essence of film is apparently less determined by the plurality of films or its much admired realism, which has brilliantly rehabilitated the logic of representation thought to be overcome in modernism, but instead by the paradox of a "historical ontology", which multiplies film or cinema's mode of being and exposes it to temporal change, a historical becoming. In this context, Deleuze repeatedly comes back to Nietzsche's formulation again, according to which "something new (a new art) can never reveal its essence at the beginning, but is only able to prove what it has been from the beginning through the circuitous route of its development" (Deleuze 1991:63).

Against this background, Godard's frequently cited statement may perhaps be better understood, that it is not a matter of "making political films, but rather making films politically". In fact, there is something problematical about the relationship between film and politics, which does not permit simply going from one to the other, from making films to making politics and vice versa. What is problematical here has to do with the position from which one speaks, with speaking itself, and with the medium that conveys it; in short: with the problem of the "how" of representation, in which the becoming-problematical of every form of representation is found. Of course, this problem does not relate only to film or cinema, but it is especially clearly evident there from the perspective of a "historical ontology".

This applies, first of all, to the question of whether cinema can even be a suitable site for political articulation or the articulation of the political under the present conditions. In the late sixties, early

seventies, this was apparently not really the case: "Film can show revolutions - but it cannot stimulate revolutions by showing them, nor any revolutionary consciousness and especially no revolutionary violence (Lepenies 1972:38), wrote Wolf Lepenies in 1970. The film that purports to stimulate revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary violence, according to Lepenies, would be nothing other than trivial and thus have an anti-enlightenment effect: "What the film would have to look like, if it should be able to find viewers and have an enlightening effect at the same time, has, of course, not yet been discovered by anyone. Godard makes films for intellectuals, because he wants to destroy the myth that an art for the masses is possible now" (Lepenies 1972:29). The necessity of making films politically resulted in the late sixties, early seventies, from the situation that cinema as art for the masses could no longer be a place for forming political consciousness, indeed might never have been a place for this at all.

It only takes a small step to go from this conviction to the next, namely that cinema is not at all a place for forming consciousness - neither political consciousness nor any other. Were the hopes of the twenties, that the masses would encounter themselves in the cinema as revolutionary subject, that cinema could contribute to the individuation of the masses, not based essentially on the figure of the shock of recognition (presupposing, of course, that a proletarized mass exists)? In other words, on a figure of the sublime that compels thinking, but does not anticipate it? And when these hopes are crushed (historically because of the mediocrity of productions as well as propaganda and state manipulation - key word: aestheticization of politics and politicization of art), does this not sever the delicate link between compelled thinking and renewed consciousness in the place of the cinema?

Deleuze says yes: "When the violence is no longer that of the image and its vibrations, but rather that of the represented, one falls into a bloody arbitrariness, and when the grandeur is no longer that of the composition, but rather a pure and simple swelling of the represented, there is no more intellectual stimulation and thinking no longer arises" (Deleuze 1991:215). With this song of farewell for the "old cinema" Deleuze introduces his explanations showing that the hopes of a new cinema have also fundamentally changed along with the conditions: What compels us to think in modern cinema is no longer the emergence of consciousness, but rather the impotence of thinking. In this way, cinema realizes the extensive implications of the "spiritual automaton". Deleuze provides a threefold definition for this impotence, which modern cinema proclaims and which conversely first makes it modern cinema: impotence is expressed "from the perspective of the extinguishment of the whole or the totalization of the images in favor of an outside that inserts itself between them[1]; the extinguishment of the inner monologue as the whole of the film in favor of a free indirect speech and view[2]; the extinguishment of the unity of the human being with the world in favor of a break, which leaves us no more than the belief in just this world[3]" (Deleuze 1991:243). - A decidedly melancholy perspective, which obviously finds its power in the affirmation of this melancholy.

For Example "La Chinoise"

Ten years afterward, Jean-Luc Godard would say about "La Chinoise" that the film is an example "that cinema can serve to show us the emergence of forms" (Godard 1984:217). Filmed roughly a year before the events of May 1968 in France, the film

shows the atmosphere that contributed to their occurrence. That has nothing to do with vision or becoming conscious, but rather with the painful consciousness that there is something ridiculous about the endeavors of the figures, who play Marxist-Leninists in the film, although there is also something true in their endeavors. The figures are true and false at the same time, but for that very reason they reflect the tone that predominated then. That is also why Godard called "La Chinoise" a documentary film: "There was something interesting and true about the things that happened. When it was said in France in 1967, that is ridiculous, these children are ridiculous ..., that had to be contradicted. And when it is said today, these children, 68, they thought something right, they did something right ..., then today I can only say, yes, but they were also rather ridiculous" (Godard 1984:218).

The crucial portion of this constellation, which not only suspends judgment on the figures shown, but also makes them undecidable (i.e. turns them over to the "power of the false"), is the method, with which Godard undermines the representative function of images and their links. From the formula "not a correct image, just an image" Godard developed a pedagogy problematizing seeing and speaking, in which nothing other than difference constantly returns: "[Godard] counters that which the other says (assertion, explanation, sermon) with that which *another* other says. There is always a great unknown in his pedagogy, because the kind of relationship he has to the 'good' discourses (which he defends, for example the Maoist) remains in the dark" (Daney 1998:73), wrote Serge Daney, for instance, in 1976.

The great misunderstanding, for example, that Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Leaud) clears up – the Lumière brothers were not the first documentarists, but rather the last impressionists, Georges Mélies did not invent fictional cinema, but rather the weekly news – relate

to a conventional myth of the origins of cinema, which the thesis that Guillaume expounds simply turns on its head. The misunderstanding is not cleared up in this way, though, but simply repeated in the inverse form: the sense of the inversion still remains in the dark, even though it retains the essential – the separation between document and fiction, which is consistently undermined, not least of all, by "La Chinoise".

In addition, Guillaume's lecture itself represents a twofold repetition: Henri Langlois' thesis that he presents, and which in turn repeats a gesture of inversion. This gesture of inversion could be characterized as another myth of origins, specifically that of materialist dialectics (turning Hegel right side up), the analytical power of which is simultaneously affirmed and rejected by the scene. It is affirmed, because the misunderstanding could be clarified, and rejected because the clarification of the misunderstanding represents none other than the affirmation of the analytical power of materialist dialectics. It is like in school, where there is no interest in the acquisition of knowledge, but only in passing on the letter, and where the relationship teacher/pupil is joined by a third instance: "Thus a structure arises with three instances, a little theater of three, where the teacher (who is merely the repetitor) and the pupil (who merely repeats) are joined by a third, who says what is to be repeated, the henchman discourse, to which teacher and pupil are both, if not to the same extent, subjected" (Daney 1998:74).

The henchman discourse is naturally represented (although what does it mean to represent?) in "La Chinoise" by the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The "Mao Bible" is constantly present as its symbol, embodying the good discourse, but without being embodied itself by one of the figures. These make use of the book as the source of a free indirect speech (and sometimes as wall or

projectile as well), which emphasizes the difference between the particular truth, which the book perhaps vouches for, and the situation, in which they find themselves, rather making this difference disappear (the Chinese Cultural Revolution is neither questioned nor criticized, it does not represent the horizon of endeavors for change, but rather their irreducible exterior). The in-between space, which opens up between what is written and what is said, between the French situation and that in China or Viet Nam, precludes their conjunction. In this way, difference itself, which is based on the distribution of similarities, becomes inescapable. The imperialists are still alive and China is far away, and besides, one knows much too little about it.

If difference has become inescapable, then the in-between spaces start to spread everywhere: in the image, in speech, between image and image, between image and sound. There is no criticism, as said before, of the henchman discourse, it is simply countered with something else that results in an in-between space between them both: such as at the end of the segment, for instance, where there is talk that the human sciences must be made into a political instrument again and a militant truth aimed at the mutability of structures, while it is shown at the same time that it is still always women who do the housework. The opposition that allows an in-between space to emerge, however, can also appear in the image or in the speech itself. The problem that Guillaume purports to analyze in the same sequence only repeats in its result the position that the analysis started with: using the example of the Viet Nam war, it can be shown that Chinese communism is the only true communism. In this way, however, the problem is neither analyzed nor solved, but rather affirmed in its continued existence as problem, which no book and no idea can reach: the little red book

apparently functions as a kind of answer, for which the question has yet to be found.

In this whole game of speech and counter-speech, not only does the coherency and consistency of the narrative development dissolve, but also the position of the filmic dance of statements, of the author. The cipher Godard is not alongside or even above everything in this game, but is instead in a position that merely reserves judgment (about the Cultural Revolution, about Viet Nam, but ultimately also about cinema) and is perpetually evasive in this reservation. Even before May 68, but especially afterward, cinema as a whole became a school for Godard, and this school became a good place: school makes it possible to "hold an audience of pupils, in order to postpone the moment when they are in danger of going too quickly from one image to another, from one sound to another, seeing to quickly, expressing themselves too quickly, believing they are finished with the cinema, when they actually have no idea what a complex, serious and not at all harmless matter it is to link images and sounds" (Daney 1998:75).

Yet what is political about this school? Serge Daney writes that Godard's pedagogy aims to win time, specifically enough time for the images and sounds to be given back to those, from whom they were taken, the ones filmed – even if it is already too late, as in the case of Fedajin in "Ici et ailleurs". From the impossibility of drafting a new type of filmic contract after the end of the film as "equalizing mass art", Godard concludes the necessity of retaining and reparation: "Reparation means giving the images and sounds back to those they were taken from. A stubborn phantasm. It also means getting them to produce their own images and sounds. A decidedly political endeavor" (Daney 1998:76).
Not making political films, but making films politically consequently means, in Godard's case, making the border visible

that separates film and politics: film is not politics, even though politics may sometimes seem like a bad film. However, if one understands as the "political" the moment of openness and undecidability that occurs when structural principles of society are called into question, then "making films politically" would not be the repetition or distribution of political slogans, but rather creating such moments of openness and undecidability: moments that also question the structural principles of cinema and the filmer-filmed-viewer contract, thus operating in the terrain where film is directly political.

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[1]The whole is thereafter no longer the open, but rather the outside, which penetrates into the in-between spaces: whereas the whole in classical cinema resulted from the process of an open totalization, a perpetual becoming, by internalizing the images and disposing itself in them, in modern cinema it is no longer a matter of the linking and attraction of the images, but of the in-between space between two images: "a spatialization that causes each image to tear itself away from the void and fall back into it" (Deleuze 1991:233).

[2]This means the figure of the "self is another", which affects all the film's instances of statement: the actors, the characters, the author, etc.

[3]The figure of a loss of world, according to which only the belief in the world, but not the world itself can be filmed.