POLITICAL THEORY AND FILM

From Adorno to Žižek

IAN FRASER

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From Adorno to Žižek

Ian Fraser

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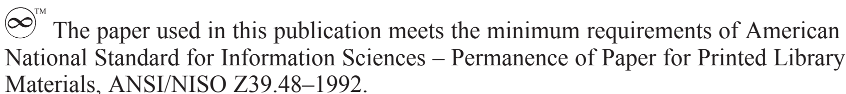
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Political Theory and Film

Political theory has conventionally focused on the constitution and operation of the state, but it also seeks to identify the power relationships within civil society. This extension of the notion of political theory can provide valuable insights into the social significance of film.[1] In turn, films can often offer dramatic demonstrations of ideas developed in modern political theory. To illustrate this, I examine the political theory of film in the work of eight radical political theorists and apply them to enhance our political understanding of eight films that extend from the 1940s to the present and across multiple continents.[2] The theorists and films considered are: Theodor Adorno (Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*), Walter Benjamin (Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*), Ernst Bloch (Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*), Gilles Deleuze (Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Neighbouring Sounds*), Alain Badiou (Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*), Jacques Rancière (Gavin Hood's *Rendition*), Julia Kristeva (David Fincher's *Fight Club*) and Slavoj Žižek (J. C. Chandor's *Margin Call*).

The choice of theorists is reflective of the development and vibrancy of a multiplicity of theoretical approaches to the political meaning and theoretical function of film. They all deem the social relations prevailing in capitalist societies to be oppressive, in many ways, and they are searching, in their radically different approaches, for expressions of resistance or opposition with the possibility for emancipation. The rationale for choosing these particular films is that, like the radical political theories used to examine them, they are offering a critical stance to the status quo in the various countries in which they are located. This raising of political issues grounded in theory can invite us to think critically, both within the internal logic of the film and how that might impact externally on the way we live our lives.

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The relationship between political theory and film has attracted academic attention but not extensively. Most notably, Michael Shapiro's *Cinematic Political Thought* started the trend in 1999 and this has been followed by the more recent work of Davide Panagia, Richard Rushton and John S. Nelson.[3] All of these approaches in their various ways have interesting and illuminating perspectives on the relationship between political theory and film and draw on some of the theorists considered later in this book to inform their own perspectives. This first chapter provides an overview of their theories as useful representatives of the state of political theory and film today.

My contribution to political theory and film then follows in the subsequent chapters by the application of the eight theorists' ideas and concepts to the selected films. Each of the chapters is independent in that they focus exclusively on the theorist concerned in the first part and assess the efficacy of their approach to the chosen film in the second part. This means that each of them can be considered critically on their own in relation to the chosen film, while also being used as frameworks to analyse other films. This should then further enhance the development of the approaches to political theory and film. I will now outline the main ideas of Shapiro, Panagia, Rushton and Nelson to indicate the many different and vibrant ways political theory relates to film in the current literature.

SHAPIRO'S POST-KANTIANISM

Shapiro's sophisticated cinematic political theory fuses philosophy and politics in his examination of films to encourage 'ethico-political thinking'.[4] He proffers a 'politics of critique' based on the critical legacy developed from Immanuel Kant, not exegetically but in engagements with his 'philosophical imaginary and his constructions of global space' to '*think* the political'.[5] Shapiro utilises Kant's understanding of political subjects as cognising human citizens to make them 'cosmopolitical', a term he borrows from Étienne Balibar, and so create global citizens who transcend national borders and develop a 'cosmopolitan hospitality'.[6] Kant's political ideas inspire perspectives, including Shapiro's own, that reject the narrowness of national identity politics and 'security-mindedness at the level of global political exchange'. Additionally, Shapiro endorses Kant's affirmation of contingency that sees the political subject as 'transcendental' and attempts to achieve a 'unity of experience' between reason and imagination. This subject is still part of the universal 'world of things-in-themselves' but not in a fixed manner.

This aspect of Kant's thinking has influenced Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, all of whom Shapiro classifies as post-Kantians.[7] The prefix 'post' indicates their resistance to the tendency to contain the radically open

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and contingent aspects of Kant's critique 'within homogenising conceptions of individual and collective subjects', while accepting his emphasis on avoiding 'empiricist and hermeneutic models of epistemic closure'. Shapiro particularly praises Deleuze for his cinematic thinking and Foucault's genealogical approach to history as part of his own interventions into contemporary political issues and in his analysis of films.[8] He explains that he analyses films to illustrate his arguments and that he structures his writings cinematically, now invoking Benjamin who also recognised this as a way to depict history pictorially, as in his arcades project. Shapiro interprets Benjamin's use of cinematic language as being 'epigrammatic' rather than 'programmatic' with his use of literary montage as a form of exhibition and juxtaposition of various images to display the 'time of the now' from a critical, historical perspective.

Shapiro also commends Deleuze for his analysis of the movement and time-images of modern cinema, as he offers a more solid foundation for using cinematic style in his writing and makes the 'present surprising and contingent'. Foucault is endorsed because he also emphasises historical political contingency against historical political chronology. Shapiro uses these approaches to offer critical interpretations and interventions based on genealogy and deconstruction that grasp the radical temporal nature of cinema's compositions. He contends that this will then resist the viewpoints of characters or groups that the films depict. He can then engage in 'writing-as-critical-thought' via cuts, juxtapositions and time-images against those who adhere to the delimitation of individual and collective identities.[9] Yet he is not concerned simply with disrupting these identities.[10] He wants to use his post-Kantian critique as 'ethical as well as political' to promote openness towards flexible notions of what constitutes an identity and a community. He does so through examining areas of 'political exclusion' and 'security politics' that deny movement both substantively and symbolically, namely, immigration and 'migrating sexualities'. Shapiro suggests that this can then extend recognition to the possibility of identity and interpersonal relations to those who go unrecognised, rather than to established identities that are already attached to certain people. He states that these are 'aspects of the unthought or the virtual within the actual' that he uses to analyse, in Benjamin's terms, the 'politics of now-time'.

Returning to Kant, Shapiro argues that, although he is a philosopher of common sense, he also creates the conditions for a critical, uncommon sense encounter with the present.[11] The enlargement of the enlightened subject that Kant hopes for arises from people hearing about important events and so sharing a global experience, achieving a 'global harmony' and a 'moral *sensus communis*' containing a 'cosmopolitan tolerance'.[12] Kant's notion of the *sensus communis* is cognitive and formal rather than social and cultural and cannot account for the complexity of our experiences and the different

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ways they are perceived.[13] Even so, what Shapiro sees of value in Kant's philosophy is his 'critical attitude towards modernity' and the way an event 'can be located in a more critical horizon of contemporary values'.[14] For Shapiro, it is Foucault and Deleuze who offer 'thought vehicles' to enhance this critique. Foucault does this through his genealogical approach to contemporary events, whereas Deleuze uses cinema to demonstrate the time and events that enlighten the present. Shapiro interprets Foucault and Deleuze as rejecting Kant's universal, legislative power that inheres in the common sense of mental faculties. Drawing on Nietzsche's attack on the philosophical tradition of 'institutionalised forms of intelligibility', of which Kant was a major part, Foucault and Deleuze utilise 'conceptual strategies' that give 'access to an uncommon sense'. For Deleuze, thought is an uncommon sense that expresses events rather than represents them and provides ways to see the world differently rather than seeking the truth.[15] The common sense view of the world is recognition rather than thought and an acceptance of the banality of everyday discourses. A Deleuzean approach subverts this with critical conceptualisations of the forces that shape relations of time and value that create vehicles as productions of 'thinking-as-uncommon-sense'. Cinema is one of these vehicles that Deleuze turns to for critical thought because in its modern form it is a 'mode of articulation that thinks the politics of time and value'. Cinema does not represent but is instead a critical and disruptive thought process that Kant, writing in a pre-cinematic era, could not foresee.[16] For Deleuze, and Benjamin, Shapiro adds, cinema is part of the 'aesthetic technologies that exceed vision and intellect by reproducing and animating the sensorium' and so 'mediate and fragment experience'.

For Shapiro, Deleuze's post-Kantian perspective sees cinema as offering a prioritising of time over space and an emancipated viewpoint through the use of montage and a series of camera shots. Experiencing events critically in the present is not by exercising a faculty of judgement but via cinematic machinery. Movement in antiquity was interpreted as a transition that was eternal or immobile but, in modernity, movement is fluid, occurs at any moment and is captured in contemporary cinema through its enactment of time. Shapiro explains that, for Deleuze, cinema's discovery of the time-image facilitates a greater critical reading of events than perception. Previously, when the camera simply followed action, the image of time was due to motion and was indirect. The new 'camera consciousness' of modern cinema is no longer defined by the movements it follows but by its use of the time-image to contemplate the value and time of the present. For Shapiro, this means that cinema helps us to develop a sympathetic and critical political thinking about the world.[17] Thinking itself is resisting dominating representations of the world that are either propagated through habit or organised deliberately.[18] Cinema animates and encourages such thinking in the work of

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'certain directors'. 'Perspectival position' is the key here for Shapiro, as it allows the audience to be critics and take the position of the camera as they engage in a process of epistemic and political recovery that is 'acentered' in a multiplicity of experience.[19]

On this basis, Shapiro makes a distinction between an aesthetic and psychological understanding of a subject.[20] His preference is for the aesthetic because he interprets subjects not as static entities but engendering multiple possibilities in a process of becoming. The psychological understanding of the subject is rooted in the motivational forces of people, but for Shapiro the aesthetic subject is opposed to this because the focus should be on the way emotions affect the world. In film, this occurs visually through cinematic space and the movement within it and not just between the perceptions and acknowledgements of the actors.

In Deleuze, this transpires when he posits an equivalence between cinematic practice and a critically thoughtful experience of time-movement in the present that means 'thinking in cinema through cinema'.[21] Shapiro suggests that this is best achieved by detaching ourselves historically from the present to make it peculiar.[22] Additionally, we also need to detach ourselves cinematically from the present to discern 'how a time-sensitive, camera consciousness can render any period critically'. Shapiro states that to do this it requires a 'more static historical epoch and to analyse a cinematic practice capable of capturing it'. Doing so means grasping the links between cinematic practices and the epochs they are applied to while also allowing a critical approach to 'now-time'. For Shapiro, this allows us to 'capture an image of the past that', in Benjamin's words, 'flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised'.

One cinematic example that Shapiro cites for his approach here is Stanley Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon* (1975), based on William Makepeace Thackeray's 1844 novel. For Shapiro, the action of the film unfolds within a 'static socio-political culture' of eighteenth-century aristocratic power based on divine will. He praises Kubrick's awareness of this and his use of cinematic techniques to disrupt and penetrate that order. He does so by immobilising the camera and referring to his cameraman as a photographer rather than a cinematographer in the credits. For Shapiro, this illustrates Kubrick's understanding of the 'social-cinematic homology' present within the film, which shows the eighteenth century to be static and photographic in contrast with the cinematic that is typical of modernity.[23] The experience created from the camera shots produces time-images that relate to critical thinking so that Kubrick's immobilisation of the camera does not immobilise thought but makes thought participate in creating a politics of time.[24]

Shapiro's understanding of the relationship between political theory and film is immensely sophisticated, and its post-Kantian basis is an illuminating way to analyse movies. I now turn to Panagia who also enlists a major figure

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from the history of political theory supported by other theorists to inform his understanding of film.

PANAGIA'S HUMEANISM

Panagia proclaims that political theory needs film as its images encourage contemplation of the political and act as an aid in developing novel ways to engage in the politics of resistance in the present.[25] Film does this not through its stories but through the 'stochastic', that is, random, series of actions shown on the screen. The figures predominating his analysis are David Hume with his 'cinematic thinking', the 'ontology of film' supplied by Stanley Cavell[26] and other theorists when required such as Rancière and Deleuze.[27] Panagia's reliance on Hume relates to his emphasis on 'broken appearances',[28] which Panagia captures with his notion of discontinuity of the random serialisation of moving images film provides.[29]

For Panagia, Hume's importance for analysing film relates to his critique of personal identity, which emphasises continuity and duration when it should be understood cinematically as discontinuity, an 'interrupted instant of appearance'. For Hume, 'identity is an after-image' in the mind which is like a theatre in which perceptions appear, disappear, intermingle in various ways but are unrelated even if they succeed each other.[30] Relations between these impressions are revised retrospectively as in a film-editing room.[31] Discontinuity, Panagia declares, is why film matters to political theory in relation to the following: the action-image; discontinuity and the fact of series; actors, artificial persons and human somethings and political resistance and an aesthetics of politics.[32]

The action-image shows why film matters to political theory due to its visibility of action, the disclosure of who the agent is in terms of intention and presence and, most importantly, the use of gesture to show how one action might be more significant than any other.[33] Discontinuity and the fact of series suggest that the action-image does not contain anything within itself that is necessary to it.[34] Rather, film as a series of random discontinuous action-images allows us to experience a projected world beyond to engage in resistance.[35] Out of these random serialisations of discontinuous actions that impact on our experiences of political action arises the human something: an artificial mechanical person or actor.[36] Panagia claims that when we see an actor on a screen it is an apparition that seems to be human but is not, and its 'luminous partiality' undermines our deepest political understandings of subjectivity and action.[37] This cinematic insight means that we appear to each other as 'interrupted perceptions' so that we can think of politics without identity in terms of agency and political participation.[38]

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Panagia relates all the previous three aspects to his emphasis on political resistance and an aesthetics of politics, which is an experience of discontinuity in the 'blinks of experiences between one frame of succession and the next'.[39] He states that his juxtapositioning of aspects of the relation of film to political theory in the stochastic way he does, intimates the consideration of political resistance in ways different from the traditional path of overturning the 'hierarchies of values'.[40] Essential to this articulation is that all forms of continuity are split into discontinuous partialities, which Panagia refers to as aspects, and they are unrelated to each other.[41] There is 'no continuity, or identity, or subjectivity, or event' that is 'necessary to the action-image of political resistance'. Following Hume, and cinema itself, continuity is an after-image that is disconnected from the way in which the images succeed each other. For Panagia, the project of an aesthetics of politics is based on discontinuity or non-necessity. Aesthetic experience is the experience of a sensation that discontinues our relation to a previous context of interest and has no necessary relation to that which preceded or succeeded it. He invokes Rancière's notion of the 'no-part' to describe this.

Panagia interprets these four aspects as 'distinct, juxtapositive, impressions', so they link to one another not directly but, following Hume, as 'interrupted perceptions' to how we think.[42] A lucid argument from this is 'a series of discontinuous impressions, retroactively assembled according to a conventionally available partition of the sensible'.[43] He suggests that experiencing images like this gives us a 'mode of political thinking' that can resist the 'force of necessity associated with the narratocrising impulses of political theory'. For Panagia, political theory's emphasis on narrative means the domination of the liberal claim that political participation is possible only with good thinking. 'Narratocracy, or the rule of the narrative, is the organisation of a perceptual field' to make things readable, resulting in a 'specific type of political subject: the literary individual'.[44] Narratocracy produces a 'literary subjectivity where viewing *is* reading' in a process of identifying 'what is and is not sensible' through narrative and counter-narrative.[45] To disrupt narratocracy's hold on the viewer, he emphasises what he terms 'haptic visuality as an effect of viewing',[46] meaning the fusion of seeing and touching in our aesthetic experience.[47] For Panagia, 'haptic visuality' means that 'the entire body is at play in a configuration and reconfiguration of sense experience', which 'makes narrativity insufficient to aesthetic experience'. He interprets this movement from the modern citizen subject as a reader to the contemporary citizen subject as a viewer as a 'critical challenge for democratic theory'.[48]

Panagia concludes that his politics of resistance based on discontinuity, as he has outlined in both Hume and film, means 'thinking the otherwise-of-sense, the non-necessity of sense, and hence the non-necessity of intelligibility'.[49] He

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is not privileging any of these ideas but is positing the 'otherwise-of-sense' and discontinuity as a 'site of political agonism', where resistance can occur against 'sense-making'. As examples of what we could and should resist, Panagia cites the imposition of conditions to establish an identity for citizenship or the formulation of mores for gender roles. These must be rejected because there is 'no necessity of rule' in Panagia's aesthetics of politics and that, he argues, is his contribution to democratic political thought and why film matters to political theory.

As a cinematic example for his perspective on the relation between political theory and film, Panagia identifies the 1931 film *Possessed*.[50] The story centres on a small town factory worker, Marian Martin, who lives with her mother but seeks a better life in the big city. As part of his rejection of narratocracy, Panagia suggests that the story is irrelevant and he instead focuses on a scene that occurs at the beginning of the film.[51] Marian approaches a railroad junction and a train goes past in front of her, presenting a number of discontinuous images from the windows of the train to both her and the viewer. Each window projects images of class, race and gender indicative of the time and Marian's fantasy of what a better life in the big city might offer. He asserts that all these images are disconnected from each other and offer an 'instantaneous world-projection in a fountain-like spray of pictures'. He proclaims that it is not the passing scenes or the stories they recount that are crucial here, but the bolts and screws over each window because they look like the perforations on a film strip.[52] Being visible and in detail, he proposes that the bolts offer a partition of what is sensible for film-making and film-viewing, as the retroactive cut is projected onto the train of moving images in a process of 'durational intensity'. For Panagia, this scene displays how 'film transcribes the passage between instants by streaming together distinct and separate action-images', and gives us an 'experience of assemblage through the conjoining of discontinuities'.[53] He concludes that cinematic action based on discontinuity results in a politics of resistance that operates outside the formal structures and hierarchies of state power.

Panagia's Humean approach to political theory and film further displays the potency in current trends in contemplating this relationship for a more critical world. This is now developed in another innovative direction by Rushton.

RUSHTON'S DEMOCRATIC INDIVIDUALISM

Richard Rushton applies political theory to film by exploring what a politics of cinema might be by relating it to issues of democracy in a selection of classical Hollywood movies.[54] The political theorists of democracy he

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utilises are Ernesto Laclau, Chantel Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, Étienne Balibar and Claude Lefort, among others, and he admits that he minimises many of their differences in order to give coherence to a notion of the democratic.[55] Rushton distinguishes his interpretation from previous examinations of film as a democratic art by offering a more detailed consideration of the relationship between cinema and democracy. He also wants to show the importance of Hollywood films for discussions about politics and democracy to counter the dominant narratives against them in film studies as a discipline.

Rushton recounts how the birth of film studies as an academic discipline in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by Marxist depictions of Hollywood films as simplistic, regressive and politically reactionary.[56] Journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* in France and *Screen* in the United Kingdom epitomised these views and encouraged new styles of film-making against the Hollywood hegemony of films that endorsed bourgeois capitalist values.[57] He refers to this trend as 'political modernism' where political films are good and unpolitical films, or those that contain a veiled ideologically conservative message, are bad, an approach indebted to the work of Bertolt Brecht.[58]

In embedding this critical approach to film studies as an academic discipline, the political philosophy of the French Marxist Louis Althusser was pivotal.[59] Under this Althusserian-Marxist framework, three principles were put forward to foster a politics of cinema: contradiction, alienation and symptomatic reading.[60] Contradiction uses techniques to undermine the way Hollywood and commercial films reproduce a reality that reaffirms capitalist ideology by exposing, for example, class incompatibilities that reveal the unfreedom of the working class.[61] Alienation produces a politics of cinema by stopping the viewer from identifying with its ideology. The viewer then becomes alienated from the film's attempt at ideological imposition in a process of resistance. Finally, a symptomatic reading offers a politics of cinema through a new or informed gaze from which the film scholar, film critic and film studies as a discipline itself originate. These were trained master interpreters steeped in the various techniques necessary for exposing the ideological basis of films so everyone could see it, but only via them.[62] Unsurprisingly, these experts have dominated within the academy but have had little effect outside it.[63]

Post-Althusser, film studies merged into cultural studies and a preoccupation with issues of race, gender and sexuality rather than just class.[64] Whereas Marxists bemoaned the lack of working class voices in Hollywood films, cultural studies attacked the way that blacks, women, lesbians and gays have been ignored. For Rushton, all these voices should be heard but within a political framework that is democratic. His contention is, despite these approaches stating the contrary, that Hollywood film is a place within which this can be achieved.

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Rushton therefore ultimately rejects political modernism because he wants to show that films can and have explored issues about democracy and politics in nuanced and exacting ways.[65] He maintains that these Marxist-inspired principles and the approaches that emanate from them are now irrelevant in defining a politics of cinema.[66] Instead, Jacques Rancière's theories are endorsed because he rejects the political modernists' intellectual contempt for the sensibilities of the masses. Rushton appropriates Rancière's notion of a politics of democratic individualism based on equality that avoids the need for an enlightened elite.[67] Rushton claims that one of his main aims is to defend universality and equality, intrinsically related to freedom, as being crucial for politics against those who emphasise difference, non-conformity, anti-universality and exceptions rather than the norm.[68] Additionally, Rushton wants to privilege the actual over the virtual and so endorse universalism as a goal to be aspired to, as Kant did in the search for what we have in common, a '*sensus communis*', rather than what separates us.[69] We can then have competing perspectives which are the lifeblood of politics to encourage people to engage in debate, articulate their desires and make them actual. We all do so, he suggests, as subjects, a category that he wants to defend and use as a basis for his democratic politics.[70] Rushton endorses Kant's transcendental subject as a universalistic basis of experience or, at the very least, a transcendental basis to universal aspects of human subjectivity.[71]

Rushton then draws on the work of the American philosopher Robert Pippen who attempts to propose a notion of subjectivity wherein political philosophy pertains to films and cinema.[72] For Pippin, reports Rushton, going to the cinema to watch a film, 'especially films associated with the Hollywood style', engages us in a process of interpreting the subjective acts and motivations of the characters. Subjectivity is at the heart of the cinematic experience, despite views to the contrary. He does not deny that this might mean the subject encounters deception, but as a thinking subject the possibility is there for the type of democratic politics that Rushton (via Pippen) desires.[73] For Pippin, Hollywood films offer us psychological insights into politics that recognise what films and viewers are capable of when watching them. Rushton endorses this because if the characters we watch are making choices, then we also might reflect on whether they were the right ones or not despite their complexity. That is what gives Hollywood films their interest.[74]

Rushton also affirms Pippin's argument for recognitional dependence as outlined in Hegel's master-slave dialectic.[75] Rushton utilises this to inform his notion of the political. He proposes that freedom can be found only socially when someone is dependent on someone else and someone else is dependent on you.[76] People in their interactions with each other need to develop claims for political freedom as a historical moment and agree on principles for the best way to live on the basis of equality.[77] What is at stake in declaring this

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freedom is the realisation that your own freedom is worthless without the freedom of others.[78] This requires placing ourselves in the position of the other, to share the other's point of view and let the other share in ours.[79] Rushton realises the risks involved in taking something from the inner world of subjectivity and trying to make it available to another in an objective manner, but these are the stakes involved in making a world together, which is what he refers to as politics.[80] Following Stanley Cavell, while admitting that his analysis of Hollywood films is only implicitly political, Rushton insists that Cavell's commitment to politics is affirmed by this desire to ground human experience as a shared activity.[81] The social question on what is or could be is also a directly political question because it is asking what type of society we can build together.[82]

As an example, Rushton considers the cross-class boundaries displayed in Frank Capra's 1934 film, *It Happened One Night*, in which an aristocratic woman and a relatively poor lower-class journalist fall in love with each other and live happy ever after. For political modernists, this crossing of class boundaries is symptomatic of the ways in which Hollywood films delude us and offer only illusions of freedom.[83] Rushton counters that freedom needs to be understood as freedom with another or others and demands a social requirement of acceptance, which is what he purports is happening in the film. The main protagonists debate and bicker but ultimately cross their class boundaries and agree on the type of world they want to begin together.[84] For Rushton, following Pippin, if one remains within the realm of intention by being fixed on who you are but not acting on that, then the self becomes suspended instead of actualised in the world with others and that is what the film displays.[85]

The richness of Rushton's approach acts as an important addition to the theories of Shapiro and Panagia, and this is also enhanced with Nelson's contribution that I consider next.

NELSON'S IDEALISM, REALISM AND PERFECTIONISM

John S. Nelson examines political theory through the medium of popular cinema in the form of epics, noirs and satires.[86] He contrasts the strengths and weaknesses of idealism and realism in relation to political action and politics in general.[87] He notes how this opposition has its roots in ancient Greek society with realism represented by the Sophists against the idealism of the Platonists, which was replicated later in Niccoló Machiavelli's realism and Thomas More's idealist utopia.[88] Today, Nelson interprets the debate as 'convoluted in theory and complicated in practice' but simplifies this by denoting idealists as those who apply principle to guide political action to

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make the real world accord to principles and ideas.[89] Conversely, realists calculate consequences to guide political action so that ideas and principles are informed by actual events. Nelson still accepts that this can result in interminable charges made by one side against the other about the viability and efficacy of both positions but seeks to escape that spiral.[90]

He does so by referring to idealism and realism, which he still considers to be in some way projects of politics, as political styles because they are 'sensibilities for experiencing community affairs'.[91] Idealism and realism engage people who share significant aspects of their lives and do 'community business' together, but in a way that is gestural rather than structural even when they promote a form of government. Idealism emphasises direct or popular democracies whereas realism promotes democracies of an elite, pluralist or representative kind, but neither copes well with the practicalities and theoretical problems that democracy entails. Consequently, Nelson reaffirms that we should understand idealism and realism as political styles for personal action, especially in our everyday lives, and popular cinema allows us to do this.[92]

Nevertheless, Nelson notes how idealism and realism are not the only political styles that predominate today, and he cites perfectionism as derived from Friedrich Nietzsche as another example.[93] Perfectionism is a 'style of personal action' that often confronts and defeats idealism and realism, unsettling them politically even in their opposition, it is also connected to perspectivism within political theory. Perfectionism eulogises the transcendent genius while rejecting the merely human, as exemplified in Nietzsche's aphorisms that have been popularised in American culture and Hollywood films.[94] Nelson gives examples in unspecified Hollywood films such as 'There are no facts, only interpretations'; 'Without music, life would be a mistake' or 'That which does not kill us makes us stronger', among others. One film he does mention in this regard is *Forrest Gump* (1994) that has Nietzschean-type aphorisms even if they can be misinterpreted: 'shit happens', 'stupid is as stupid does' and 'life is a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get'. Nelson also maintains that some of Nietzsche's main perfectionist phrases, 'beyond good and evil', 'the death of God', 'human all too human', 'twilight of the idols' and 'the will to power', predominate in American culture. Similarly, he speculates that we can fully comprehend our current predicament only by utilising perfectionist concepts like 'aestheticism, charisma, cult of personality, eternal return, monumental history, moralised memory, nihilism, perspectivism or truth as tropes'. Perfectionists transcend the normal boundaries within which idealism and realism operate and are creative, but also dangerous, as they dispense with the laws and limits of Western civilisation.[95] Perfectionists reject any attempt at self-reflection because any form of self-consciousness or self-criticism is an impediment to actions that create moments of genius.[96] They are not completely averse to analysis but they

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distrust it because it will distract them from pursuing their own aims. They embody an aesthetic style of practice and manners that contains, what is for them, a form of purity.

Cinematically, Nelson cites the psychopath Hannibal Lecter, as portrayed in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and in the sequel *Hannibal* (2001), as an exemplar of a perfectionist because of his intelligence, aesthetic tastes and cannibalism that transcend the merely human.[97] Moreover, Nelson posits as the political dimension to Hannibal's perfectionism his drive to protect Clarice Starling. She embodies the idealist pursuit for justice from the corruption of realism in American politics and parts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that tries to undermine her.[98] Hannibal, the perfectionist, will murder the perpetrators in some kind of poetic justice. For Nelson, this is why idealism and realism are undermined when 'facing the strange politics of perfectionism'.[99]

Nelson's emphasis on political style is seen by him as a way to appropriate what is valuable in idealism, realism and perfectionism.[100] For Nelson, all these forms of analysis can stand alone but offer a richness collectively to interrogate themselves and each other when trying to understand politics in popular cinema.[101]

CONCLUSION

These four approaches offer, in their different ways, sophisticated attempts to show how political theory can relate to film. For Shapiro, the post-Kantian perspective endorses the creation of cosmopolitical citizens as they engage in ethico-political contemplation based on contingency and uncommon sense. He argues that film, as a time-image using montage and camera shots in a series, impacts on these citizens to make them more sympathetic and politically critical about the world in a multiplicity of experiences and possible identities.

From Panagia's perspective, Hume acts as a crucial figure, supported by other thinkers when needed, to show why film matters to political theory. Panagia identifies the power of the random serialisation of actions in films that produce images of political thinking which covers: the action-image; discontinuity and the fact of series; actors, artificial persons and human somethings. These lead to a political resistance and an aesthetics of politics in relation to class race and gender beyond formal political structures.

Rushton's focus is on exploring the notion of a political theory of democracy in relation to Hollywood film while also drawing on an eclectic number of thinkers when required. He emphasises the importance of subjectivity when watching films, and the identification with the images and actions on the screen, in a process of recognitional dependence with other viewers.

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Rushton suggests that a democratic moment emerges as we, through the mediation of film, and for him Hollywood film, in particular, makes us think how we might create a more ideal world together.

Finally, Nelson relates political theory to film via idealism, realism and perfectionism. Idealism involves the application of principle in guiding political action to make the real world accord to principles and ideas. Whereas realism is the calculation of consequences to guide political action so that ideas and principles are informed by real events. Both are political styles for personal action and can be profitably explored in popular cinema. Perfectionism acts not only as an appropriation but also as a disruption to these philosophical traditions. It promotes an emphasis on enlightened individuality to the detriment of anything and anyone else and aids us further in our understanding of film.

The search for an overarching perspective to understand the political theory of film is, as we can see from the earlier contributions, an ongoing project that reveals the potential for engaging people in thinking politically and in different ways. My contribution is now to examine how key ideas from a range of modern political theorists can be used to illuminate our understanding of a selection of films beginning with Adorno.

NOTES

1 My first forays into this area are as follows: 'Affective Labour and Alienation in *Up in the Air*' in Ewa Mazierska (ed.) *Work in Cinema: Labour and the Human Condition* (Houndmills, Palgrave, 2013) and 'Bloch on Film as Utopia: Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives*' in Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen (eds) *Marx at the Movies: Revisiting History, Theory and Practice* (Houndmills, Palgrave, 2014).

2 In my last book I did a similar approach by utilising a number of theorists to analyse contemporary fiction. See my *Identity, Politics and the Novel: The Aesthetic Moment* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

3 Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Political Thought. Narrating Race, Nation and Gender* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Davide Panagia, 'Why Film Matters to Political Theory', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12, 1, 2013; Richard Rushton, *The Politics of Hollywood Cinema: Popular Film and Contemporary Political Theory* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and John S. Nelson, *Popular Cinema as Political Theory. Idealism and Realism in Epics, Noirs and Satires* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

4 Shapiro, *Cinematic Political Thought*, p. 1.

5 Ibid., pp. 1–2.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

7 Ibid., pp. 2–3.

8 Ibid., p. 6.

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9 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
10 Ibid., p. 7.
11 Ibid., p. 11.
12 Ibid., p. 13.
13 Ibid., pp. 14–15.
14 Ibid., p. 15.
15 Ibid., p. 22.
16 Ibid., p. 23.
17 Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 4–5.
18 Ibid., p. 5.
19 Ibid., pp. 5–6.
20 Ibid., p. 8.
21 Shapiro, *Cinematic Political Thought*, pp. 23–24.
22 Ibid., p. 24.
23 Ibid., pp. 24–25.
24 Ibid., pp. 25 and 27.
25 Panagia, 'Why Film Matters to Political Theory', p. 2.
26 Ibid., p. 5.
27 Ibid., p. 3. Panagia has developed his use of Hume more extensively in *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013) and for Cavell in 'Blankets, Screens and Projections: Or, the Claim of Film' in Nikolas Kompridis (ed.), *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought* (London: Continuum, 2014).
28 Panagia, 'Why Film Matters to Political Theory', p. 2.
29 Ibid., p. 4.
30 Ibid., pp. 5–6.
31 Ibid., p. 6.
32 Ibid., p. 6.
33 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
34 Ibid., p. 10.
35 Ibid., p. 13.
36 Ibid., p. 15.
37 Ibid., pp. 15–16.
38 Ibid., p. 16.
39 Ibid., pp. 17–18.
40 Ibid., pp. 18–19.
41 Ibid., p. 19.
42 Ibid., p. 4.
43 Ibid., p. 5.
44 Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC; and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 12–13.
45 Ibid., p. 14
46 Ibid., p. 121.
47 Ibid., p. 109.
48 Ibid., p. 122.

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49 Panagia, 'Why Film Matters to Political Theory', p. 20.
50 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
51 Ibid., p. 10.
52 Ibid., p. 11.
53 Ibid., pp. 11–12.
54 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 1–2.
55 Ibid., pp. 2 and 212.
56 Ibid., p. 1.
57 For a classic critique of the politics of Hollywood films, see Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica. The Politics and Ideology of Hollywood Film* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) and more recently Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars. Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
58 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, p. 2. For further background and context, see D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
59 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, p. 3.
60 Ibid., p. 55.
61 Ibid., pp. 55 and 21.
62 Ibid., pp. 55–56.
63 Ibid., p. 56.
64 Ibid., p. 4.
65 Ibid., p. 3.
66 Ibid., p. 55.
67 Ibid., p. 56; Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 68.
68 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 5–6.
69 Ibid., p. 6.
70 Ibid., p. 7.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 16. Referring to Robert Pippin, *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012).
73 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, p. 16.
74 Ibid., pp. 16–17.
75 Ibid., pp. 24–25; Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 215.
76 Rushton, *Politics of Hollywood Cinema*, p. 24.
77 Ibid., pp. 24–25.
78 Ibid., p. 26.
79 Ibid., p. 27.
80 Ibid., pp. 28–29.
81 Ibid., p. 17.
82 Ibid., pp. 29–30.
83 Ibid., p. 21.
84 Ibid., p. 30.

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85 Ibid., p. 32; Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, p. 233.
86 Nelson, *Popular Cinema*.
87 Ibid., p. xi.
88 Ibid., p. 4.
89 Ibid., p. 5.
90 Ibid., pp. 5–6.
91 Ibid., p. 6.
92 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
93 Ibid., p. 8.
94 Ibid., p. 175.
95 Ibid., pp. 175–76.
96 Ibid., p. 190.
97 Ibid., p. 177.
98 Ibid., p. 180.
99 Ibid., p. 181.
100 Ibid., pp. 190–93.
101 Ibid., pp. 191 and 193.

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Chapter 2

Theodor Adorno: Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*

Theodor Adorno held formal politics and even radical movements at a great distance as vehicles for emancipation from the administered world of capitalism and its natural terminus in fascism. Bourgeois politics was tainted with political parties that were barely indecipherable from each other and promoted policies of amelioration rather than abolition of the status quo. The restrictions on the freedom of thought necessary within radical resistance and adhering to the party line were also anathema to the openness that he thought was necessary to engage in critical thinking about the world. He turned instead to art where the 'faint heartbeat of utopia' can be heard 'amidst the deafening cacophony of contemporary culture'.[1] The culture industry, the commercialisation of art in all its forms, is the negation of this utopian moment that he thought could be captured only by the great modernists: Picasso for art, Schoenberg for music and Beckett and Kafka for writing. Adorno's politics are a politics of aesthetics that stays above the debris of the everyday and puts us in contact with an objective source, with spirit, which in turn through our interaction with it leads to our own spiritual development and growth.[2]

In relation to cinema, Adorno displays an equivocal attitude as exemplified in his 1966 essay, 'Transparencies on Film'.[3] He refers to the 'commodity character' of films of the culture industry bearing the 'mark of Cain on their foreheads', so 'every commercial film is actually only the preview of that which it promises and will never deliver'.[4] Considering the previews of the coming attractions from the main film that people are waiting to see, he thinks this gives us some insight into these main attractions.[5] He interprets them as being like pop hits and basically advertisements for themselves, referring to them as 'snobbish psychological class A pictures which the culture industry forces itself to make for the sake of cultural legitimation'.[6] These are then

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artificially contrasted with the 'standardised Westerns and thrillers', the 'products of German humour and the patriotic tear-jerkers'. He designates these as being 'even worse than the official hits' so that 'in integrated culture one cannot even depend on the dregs'. However, he also states, albeit briefly, 'how nice it would be if, under the present circumstances, one could claim that the less films appear to be works of art, the more they would be just that'.[7] So there is an ambiguity in his theory that can allow for a more positive interpretation of his analysis of film. Miriam Bratu Hansen has advocated this more enlightened reading of Adorno on film against the common conception of objection and dismissal.[8] She identifies the 'Transparencies on Film' essay as pivotal, while also incorporating Adorno's 'scattered remarks' in his other texts to highlight 'alternative impulses' in his pronouncements on film.[9]

Brian Wall also contributes to this more positive reading of Adorno. Wall's concern is to rectify an absence that he sees in Adorno's own work, which is to offer a sustained analysis of particular films.[10] Wall's aim is to use Adorno's notion of immanent critique to stay within the terms of a particular film to expose the contradictions present and allow them to 'speak to the material conditions in which a film was made'. Wall realises that this can lead to a conflict between the theoretical analysis of film that sees it as an art form and the cultural analysis of film that demarcates it as an ideology or a commodity.[11] For Wall, film as art always has to be proven but film as ideology or a commodity is always assumed. His aim is to discover if 'there persists in some filmic commodities a truth that resists commodification and exchange value'.[12] Adorno's ambiguity is resolved by Wall to weigh more on the positive possibilities of film rather than the negative.[13]

I also want to explore the positive side of this ambiguity and consider it in relation to Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). Adorno is said to have designated the film as a masterpiece after he and his wife Gretel were invited to see a private showing of it by Chaplin, who Adorno admired greatly.[14] There has been no attempt to apply his theory of film in relation to *Monsieur Verdoux*, so my aim is to fill this gap. This can then also serve as a way to offer the possibility of outlining the Adornoan framework for the further analysis of other films in both the past and the present.

Monsieur Verdoux is about a man who marries wealthy women and kills them for money. The source for the film was the real serial killer Henri Désiré Landru.[15] Verdoux does this because he was employed as a bank clerk for thirty years but is made unemployed during the 1930 Depression. His main motive is to provide for his real wife, an invalid, and his young son. After a number of murders and various escapades, he is eventually caught and sent to the guillotine.

I now begin by outlining some of the main aspects of Adorno's understanding of film and then draw on them to analyse *Monsieur Verdoux*. I argue that

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this film does not bear the mark of Cain but is a work of art in the Adornoan sense. It affirms a politics of aesthetics against the culture industry, the contradictions of capitalism and the horrors of fascism.

ADORNO ON FILM

Adorno begins his discussion of film in 'Transparencies on Film' by referring to the Oberhauseners, a group of West German film-makers who declared the Oberhausen manifesto on 28 February 1962 at the Eighth West German Short Film Festival in Oberhausen.[16] They referred to the history of the nearly sixty years of the film industry as 'Daddy's Cinema', whose proponents retorted dismissively with the opposite sobriquet of 'Kiddy's Cinema'.[17] Adorno identifies the 1966 film *Der Junge Törless* (*Young Törless*), by first-time director Volker Schlöndorff and adapted from the autobiographical novel *The Confusions of Young Törless* by Robert Musil, as being integral to launching the New German Cinema movement.[18] It won the 1966 Cannes Film Festival International Critics' Prize. Comparing the dispute between the two groups as children squabbling, Adorno refers to the proponents of Daddy's Cinema as 'pathetic' for arguing that they have more experience in film-making to counter the impending new age of cinema.[19] Indeed, the slogan of the Oberhauseners was as follows: 'The old film is dead. We believe in the new one'.[20] Adorno also rejects the old Daddy's Cinema because 'its infantile character, regression manufactured on an industrial scale' is 'repulsive' as its films 'play along with business' and is 'supported by the power of capital'.[21]

For Adorno, Daddy's Cinema is simply responding to what the viewers as consumers want or, to be more exact, it gives them an 'unconscious canon of what they do not want'.[22] Adorno sees this 'what they do not want' as 'something different from what they are currently being fed', and without this 'something different' the 'culture industry becomes a mass culture'. So there is a manipulation of the masses where in appearance it seems they are demanding to watch these bad films but in essence they are manipulated into doing so. Nevertheless, the 'unconscious canon of what they do not want' indicates a possibility that they will be able to see through this manipulation of which they are a part.

Adorno notes how the apologists of the culture industry claim that it is the 'art of the consumer' but for him it is in reality the 'ideology of ideology'.[23] It purports to give people what they want on the basis of supply and demand but therein lies its ideological nature.[24] The appearance is one of responding to the consumer but the reality is that it is a form of exploitation as the audience assimilate themselves to what they are watching in an uncritical manner. Adorno refers to this as a 'reified consciousness' as the culture

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industry fulfils its secret desire of impeding the development of a critical consciousness to ensure the status quo of capitalism. Moreover, the culture industry allows those in control to project their own will and power to make consumers remain as consumers and victims of domination. To counter this artistically implies renouncing the 'syrupy substance' propagated by the films of the culture industry and the 'reified consciousness of the audience' that accompanies it.

Against these manipulative practices by the culture industry, Adorno notes how a more experimental cinema has developed and his hope is that this can offer an alternative to make audiences think more critically.[25] For Adorno, this positive aspect is present in those films that are not technically complete and have an improvised quality, which gives them the possibility of becoming 'autonomous art'.[26] Their autonomy arises from the 'liberating quality' they contain against the restrictive, controlled and manipulative films of the 'culture industry' that operates in much of the same way as the 'cosmetic trade eliminates facial wrinkles'. In contrast, Adorno endorses this more liberating cinema where the 'flaws of a pretty girl's complexion become the corrective to the immaculate face of the professional star'.

Adorno also considers Chaplin's films in this regard, as they were criticised by experts in cinematographic techniques. They suggested that he was deliberately avoiding or was unaware of these skills to concentrate on slapstick performances and that he depicted sketches photographically.[27] For Adorno, this should in no way diminish Chaplin as a film-maker because it is undeniable he was 'filmic' and it is only on the screen that this 'enigmatic figure' could 'have developed its concept'. Simon Louvish also notes how Chaplin was criticised for the 'primitive' nature of his cinematic techniques and especially in relation to *Monsieur Verdoux*.[28] It was only later after the storm over the film lapsed that viewers and critics realised the qualities of his work. He used sketches of the proposed sets that were then translated into reality and allowed him as director to stage each shot with precision for the actors. That Chaplin could achieve this endorses Adorno's appreciation of his filmic qualities in the realisation of his concept in the form of Verdoux. Moreover, the inability of critics to recognise initially the artistic nature of his cinematic techniques indicates the autonomous aspect of his work with the controlled appearing as uncontrolled and the intentional appearing as accidental.

Adorno also considers those content analyses of film that have attempted to relate films to their reception and warns that a more subtle approach is needed.[29] These content analyses relied mainly on the intentions of film to the detriment of the gap present between these intentions and their actual affect, a gap which Adorno states is intrinsic to film as a medium. Adorno indicates that film contains 'various layers of response patterns' so that the films of

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the culture industry may not be as all-encompassing when they impact on the consciousness of the viewers. Adorno also notes how a number of unofficial models of films overlap with the official. The unofficial model, or what Adorno terms the 'heterodox ideology', has to be made in a 'much broader and juicier fashion than suits the moral of the story' in order to 'capture the consumers and provide them with substitute satisfaction'. So there is an antagonism present even in the films of the culture industry when it tries to manipulate the masses because it 'contains its own lie'. The 'hope' is that people will realise that they are being manipulated by the culture industry and will undergo a raising of their consciousness to a more critical level when identifying the 'heterodox ideology' present in a film.

For Adorno, film also needs to find a procedure that does not descend into a documentary or a form of arts and crafts and that is montage.[30] Montage generally refers to 'a dynamic editing style that combines many shots, often rapidly, to make a point (about, say, the passage of time or the evolution of a character)'.[31] Adorno understands montage as a form of constellation as is the case in writing. He interprets montage as a being based on 'the principle of shock', but he is concerned that this can be overused and can lose its power.[32] However, in *Aesthetic Theory*, he sees this more positive side of montage as part of art's general concern with the 'negation of meaning in the face of an increasingly meaningless world'.[33] For Adorno, this is why montage is important for film.[34]

Adorno proffers that one of the functions of film is also to offer 'models for collective behaviour', and this is 'not just an additional imposition of ideology'.[35] Collective behaviour is inherent in films because the movements they show can be copied, 'mimetic impulses' that come before all content and meaning, encouraging those viewing and listening to 'fall into step as if in a parade'. Film is similar to music, just as at the start of the radio age music was similar to film strips, so the 'constitutive subject of film' is a 'we in which the aesthetic and sociological aspects of the medium converge'.

Adorno mentions the 1930s film *Anything Goes* (1936) starring, he states mistakenly, the 'popular English actress' Gracie Fields (the actress was actually Grace Bradley). He contends that the 'anything in the title captures the very substance of the film's formal movement, prior to all content', and so 'facilitates the ideological misuse of the medium'. The viewers are simply carried along with the film which engages in a 'pseudo-revolutionary blurring in which the phrase, things must change, is conveyed by the gesture of banging one's fist on the table'. Adorno reasons that for a film to be 'more liberated' it would need to overcome this prior aspect of 'collectivity from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence and enlist this collectivity in the service of emancipatory intentions'.[36] So there is a positive aspect to film here for Adorno as

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long as it undermines the a priori collective and the stupefying impulse to be manipulated by the medium.

Adorno understands the radical potential of film as a possible affront to the culture industry's misuse of it through the manipulation of the masses in the interest of business and capitalism. I now want to consider how he comprehends this in relation to his comments on *Monsieur Verdoux*.

ADORNO ON *MONSIEUR VERDOUX*

Adorno considers *Monsieur Verdoux* in his essay, 'Notes on Kafka', written in 1953, commenting that Kafka's writings are a 'trial run of a model of dehumanisation' rather than a 'reflection on the human'.[37] Reinforcing this point in 1963, Adorno argued that 'the place of moral philosophy today lies more in the concrete denunciation of the inhuman' because there can be 'no ethics . . . in the administered world'.[38] Kafka does this by making the subject regress biologically and in so doing paves the way for his animal parables.[39] Adorno states that the crucial aspect to which everything in Kafka's work is directed is in people realising that they are not themselves. They become 'things' just as capitalism turns people into 'things' as they are subordinated to commodity production and the pursuit of profit in a process of reification. Adorno approvingly mentions Kafka's 'The Judgement' here because its 'long and imageless sections, beginning with the conversation of the father' with his son Georg, demonstrate to people 'what no image could, their unidentity, the compliment of their copylike similarity'. Georg's 'lesser motives' are exposed also by his fiancée Frieda but 'are alien to him' until he ultimately 'admits these motives' by committing suicide. As Adorno continues, 'Kafka brilliantly anticipated the concept of the Ego-alien later developed by psychoanalysis'. He shows how a person's 'individual' and 'social character are split as widely as they are in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*' and so 'contain the social genesis of schizophrenia'.

Verdoux is a clear case of Chaplin offering an aesthetic example of a 'dehumanisation of the individual' under the pressure and logic of capitalism. This is why Adorno praises Chaplin for offering the 'utopia of an existence that would be free of the burden of being-one's-self'.[40] This is encapsulated in his 'lady killer', Monsieur Verdoux, being a 'schizophrenic'. From Adorno's analysis, we can see why he deeply admired Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. Verdoux is a 'model of dehumanisation' who, becoming unemployed due to the Depression, becomes aware that he is not himself but rather a 'thing'. Needing money to support his invalid wife and son, he becomes the 'Ego-alien', a lady killer in pursuit of money while also being a dutiful and caring husband and father, a schizophrenic victim of capitalism. Interestingly, and to

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enhance this view, Louvish contends that Verdoux was Chaplin's 'alter ego' and also the robotic worker depicted in *Modern Times*.[41]

In an essay written in 1964, Adorno considers Chaplin in his role as a clown and makes a number of observations to offer an understanding of his image.[42] Adorno notes how different Chaplin is in private compared to the vagabond on screen. He suggests that it relates not just to his immaculate elegance, which he parodies in his role as a clown, but also in 'expression'. For Adorno, this expression resides not in the sympathy awarded to the clown, but in Chaplin's 'powerful, explosive and quick-witted agility', reminiscent of a 'predator ready to pounce'. Adorno proclaims that the 'empirical Chaplin' is far from being a victim and seeks victims out to 'tear them apart'. He is, according to Adorno, a 'vegetarian Bengal tiger', and Verdoux does not eat meat, an interesting contrast with his willingness to take human life.[43] As Detlev Claussen notes, this depiction of Chaplin as a predator reflects Adorno's belief that he was 'capable of extracting a form of reconciliation from the barbarism of the culture industry'.[44]

Despite these limited comments by Adorno on *Monsieur Verdoux*, we can discern from his general discussion of the film and Chaplin as an artist why Adorno rates it and him so highly. This becomes even clearer when I now identify some of the main themes that emerge from the film before a more detailed analysis of some key scenes.

Monsieur Verdoux

As Louvish perceptively notes, the film marked the end of Chaplin's Tramp who now emerged 'out of the mud and muck of war, hypocrisy, mass slaughter and lies', with 'a searing urge both to confess and to explain human transgressions' to assume a new persona, the 'prim French bourgeois moralist and murderer', Monsieur Verdoux.[45] This change in Chaplin's subject matter meant that the film 'opened to general puzzlement and a fair amount of hostility'.[46] At the premiere there was booing and hissing from the audience forcing him to leave before the end. At the press conference the next day, Chaplin faced combative questions about his political beliefs. He was accused of being a communist sympathiser and unpatriotic towards the United States because he had never become a US citizen. Boycotts of the film were organised in several states.

Chaplin used the attack on him to encourage people to see the film and there was a renewed flurry of interest; the screenplay was also nominated for the 1947 Academy Awards. Nonetheless, the film faded and was not resurrected until it was re-released in 1972. The guardians of the culture industry appeared to have held sway but no wonder they were worried about the impact of the film on the audience. 'Chaplin's assault on society, marriage,

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money and even God was unprecedented in the American cinema'.[47] Even more shocking was showing how Verdoux's way of life, as David Robinson so rightly claims, 'carried to logical extremes the philosophies on which contemporary capitalist society is built'.[48]

In an interview before the film was released, Chaplin also emphasised how the military theorist 'Von Clausewitz said that war is the logical extension of diplomacy' but 'Verdoux feels that murder is the logical extension of business'.[49] Verdoux typifies the 'psychological disease and depression' of the times that can create such a person. For Chaplin, Verdoux is 'frustrated, bitter and at the end pessimistic. But he is never morbid' and nor is the picture itself which is why, 'under the proper circumstances, murder can be comic'. As Louvish also adds, even more menacingly, Verdoux is the exemplar of the 'little man' that seizes power by becoming a criminal and is similar to all those who supported fascism.[50]

For Louvish, this is why the audience had problems identifying with Verdoux as he is the obverse of Chaplin's Tramp. Verdoux is an anti-hero who personifies capitalism taken to its extremes and fascism as its terminus where people are treated like commodities to be consumed. The Tramp was the plucky underdog trying to feed himself, help others and resist the powers that be. The audience is confused as they do not know whether they should be identifying with Verdoux or not. They cannot deal with the schizoid nature of his character. Moreover, Chaplin is making us laugh here in a different way to his other films. It is an uncomfortable laugh. He still has moments of his comic aspects, falling through a window or from a rowing boat into a pond, but all of this is against the backdrop of Verdoux's murderous activity and the violent nature of capitalism itself as it treats humans as a means to an end.

Verdoux's character had no previous equivalent in cinema that could capture the way he is 'charming, ruthless, amoral, utterly businesslike and convinced of the inescapable logic of his multiple lies as well as his multiple murders'.[51] Verdoux's 'ventures proceed with a kind of clockwork precision, moved from location to location by the quick whirr and clack of rushing train wheels'. Precision is part of the nature of capitalist production where time is money and capital must be accumulated. The train wheels themselves are certainly used as a device to show how Verdoux has transported himself from one place to another, but they are also symbolic of the recurring wheels of capital where profits need to be made and remade every day.

This now brings us to the film itself and I will examine some key scenes to explore the issues that Adorno has raised in relation to his understanding of film beginning with the murder of Lydia Floray.

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LYDIA FLORAY

Verdoux needs 50,000 francs or his shares will be wiped out, so he goes to see another one of his wives, Lydia Floray, to pilfer money from her. When Verdoux approaches the front door of Lydia's house, the shot is of his back and the lighting casts a shadow of himself on the door as his individual and social self are schizophrenically presented. He has not been in contact for over three months and he was meant to be in Indo china. She is old, her face wrinkled, not very attractive and the opposite of the 'syrupy substance' of the beautiful women pedalled by the culture industry.

He tries to charm her using his social self and calling her 'dear' but she resists and berates him for leaving her alone. He reasons with her that it is because of his 'business' as he is an 'engineer', but she wishes she had known that before she met him and curtly questions what he wants. Verdoux is now standing by the mantelpiece and is reflected in the mirror above it. His schizoid nature as his social self will soon be giving over to his murderous 'individual', 'Ego-alien' self.

She knows he is after something but he denies this and pleads with her not to quarrel as life can soon descend into something 'sordid and vulgar', which it will as he is going to kill her. He entreats her to keep things 'beautiful and dignified' and stands in the centre of the shot behind her as she sits on the sofa staring sternly. The 'vegetarian Bengal tiger' is quarrying his prey, and for the first time he glances at the camera as he speaks drawing the audience into his scheme. He informs her that they are not young anymore and in the 'sunshine of their lives they need companionship, love, tenderness and each other', while again also looking straight into camera. He continues with his charm after holding her hand but she pulls away saying she is too old for that nonsense. He admonishes her for mentioning the age saying he thought he had cured her of that complex, but she responds that she is cured of him after he absconded and orders him to sit down.

The interchange is comical but the mirror again captures his reflection indicating his individual, 'Ego-alien' side as present and ready for action once he can get the money from her. The subversion of what is meant to be a love scene, given the endearing terms Verdoux uses, by his sly looks to camera as he goes about his 'business', is an affront to the 'business' of the culture industry. Verdoux's camera glances are also drawing the audience in with him. The audience do not want a vulnerable woman to be robbed and murdered, but Verdoux is almost implying they have willed it by going along with a system that produces this outcome. The 'unconscious canon of what they do not want' is showing them that the end point for business is murder, and therein lies the possibility for a 'collective' response and a more critical attitude to be developed against the status quo.

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Verdoux feigns that there is a financial crisis, the banks will collapse everywhere and as they close at four o'clock she should go and retrieve her money which she reluctantly but eventually does. He is lying now but the precariousness of capitalism will be shown to the audience when the real crash happens later to undermine the manipulation of the culture industry's support for the status quo. He suggests that they go to bed so she takes the money, goes on ahead and commands him to turn the lights off. He does so and follows her up the stairs. He stays on the landing as she enters the bedroom and extinguishes the last light. Darkness will now prevail in her murder. The proximity of Verdoux mentioning the financial crash and his need of the money to save his shares illustrates Adorno's point that there can be no ethics in the administered world of capitalism. The audience are presented with what appears to be immorality at the individual level as Verdoux is robbing an old woman of her savings for his own gain. However, at the social level, no immorality is seen to apply in the parasitic world of share trading even though similar principles of ruthlessness apply for survival in the market in the pursuit of profit.

Verdoux looks at the moon and declares, 'what a night' and she shouts off scene from the bedroom, 'yes, full moon'. Almost in a trance, he exclaims, 'how beautiful, this pale, Endymion hour'. His shadow is reflected on the wall to the right as his 'Ego-alien' self is about to emerge from the darkness. Lydia bellows abruptly and aggressively from the bedroom asking him what on earth he is talking about. Verdoux shouts, 'Endymion, my dear, a beautiful youth possessed by the moon'. She instructs him to forget about that and get to bed. Verdoux obeys and moves towards the door saying, 'our feet were soft in flowers'. As he goes in, romantic music that has been playing reaches a jarring violin crescendo and then all is quiet. Louvish maintains that the 'music alone signals what is to follow',[52] that is Lydia's murder, but this is suggested also with the turning off of lights as Verdoux follows her up the stairs, the darkness of death against the light of life.

A montage then occurs as the camera stays on the landing framing the window in the centre of the shot. Night eventually turns into day through two barely perceptible editing cuts with Verdoux then emerging having done the deed with the money in his hand. Then like any capitalist, he meticulously counts his money. Once finished, he gives a sly look straight into camera as though we as viewers are complicit in his atrocity. Adorno's positive understanding of the use of montage is brilliantly employed by Chaplin here. The sequence taking the viewer from night to morning with what has happened revealed, not overtly but implicitly, heightens the aesthetic quality of the film. The scene is shocking but certainly part of the 'heterodox ideology' that Adorno interprets as crucial to penetrate the consciousness of the audience and rupture its subservience to the manipulative messages of the

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culture industry. Chaplin is showing how the logic of capitalism can make people into murderers in the pursuit of money. He is creating an unsettling effect on the audience that should make them question the status quo, and the administered society they are a part of. This becomes further evident in the philanthropist scene.

A PHILANTHROPIST

Adorno's disdain for the way the culture industry manipulates the masses with films of 'syrupy substance', which reifies the consciousness of the audience, is evident in the philanthropist scene. Verdoux has developed a new poison that is meant to be untraceable. He searches for a victim to 'experiment' on and encounters a girl on the street. She is clearly meant to be a prostitute and the censors of the culture industry objected but Chaplin argued that the scene was 'anything but lewd or titillating'.[53] The censors do not want the audience to see the realities of capitalism but Chaplin will expose this as the scene progresses.

Interestingly, Adorno's disdain for the way the culture industry uses a 'professional star' to manipulate the masses is also undermined here. The actress, Marilyn Nash, was an unknown, and it was her first part.[54] She was, according to David Robinson, 'all too clearly without experience or great natural talent'. Although this concerned Chaplin at times in shooting the scene, he still persevered with her even after she fell ill, despite recruiting two other actresses to play her part. In my view, Chaplin was right to stand by Nash as, contrary to Robinson's assessment, her rawness gives her performance a more realistic feel as she is meant to be awkward, nervous and vulnerable in the scene.

She is standing in a doorway staring into the sky and sheltering from the rain. There is a close-up of her face which is radiant as the light shows off her beauty. Adorno would be suspicious of this given his preference that the 'flaws of a pretty girl's complexion' should 'become the corrective to the immaculate face of the professional star'. Moreover, the 'syrupy' nature of the scene, with Verdoux deciding not to poison her and giving her money to help her escape destitution, seems like one of the culture industry's use of 'tear-jerkers' to assure the masses that even in the worst of times happiness will prevail. However, once we analyse this scene in more detail we will see that Chaplin is subverting these tools of the culture industry rather than endorsing them.

To the right of the shot is a sign for hats. She is dressed in an ill-fitting raincoat and her hat is floppy. They look more like they are for a man rather than a woman and it could be they are the attire of her husband who we soon discover is dead. The camera pans left to reveal Verdoux turning the street

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corner going past the bakery; the link between bread as a euphemism for money is immediately made at the start of the scene. It is the money that he not only craves but also gives her at the end of the scene to help save her from poverty. The demonic nature of Verdoux is again captured through the use of darkness and light. As he passes the girl and turns round, his piercing eyes having identified a possible victim, his sinister shadow follows him along the wall as he makes his way towards her, the 'Ego-alien' after his next victim.

They go to his apartment; he takes her hat and coat and discovers that she has been hiding a kitten inside that she has rescued from the rain. He responds warmly to her request for some milk for the kitten and proposes that he might adopt it, to which she delightedly agrees. This apparent act of grace is only because she will be dead so the kitten will be abandoned, and Verdoux does care about animals rather than humans. The usual 'syrupy' tropes of the culture industry, endangered cute kitten, vulnerable beautiful woman, are undermined by the evil that is Verdoux and the brutality of the capitalist system that created him. The milk of human kindness towards the kitten is juxtaposed against his murderous intentions towards the girl.

He knows she is concealing something and demands her to tell him the truth about her situation because he wants to help her. She is surprised and mocks him by asking if he is a philanthropist to which he quickly concurs and wants nothing in return. She is still astounded and ironically queries if this is the Salvation Army. He turns away pretending to be slighted and tells her she is at liberty to leave. This forces her to confess that she has just come out of jail after three months for being convicted of pawning a rented typewriter. Verdoux declares, 'oh well, nothing is permanent in this wicked world, not even our troubles'. The suspicion that the girl has towards his philanthropy is an indictment of the administered world of capitalism. Good deeds seem incongruous in relation to the values of self-interest and profit maximisation, which are what Verdoux represents. She is his 'experiment' for testing the poison for its subsequent use in continuing his 'business' of 'liquidating members of the opposite sex' for their money. The 'unconscious canon of what they do not want' is here represented to the viewers as an axiomatic fact of capitalist life.

He offers to make her something to eat and when she goes back into the living room he prepares the food and brings out a bottle of poisoned wine and pours her a glass. Verdoux ponders as he drinks his unpoisoned wine and discovers that she is reading Schopenhauer. He wonders if she has read his treatise on suicide but she indicates that it would be of no interest to her, to which he responds, 'not if the end could be simple?'

Chaplin's introduction of Schopenhauer and suicide also affronts the mores perpetuated by the culture industry where suicide is a sin, but Verdoux is seeing it as a release from the awfulness of capitalism for her and those in

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destitution. In his essay on suicide, Schopenhauer considers the example of how you would feel if a friend had committed a crime, whether ‘a murder, an act of cruelty or deception, or theft’, and then committed suicide.[55] He claims that hearing about the crime may incite in us ‘intense indignation, the greatest displeasure, and a desire for punishment or revenge’. Nevertheless, when we hear that this resulted in suicide, he surmises that it ‘will move us to sorrow and compassion’ and a ‘feeling of admiration’ for their ‘courage rather than one of moral disapproval, which accompanies a wicked act’. The girl too has committed a crime and been punished for it. For Verdoux, her destitution and suffering can be solved by him giving her the poison in a sort of assisted suicide, as though he is doing her a good deed to take away ‘her troubles’ from the injustices of capitalism.

This is why he encourages her to imagine going to sleep without any thought of death but then there would be a sudden stoppage. He suggests that would be preferable to carrying on with this ‘drab existence’. She agrees that if the unborn knew about the ‘approach of life they’d be just as terrified’. Verdoux then picks up his glass again and she does likewise but as she puts the glass to her lips she pauses and declares, ‘yet life is wonderful’. Verdoux is getting impatient and asks tersely, ‘what’s wonderful about it?’ She puts the glass down on the table and proclaims, ‘everything, a spring morning, a summer’s night, music, art, love’. He interjects and queries her incredulously, ‘love?’ She smiles declaring that ‘there is such a thing’ and when he questions how she knows she divulges that she was in love once.

Chaplin is again subverting the culture industry and its ‘syrupy substance’ on the nature of love with Verdoux’s cynicism. She asserts the romantic language of the culture industry that love is ‘giving, sacrificing, the same thing a mother feels for her child’. Verdoux enquires if she has loved like that and she affirms that she did with her husband. His wine glass now half full is in the centre of the shot and he is running his fingers around its base, but with the mention of her husband he suddenly moves his hand away and his face exhibits a mild expression of shock. He enquires if she is still married and she gazes vacantly into space while telling Verdoux that she was but her husband died while she was in jail. The poisoned glass of wine is prominent in the shot as it sits in front of her plate. Verdoux is a little unsure of his plan now and taps the table as he begins to reflect on what she has said and prompts her to tell him more. At this point his ‘Ego-alien’ self has been restrained.

She leans back from the table further away from the poisoned wine and relates how her husband was wounded in the war and made an invalid. The shot cuts back quickly to Verdoux who expresses in surprise, ‘an invalid?’ She maintains that is why she loved him because he needed and depended on her like a child, even though he was more than a child to her. He ‘was a religion’ and her ‘very breath’ and she would have ‘killed for him’. The

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original script has the 'Spanish Civil War' rather than the generic term 'war' and Chaplin does not say if the censors requested this change.[56] Even so, the political import is clear here as her husband was fighting against fascism which will soon loom on the horizon with World War II and which for Verdoux and Adorno, is a natural outcome of business.

The shot cuts to Verdoux, who has his piercing eyes back. He stares at her intently but also appears to be deep in thought. 'No', she concludes, 'love is something very real and deep. I know that'. The symmetry with Verdoux's own situation is clear. He has his invalid wife, her husband was like a child dependent on her and he has a wife and child dependent on him. She would have killed for her husband as he has killed for his wife and son. How can he now kill a kindred spirit? Someone who could have been just like him? His reluctance is not out of love as it would be in a film of the culture industry.

She leans forward and takes hold of the glass and is about to drink the wine but Verdoux intervenes suggesting that there is a bit of cork in it. He takes the glass from her hand, fetches a clean glass and pours her out the unpoisoned wine. He is in a reflective mood as he sits down again and raises his glass to hers, she reciprocates and they simultaneously take a drink. Verdoux smiles, giggles to himself and is in a state of reverie as she requests, 'a penny for your thoughts?,' which brings him back to reality and he solemnly utters, 'oh no'. He cannot share his thoughts that he was going to kill her but resisted because she reminded him that his murderous exploits where based on his love for his invalid wife and child. Outside of that, love is meaningless to him.

He realises that she is very tired and needs to go home. He then takes out some money to give her and she suddenly realises it is an enormous amount and reels back in shock saying this is too generous. She breaks down, starts to cry and then apologises for showing her emotions but she was beginning to lose faith in everything; his kindness has made her want to believe all over again. Verdoux becomes stern and warns her not to believe too much because this is a ruthless world and you need to be ruthless to cope with it. She admits it is a blundering world and a very sad one but a little kindness can make it beautiful. Verdoux responds, 'You'd better go before your philosophy corrupts me'. As she leaves, there is a shadow representing his dark side reflected on the door as he closes it. He raises his hands and purses his lips as if to say what else could he do? The symbolic shadow of his other 'Ego-alien' self illustrates that he needs to revert to his work of murder and capital accumulation.

Verdoux's inability to be true to his murderous intentions is not because of the beauty of the girl or that he has fallen in love with her, as it would be in a film of the culture industry. Rather, it is because she mentions her invalid husband. This visibly jolts Verdoux to think about his own invalid wife and why he is doing his heinous crimes. She said she would have killed for her

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husband and he recognises that is what he is doing for his own wife. The only difference is that she has not or could not carry out her threat. They are both victims of the system and the unfortunate circumstances with their dependent spouses. All the girl has left are her looks to sell in much the same way as Verdoux has his charm, masquerading a murderous intent in the pursuit of money. This becomes even more evident when he meets her again later in the film.

He does not recognise her at first. She is dressed immaculately and her floppy hat is now replaced with an ornate expensive one. She calls him from her chauffeur-driven car and greets him with, 'Hello, Mr Philanthropist'. He is bemused but she reminds him how he fed her, gave her money and then sent her on her way 'like a good little girl'. Verdoux infers that he must have been a fool to do so implying that as she was wealthy he would have killed her. He gets in the car with her and they go to the Café Royal after she teases him that he can feed her again. He finally realises who she is and states, 'Of course, your invalid husband'. So again the reference is back to her invalided husband just like his wife and shows that is the reason why he spared the girl's life previously.

She expresses surprise that he remembers that and he solemnly announces, while staring vacantly at the floor, that it is something he shall never forget. He snaps out of his reverie and wonders how she has become so wealthy. She concedes it is the 'old story, from rags to riches' because after her encounter with Verdoux her luck changed as she met a munitions manufacturer. Verdoux quickly responds, 'That's the business I should have been in'. She agrees and predicts that 'it will be paying big dividends soon' with the impending world war. Verdoux, like any capitalist, is always looking to see where profits can be made most easily and at a high level of return and war is just like any other business opportunity.

In the next scene they are seated together in the Café Royal and she tells him how nice it is to see him and that he will never realise how much his kindness meant to her. He responds that 'kindness is a convenient thing at times, my dear'. He deflects attention from himself by enquiring about her new gentleman who she describes as 'very kind and generous, but in business quite ruthless'. Verdoux concurs by stating, 'Business is a ruthless business'. He enquires if she loves her boyfriend but she reminds Verdoux of their conversation in his apartment when he seemed not to believe in love. He now ruefully declares that 'everyone needs love'. She senses that he seems to have lost his 'zest for bitterness' and he agrees that he has got no more use for it. Like a bankrupted capitalist and having no more capital to invest, his days of accumulation are over.

She insists that there is always something to fight for but he declares that for him there is nothing. He reveals that soon after the crash he 'lost' his wife

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and child. She is shocked but he sternly states that they are 'much happier where they are than living in this world of fear and uncertainty'. She can clearly see that he has changed and he discloses that since he lost his family he seems to have awakened from a dream. He relates that he was a bank clerk once and that his existence was a 'monotonous rhythm, day in and day out, counting other people's money' in the administered world of capitalism. He realises that 'something happened, the rhythm was broken' and he lost his position and 'what followed was a numbed confusion, a nightmare'. He lived in 'a half dream world. A horrible world' but now he has woken up and sometimes wonders if that world ever existed. It did and still does of course because it is the murderous business of capitalism.

The tropes of the culture industry are again present here with the 'rags to riches story' of the girl, but again it is undermined by the line of work her new boyfriend is in: making money out of death. Pertinently, Chaplin was answering questions at the hostile press conference the day after Verdoux premiered.[57] He was asked if he would let his children see the film to which he concurred, but not the pictures that purported to have a 'high moral purpose' while offering a 'false notion of life. Something that doesn't exist', adding that 'a lot of pictures are very dishonest. So-called boy meets girl'. Yet he has put a similar fairy tale ending for the girl in this film implying that he is deliberately and ironically mocking films that fraudulently sell dreams to people that rarely materialise. He is at one with Adorno and his critique of the culture industry as the dream factory peddling its lies to the masses to make them complicit in their own ideological domination. The 'hope' is that the 'unconscious canon of what they do not want' breaks forth against a 'false notion of life' and the murderous use of weapons as a source of profit from the deaths of millions of people. This brings us to a further rupture to the wheels of commerce that permeate the film when Chaplin considers capitalism's tendency to fall into crisis.

CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

At the beginning of the film, Verdoux is sitting outside a café finishing a coffee when a fellow former employee from the bank recognises him and joins him with a friend. He recounts to his companion that they were both cashiers in the bank. The former employee ventures Verdoux to explain what he does now. He says, 'A bit of everything, real estate, the stock market'. As Verdoux takes out a large roll of banknotes, the former employee points at it and remarks that he 'must have made a killing', to which Verdoux smiles ruefully and concurs. The former employee assesses that the market is low and Verdoux agrees, advising that now is the time to buy when everyone is selling.

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Once Verdoux leaves, the former employee pronounces, 'poor old Verdoux' but adds that he seems to be doing well. He then imparts to his friend how Verdoux 'got a pretty raw deal' as he had been with the bank for thirty years, but when the Depression arrived he was one of the first to be dismissed. With a sigh he utters, 'yes, after thirty years', but reflects he is prospering now.

His long service should have accounted for something but the brutality of capitalism renders sentiment meaningless. The language used here is also pertinent because the former employee uses the term 'make a killing' in terms of making money on the market. Verdoux, though, is literally killing women, so the term takes a more sinister indictment of the nature of business in capitalism. Moreover, the amoral nature of the system is further revealed by Verdoux advising that it is a good time to buy when people are selling so people can profit at the expense of others. The audience are being presented with the everyday workings of capitalism, but a 'heterodox ideology' is subverting this with the 'unconscious cannon of what they do not want' and so undermines the power of the culture industry. Capitalism is a murderous, cut-throat system just as Verdoux's new occupation as a mass killer is. The a priori 'collective behaviour' of the audience is one of acceptance of capitalism as propagated by the culture industry. However, the film exposes the system for what it really is so that a new collective of 'emancipatory intentions' for the viewers is possible, should they develop the critical acumen to see it.

Much later in the film, the contradictions of capitalism are shown when tragedy strikes for Verdoux as the stock market crashes. Chaplin uses a montage beginning with a shot of newspapers coming off a conveyor belt and then a newspaper headline from *Le Figaro* declaring, 'Stock Crash; Panic Follows'. This then dissolves into a high-angle shot of the stock market trading floor, and then the camera zooms in showing the traders mauling with each other in a frenzy, desperately trying to sell their shares. The shot then focuses on one trader with all the others grabbing him as they attempt to offload their rapidly depreciating stock. The intensity of the shot and the wild nature of their grimaced faces show the madness of capitalism when in crisis.

There is then a cut back to the newspapers on the conveyor belt and then a dissolve to a headline in *L'Humanité* that lurches forward to proclaim, 'Banks Fail; Riots Ensue'. A dissolve then shows us many people inside a bank demanding their money, fists raised in the air, and then they smash the windows of the bank. A high-angle shot shows some of them trying to get to the cashier's desk in mass panic. The next shot in the montage is another high-angle view of an investor; papers are strewn across the desk and on the floor, along with the discarded ticker tapes of share prices. He has a gun behind his back, turns to face the camera and puts the gun to his head. There is then a cut to another investor who climbs on to a window sill, turns sideways to look back at the camera and then throws himself off.

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The power of Chaplin's use of montage here encapsulates the insanity of capitalism in a very short sequence. Adorno's concern that the shocking nature of the montage means it is susceptible to lose its shock value through overuse is not borne out here. It accords more with his fulsome praise of montage as a response to the 'negation of meaning in the face of an increasingly meaningless world'. The shock value is the continued existence of the contradictions of capitalism. Moreover, Chaplin's use of high-angle shots visualises a world that is crashing down on those whose life it is 'to make a killing', until that is they are killed themselves.

Verdoux then speaks to his broker on the phone who is foreclosing on his shares. Verdoux pleads with him not do that as he has a wife and child but to no effect. So the realities of the brutality of capitalism come back to haunt Verdoux just as it did when he became dispensable as a bank clerk. Verdoux begs for a hiatus of ten minutes and the broker accedes. Verdoux rings his other broker and orders him to sell everything at once but the broker thinks he is mad as he was wiped out hours ago. Verdoux slowly replaces the receiver and the camera zooms in for a close-up with horror written across his face realising that both for him and his family time is nearly up. There is then a dissolve to a newspaper headline stating 'Crisis in Europe' and then a montage of shots of people demonstrating, and footage of Hitler and Mussolini. In the next scene, *Le Figaro* newspaper is being held up by Verdoux. The headlines report the Nazi bombing of Spanish loyalists with thousands killed, obviously referring to the atrocity at Guernica, and that war is immanent. The paper is lowered revealing it is him. He is older, frail, his hair greyer and that is when he encounters the girl again on the way to his arrest and eventual doom.

The end of this scene has taken us from capitalist boom to bust for Verdoux but the ultimate terminus is, as Adorno perceptively realises, fascism with the overt references mentioned earlier. There are also other more subliminal links to fascism, in general, and Nazism, in particular, in the film. In an early scene, Verdoux is tending the roses in his garden and in the background the fumes from an incinerator puff into the air as he is burning the corpse of one of his wives. The horror of the ovens of Auschwitz are conjured up and juxtaposed to an indifferent Verdoux happily going about his task, just as those Germans who lived close to the concentration camps did, despite knowing what was occurring inside.

Verdoux also maintains, as mentioned earlier, that he went into the 'business of liquidating the opposite sex', and we can see this resonates with the Nazis 'liquidating' the Jews. Additionally, Verdoux is trying to create an untraceable poison to kill his victims. He calls it the compound of 'C_2HC' and Zyklon B was the gas eventually developed by the Nazis for use in the gas chambers. The Nazis had experimented with many different methods before this, just as Verdoux does. As we have seen, when he picks the girl up to test

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the poison, he refers to that as his ‘experiment’, which he succeeds with when he kills a policeman after sparing the girl. The madness of capitalism and its descent into fascism through crisis is potently portrayed by Chaplin through the monster that is Verdoux, but he is a socially constructed monster as he enunciates at his trial and execution.

THE TRIAL

At the trial the prosecution lawyer refers to Verdoux as a ‘cruel’, ‘cynical monster’ and instructs the jury to scrutinise him. Verdoux looks behind him as though unaware it is him being talked about. The lawyer deduces that Verdoux has brains and if he had a decent instinct he could have made an honest living, but preferred to rob and murder unsuspecting women and ‘made a business of it’. As a ‘mass killer’, the lawyer demands the maximum penalty of the guillotine to protect society rather than as any sort of vengeance. Adorno lauded the schizophrenic nature of Verdoux for exposing capitalism’s impact on human beings by treating them instrumentally and this is quite apt here. The irony of him making a ‘business’ out of killing also stands as an indictment of the business of capitalism which can be just as ruthless as Verdoux now relates.

Verdoux is found guilty but before the judge passes sentence, he offers Verdoux the opportunity to speak, which he accepts. He thanks the prosecutor for at least admitting that he has brains which he used honestly for thirty-five years, but when they were unwanted, he was ‘forced’ to go into business for himself, just like any capitalist does. As for the charge of being a mass killer, Verdoux provocatively remarks, does the world not encourage it and is it not building weapons of destruction precisely for the purpose of mass killing? Continuing in a more graphic fashion, Verdoux suggests that these weapons have blown women and children to bits and done so ‘very scientifically’. He considers himself an amateur mass killer by comparison but decides to stop there as he does not want to lose his temper, given he will shortly lose his head. At this point the camera switches to a close-up of the girl who is sitting in the public gallery and has tears in her eyes. She then bows her own head. She has seen not only the ‘bitterness’ of Verdoux as she called it, but also his limited humanity and compassion as someone who helped her not once but twice. Admittedly, this was only because her husband had been an invalid but he did so all the same. She is a testament to the first part of his speech that circumstances of the inhuman world of capitalism forced him to act in the way he did and why she can cry at his fate.

When he is in prison awaiting execution one of the journalists has been speaking to him. The journalist describes Verdoux as being ‘nuts’ and

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'talking like 'a saint' while twisting everything into half-truths. For example, Verdoux maintains that you cannot have good without evil because evil is the 'shadows cast from the sun'. This mirrors the shadow that has followed Verdoux throughout the film as the darker side of his identity and the schizoid nature of his individual and social self. Another journalist entreats Verdoux to give him a moral for his story, a 'tragic example of a life of crime'. Verdoux responds by saying it is impossible for anyone to be an example in these criminal times. The journalist suggests that Verdoux is an example with his robbing and murdering people but he contends, 'that's business', to link back to the operations of capitalism again. The journalist persists, asserting that other people do not do business like that but Verdoux is not to be dissuaded. He insists, 'That is the history of many a big business. Wars, conflict, it's all business'. Verdoux finally concludes that 'one murder makes a villain, millions a hero. Numbers sanctify'.

Louvish perceptively interprets Verdoux's argument as being a 'Nietzschean one, with a Marxist twist: there is no individual Good or Evil in the faceless clash of modern politics'.[58] Louvish suggests that Verdoux's defence 'echoes down the decades from the shadow of Hiroshima to our own day'. Consequently, the awful 'legacy of the Tramp in modern times, in the age of the Bomb and of Auschwitz', the advent of the 'Cold War and the strong possibility of Mutually Assured Destruction' are voiced by Verdoux in court and in his death cell.

Adorno would no doubt concur with this and the denouement of an unrepentant Verdoux exposing to his accusers the realities of capitalism and fascism. The 'vegetarian Bengal tiger' has subverted the culture industry by presenting viewers with the 'unconscious canon of what they do not want'. The 'hope' is that they can resist the reification of their consciousness and collectively discern the 'emancipatory intentions' present by adopting a critical stance to the status quo and thereby demand a better world.

CONCLUSION

Adorno's understanding of film and his admiration for Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* has given us a more positive approach than the general assumption of outright dismissal, as evinced in his own edict of films containing the 'mark of Cain on their foreheads'. Because of the power of the culture industry in manipulating the masses, Adorno is suspicious of any emancipatory possibilities in film. Even so, he does think they are there in the form of the 'unconscious canon of what they do not want', a 'heterodox ideology', the power of montage and the potential for the emergence of a 'collective behaviour' that is critical of the status quo. His praise for *Verdoux* and the Adornoan informed analysis offered here is an attempt to further these

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emancipatory moments against the evils that Chaplin identified in the 1940s. Adorno's emphasis on the impossibility of an ethics in the administered world of capitalism, but the possibility for denouncing what is inhuman, is displayed in *Verdoux* also as an indictment of our modern times. The film shows that acts which are considered to be immoral in interpersonal relations are reproduced at the social level, but there they are treated as expedient or even dutiful when they are actually destructive of humanity. The Adornoan reading of the film stands as an affront to the carnage unleashed by the operations of capitalism and its end point in fascism.

NOTES

1 Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 109.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone, 1997), p. 175.

3 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film' in *The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

4 Ibid., pp. 185–86.

5 Ibid., p. 185.

6 Ibid., p. 186.

7 Ibid., p. 186.

8 Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 207.

9 Ibid., p. 210.

10 Brian Wall, *Theodor Adorno and Film Theory. The Fingerprint of Spirit* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

11 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Wall does this by analysing four films, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), *Repo Man* (1984) and *The Big Lebowski* (1998).

14 Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno. A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 312.

15 Chaplin got the idea from Orson Welles, who initially wanted Chaplin to play Landru in a documentary. Chaplin decided he wanted to do a comedy based on Landru and after some reticence on Welles's part he bought the rights to the project off him although he acceded to having a screen credit acknowledging Welles's initial input. See Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 412–13.

16 Adorno, 'Transparencies', p. 178. Bodo Blüthner et al., 'The Oberhausen Manifesto', 28 February 1962. Available at: https://www.moma.org/calendar/film/1287?locale=en. Accessed 20 April 2017.

17 Adorno, 'Transparencies', p. 178.

18 Ibid., pp. 179 and 186 note 1. Robert Musil, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (London: Penguin, 2001). See also Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The German Cinema* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1971), p. 128 and chapter 8, for an overview of the rise of New German Cinema.

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19 Adorno, ‘Transparencies’, p. 178.
20 Blüthner et al., ‘The Oberhausen Manifesto’.
21 Adorno, ‘Transparencies’, p. 178.
22 Ibid., p. 184.
23 Ibid., pp. 184–85.
24 Ibid., p. 185.
25 Ibid., pp. 178–79.
26 Ibid., p. 179.
27 Ibid., p. 180.
28 Simon Louvish, *Chaplin. The Tramp’s Odyssey* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 298.
29 Adorno, ‘Transparencies’, p. 181.
30 Ibid., p. 182.
31 Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, *An Introduction to Film Analysis. Technique and Meaning in Narrative Film* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 15.
32 Adorno, ‘Transparencies’, pp. 182–83.
33 Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 222.
34 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 154. Cf. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 222.
35 Adorno, ‘Transparencies’, p. 183.
36 Ibid., pp. 183–84.
37 Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), p. 255.
38 Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 175–76.
39 Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 255.
40 Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Chaplin Times Two’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 9, 1, 1996, p. 60.
41 Louvish, *Chaplin*, p. 305.
42 Adorno, ‘Chaplin Times Two’, p. 58.
43 Ibid., p. 60.
44 Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno. One Last Genius* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), p. 172.
45 Louvish, *Chaplin*, p. 295.
46 Ibid., p. 296.
47 Ibid., p. 298.
48 David Robinson, *Chaplin*. *His Life and Art* (London: Grafton, 1992), p. 530.
49 Quoted in ibid., p. 531.
50 Louvish, *Chaplin*, p. 303.
51 Ibid., p. 298.
52 Ibid., p. 301.
53 Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, p. 431.
54 Robinson, *Chaplin*, p. 536.
55 Arthur Schopenhauer, ‘On Suicide’. Available at: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/essays/chapter12.html. Accessed 28 April 2017.
56 Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, pp. 434–35.
57 Robinson, *Chaplin*, p. 542.
58 Louvish, *Chaplin*, p. 304.

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Chapter 3

Walter Benjamin: Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*

Walter Benjamin's overall political concern was to focus on the victims rather than the victors through a redemption of the class struggles of the past, to expose their 'courage, humour, cunning and fortitude', as an aid to help emancipation in the present.[1] He understands film as part of this politically oriented project and it is emblematic of his interest in mass culture as part of his aesthetic theory from a Marxist perspective. For Benjamin, film is a mass art which can be used to advance the communist cause. The film I will be focusing on in this chapter is the Cannes award–winning *Land and Freedom* (1995) set at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and directed by the avowed socialist and anti-establishment director Ken Loach. Benjamin sees film as a mass art with emancipatory potential as does Loach, which is why his films have 'consistently sought to challenge prevailing political orthodoxies by giving vent to views and attitudes that are often discounted, or marginalised, within the mainstream media'.[2] As David Archibald indicates, it is 'Marxist cinema with use value'[3] as Loach 'seeks to sympathetically represent the struggles of working-class people'.[4] In doing so, 'one central theme' that runs through many of his films, and especially in collaboration with his scriptwriter Jim Allen, is the 'contention that working class struggles are continually betrayed by the leaders of the workers' movement' and *Land and Freedom* exemplifies this.[5]

The central character is David Carr, an unemployed Liverpudlian and Communist Party member who watches a factual film on the conflict showing the violence and atrocities being committed by Franco's fascists. He resolves to participate in the fight against fascism and the film portrays a 'visceral, emotional and intellectual experience' of what happened.[6] It begins in 1994 with ambulance men running up a stairwell covered in fascist and

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anti-fascist graffiti in a dilapidated housing block. They enter the flat of the then-eighty-year-old Carr who has had a heart attack and is lying on the sofa with his teenage granddaughter Kim in attendance. To her obvious distress, Carr dies on the way to the hospital. When she returns to his flat to sort out his belongings, she finds a suitcase containing numerous photographs, letters, press cuttings and a red neckerchief with a handful of earth inside it that are all related to the Civil War in Spain. Kim examines them and transports her and us back in time. We see the conflict through Carr's recollections and participate with him visually as he moves from his initial idealism to the reality of war and politics, through the internal divisions of the various groupings on the left and the authoritarianism of fascism and Stalinism. The film's message of hope is carried forward with the image of Kim holding the red neckerchief aloft after Carr's coffin is lowered into the ground implying that defeating fascism in its many forms and implementing socialism are still essential political projects that she will now be involved in. I now outline Benjamin's main ideas on the relationship between political theory and film before applying them to *Land and Freedom*.

BENJAMIN

Benjamin was writing at the dawn of film and he saw it as a new form of technology that offers a major 'fracture in artistic formations' because 'a *new realm of consciousness*' emerges in the minds of the masses.[7] Film as a 'prism' allows people to see the environments in which they live, follow their hobbies and partake in leisure in a 'comprehensible, meaningful and passionate way'. For Benjamin, it is a 'sudden change of place' rather than a 'constant stream of images' revealing the hidden beauty of something that originally appeared very ordinary. Moreover, because these are collective spaces so are the people in them, the proletariat, and the film completes its 'prismatic work' in bringing them to the screen.[8] He praises Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) for offering the first visual representation of the suffering of the Russian people under the political tyranny of tsarist rule. For Benjamin, only film can 'reproduce this collective in motion' and 'convey such beauty or the currents of horror and panic'.

Benjamin links this 'collective' aspect of film to his notion of 'aura', the authentic aspect of an artwork, which 'withers' when it is technologically reproduced and '*substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence*'.[9] Additionally, the reproduction actualises itself in people in whatever situation they are in. Benjamin proclaims that both of these 'processes are intimately related to the mass movements of our day' as a 'renewal of humanity' and 'their most powerful agent is film'. Nonetheless, Benjamin's concept of aura has,

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as Miriam Bratu Hansen indicates, a ‘range of meanings’ covering ‘multiple, philosophically, and politically incongruous genealogies’.[10] The first time he mentions the concept in 1930, he states that ‘genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain things as people imagine’.[11] As Hansen observes, this is in contrast to its general perception as a mainly aesthetic notion,[12] and I utilise this expansive understanding of aura to include any object when analysing the film.

Benjamin had an archival fascination with the artefacts of everyday life, which he saw as important as cultural ones in terms of what they can teach us.[13] As Erdmut Wizisla notes, ‘Benjamin’s archives consist of images, texts, signs, things that one can see and touch, but they are also a reservoir of experience, ideas, and hopes’ and his whole oeuvre ‘can be conceived as an archive of thought, of perceptions, of history and of the arts’.[14] He collected ‘scraps, notebooks’, ‘cuttings-out’, various artefacts and ‘photographs and documents pertaining to his life’.[15] Benjamin’s relationship to these objects was not based on their utility but, as he states, as someone who ‘studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate’.[16] Holding them in his hands means ‘seeing through them into their distant past, as though inspired’. Memory, as ‘the medium of that which is experienced’, is like a form of ‘digging’ for a ‘buried past’, ‘to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil’.[17] For Benjamin, ‘genuine memory must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers’ and must reveal ‘long-sought secrets’ through ‘meticulous investigation’.

Returning to film, Benjamin proclaims that people can then become ‘quasi-expert’ when discussing and analysing movies, which display the democratic nature of the medium.[18] The audience in the cinema has both a ‘critical and uncritical’ attitude because individual reactions to what is occurring on screen manifest themselves into collective reactions that regulate each other.[19] Additionally, Benjamin notes how anyone can participate in a film through the use of newsreels or when directors use real people rather than professional actors furthering the democratic nature of the medium.[20] He contends that in Western Europe this is confronted by the capitalist exploitation of film that attempts to stop people’s ‘legitimate claim to being reproduced’, but he counters that it is in the film industry’s interest to allow the masses to be involved ‘through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations’.[21] Film ‘offers a hitherto unimaginable spectacle’ and has an ‘illusory nature’ in the way the cinematographer ‘penetrates deeply into its tissue’ offering a ‘piecemeal’ image whose ‘manifold parts’ are assembled via editing.[22] Technically, film gives us ‘insight into the necessities governing our lives’ by using ‘close-ups’, accentuating hidden aspects in ‘familiar objects’ and exploring ‘commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera’.[23] Film presents us with ‘a vast and unsuspected field of action’ through the depiction

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of 'bars and city streets', 'offices and furnished rooms', railroad stations' and 'factories'. All of these seem to close around us but film appeared and 'exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split-second', allowing us to go on 'journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris'.

Film has a 'shock effect' as thoughts are replaced by moving images which, under contemplation, are suddenly replaced by further images that heighten the attention of the viewer.[24] The masses who watch a film are engaged in a process of 'distraction' in which they 'absorb the work of art into themselves' as a 'collective'.[25] For Benjamin, 'reception in distraction . . . finds its true training ground in film' through its 'shock effects' that not only 'encourages an evaluating attitude in the audience' but also does so by requiring no attention.[26] Consequently, 'the audience is an examiner, but a distracted one'[27] as they are bombarded with images 'that are immediately interrupted by new images' and changes of scene.[28] So 'the masses are a matrix from which all customary behaviour toward works of art is today emerging newborn' and film is a crucial part of this process.[29]

With Benjamin's main ideas on political theory and film outlined, I will now apply them to *Land and Freedom*.

CARR THE ARCHIVIST

Benjamin's emphasis on the power of everyday objects containing a 'reservoir of experience, ideas and hopes' as an 'archive of thought', 'perceptions' and 'history' relate to the artefacts that Carr has collected from the Spanish Civil War. We are first introduced to them when Kim returns to his flat and spots the suitcase on top of a wardrobe that contains them. The suitcase is as hidden as the Spanish Civil War was and part of Loach's project is to recover the 'hidden history of the Spanish Revolution'.[30] Kim, via Carr's artefacts that reveal his story, is the vehicle for this in a journey 'of adventure among' the 'far-flung debris' in the fight for socialism and its defence against fascism.

The first item Kim retrieves is the red scarf filled with Spanish dust and stones. After opening it, she runs her fingers through them and the symbolic bond between Carr and herself has begun as his fingers were also immersed in them. The land on which the Spanish Civil War occurred is returned to the present. Kim then picks up a photograph of Blanca, Carr's fellow comrade and lover who is shot by a member of the regular army, and whose scarf it is. The soil and stones are from where she was buried. Kim then peruses the press clippings with the headlines, 'Spanish Troops Revolt' and 'All into Action Now! Defend Spanish Republic!'

From Benjamin's perspective, these artefacts, minus their aura, allow Kim and the viewers to have a mass experience as redeemers of the memories of

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those who were vanquished in the past. Holding these artefacts in her hands means, as the aura 'withers', she is 'seeing through them into their distant past, as though inspired'. She engages in a form of 'digging' for a 'buried past' just as 'one turns over soil'. The 'shock effect' of the film that 'heightens the attention of the viewer' begins via these artefacts, educating Kim and us to evaluate one of the major class struggles in history.

Loach accomplishes this throughout the film with the use of flashbacks from the present to the past and the past to the present in a process of 'distraction' that attempts to create an evaluating attitude in the viewer. It is no accident that the start of the film in the early 1990s shows fascist and anti-fascist graffiti to alert us that the struggle is still needed today. Kim will be the medium through which that message will be played throughout the film as she and the audience are educated into why the Spanish Civil War occurred and why fascism had, and still has, to be challenged and defeated. From Benjamin's perspective, this is the redemptive aspect of the film as it attempts to raise 'a new realm of consciousness' in both Kim and the viewers.

Benjamin notes how anyone can participate in a film through the use of newsreels or when directors use real people rather than professional actors and so gives them a 'legitimate claim to being reproduced'. In the scene where Carr is radicalised, it is by being shown a newsreel of what has been occurring in Spain. There is actual footage of Spanish people waving banners, their fists in the air in salute and marching. The atrocities perpetrated by Franco and his fascists are displayed with dead bodies of trade unionists that have been shot. The newsreel produces an 'evaluating attitude' in Carr in the images of fighting for socialism and the need to fight fascism. He develops a 'new realm of consciousness' as he 'distractedly' absorbs the newsreel's message.

Although the main focus is on Carr, Loach also shows the rest of the audience in a panning shot and a longer shot showing that Carr is part of a group of people. In Benjamin's sense, he is part of the 'collective', even though the story will be told mainly through him, endorsing the film as a 'mass art' with the emancipatory potential that entails. Carr's decision to go and fight is induced by the 'shock effect' of the film within the film. He has seen a 'sudden change of place' and created an 'evaluating attitude' through the power of cinema.

Kim is further educating herself and developing an evaluating attitude by reading the headlines in the newspapers that Carr has archived. One caption informs that Franco has captured Malaga, Madrid has been heavily bombed and Nazi planes fired on civilians in the streets. A close-up of Kim shows her studying the reports intensely, being given her own history lesson and, as Benjamin would say, developing a 'new realm of consciousness', but so are we in absorbing the montage of print and pictures relating to the horrors

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committed by the fascists. Carr the archivist is bringing the Spanish Civil War from the past to present.

Kim receives another important lesson on developing an 'evaluating attitude' when Carr relates in a letter that he has arrived in Spain and is on a train to Barcelona. Carr meets members of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM), the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, and, despite being a member of the Communist Party and unaware of the existence of the POUM, decides to join them because of their fraternity. Benjamin emphasises how artefacts can bring the past back to life and this letter certainly does that because he describes his group as 'socialism in action', with the leaders being elected, and everyone, women included, on the same pay. Kim is being introduced to the possibility of a different society where both men and women are treated equally and work for the common good.

At this stage, she is similar to Carr, engaged in a seemingly innocuous adventure but she will become radicalised through his story and the artefacts that Carr has archived, because memory as 'the medium of that which is experienced' gives us 'an image of the person who remembers'. The archived letters, photographs, press clippings and the red scarf containing the soil will offer us 'an immense and unexpected field of action' of the Spanish Civil War, which begins when Carr and his comrades go to liberate a town from the fascists.

THE FIRST BATTLE

From Benjamin's perspective, the 'shock effect' of the depiction of the battle to take over the town, which Loach directs brilliantly, is captured in the close-ups of the combatants fighting in the streets. Benjamin praised the film for giving us an 'unimaginable spectacle' and the powers of the cinematographer in bringing this to the screen. The camera work here makes us feel as though we are with Carr and his comrades as they progress through the narrow streets and attack the fascists, further heightening our attention and willing them to win. The cacophony of the rifle fire also intensifies the awareness of the viewer with its 'shock effect' that brings us to a 'sudden change of place' and the 'horror and panic' in the fight against fascism.

The 'shock effect' of the scene is also escalated when an Irishman named Coogan, one of Carr's comrades, is shot and killed. Coogan may be a victim but from Benjamin's perspective his redemption lies in his struggle against fascism that has been aesthetically preserved through the power of film. Moreover, Coogan's 'courage' was not just evident in Spain because he was also an Irish republican who was imprisoned for five years for fighting the British. There is also a German and an Italian in the unit, indicating the

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international dimension to the struggle. Twenty years before, the workers had been slaughtering each other in the name of nationalism but now they were internationalist and confronting their real enemy, illustrating that the class struggle in Spain was a struggle for the working classes everywhere. Similarly, the struggle for Irish independence against the oppression of British imperialism brings another emancipatory aspect of the film to the audience's attention and the creation of an 'evaluating attitude'.

The 'shock effect of the battle makes Carr reflect that he is a different person to the one he was before and sees the world differently. He notes how he left Liverpool with a 'daft idea' but realises that in war people get killed, like Coogan and the women and children in the village. He acknowledges that it is all part of him now and he can 'never shake it off'. As Kim reads this from his letter, and engages further with the story of the civil war, she will also be a different person and perhaps some viewers might as well, as they become 'quasi-expert' in their evaluations of the fight against fascism.

This scene certainly captures not only the 'horror and panic' of the war against fascism but also the 'beauty' of solidarity and 'fortitude' of those opposed to it, just as Benjamin said Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* did for the Russian people against tsarism. *Land and Freedom* gives us this 'collective in motion' where even a defeat in Coogan's death offers the possibility of the 'renewal of humanity' today.

THE VOTE

Benjamin mentioned positively how some directors use real people and not just professional actors in films. This allows ordinary people the 'legitimate claim to being reproduced' against the capitalist exploitation of film that attempts to deny this to the masses. This 'collective in action' is captured in Loach's policy of recruiting both professional and non-professional actors 'on the basis of their affinities with the parts that they played'.[31] The power of this approach is exemplified after the town has been liberated in the famous scene where the pros and cons of collectivising the land takes place and is put to a vote. The scene is shot using a 'skilfully crafted illusion of the authentic' with the camera following the action as each person speaks and it is sometimes 'caught out by' their 'movement', creating a 'sense that the audience are witnesses to events as they are unfolding'.[32] There was also a spontaneous aspect to the scene because, although the structure was agreed beforehand, the participants could develop their viewpoints freely.[33] The potency of this scene also lies in its 'presentation of conflicting positions that strive to get to the heart of the politics of the conflict'.[34] Loach accords due respect to all the different political arguments around collectivisation and the implications

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for the wider struggle against fascism,[35] displaying the democratic nature of film and encouraging an 'evaluating attitude in the audience', as Benjamin desires. The evaluation is based on the different positions put forward on redistributing the land in the complex circumstances they encountered. The audience are encouraged to imagine what a different world might be like, free from capitalist exploitation and fascism, but as the debate shows, this is not unproblematic.

Initially, the exchange raises important issues over collectivisation for the greater good and an amendment to that by Pepe who becomes the centre of the discussion. He is confronted with collectivist arguments that emphasise greater productivity to ensure that they feed themselves and get food to the comrades fighting at the front. He agrees and also endorses redistribution but suggests that everyone should still have some land of their own. He admits that he only has a small piece of land but he wants to keep it because he has worked on it. Pepe reasons that there are those who know how to work and those who do not and he has got what he has because he has laboured for it. When he is asked if, when the harvest is ready, he will eat all the bread and potatoes, he says not, emphasising that he still believes in general redistribution but wants to keep his own land.

Further arguments are put forward citing the need to subordinate everything to the revolution, that other villages have collectivised and are more productive on that basis, and that private property should be abolished to allocate resources on the basis of need. Pepe encourages the militia to enter the debate and after some reluctance, because he thinks they should decide as it is their village, Lawrence advises that they should divide the estate and the land among the people immediately. He adds that the decree passed by the Republican government in October allows for that and for people like Pepe, who is also an anti-fascist, to work his own land.

The democratic way these differing viewpoints are presented by Loach can engender an 'evaluating attitude in the audience' that Benjamin desires. We are being asked, not told, to consider which side we would take in a similar situation and the difficulties we face in creating and preserving a socialist society. Pepe's request seems reasonable, as does Lawrence's defence of it as a general policy to support and save the Republic by getting the peasants on their side, which the decree allows. The dangers of this are also aired by deeming communal ownership essential because private property preserves the capitalist mentality that they are opposed to, increasing the 'evaluating attitude' of Kim and the cinema audience.

The discussion then relates to the issue of socialist strategy and again the democratic nature of the discussion allows conflicting viewpoints to be aired and an 'evaluating attitude' to be cultivated. There are appeals for compromise and a tempering of the revolutionary spirt to encourage capitalist

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countries to help them. This is countered by the betrayal of the socialists and communists in Germany to defer the revolution that resulted in the rise of Hitler. The political dimension is attached to the land redistribution discussion by the suggestion that collectivising the village can act as a beacon to others in Germany and Italy that a new way is possible.

Carr finally intervenes and retorts that a million people will be dead, irrespective of ideas, as Franco will kill them, while adding that ideas are not an abstraction in some textbook but reside in our actions. So unless they win the war against fascism, there is little point in having the ideology which does not exist in a book but in a real place with real people.

We have been following Carr as our main vehicle for understanding the nature of the Spanish Civil War but he has been largely inconspicuous in this scene and, if anything, Lawrence's views have been more prominent. Carr has been allowed to develop an 'evaluating attitude', just as we have, and sides with Lawrence at this point. Even so, the vote for collectivisation is passed with a majority and democracy must be respected just as it was in the general discussion.

Benjamin praises the democratic nature of film as a medium and its capacity to create an 'evaluating attitude' in the audience and this scene brings that home forcefully. Kim and the viewers are left to make their own minds up on which position they think they would take even within the parameters of socialism. These are debates that Kim will take with her in the socialist cause she will join, as will those viewers who identify with creating a more just society.

In the heat of the debate, it was also pointed out that they should fight together not against each other, a warning against the divisions and betrayals to come. So the sinister spectre of Stalinism has also raised its head here to show the 'more general division within the anti-fascist forces then emerging'.[36] As Paul Preston notes, the Communist Party's desire to win over the small farmer was 'all part of a policy of dismantling the revolution' and backed by Stalin.[37] That Stalinism crushed the spirit of the revolution becomes a major theme in the film and is brilliantly portrayed as Carr develops a 'new realm of consciousness' towards the politics of the Left.

STALINISM

The depiction of Stalinism in the film is heavily influenced by George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which was the initial inspiration for the script.[38] It is controversial because Orwell's view reinforces the interpretation that the revolutionary forces within the war were subordinated to Stalinist ends, but for others it was far more complex.[39] Nonetheless, there were

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numerous instances of Stalinist practices that stifled the revolutionary spirit during the war and in showing this the film acts as a universal warning for struggles on the Left and the dilemmas to be faced against a common enemy. From Benjamin's perspective, the aura of the film 'withers' in its reproducibility because it is turning a 'unique existence' into a 'mass existence'. This can create an 'evaluating attitude' in the audience and also in Kim on the path to redemption today. The victims of Stalinism, as depicted in the following scenes, expose their 'courage, humour, cunning and fortitude' to help emancipation in the present and an understanding of a largely hidden past.

In one letter, Carr describes how fascist planes dropped leaflets stating that they can never win the war, but he claims that in Aragon they are holding firm even if they do need more guns. Carr then muses that there might be some Russian tanks coming over the hills but adds ruefully, 'some hope eh?' At this point, Carr still has faith in the Communist Party but his ruminations are leading him into a 'new realm of consciousness' and an omen of the betrayal of Stalinism.

This is even more evinced in the next scene where the militia leader recounts that they have been requested to integrate into the new Popular Army. He adds that if they refuse then they will not get any arms. Lawrence accepts this, as does Carr, but another comrade infers that the discipline from being in an army will destroy the 'revolutionary spirit of the people' and that is what Stalinists desire. Carr is perplexed and counters that the Communist Party was set up for creating a revolution, not suppressing it. At this point, Carr seems unaware of the dangers of Stalinism but the comrade elucidates that as they are the heart of the revolutionary process, Stalin fears them and wants to control them. He wants to sign treaties with the West as he has already done with France. To do so, he needs to be seen as respectable and reassuring, so allowing revolutionary militia like them to exist will undermine that, which is why they are a 'real threat' both for Stalin and the other countries. Lawrence admits that he may be right but all he knows is that they will not win a war with a 'bunch of amateurs'. After some further debate they vote to keep their militia within the new regular army, but Lawrence, who voted for disbandment, is clearly unhappy. When a rifle then blows up and shrapnel hits Carr in the arm, Lawrence seems justified in his concerns.

The scene excellently portrays the dilemma of both the situation in the war and how we as an audience 'evaluate' it. Both sides of the argument are represented in keeping with Loach's democratic approach to debate. The preservation for the need for a revolutionary spirit is clear, as is the paucity in the equipment to do so, but the import of the scene rests that responsibility on Stalin's desire for control. Kim has been reading this and may have little knowledge of the context, but again, from Benjamin's perspective, it highlights important universal issues in the class struggle of today in terms of

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compromise or keeping the revolutionary flame alive. Carr is also furthering his journey into a 'new realm of consciousness' but still adheres to his faith in the Communist Party, which is severely tested when Blanca visits him in Barcelona and they make love.

She discovers, to her disgust, that he has left the militia and joined the International Brigades. Carr still clings to his faith in the Communist Party but she confronts his consciousness with allegations that the Stalinists are betraying the revolution, calling POUM members 'social fascists' and banning their own newspapers. Carr is still in denial because he will not believe it until he sees it himself. There is then a flashback to Kim, who has a photograph of Blanca in front of her with 'Con amor, B' written on the back. The artefact's aura, the pictorial capture of Blanca at that time, 'withers' and so reproduces her critique of Stalinism into the present for Kim and us to evaluate. Kim then reads a newspaper cutting about the bombing of Guernica. She is drinking a bottle of German beer and eating an Italian pizza. Loach may be subliminally suggesting symbolic solidarity with the workers of those countries that might inform Kim's commitment to international socialism as portended at the end of the film.

Carr's voice-over describes the splits now forming on the Left between the POUM, anarchists and communists and how it is difficult to explain but admits that the truth is falling before his eyes and no one trusts anyone anymore. She opens another paper with the headline, 'Spanish Trotskyists Plot with Franco', as his voice-over claims that he still has faith in the Communist Party. Next to the headline has been written, 'LIES', obviously by Carr himself when he discovered the truth, but at this stage he still adheres to his belief in the Party and Stalin. The decline of the aura of the artefacts is encouraging Kim and the audience to have an 'evaluating attitude' between the positions of Blanca and Carr, but it is Blanca's viewpoint that will begin to push him on the path to a 'new realm of consciousness'.

Loach then uses the battle over the Telefónica communication building in Barcelona between communists and anarchists to show the internal conflicts that beset the fight against fascism and the perniciousness of Stalinism. This creates an 'evaluating attitude' for Carr because he can see the folly of what he is doing when he discovers a fighter on the other side is from Manchester. They both ask each other why they are not on the same side but neither can explain why. This is exacerbated when a woman in the street shouts to them that they should be fighting the fascists, not among themselves. The first doubts about the role of the Communist Party are now emerging on his path to a 'new realm of consciousness'.

When he goes to a café the next day, his faith is shattered after hearing the way the communists talk about the POUM in a disparaging manner. Carr returns to his room and angrily rips up his Communist Party membership

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card into bits, puts them in an ashtray and stares at them as the fragments of betrayal. He has now entered a 'new realm of consciousness' and engaged in an 'evaluating attitude' just as Kim and the audience have.

He decides to rejoin his comrades in the militia and they all welcome him back. One calls him 'Lazarus', while Carr replies, 'back from the dead', which he is, both in returning to the cause and through his artefacts that are bringing his life back to Kim and the viewers with the realities of the Spanish Civil War. He approaches Blanca who is more cautious but he admits to her that he has seen with his own eyes that she was right about Stalinism. There is then a cut to Kim reading a letter in which he states that the Party 'stinks' and is 'evil and corrupt' and how he never thought he would say that but in Barcelona he saw good comrades snatched off the streets and executed or tortured. He depicts Stalin as treating the working class 'like pieces on a chess board to be bartered, used and sacrificed'. Despite this, and the lack of weapons, he proclaims that their spirits are high and they will win. Kim and the audience are being asked to be 'quasi expert' in their 'evaluating attitude' and they are being presented with an account, via Carr, that exposes the evils of Stalinism and Carr's 'new realm of consciousness'. His previous faith in the Communist Party makes this revelation even more 'poignant' and perhaps probes us to question our own beliefs or at least think more critically about the world which is, as Benjamin realises, one of the powers of film.

The tentacles of Stalinism reach even further when they engage in another battle and come under heavy bombardment. The regular army seem to have set them up to be slaughtered as they are given contradictory information on whether to stay or retreat. Back at the camp as Blanca is tending to the injured, Carr sees trucks approaching in the distance full of soldiers from the regular army. He observes, ironically, that they have a come a bit late for the fight to suggest that interpretation and Blanca's murder confirms it. Lawrence, the former POUM member, is among them, intimating Loach's emphasis on betrayal, and the commander orders them all to disarm and disband. The militia leader wants to know why but the commander orders him to obey. He then reads out the names of those in the militia being arrested, orders the rest to go home, announces that the POUM is now illegal, its newspapers banned and its leaders in custody. The charges against them are for collaborating with the fascists and Franco. The militia leader shows the wounded to expose the falsehood of the accusations but the commander identifies the leaders as being responsible. The militia leader claims it is a Stalinist plot and names all of the towns the POUM liberated from the fascists, making a mockery of the allegations against them. After confronting Lawrence, Blanca is eventually shot in the back by a member of the regular army, an emblem of the 'betrayal of the revolutionary spirit of the civil war'.[40]

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Loach shoots this scene with the regular army on a small hill looking down on the militia members. Their elevation is indicative of the top-down control of the Communist Party that will now eliminate the militia groups at the behest of Stalin. The bottom-up form of democracy of the POUM and the life-blood of the revolution as 'socialism in action' are about to be extinguished. There is also a close-up of Lawrence's boot as he towers over Blanca, which suggests a link between Stalinism and the jackboot of Nazism that will form the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939.

The next shot is of Carr on the back of a horse and cart that is taking Blanca's body back to her family and she is, in Benjamin's sense, a victim. Nonetheless, through her struggles, Kim and the audience have seen her 'courage, humour, cunning and fortitude' to aid emancipation in the present. Carr is then shown sitting next to her corpse and he is given her red scarf in remembrance, an artefact whose aura 'withers' when Kim discovers it, bringing the past to life in remembrance of the victims of Stalinism. Carr's voice-over relates how they buried Blanca in collectivised land which she would have liked even though the Stalinists came three weeks later and ripped up the commune, but at least the 'air belonged to her for a short while'. Even so, he regrets nothing, declares the revolution a contagious spirit and adds that if they had succeeded there, and they could have done, the world would be a different place but never mind because one day their world will come. It is a life-affirming message for Kim and the audience to ponder in their 'evaluating attitude' of the film and its events.

As they lower Blanca's coffin into the ground, Carr throws a handful of dust and stones in but then picks up some more and puts them into her red scarf. There is a close-up of him holding it the way that Kim had at the beginning of the film. To show the past in the present and the present in the past, there is then the 'shock effect' as the film cuts to Carr's own coffin being lowered into the ground. People begin to toss soil into the grave and Kim asks to speak as she has found something in Carr's possessions that she thinks is appropriate. It is a poem by William Morris, 'The Day Is Coming', and she recites the lines: 'Join in the battle wherein no man can fail, for those fadeth and dieth, yet his deed shall still prevail'. She then opens the red scarf and empties the Spanish dust into his grave, retains the red scarf and holds it aloft in a right-fisted salute. The aura of Blanca's scarf 'withers' to allow Kim to carry on the cause for 'socialism in action' as a redemption of the revolutionary spirt of Carr, Blanca and all the other comrades for today.

CONCLUSION

Benjamin's understanding of the role of film gains illuminating expression when applied to *Land and Freedom*. Carr's archive resurrects the story and

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memory of the Spanish Civil War that has largely been hidden from sight, just as his old suitcase was. Kim's engagement with these artefacts as their aura 'withers' gives her and us as viewers a change of landscape to another world to see the 'collective in action'. Carr's journey sees him develop a 'new realm of consciousness' in fighting fascism and then rejecting Stalinism. Kim also develops a 'new realm of consciousness' that is then mediated to us as part of Benjamin's notion of distracted absorption in the hope that we change our perceptions and create an 'evaluating attitude'. She has been given the archival memory of her grandfather, as 'the medium of that which is experienced', a form of 'digging' for a 'buried past', 'to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil', literally in the soil from Spain. For Benjamin, this is why film's aura as it 'withers' in its reproducibility is a 'powerful agent' in offering the possibility of redemption for a better future as it 'substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence'. In the case of *Land and Freedom*, this is to affirm socialism, defeat fascism and Stalinism and remember those who were, and are, its victims in their 'courage, humour, cunning and fortitude'.

NOTES

1 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 4. 1938–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389–90.

2 John Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1–2.

3 As told to me by David Archibald at the 'Marx and Ken Loach' Panel at the Marx at the Movies Conference, University of Central Lancashire, on 1–2 July 2015, where I presented a paper based on this chapter.

4 David Archibald, *The War That Won't Die. The Spanish Civil War in Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 152.

5 Ibid., p. 152.

6 Philip French, 'Idealism and illusions', *The Observer*, 8 October 1995. Available at: http://observer.theguardian.com/screen/story/0,6903,595331,00.html. Accessed 19 November 2013.

7 Walter Benjamin, 'Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 2. Part 1. 1927–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 17.

8 Ibid., p. 18.

9 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (Third Version) in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 4. 1938–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 254.

10 Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 105.

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11 Walter Benjamin, 'Hashish, Beginning of March 1930', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 2. Part 1. 1927–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 328; cf. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 104.

12 Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 104.

13 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. xi.

14 Erdmut Wizisla, 'Preface' in Ursula Marx et al. (eds) *Walter Benjamin's Archive. Images, Texts, Signs* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 2.

15 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

16 Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 2. Part 2. 1931–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 487; cf. Wizisla, 'Preface', pp. 4–5.

17 Walter Benjamin, 'Excavation and Memory', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Vol. 2. Part 2. 1931–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 576.

18 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', p. 262.

19 Ibid., p. 264.

20 Ibid., p. 262.

21 Ibid., pp. 262–63.

22 Ibid., p. 263.

23 Ibid., p. 265.

24 Ibid., p. 267.

25 Ibid., p. 268.

26 Ibid., p. 269.

27 Ibid., p. 269.

28 Ibid., p. 267.

29 Ibid., p. 267.

30 Archibald, *The War That Won't Die*, p. 153.

31 Hill, *Ken Loach*, p. 205.

32 Archibald, *The War That Won't Die*, p. 158.

33 Ibid., pp. 158–59; Hill, *Ken Loach*, p. 207.

34 Archibald, *The War That Won't Die*, p. 159.

35 Hill, *Ken Loach*, p. 207.

36 Ibid., p. 208.

37 Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War. Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), pp. 248–49.

38 Archibald, *The War That Won't Die*, p. 156.

39 See Archibald, *The War That Won't Die*, pp. 161–62, for a useful overview and defence of Orwell and Loach's position with which I agree.

40 Ibid., p. 163.

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Chapter 4

Ernst Bloch: Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*

Ernst Bloch offers a politics of utopianism that is rooted in our everyday lives and present in nearly all cultural formations and artistic practices. He argues for hope in the here and now which is built on dreams for a better life and a more humane world as people strive for the 'Not-Yet' of what could be. Bloch emphasises the 'warm stream' of Marxism because he wants to recapture the utopian aspect of the Marxist tradition to complement the 'cold stream of analysis' to critique everyday social relations in society.[1] Capitalism denies these moments of hope in so many ways or makes us pursue false dreams that only enslave, rather than liberate, us. Even worse, we can repress our dreams as we have to live with the day-to-day reality of our lives but the task is to strive to make our dreams part of that reality. Film is one aspect of this utopian project that attempts to make us yearn for a principle of hope through moments of the 'Not-Yet' and question our everyday existence. Film, as the 'movement of wishful dream', uses what is real to show another reality, and so displays how another society or world is circulating, even if it is hindered, in the present one, offering a 'wishful action' or a 'wishful landscape'.[2] Following this theme, my focus in this chapter is on Bloch's dialectical interplay of daydreams and night-dreams to critique capitalism as applied to Woody Allen's magical *Midnight in Paris* (2011).

The film centres on Gil Pender, an aspiring writer, who has a lucrative but unfulfilling job writing Hollywood movie scripts. He visits Paris with his rich although uncultured fiancée, Inez, and her right-wing parents, John and Helen. After wandering in Montmartre late in the evening, a church clock strikes midnight and Gil enters a vintage Peugeot car. He is transported back to Paris in the 1920s to meet some of the greatest artists and writers of the period that he admires deeply. Gil has a night-dream which is like a daydream

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because he is awake. This causes him to transfer his utopian experiences back into his real life and question the warped values of those around him, while also affirming his more authentic self. Before analysing the film, I now outline Bloch's discussion of dreaming as part of his politics of utopianism.

BLOCH ON THE POLITICS OF UTOPIANISM

For Bloch, when we contemplate our lives and ask what gives it meaning this often leads to anxiety and fear.[3] Against this, Bloch specifies that we need to learn how to hope. He characterises the principle of hope as having the following characteristics. It is superior to fear. It is in love with success rather than failure. It is neither passive nor shrouded in nothingness like failure. It requires people to come out of themselves into a process of becoming.

Hope is also encapsulated in thinking as a 'venturing beyond' which involves grasping the 'New' to going beyond abstractions and that which is 'In-Front-of-Us'.[4] Then we can be oriented to the future by striving and nurturing what is hoped for rather than what is feared. Bloch sees Marx's writings as crucial in this respect because they offer the turning point in the process of a concrete venturing beyond becoming conscious.[5] For Bloch, engaging with the materialistic dialectics of Marx makes us realise that there can be no rigid divisions between the future and the past, as each inform and struggle with each other on the path to the 'New' through '*comprehended hope*'.[6] Before Marx, the 'Not-Yet-Conscious', 'Not-Yet-Become' existed neither as words nor as a concept in previous philosophy. Bloch cites for support Lenin's point that 'forward dreaming' was not properly reflected on or developed until Marx.[7] Bloch is critical of previous philosophy because it contented itself with contemplative knowledge that was preoccupied with the past and so neglected the future.[8] Only with Marx do we get the edict not just to interpret the world but to change it.[9] This desire for change 'is absolutely nothing but the struggle against the dehumanisation which culminates in capitalism' and the 'promotion of humanity' in its place.[10] For Bloch, this task is not just for the proletariat but is part of 'his broader perception that utopian yearnings were to be found across social classes and in diverse cultural forms'.[11] Marxist philosophy is a philosophy of the future that 'is still unbecome' on the becoming journey to 'homeland'.[12]

Bloch's aim then is to 'bring philosophy to hope' and to do this he wants to reclaim the notion of utopia because it has not been properly and explicitly illuminated.[13] He proposes that utopia must be understood as a positive principle that contains hope, expectation and intention to that which is yet to come, the 'New', which itself is both a basic aspect of human consciousness and part of concrete reality as a whole. Philosophy will then have a

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conscience of tomorrow, a commitment to the future and a knowledge of hope.[14] What guides us on this journey is the presence of the 'forward signal' of the 'Not-Yet', which Bloch suggests that we need to grasp thoroughly by 'forward dreaming', and the hope for a better life, and he again cites Lenin in support here.[15]

For Bloch, an important aspect of hope is encapsulated in daydreams that everyone engages in. Daydreams can be negative when they are unregulated and involve mere escapism, but they can be positive when we know them deeply and train them on doing what is right.[16] Daydreams need to be clearly understood, become specific and made more familiar,[17] and as long as our lives are impaired in any way, then our private and public existence will be pervaded by daydreams.[18]

For Bloch, dreaming is a utopian moment in the lives of all of us that exists as a real need for nurturing our capacity to hope. Bloch also identifies the dreamy person during the day as different from the one who dreams at night, because the daydreamer is not asleep and can be led astray in various ways.[19] Nevertheless, as Bloch realises, this does not mean daydreams and night-dreams are unrelated because sometimes an exchange can take place where these experiences inform one another. As Bloch states: 'If the inclination to improve our lot does not sleep even in our sleep – how should it do so when we are awake?'[20] Additionally, the 'archaic material' of the night-dream communicates with our imagination when we are conscious.[21] Bloch specifies that this is both psychological and objective because '*many night-pieces are also undischarged or unfinished* and therefore demand daydream, forward-intention'. For Bloch, this 'archaic brooding' from the night-dream can be utopian in the present by allowing the convergence of both night-dreams and daydreams. The relevance of night-dreams infuses reality and so gives us a glimpse of a different political society.[22] Dreams themselves are 'wish-fulfilments' of an 'unconscious wishful fantasy' for better lives 'in the vast field of utopian consciousness'.[23] It is this dialectical interplay between the night-dream and the daydream as part of Bloch's politics of utopianism that I now want to apply to *Midnight in Paris*.

In one sense this raises a problem because Bloch is imaging a different political society for his utopianism, so how can Gill's personal ambition to be a novelist be utopian? Applying Bloch's utopianism to an individual's aspirations such as Gil's means there must be something in his principles that holds out the hope he will contribute to a better future. Gil's dream to be a novelist, an affirmation of his more authentic self, allows him to also reject the warped principles of the privileged world he inhabits in an affirmation of Blochian hope and a rejection of right-wing politics. So there is a fusion of the personal with the political in his dreaming but how that eventuates itself at the end of the film is, for Gil, and us, left open.

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GIL'S UTOPIAN YEARNINGS

The film begins as a beautiful Sidney Bechet clarinet score, *Si tu vois ma mère* (*If you see my mother*), is played during a montage of shots showing Paris by day and night from the different seasons of the year. The visual and musical evocation is one of an aesthetic appreciation of the city that will persist throughout the film, but it also sets the stage for the development of Gil's consciousness as he begins to question the path his life has and will take him.

The opening scene has a discussion between Gil and Inez on how beautiful Paris is. He clearly adores it, especially in the rain. He wants to imagine it in the 1920s with the writers and painters he worships and even suggests living there after they are married. Gil reminisces that if he had stayed in Paris the first time he came and wrote novels rather than 'grinding out movie scripts', he would drop their luxurious lifestyle in Beverley Hills in a second. She cannot empathise and thinks getting wet is ridiculous and could never live anywhere but in the United States.

The viewer has been listening to this while watching the blackness of the screen illuminated only by the credit titles, but the differences between their outlooks on life are already being stifled in the symbolic gloom. Gil's 'wish-fulfilment' of becoming a writer in the past before he capitulated to making money easily meant he denied the need for 'hope' and the 'Not-Yet'. This opening scene indicates that he is attempting to bring the past into the present, engender his 'utopian yearnings' and especially his desire to relive Paris in the 1920s with all the major artists. The contrast with Inez is sharp as she shares none of his passion or understanding of an aesthetic world and a history that the city contains. His dream is to live a more fulfilling existence against the false dreams that are enslaving him to the capitalist system.

When the credits end, we see that they are in Monet's garden in Giveny. They approach the Japanese bridge and stand in the centre of it over the famous lily pond that Monet immortalised in his paintings. Gil is ecstatic and implores her to look at the beautiful surroundings that are only thirty minutes from the city. There is a long shot of them from the other side of the pond and they are reflected in the water underneath. The distance implies the distance that is between them in their outlook and dreams on life. The reflections suggest that they have two sides to their personality that will ultimately be irreconcilable. Gil will begin the process of 'becoming' to his other and currently denied self on the path to the 'Not-Yet'. There is a cut to them standing on the bridge with their backs to camera and they then turn side on and face each other. The closeness now contrasts with the distance of the previous shot but it is the distance that will prevail between them once Gil begins to realise his 'hope' of being a writer.

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In this idyllic dreamy setting, Inez accuses him of being in love with a fantasy, to which he responds: 'I'm in love with you'. So the Blochian moment of dreaming is present at the outset. Gil dreams of fulfilling his desire to be a novelist and so engages in forward dreaming of the 'Not-Yet', but the play on the notion of fantasy also applies to his perception that he is in love with Inez, which he finds out eventually to me not true love.

Inez is a constant fetter on his 'wish-fulfilment' and pursuance of the 'Not-Yet'. She pleads with Gil that if his book does not materialise then he should stop trying to write it and return to what he does best as the studios adore him and he is in demand. She wonders what the point is of giving all that up 'just to struggle'. Before he can answer she pulls him towards her and kisses him, while saying why would he want to do that and so uses her sexuality to deprive him of his dream.

Her antithesis to his dreaming increases further when they go to Versailles with Paul, her previous professor, who Inez confesses to Gil that she had a crush on while at university, and his wife Carol. Inez starts to talk openly about Gil's dream of wanting to live in Paris and the difficulties he has writing his novel. Gil is clearly uncomfortable, especially as he thinks Paul is a 'pseudo-intellectual', so he refuses to discuss his work. Inez goads him to mention the main character but Gil declines so she divulges that he works in a nostalgia shop. Paul is dismissive and disparaging at such an idea and cannot believe anyone would want to buy such junk. Inez mockingly pronounces that those who want to live in the past do and divulges that Gil wants to live in Paris in the 1920s in the rain.

Gill's yearning for the 'Not-Yet' is confronted with the 'In-Front-of-Us' as he is pilloried by Paul. He declares nostalgia to be a form of denial of a painful present and indicative of the 'fallacy' of 'Golden Age Thinking'. Paul arrogantly continues by explaining that it is the erroneous notion that a different time period is better than the one you are living in. For him, it is a flaw in the romantic imagination of people who find it difficult to cope with the present.

Gil has spoken only briefly in the whole of this scene as Paul and Inez have taunted him. They want to repress his dreams and make him remain in the everyday existence that his utopian longings want to 'venture beyond'. These hopeful longings seem absurd to Paul and Inez to bother contemplating, but for Gil it is part of going beyond what is 'In-Front-of-Us' and a reconnection with the past. However, part of Paul's assessment is correct because Bloch advises us to grasp the '*dream of a Golden Age* practically', and then the 'real debit and credit of real hope begins'.[24] At this point Gil is neglecting to bring the past into the present, but once he has his first night-dream this will occur and his 'forward dreaming' of a different life will begin to emerge.

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FIRST NIGHT-DREAM

In his first night-dream, Gil is transported to Paris in the 1920s. He goes to a party with Cole Porter playing on the piano and singing, 'let's do it, let's fall in love'. Gil is in a state of utter bewilderment and is suddenly approached by Zelda Fitzgerald who observes that he looks 'lost', which he is both in transcending time zones and in his personal and professional life. As the song is playing 'let's fall in love', the intimation is that he is not in love with Inez and a new compatible love awaits.

Gil declares to Zelda that he is writing a novel rather than writing movie scripts, which is his main occupation, so his dreaming of the 'Not-Yet' is becoming more concrete. This is affirmed even further when Scott Fitzgerald introduces himself and Gil deduces that it is really them. Zelda observes, 'you have a glazed look in your eye, stupefied, stunned, anesthetised, lobotomised'. He is in a dreamlike state within the night-dream. Zelda interprets his perplexity as boredom and proposes that they go to Bricktops nightclub which they all do. Gil watches the dancing and a close-up of his face shows his eyes wide with wonderment but he then starts to nod with the music, absorbs what is around him and begins to engage with the past that will inform his present.

This first night-dream has given Gil his longing to be a writer with his love for great literature and art as his wish-fulfilment on the path to the 'Not-Yet'. The 'archaic material' of the night-dream will eventually be translated into his daydreaming and reflect his desire to improve his 'lot'. Gil has accumulated this 'archaic material' over his life by reading the novels, seeing the paintings and other artworks of these artists and reading about the stories of their lives. These night-dreams will require a 'forward-intention' for Gil in his daydreams. Moreover, it is instructive that Gil has previously described himself as a 'Hollywood hack' and Scott Fitzgerald ended his days in Hollywood doing the same job because of a lack of money.[25] The difference is Scott had been one of the great writers but ended up in that state. Gil is dreaming to go in the opposite direction and grasp his 'hope' for a more authentic existence.

Zelda and Scott take Gil to Le Polidor restaurant where he is introduced as a writer to Hemingway. Gil now readily concurs that he is and thereby increases his yearning for the 'Not-Yet. Their discussion centres on the writing process and contrasts Hemmingway's confidence as an author with Gil's anxiety and fear that his work will not be taken seriously. Gil recounts how his novel centres on a man who works in a nostalgia shop. Just like Paul did earlier, Hemingway is quizzical so Gill explains that it is a place that sells memorabilia, but he is worried that the story sounds terrible. The difference here is that, whereas Paul was dismissive of Gil's authorial hopes, Hemmingway is supportive and declares that no story is bad if the subject is true,

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the prose clean and honest and affirms courage and grace under pressure. Gil again displays his inability to embrace hope by then mentioning he is having problems trusting someone to evaluate it. Hemmingway admonishes him for being too self-effacing but agrees to give it to Gertrude Stein to assess and put Gil further along the path of the 'Not-Yet'. Gil is on the path to being given the confidence to have faith in his work and be a full-time writer. The scene with Hemingway is comical but underlying the humour is the anxiety and fear that Gil needs to conquer to 'comprehend hope' and reach the 'Not-Yet'. The assurance of wealth that he has from writing movie scripts is also a fetter on his utopian yearnings but it is something he must overcome to live a more authentic existence.

DAYDREAM/NIGHT-DREAM DIALECTIC

The next morning back at his hotel, Inez is glad he did not go dancing as he would have hated the music and the crowd but she enjoyed herself, again indicating their incompatibility. He is lying entranced on the bed and Inez describes him as being in a 'daze'. Just as Zelda said to him that he looked 'glazed' in his night-dream, Inez is saying the same thing in the day, which is indicating the dialectical interplay between night-dream and daydream. He is also framed in the shot in the bed, the place where we sleep and dream. As he recounts the previous night's events, Inez is incredulous and thinks he must have a brain tumour. He is staring straight ahead again in wonderment and describes Zelda Fitzgerald as being exactly as she is portrayed in books and articles. She is charming but 'all over the map' and hates Hemingway. He adds that Scott knows Hemingway is right but he is conflicted because he loves her. Inez has grown impatient and orders him to get up even though he wants to stay and work on his novel. His trance has now been broken, as has his hope that she could understand why he would need to work on the book. She is more concerned with going shopping for furniture. The parallels with what occurred in his night-dream are infusing his daydream here, because Inez is inhibiting Gil's ability to write just as Zelda is for Scott. Gill loves Inez as much as Scott loves Zelda and Gil knows that it culminated in destroying Scott as a writer. As Gil's dialectic of night-dreams and daydreams develop, he will be confronted with a similar decision in dealing with Inez, who in her own instrumental and materialist way is also 'all over the map'.

The Blochian dialectic between the night-dream and the daydream has now been exposed. It could be that Gil has been night-dreaming in that he may have been asleep and had these fantasies. To him, they are of course very real, as dreams often are, but their importance is that they have translated themselves into the everyday world. They have started to make him begin to

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question both his life and identity, and the identity of those around him. As Bloch states, so the 'daylight opens up the wonderfully relevant material of night-dreams' and transposes it in a 'utopian way'.

The incompatibility between Gil and Inez to show that their respective dreams are in opposite directions increases further when he attempts to include her in his night-dream. It fails because she leaves before the clock chimes at midnight. She also wants to get back to the hotel and read a book that Carol has lent her. The book is a euphemism for Paul as we discover Inez will sleep with him. He is a walking book anyway, adjudicating on everything, often mistakenly, justifying Gil's assessment of him as a 'pseudo-intellectual'. Inez's fascination with Paul and her collaboration with him in demeaning Gil's hopes and dreams further display her shallowness and their incompatibility.

The Peugeot appears again. Hemingway is inside and more evidence of the incompatibility between Inez and Gill emerges. Hemingway recites a scene from his book that causes them to consider the issue of death, writing and love. Hemingway's confidence is again contrasted with Gill's anxiety and fear of dying, reasoning that you will never write well if so. Hemingway is forcing Gill to confront his fears as Bloch demands we do in order to hope on the path to the 'Not-Yet'. Hemingway then turns to love as an affirmation of life against death and, under questioning, Gil cites Inez as an example of a truly great woman he has made love to. Hemingway questions if Gill feels true and beautiful passion and at that moment loses his fear of death, but Gil answers in the negative, so even the physical side of the relationship is problematic. Gil's hope is for Inez to share his night-dream, but her disinterest in the great modernist writers that he adores, and his obsession with the past, suggest not. Also, the physical side of their relationship seems a sham. This becomes more evident to Gil when he meets Adriana.

ADRIANA

Gil meets and falls in love with Adriana in one of his night-dreams. They have a discussion about Paris and he evokes its beauty and how no artwork can compete with it. He cites how all its streets, café life, lights and people have their own aestheticism and stand in opposition to the meaninglessness of the world. Adriana reacts by describing him as a poet and Gil, slightly embarrassed, considers that he would not call his babbling poetic but admits that he 'was on a pretty good roll there'.

From a Blochian perspective, Gil's night-dream is forcing him to confront the nature of our existence in his consideration of the medium of art and the artistic enterprise, which in engendering hope makes the 'Not-Yet' tangible.

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He sees the aesthetic realm not simply in artworks but also in our surroundings as in the shimmering of Parisian lights at night to the everyday world of our social interactions with each other. Moreover, Gil is also exploring the dialectical interface between night-time and daytime in relation to Paris, which he contends is so difficult to distinguish in terms of its beauty. Again, we should be alert to the merging and interaction of the night-dream and daydream in its impact on changing Gil's consciousness and orienting him towards a principle of hope and a transformation in his identity. Adriana's reference to his musing as being poetic also indicates that he is going to be a different person who will grasp his more authentic self and accept the challenge to be a writer. His doubt and anxiety when confronted with this possibility makes him initially question this, but he begins to see that confronting his fear of abandoning his comfortable but meaningless life churning out Hollywood movie scripts is possible when he reflects that he was 'on a roll there'.

They see Zelda who is attempting to throw herself in the Seine because she thinks Scott does not love her. Gil assures her he does as he knows how the relationship endures with Scott staying devoted to her despite her insanity. Nonetheless, he is also starting to realise what true love is and that is not what he and Inez share. This is evinced when Gil gives Zelda a Valium. He reveals he has been taking them because since he got engaged to Inez he has been having panic attacks. He hopes that they will subside after the wedding, but again he is avoiding the 'In-Front-of-Us' reality that he can only reach the 'Not-Yet' by affirming his more authentic self without Inez.

His false hopes and inability to avoid anxiety and fear that are enshrined in Inez indicate that he is having matrimonial misgivings. He describes Inez to Adriana as attractive and possessing a sharp sense of humour but more chinks in their relationship appear to expose their incompatible dreams. He confesses that they agree on small things and have a 'disconnect with the big things'. Inez wants to live in Malibu and for him to work in Hollywood, but they do both like Indian food. Then he corrects himself by saying not all Indian food and in fact just the naan bread. The understated comedy of his account reveals a sadder side that he is not fulfilling his dreams and this becomes even more evident when he meets Salvador Dalí.

Dalí is sitting at a table and is framed in the shot; behind him on the wall there is a theatre poster with the words, 'Le Mariage Poney Blanc'. 'Mariage Blanc' means marriage in name only, empty or not consummated, which is what Gil's marriage to Inez will be as he will realise that he does not love her, and she loves him only because he has money. Moreover, he will not be able to fulfil his dream of being a writer if he stays with her as she is a fetter on his hopes. The doubts are now coming to the fore for Gil and are expressed in his night-dream, but they will eventually permeate his daydreams also and he will realise, as the poster said, it will be an empty marriage.

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Dalí is joined by Luis Buñuel and Man Ray, three exponents of surrealism. Surrealism's purpose was 'to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality'.[26] Gil's Blochian dreaming and his living in two time zones are therefore perfectly acceptable to them as Gil realises. They are embodiments of the capacity to dream, but Gil is now feeling morose as the realisation of his incompatibility with Inez and his love for Adriana tear him between the past and the present. Dalí informs Gil that he will paint him with sad eyes and big lips melting over the hot sand, with one tear containing the face of Christ and a rhinoceros. Dalí also describes how the male rhinoceros mounts the female when making love.

The scene is hilarious but also indicative of Gil's plight that he must confront the 'In-Front-of-Us' and choose hope over fear. Dalí's mention of Christ in Gil's tear indicates that he must be honest and true to himself to overcome his melancholy and grasp the 'Not-Yet'. The rhinoceros was to feature in many of Dalí's paintings and was linked to the theme of chastity.[27] Moreover, Dalí's description about the sexual activity of the rhinoceros, though funny, carries a more important portent. This is the night that Inez is out alone with Paul and she will be unfaithful, which links in with notions of chastity also. One of Dalí's first paintings with his use of rhino horns was *Young Virgin Auto-Sodomised by the Horns of Her Own Chastity*, and that has implications for the next scene back in the hotel in the morning.

Inez is wearing a white bath towel. Gil is again on the bed but now working on the book, which he now deems too realistic and desires to be 'crazy' rather than 'logical'. The meeting with the surrealists seems to have fired his imagination and increased his dreaming. Gil grabs her with the intention of having sex but Inez resists. He persists, pulls her onto his lap but she symbolically turns her back on him and stands up and moves away. Unbeknown to Gill, she has slept with Paul. The incongruity of the white towel, a symbol of chastity and innocence, hides what she has done. The rhinoceros theme also continues with her sitting on Gil with her back to him, suggesting he would mount her as the male rhinoceros would from behind, and as Paul may have done.

In the next night-dream, Gil visits Stein who has read his book, describing it as very unusual, almost like science fiction. She counsels Gil, in an echo of Bloch's demand for us to face what is 'In-Front-of-Us', that 'we all fear death and question our place in the universe. The artist's job is not to succumb to despair but to find an antidote to the emptiness of existence'. She praises his 'clear and lively voice' and demands that he should not be 'a defeatist'. Gil raises his eyes and looks beyond her as though she has touched a raw nerve which she has. Stein presents Bloch's challenge to Gil that to answer the question of what gives life meaning may lead to anxiety and fear, but we must learn to overcome despair and venture for the hope of the 'Not-Yet'.

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The final scenes with Adriana make Gil realise, as Bloch says, that we must use the past as a source of hope to affirm ourselves on the path to the 'Not-Yet' in the present. At first there is a source of optimism for Gill because when he kisses her he feels 'immortal', in contrast with making love to Inez as he told Hemmingway earlier. He also admits that he is unsure about getting married and laments that he abandoned his hope of being a writer to be a 'Hollywood hired hand'. He is moving further towards the 'Not-Yet' and a more authentic existence and at the moment that seems to be with Adriana, but when a coach arrives and transports them to the belle époque he realises he must go back to the present.

Adriana is the catalyst for this because she adores the belle époque and wants Gil to stay there with her as, for her, it is the greatest era Paris has ever known. Gil prefers the 1920s with all the sensational artists but for her that is the present and it is dull. The scene is crucial for Gil's search for the 'Not-Yet' because he now realises that he was trying to escape his present like she is trying to escape hers to a golden age. He now accepts that is a mistake as you will always imagine another time was a golden time. For him, that is what the present is, 'a little unsatisfying' because 'life is a little unsatisfying'. To write, he needs to lose his illusions and the idea that he will be happier in the past is one of them. He is now ready to make the golden age a practical reality in his more authentic existence in the present, but before that the reality of his incompatibility with Inez needs to be faced to venture beyond the 'In-Front-of-Us'.

Stein reports to him that Hemmingway has read the novel but finds it implausible that the main character cannot detect his fiancée is having an affair right before his eyes with the other character, the 'pedantic' one, which is Paul. Reality finally hits Gil as he admits he has been in 'denial'. Gil's dreaming has made him realise that it is an illusion to want to live in the past if he is to be a worthwhile writer, but that is not the only illusion; the other is his love for Inez. He needed to bring the past into the present to do this and be invigorated by the writers and artists of that time. He is making the 'night-dream' into the daydream and an emphasis on the 'Not-Yet' of that which is to come so he can make his utopian moment a reality in a more authentic existence.

He confronts Inez who denies the affair and accuses Gil of being 'crazy'. Gil responds by saying that Hemingway told him, but Inez reminds him that the only problem with that is he and the other people he mentions have been dead for years. Gil's retorts is, 'The past is not dead, actually it's not even past. Do you know who said that? Faulkner, and he was right'. So the Blochian dialectic of past, present and future comes into play. As Bloch stated, the 'future still exists in the past' because these 'night pieces are also undischarged and unfinished' and so demand again 'forward-intention'.

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Inez confesses to her affair and arrogantly assumes he will accept it, but he now realises their incompatibility and determines to stay in Paris to fulfil his dream of being a writer.

Gil traverses Paris dreamily in the day and then in the night-time as the clock strikes midnight. He encounters Gabrielle who he met in a flea market earlier in the film working in a memorabilia store and shares his passion for Cole Porter. They agree to walk back together and it starts to rain but, unlike Inez, she does not mind getting wet. The Bechet music from the start sails into the air as she proclaims that Paris is most beautiful in the rain. The chimes at midnight no longer return Gil back in time. He has faced his anxiety and confronted the question over the meaning of life and wants his dreams to come true and with Gabrielle he has now discovered someone to share those dreams. Gil has found his Blochian 'homeland' in Paris as his fantasy and utopian dreaming emerge from the midnight air and become an everyday reality.

The end of the film is incredibly upbeat but the importance Bloch places on good dreaming means that dialectically we must look at its opposite, bad dreaming, which I do now. Then I will conclude by considering the explicit moments of politics in the film that infuse Gil's vision of the good life.

BAD DREAMING

Bloch emphasised how we should not engage in dreaming that is mere escapism and there are moments in the film that show this. In one scene, there is a close-up of a jeweller's window showing Inez's sparkling wedding ring surrounded by two diamond and ruby drop earrings and a diamond necklace. The focus on the very expensive jewellery indicates the level of wealth Inez's family have, and how much Gil might have to use his own wealth to fulfil her dream and undermine his dream of being a writer. Inez's comments on the ring are more about it being in fashion and her flamboyance as she is excited because even people at the back of the church will see it. Its intrinsic beauty and it being a love bond between her and Gil are secondary. Even Helen sees the wedding as an 'event' to show off to their other wealthy Republican Party supporting friends, rather than a day of declared love between Inez and Gil. Helen also reveals that she and her husband are not happy with Inez's 'choice' of Gil as a marriage partner, as they are perturbed by his anti-right-wing political views. The word 'choice' also implies a form of instrumentality rather than love as though Inez picked Gil out of a number of suitors just as she would pick up and choose a piece of expensive jewellery. He seems to be treated as a mere appendage. When challenged by Helen about Gil, Inez does not mention love but only that he is 'smart and very successful', by which she means he is wealthy and that seems the decisive factor for her marrying him.

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After the close-up, the camera follows them from behind as they walk along the street as if they are turning their backs on those who will never inhabit their luxurious lifestyle and do not even merit a thought anyway. They are engaged in bad dreaming by endorsing the everyday social relations of society. Their utopia is what is, not that which is to come, and an endorsement of the status quo and all the inequalities and dehumanisation that implies.

The emphasis on ostentation as a form of bad dreaming also occurs when Gill is caught with boxed earrings that he is going to give to Adriana that are really Inez's. Inez sees the box in his hand and thinks it is a present for her. He stutters saying it is but it is from the flea market, and then lies further by saying that it is for a special dinner they will have together. She hopes it is to her taste as the moonstone necklace he bought her previously was not. He thought she liked it and he describes it as 'elegant but understated,' which is what her mother would say. Helen quickly retorts that 'cheap is cheap' is what she would say. Inez bemoans how awful the necklace is and goes to retrieve it to prove so to her mother, with Gil asking why everyone bemoans moonstone at the moment. The irony is that the moonstone is traditionally meant to bring hope, unselfishness and humanitarian qualities which seem lacking in Inez and her parents.[28] Helen disparages its simplicity and Gil adds that he thought Inez liked that aspect about it, implying that she is simple herself. She shouts back that is the problem as it is too simple, indicating that all she is interested in is ostentation.

In another case of bad dreaming, Inez and Gil go shopping with Helen who is initially framed in the centre of the shop surrounded by glittering chandeliers and other expensive objects. There is a clear contrast with the nostalgia shop that Gil likes and which figures in his novel. She finds two chairs to put in the Malibu house and Inez approves. They are extremely expensive, causing panic in Gil. Helen justifies spending this amount because it is very difficult to find these items back in the United States to which Inez concurs, but Gil is sceptical and reminds her that they have not even found a house yet. More pertinently, in terms of where his real interest lies, is that he wants to keep prices down to avoid writing movie scripts so he can write his novel. Helen opines that you only get what you pay for and that 'cheap is cheap'. Gil would no doubt prefer to get them from a nostalgia shop as Helen's comment implies but his night-dream is permeating his daydream of being a novelist and meeting his literary idols. He has been galvanised to pursue his 'Not-Yet' in the present as he no longer wants his current job as a 'Hollywood hack', where Fitzgerald sadly ended up and Gil is currently imprisoned, both for reasons of money. Good dreaming overcomes bad dreaming for Gil, but his yearning for the 'Not-Yet' has explicit political connotations when we examine the politics present in the film.

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POLITICS

In the first dinner with Inez's parents, the contrast between Gil's politics and that of her parents is stark. John is excited about the corporate merger between his company and the French firm but overall he is not a big Francophile. His wife explains on his behalf that he hates their politics and they have been no friend to the United States. Gil reasons that France cannot be blamed for 'not following them down that rabbit's hole in Iraq' with Bush. Inez raises her eyes and pleads not to get into that discussion again. Gil assures her that they are not and it is fine for him and her father to disagree as that is what a democracy is. Gil accepts her father's support for the extreme right-wing Tea Party of the Republicans, but he thinks one has to be a demented lunatic to do so. Inez is trying to dissuade him but Gil maintains that at least they respect each other's views and requests John to concur. The shot cuts to John and his wife who are staring at him with utter disdain, showing their contempt for both democracy and political positions opposed to their own. Allen uses the scene humorously but it raises important issues about American imperialism and the horror that was the Iraq War which, as Gil intimates, was based on a lie. The stifling of debate as expressed in Helen's and John's face also exposes the pernicious side to Tea Party Republicanism.

Another overt moment that explicitly addresses politics in the film is when there is a long shot of the dining table with Inez and her parents seated but Gil's seat empty, portending that he will not be staying with Inez. Helen enquires where he has gone and Inez explains that he is working. She patronisingly recounts how he has been walking round Paris at night for inspiration, but she is unperturbed because she is going dancing with Paul as Carol is in bed with a bad oyster. Once Inez departs, the parents discuss Gil, and although John praises his wealth, he thinks he has a 'part missing'. He is incensed by Gil's remark about Tea Party Republicans, who John insists are 'decent people trying to take back the country' and not the 'crypto-fascist airhead zombies', described by Gil. Allen is clearly poking fun at the extremist right in the United States but his mention of fascism does indicate that they may seem respectable people, like Helen and John, but that respectability can be a smokescreen for more heinous and dangerous views. This also manifests itself in their assessment of those they see as beneath them in the social order, which is evident in the scene where Gil needs earrings to give to Adriana.

He has taken Inez's pearl earrings and, when she discovers they are gone, her class prejudice and that of her mother become evident. Helen had advised her to keep all valuables in the safe. Inez muses that it might be the maid and Helen agrees that it is always the maid and they should report the theft immediately. Inez now remembers how the maid was 'so snotty' towards her when she asked her to turn down the beds. Gil is in a state of panic and

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entreats them not to be so presumptive or make a charge of theft. Inez persists and telephones for the house detective to come up to their room to investigate. Gil sees this as a 'witch-hunt' and demands that people should not be treated in that way but Helen insists they should if they have stolen something. Inez reveals that she disapproved of the maid from the start. Gil disagrees, describing her as 'sweet and upbeat' but Inez attacks him for always taking the side of the help and that is why her father accuses him of being a communist. Gil runs to the bathroom and returns saying he has found them on the sink. Inez is still sceptical but Gil uses it as a way to conceal his transgression and praises the maid for placing them there.

Bloch argues that the yearnings for the 'Not-Yet' transcend the social classes in the struggle against dehumanisation and Gil clearly represents this. His wealth does not, like Inez and her Tea Party parents, make him treat workers with contempt but instead he values them as human beings. Gil is part of the 'promotion of humanity' and for his sins is regarded as a 'communist'. Even at the end of the film when Gil leaves Inez, the father remarks, 'say hi to Trotsky', to which the mother agrees. All Gil desires is for people to be treated fairly which is a basic liberal position, but in the quasi-fascist nature of extremist Republicanism in the United States even that can seem far too radical.

Finally, the political nature of certain modernists that Gill meets when he goes back in time who took a critical stance towards society shows how the Blochian hope for a different world can be affirmed and misconstrued. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso, for example, all had problematic attitudes towards the status quo. Fitzgerald's disdain for the upper classes that he was a part of made him emphasise the 'fissure between great wealth and moral values' and the 'power of the rich'.[29] Hemingway was virulently anti-fascist and supported the republicans in the Spanish Civil War in his writings and financially.[30] Picasso also had a long involvement with the communist movement and his opposition to fascism is immortalised in his painting *Guernica*, depicting the Nazi bombing of that town during the Spanish Civil War.[31] Alternatively, Gertrude Stein, despite being Jewish, supported the Vichy regime in France and Salvador Dalí supported Franco in Spain.[32] Artists can affirm their aestheticism in different political ways, and given Gill's political views, he will be, from a Blochian perspective, doing so not from the political right but from the political left.

CONCLUSION

Gil eventually realises that he is not living an authentic existence. Confronting himself with Bloch's demanding question of what gives life meaning, and

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grasping the principle of hope to answer it, forces him to re-evaluate his life. He has a night-dream which is like a daydream because he is awake. This causes him to transfer his utopian experiences back into his real life through his 'archaic brooding' and question the warped values of those around him, while also affirming his more authentic self. He does this politically in his everyday life in a number of ways by overtly attacking the Tea Party views of Inez's parents, their Francophobia, the invasion of Iraq and the crass materialism that is indicative of their bad dreaming. The parents see Gil as being extremely left wing but that is only because their politics are so far to the right. They even interpret his basic liberal views as making him an heir to Trotsky, so dangerous do they think his criticisms of American politics are. However, Gil is also susceptible to bad dreaming as he wants to remain in the past with the great modernists in a 'Golden Age', but in one of his night-dreams he grasps that he must make his dreams a reality in the present and embrace the 'Not-Yet'. Gil's decision to stay in Paris and become a writer is informed by his politics in a principle of hope for a better world of utopian possibilities but how he goes on to achieve that is left open both for him and us.

NOTES

1 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Vol 3* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 1369.
2 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Vol 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 407.
3 Ibid., p. 3.
4 Ibid., p. 4.
5 Ibid., p. 5.
6 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
7 Ibid., p. 6.
8 Ibid., p. 6.
9 Ibid., p. 8.
10 Bloch, *Principle of Hope, Vol 3*, p. 1358; cf. Vincent Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 119.
11 Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch*, p. 123.
12 Bloch, *Principle of Hope, Vol 1*, p. 9.
13 Ibid., p. 6.
14 Ibid., p. 7.
15 Ibid., pp. 9–11.
16 Ibid., p. 3.
17 Ibid., p. 4.
18 Ibid., p. 5.
19 Ibid., pp. 98–99.
20 Ibid., p. 78.
21 Ibid., p. 102.

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22 Ibid., p. 103.

23 Ibid., pp. 78–79.

24 Bloch, *Principle of Hope, Vol 3*, p. 1370.

25 Jeffrey Meyers, *Scott Fitzgerald. A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2014), chapter 13.

26 Harold Osborne (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 1115, quoting André Breton.

27 Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 478.

28 'Moonstone: The Stone of Emotional Balance'. Available at: http://www.crystalwind.ca/crystalsandgems/crystals-in-depth/moonstone-the-stone-of-emotional-balance. Accessed 28 May 2017.

29 Meyers, *Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 280.

30 Scott Donaldson, *By Force of Will. The Life and Art of Ernest Hemmingway* (New York: Viking, 2001), pp. 100–1.

31 John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso. The Triumphant Years. 1917–1932* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), pp. 498–99.

32 Emily Greenhouse, 'Gertrude Stein and Vichy: The Overlooked History', *The New Yorker*, 4 May 2012. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/gertrude-stein-and-vichy-the-overlooked-history. Accessed 17 July 2017; Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*, p. 468.

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Chapter 5

Gilles Deleuze: Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Neighbouring Sounds*

Gilles Deleuze's discussions on cinema[1] make a crucial contribution to our understanding of the political theory of film.[2] For him, the political dimension of film occurs not through didacticism but by problematising issues for an open exploration of politics in differing cultural contexts.[3] Deleuze contrasts classical and modern cinema to do this but it is modern cinema that I am most interested in here because it is present in Third World cinema before becoming prominent in the West. Deleuze covers an eclectic number of Third World film-makers and I will be drawing out general themes that typify modern cinema in that region. Particular attention is paid to the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha, whom Deleuze praises greatly. Rocha was prominent from the 1960s as part of the 'Cinema Novo' movement that resisted the power of American cinema and cultivated a critique of the social and economic inequalities prevalent in Brazil.[4] Continuing with this theme, I examine Deleuze's political understanding of film by focusing on the movie *Neighbouring Sounds* (2012) directed by forty-five-year-old Brazilian writer-director and former film critic Kleber Mendonça Filho in his first feature. Within the context of Brazilian cinema, *Neighbouring Sounds* transcends the European funding-endorsed films that demand favela stories and rural pictures aestheticising poverty.[5] These are the cultural stereotypes of Brazilian cinema imposed by the West but film-makers such as Filho have refused to be subordinated to these narratives, preferring to embrace diverse themes and genres.[6] In Filho's case, critics have acclaimed *Neighbouring Sounds* for the way it offers a 'razor-sharp acuity at disparities of class that can be traced back to the colonial period'.[7] Yet some scholars have realised that there can be a Eurocentric aspect to Deleuze's analysis of films that can deter us from analysing Third World films, because it can lead to elitism and cultural imperialism due to his dependency on a philosophical framework

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rooted in Western thought.[8] They have attempted to broaden Deleuze's theories to consider world cinema while simultaneously seeking to overcome these problems,[9] but contemporary Brazilian cinema is conspicuous by its absence.[10] Given Deleuze's interest in Rocha within his discussion of Third World cinema, I want to continue that endeavour with an examination of life in modern-day Brazil with Filho's *Neighbouring Sounds*.

The film is set in Filho's hometown of Recife on the north-east coast of Brazil and centres on a community in an affluent suburb. Through a number of interrelated stories of the inhabitants, Filho presents a microcosm of the class tensions of Brazilian society today. The military dictatorship under which Rocha made his critiques of Brazilian society has now developed into 'democratic' governments since the 1980s but the disparities in wealth still persist. The film explores these tensions from a community that has emerged from a dark past to a seemingly idyllic present with a prosperous middle class congregated in condominiums, but we soon get indications that appearances can be deceptive. This is a gated world of people keeping themselves safe from the oppressed outside, but the need for servants and guards means that they are also present on the inside. Moreover, the link with the past is made with Francisco, a former sugar baron who owns more than half the whole area and is gradually selling it off for redevelopment. Three generations of his family live there and run it, among them his grandson João. The community has moved from production into housing, and industrial labour has been transformed into service labour in the new Brazilian economy. The previous class structure of the baron that dominated the community in the past has now been fractured due to the emergence of a new class in the district, the affluent nouveau-riche families that have benefited from the growing prosperity.

A security firm headed by Clodoaldo suddenly appears and they offer their services after a number of crimes have been committed, obviously perpetrated by them to justify their presence. We find out only at the end of the film that Francisco, nearly twenty years ago, had Clodoaldo's father and uncle killed by his foreman, Reginaldo, in a land dispute, 'over a fence', as Clodoaldo's brother Claudio states. The security firm is part of a plan to enact revenge for that which they eventually do. I now want to outline Deleuze's understanding of political theory and film and then apply some of his main themes to *Neighbouring Sounds*.

DELEUZE

Deleuze contends that comprehending a film politically depends on how the film and the film-maker utilise the constituent elements of the film, especially in terms of what he calls the time-image that became dominant after World

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War II compared to the movement-image that prevailed prior to that.[11] Films of the movement-image offer actions and reactions that aim to solve problems and normally do so within the time frame of the movie.[12] Films of the time-image, in contrast, are not offering solutions but working out what the problems might be as represented in the films of Orson Welles, neo-realism and the new wave that created original images and signs relating to unique time-images.[13] Deleuze cautions that it is a mistake to see the cinema of the time-image as 'more valuable' than the cinema of the movement-image. For him, films of both types are 'masterpieces' by the 'great directors' and 'no hierarchy of value applies'. Yet many of the studies on Deleuzian cinema do operate with this type of dualism when they should recognise that 'films of the movement-image and the time-image – in themselves – already explore the two images of thought, their interweavings and interrelations'.[14] So the potential of film is its 'ability to provide, facilitate and develop political expression', not simply by affirming some political message but by problematising it in a spirit of openness that will differ from culture to culture.[15]

Deleuze then considers politics in relation to film by comparing classical with modern cinema.[16] He notes three main differences between them. First, in classical cinema the people are always present even though they are oppressed, tricked or lacking initial consciousness. Soviet cinema is an exemplar of this with Eisenstein showing the people making a leap in their consciousness as in *The General Line (Old and New)* (1929) or being held back by the tsar in *Ivan the Terrible* (1944). Similarly, Pudovkin shows a growing awareness of the people that indicates a 'virtual existence' which can be 'actualised'. Additionally, in Vertov and Dovzhenko the 'different peoples' are drawn into the same 'melting-pot' from the clarion call of 'unanimity' from which the 'future emerges'.

For Deleuze, this unanimity is also the political characteristic of American cinema both before and after the war. Instead of the Soviet emphasis on class struggle and ideological battles, there is now a focus on economic crises and the combatting of moral prejudice, profiteering and demagoguery. The films of King Vidor, Frank Capra and John Ford capture this unanimity by showing people both at the mercy of misfortune and at the summit of their hope in a process of rediscovery. The people are there in both Soviet and American cinema, 'real before being actual, ideal without being abstract', promising the idea that cinema as the 'art of the masses could be the supreme revolutionary or democratic art, which makes the masses a true subject'. Such a hope was to founder with the rise of Nazism and Stalinism where the unanimism of peoples was replaced by the tyrannical unity of the party and the masses metamorphosing from subject to subjected. Even in America, the people were no longer united because they stopped seeing themselves as part of a 'melting-pot' or of a new people to come.

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Modern political cinema heralded a world where people no longer existed or were missing and it was in the Third World where this became so pronounced as part of the 'not yet'.[17] The oppressed and exploited nations of the Third World were a place of 'perpetual minorities' that had a 'collective identity crisis', and it was the film-makers of those nations that first recognised this amidst the morass of mass art of serials and karate films.[18] For Deleuze, the comprehension of a 'people who are missing' is 'not a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary the new basis on which it is founded, in the Third World and for minorities'. These directors do not presuppose a people who are already present but contribute to their invention. Against the claim by the master or coloniser that people have not been there, these directors show them as a becoming, inventing themselves 'in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute'.

The second major difference between classical and modern cinema centres on the relationship between the political and the private.[19] Classical cinema posited the possibility of the private realm of the family, couples and individuals as being immersed in the everyday life of work and relationships, going about their own business and expressing the social contradictions of society.[20] When these contradictions affect people negatively then the private realm can become politicised and raise people's consciousness. Deleuze cites as cinematic examples Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), who realises why her son is fighting and is galvanised to take over from him, and the mother in Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), who is eventually radicalised along with her son in the search for social justice. There is then a correlation between the private and the political but initially they are distinct. In modern cinema this ends because 'no boundary survives to provide a minimum distance or evolution: the private affair merges with the social – or political – immediate'.[21]

For Deleuze, there is no longer a general line from the old to the new or a revolution that produces a leap from one to the other. Now, as depicted in South American cinema, there is a 'juxtaposition or compenetration of the old and the new which makes up an absurdity and assumes the form of aberration'. The correlation of the political and private is now replaced by the coexistence, to the point of absurdity, of very different social stages, and for Deleuze this is epitomised in the work of the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha.

In Rocha's work, such as *Black God and White Devil* (1964), this absurdity manifests itself by the myths of the Brazilian people through prophetism and bandatism against capitalist violence, but they bring violence back on themselves in their need to be idolised.[22] This is evinced in the film by Manuel, the peasant farmer who murders his exploitative boss, escapes, but eventually becomes the lieutenant of a nihilistic bandit who kills rich and poor alike for

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theological and political reasons. There is no possibility of gaining awareness because it is either intellectualised or becomes ‘pressed into a hollow’, as with the sequel to the aforementioned work, *Antonio das Mortes* (1969), and ‘capable only of grasping the juxtaposition of two violences and the continuation of one by the other’.

For Deleuze, all that is now left is the greatest agitprop that cinema has ever created, an agitprop that is not about becoming conscious but is concerned with putting everything, people, masters and the camera itself, into a trance and a ‘state of aberration’ and ‘crisis’.[23] This allows violence to be communicated and make private business pass into the political and political affairs into the private as in Rocha’s *Earth Entranced* (1967).[24] Rocha’s work encapsulates the critique of myth, which is not about using myth to discover its archaic meaning or structure, but for relating ‘archaic myth to the state of the drives in an absolutely contemporary society with hunger, thirst, sexuality, power, death, worship’. Modern cinema is now no longer constituted on the basis of a possibility of evolution and revolution as in classical cinema but on impossibilities and ‘the intolerable’.

For Deleuze, the absence of people, consciousness, evolution or revolution means that the seizure of power by the proletariat or by a unified people is impossible. All that remains is Rocha’s Guevarism, Youssef Chahine’s Nasserism and black-powerism. Consequently, ‘Third World cinema is a cinema of minorities, because the people exist only in the condition of a minority, which is why they are missing’.[25] Private business is immediately political in minorities due to the fragmentation of the unanimity that was present in classical cinema, which Deleuze indicates is the third difference between classical and modern cinema.[26]

This fragmentation manifested itself in black American cinema with its return to the ghettos, not to replace negative stereotypes of black people with positive ones but to offer multiple types and characters in a myriad of identities. Similarly, in Arab cinema with Chahine’s *Why Alexandria?* (1979), this fragmentation takes the form of ‘intertwined lines’ of stories that relate to the main story of the boy in the film. In *Memory* (1982),[27] there is no main story but ‘multiple threads’ that lead to the eventual denouement of the heart attack of the author. This is ‘conceived as an internal trial and verdict as a kind of *Why Me?* but where the arteries of the inside are in immediate contact with the lines of the outside’. The question ‘why’ in Chahine’s work assumes a proper cinematographic value and is the ‘question of the inside, the question of the I’. The absence of the people and their fragmentation into minorities mean that ‘it is I who am first of all a people, the people of my atoms as Carmelo Bene said, the people of my arteries as Chahine said’, so each filmmaker is a movement in themselves. For Deleuze, ‘Why’ is about questioning the world from those outside, a questioning of ‘the people who are missing’

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and 'who have a chance to invent themselves by asking the question that it asked them: Alexandria-I, I-Alexandria'.

Deleuze notes how many Third World films use memory implicitly or explicitly in their title. As examples he offers Pierre Perrault's *Pour la suite de monde* (1963), Chahine's *Memory* and Michel Khleifi's *Fertile Memory* (1980). This type of memory is neither psychological as in forming recollections nor is it a collective memory as part of an existing people. Rather, it is 'the strange faculty which puts into immediate contact the outside and the inside, the people's business and private business, the people who are missing and the I who is absent, a membrane, a double becoming'.[28] Using Kafka's comments on small nations, Deleuze expounds further how the 'I' in a fragmented world and in a fragmented 'I' are constantly being exchanged in a communication of the world.[29] In doing so, it appears that the whole memory of the world is inculcated in the oppressed people and the 'whole memory of the I comes into play in an organic crisis', which is the 'arteries of the people to which I belong, or the people of my arteries'.

Deleuze argues that this 'I' is the 'I' of the Third World intellectual, depicted by Rocha, Chahine and other film-makers who break with the situation of the colonised but only by going over to the coloniser's side aesthetically via artistic influences. As the people are missing, the directors must produce 'utterances which are already collective, which are like the seeds of the people to come, and whose political impact is immediate and inescapable'. These film-makers may be marginalised and even separated from a generally illiterate community but this allows them in their solitude to enunciate 'potential forces' and be true collective agents and catalysts for change. This is the last defining aspect of modern cinema because the film-makers find themselves before a people that from a cultural viewpoint are colonised both by stories that have come from elsewhere, and by their own myths that have become 'impersonal entities at the service of the coloniser'. The film-makers should not become ethnologists of their people and invent a fiction as that would be another private story, because all personal fictions and all impersonal myths align themselves with the masters. For Deleuze, this is how Rocha destroys myths from the inside and how Perrault repudiates all the fiction that an author can create.[30] Story telling itself 'is not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act' through which the characters continually cross the boundaries that would separate their private business from politics and 'which *itself produces collective utterances*'.

Deleuze endorses Serge Daney's observation that African and all Third World cinema rejects the West's preference for a cinema of dances for a 'cinema which talks, a cinema of the speech-act' that 'avoids fiction and ethnology'. Deleuze cites Ousmane Sembene in his film *Ceddo* (1977) who extracts

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story telling, which is the basis of living speech to give it its freedom as a 'collective utterance', to contrast it with the myths of the Islamic colonist. He also notes the similarity in the way Rocha internally critiques myths in Brazil.

Rocha begins by isolating the present world that is beneath the myth which might be intolerable, unbelievable and indicate the impossibility of living now in this current society as in *Black God and White Devil* and *Earth Entranced*. Rocha grasps from the unliving a speech-act that cannot be silenced and a story-telling that cannot return to myth but alternatively produces 'collective utterances capable of raising misery to a strange positivity, the invention of a people' as in *Antonio das Mortes*, *The Lion Has Seven Heads* (1970) and *Severed Heads* (1970). Trance as a transition to a becoming makes the speech-act possible through the ideology of the coloniser, the myths of the colonised and the discourse of the intellectual. Rocha and similar film-makers put 'the parties in trances' to contribute to the invention of their people and who alone constitute the whole. The 'trance' produces a new form of subjectivity where the people involved may or may not recognise each other in their shared oppression but have the potentiality to do so.[31] As such, they mirror the 'multiplicity' and 'singularities' of Hardt and Negri's 'multitude'.[32]

In Rocha, the parties are not necessarily real but 'reconstructed', while in Sembene they are 'reconstituted' in a story dating back to the seventeenth century. In contrast, Deleuze mentions Perrault who uses real characters to prevent fiction and critique myth. He isolates the story telling speech-act in different ways in different films, such as a generator of action or a simulation, but always to show that story telling is memory and memory is invention of a people.[33] For Deleuze, the 'speech-act must create itself as a foreign language in a dominant language, precisely in order to express an impossibility of living under domination'.[34] He concludes that, in general, Third World cinema's aim is 'through trance or crisis, to constitute an assemblage which brings real parties together' to 'produce collective utterances as the prefiguration of the people who are missing'. I now want to explore these themes by first focusing on the people who are missing and then the role of bandatism and prophetism in *Neighbouring Sounds*.

THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MISSING

The people who are missing in the film are those who exist only in the condition of a minority. They are in the background and subsumed under a narrative of the master and coloniser, existing only as the servants and workers for the middle classes. Filho brings them to foreground as they invent themselves through 'speech-acts' within the domination of the nouveau-riche milieu they have to work in. They are invented in the sense that the audience

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is being shown a different side of Brazilian society which is still endemic with inequality, oppression and exploitation. Filho exposes this in a number of pertinent ways that I will explore shortly, but I want to begin by drawing a parallel that he makes to a film of classic cinema at the start of the movie.

Before we are introduced to João, we see a long shot of the various condominium apartment blocks claustrophobically crammed together and filling the screen. A cut takes us inside João's apartment showing a table full of empty bottles and leftover food, suggesting a party has occurred the night before. The shot lingers for a few seconds, but the significance of this is in the background, not foreground, similar to the people who are missing. There is a poster of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) on the mantelpiece suggesting parallels with *Neighbouring Sounds* and the interrelation of a film of the movement-image with a film of the time-image.

Metropolis was Lang's prediction of the future in the year 2000, an immense city-state full of towers and tenement blocks that mirror the condominiums of current-day Recife. Similarly, in terms of the plot, Jon Fredersen rules metropolis as Francisco rules his empire in Recife. Fredersen's son, Freder, is a playboy but has sympathy for the workers, unlike his father. He is comparable to João, who has a more paternalistic attitude to the servants of the middle classes. Freder also has a girlfriend named Maria, while João has Sofia. In *Neighbouring Sounds*, Filho seems to use João from the side of the coloniser and master to highlight those in servitude as the people who are missing by giving them a 'speech-act' and 'collective utterance'. Additionally, Filho's reference to *Metropolis* also relates to Lang's chiaroscuro cinematic technique in his use of light and shade. Deleuze referred to Lang as achieving the 'most subtle of chiaroscuros' in *Metropolis*,[35] and it is no surprise that Filho does the same throughout much of *Neighbouring Sounds*.[36]

In the next scene, João and Sofia are lying naked on the sofa. They are awoken by the noise of the maid Mariá and two children in the kitchen, the minorities, the people who are missing. While the couple run to the bedroom to make love, the children sit on the luxurious sofa and view a programme on a huge television screen on the wall. They watch it in wonderment as it is inconceivable they would have a TV that big at home.

The scene reverts to João and Sofia who are now dressed and enter the kitchen. João is very friendly with Mariá, giving her a kiss and hugging her as though she is his mother. Mariá is wearing a T-shirt with 'Winternational, Aspen Valley, Ski club' emblazoned across it, which is obviously not hers and perhaps has been given it to her as a present by him, indicating the presence of paternalism. Mariá brought the girls because their mother went to the doctor, so they are not her children, indicating her compassion, and he again displays his paternalist empathy for her by accepting them.

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Sofia lived in the area in 1990 and Mariá mentions that she already worked there then for João's parents and his brother and sister. She has spent a life servicing the middle classes and her daughter will do that also, as we soon discover she is taking over her job. Mariá observes that Sofia is pretty but looks a bit sad. João responds that Mariá is the same but is normally more cheery but it could be because it is her last week working there and she is missing him already. Mariá assumes it is because she is old at sixty that he is retiring her, but João suggests not, even though he is still forcing her to leave. Filho leaves it to the viewer to envisage what 'retirement' might consist of for Mariá but with no pension and an extended family still to feed it most certainly will not be a 'luxurious existence'.

The poignancy of this emerges later in the film when João and Sofia are having breakfast. Mariá's daughter, also called Maria but without the accent on the 'a', has taken over her mother's job and is ironing on the balcony. She is framed in a wide-angle shot for a few moments not only to show the laborious task she does very conscientiously, but also to indicate that she is condemned to a life of service through the generations. That they have the same name compounds this inevitability which is developed further in the scene.

Maria's daughter is sitting with João and Sofia at the breakfast table and shots are intercut back and forth to show Maria working and her daughter having breakfast. The suggestion is that the chance of them having a family breakfast together is impossible because of the early start of the work, but the paternalism of João is evident by allowing the daughter to join him and Sofia to eat. He notices that Maria is not wearing flip-flops and is genuinely concerned she might get electrocuted so he instructs her to put them on. Maria looks for them but then realises that her daughter has them on, so she takes them off her. There is a close-up of the daughter's feet as Maria does this leaving the daughter barefooted, which might suggest that the daughter does not possess any. Nonetheless, the cycle of the mother Mariá being the maid for all those years for João and his family, and now the daughter Maria replacing her, implies that Maria's daughter will succeed her. This is symbolised by her wearing her mother's flip-flops as she will be filling her mother's shoes for another generation of servitude.[37] Similarly, when Sofia asks her how old she is, she replies that she is ten, so even at that age her destiny has already been decided for her: a simple 'speech-act' capturing the 'intolerability' of life for the people who are missing in contemporary Brazil.

João forgot to mention to Maria that he will be away next week so she will not be needed and presumably will not get paid. It is an odd moment of inconsideration by João, which shows that even he is susceptible to a lack of empathy at times. Sofia, who seems sympathetic to her plight, then asks Maria how many apartments she works at and replies two including this one. The other job is in another area, implying she will have travelling costs

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in terms of time and money. Sofia will ask if anyone at her office needs a cleaner to help her out, indicating Maria needs more than two jobs to make a proper living as no doubt most of the other servants do. Maria delivers the 'speech-act' in a mundane manner but its force is to expose a community and society in 'aberration' and 'crisis'. The majority of the middle classes are oblivious to this as they remain in a 'trance' of their own.

In another scene, João's paternalism is captured when he returns to his apartment and Sidiclei, Mariá's son, is asleep on the sofa as he came home tired from work. The workers are present here but only as an accident, the people who are not seen. João seems to have a good relationship with Sidiclei. João is about to leave and discovers that Sidiclei is tired due to his job on a night shift, working as a cashier in a supermarket, which João regards as tough and Sidiclei agrees. João has also worked a night shift in bars when he was abroad and it was so tiring that he was useless during the day so he knows how Sidiclei feels. João remarks to Mariá that the kid works hard but she complains because he does not go to church, implying that religion is no antidote to the oppressed lives they lead.

João had gone to Germany to work. No reason is given for this but it seems it was to get away from his family. He expresses an ambivalent attitude towards them on a number of occasions and he hates his job taking prospective customers round the apartments. João also has experience of doing labour in the service sector and knows how arduous it can be, so he does have some sympathy for the predicament of the workers. From the side of the coloniser and master, he is giving them a 'speech-act' to expose their exploitation and oppression through him.

João's concern for the workers is further evinced at a tenants' meeting where they agree unanimously to have the security firm. They then consider Mr Agenor who is the current guard and has been employed for a long time. The man chairing the group commends Agenor for being good at his work but recognises he is exhibiting signs of fatigue and age, and there are accusations that he has been sleeping on the job. He asks the group whether they should fire him. One woman wants him out due to his disrespectfulness to her but others disagree, suggesting that she treats him with contempt, perhaps indicating that he is reciprocating in a small act of defiance. One resident suggests giving him the day job but he wants the night shift as he gets extra money and the woman quips that he is getting paid extra to sleep. He has three years to retirement, so there are suggestions again for his dismissal. There have also been formal complaints against him and a tenant's son now has video evidence to prove Agenor has been asleep while on duty. Once they see the images, most of the residents are both mortified and angry.

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João intervenes and agrees that Agenor is the worst doorman in the whole area but dismissing him for negligence after all his good work is 'mean', so they should fire him with full severance pay. Another tenant reasons that it is only mean if they look at it from a certain angle and he sees it a lot in the company he works for where workers do this deliberately to get the severance pay. The chairperson calculates that each tenant would have to give R$316.55 to allow him to take the severance pay which they all balk at. One woman exclaims, 'If you can't afford a car, take the bus', showing the cut-throat approach to life most of them have for those they deem beneath them. Another woman remarks that they are not a charity organisation. The chairperson reminds them to remember they live in a community and rebukes the other tenants for complaining about costs when they can still afford to get smashed at parties and buy incense from Amsterdam.

The man who mentioned his company is not happy as João takes a phone call and needs to leave. The company man calls the meeting comic because there are many different types of residents, not just them, implying they should not be the only ones to pay. João apologises for leaving but he had a prior appointment and warns that it will be 'so fucking wrong' to sack Agenor because of the video images, given all his previous good work. João again shows his empathy for the workers as did the chairperson by mocking their claims of unaffordability for Agenor's compensation. He also mentioned the importance of having a cohesive community but the class differences militate against that.

Sofia arrives, saving João from a difficult residents' meeting. As they walk away the camera pans back and we see that Mr Agenor is sitting hidden round the corner, a person who is missing. Probably guessing what has happened he stands up and walks slowly into his room, sits down and contemplatively watches the surveillance cameras. He sees a young couple kissing, their love a stark contrast to the lack of compassion from the majority of the uncaring middle classes that will no doubt see him dismissed with no compensation.

João and Sofia visit Francisco in his colonial home in Bonito. João has not been for some time despite his grandfather persistently asking him to, indicating his problematic attitude towards his family and its colonial past. This becomes symbolically evident in one scene where the three of them are standing together under a waterfall. There is a cut that shows João alone standing under the flushing water. He looks down and then ahead straight at the camera as though he is troubled, and then in a surreal moment the water turns red as though blood is pouring through it. It is the symbolic blood of all those who have toiled and died working in the sugar mill and been exploited by Francisco and his ancestors but water cannot wash these sins away. João is increasingly realising this and maybe that is what has deterred him from visiting his grandfather in Bonito for so long. He is a fragmented 'I' and

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the people are his arteries as their blood bounds down from the past in the waterfalls of Bonito, the incongruity of its English translation as ‘beautiful’ mocking the reality of its horrific past.

In the next scene, João is back in his flat in bed with Sofia. He is on his side and initially his eyes are closed but then he opens them and stares straight into camera, looking dismayed and morose as if he is in a trance. He has got a T-shirt on with a face with slits for eyes and for the mouth; the outer rim is black resembling a hood. It looks like a ghost from the past, the faceless people who are missing from the story of the coloniser and master Francisco. One of the girls Mariá must have brought is reciting a Brazilian nursery rhyme asking a black bull to take a little girl who is scared of grimaces. We see it is she that João is staring at and by the look on his face she means him. She does not sing the rest of the verse but it pleads not to get the child because he is beautiful and crying, the poor little one.[38]

Generations of her ancestors have been bathed in blood through their exploitation in the sugar mills and the proximity to this scene from the last suggests that link. João again feels complicit in the crimes of his ancestors and his grandfather, in particular, and that is why he always wants to treat the workers fairly and accounts for his pain now. The girl’s ‘speech-act’ is a paean to all the people who are missing, the exploited and oppressed. João looks totally despondent and then we see the girl walk away to resume her place with the people who are missing.

Towards the end of the film, the last time we see João, Dinho his cousin approaches him at uncle Anco’s niece’s birthday party. João tells him that he is thinking of leaving Recife. He likes seeing all of his relatives and realises that sometimes family can be a good thing, but only sometimes. João knows what his family wealth has been built on and, while still benefiting from the riches it provides, is leaving once again. The guilt for him seems unbearable and only by escaping Recife for the second time can he cope with its ‘intolerability’.

Filho brings the people who are missing from the margins to the forefront of society to expose the inequality, exploitation and oppression of Brazil’s past and present in a ‘collective identity crisis’. Their ‘speech-acts’, their own and those developed in relation to João from the side of the coloniser and master who empathises with them, offer the possibility of a ‘collective utterance’ that society should not be this way. Filho has invented a people as ‘political cinema’, an ‘aberration’, an affront to the middle classes in Brazil, but they remain in a ‘trance’ from which they seem unable to escape. The hope is that by depicting the plight of the people who are missing as the ‘not yet’ then their ‘collective utterance’ can be heard. I now want to turn to a more overt way, following Rocha from Deleuze, to show how Filho suggests the power of the coloniser and master can be attacked, and that is through bandatism and prophetism.

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BANDATISM AND PROPHETISM

The security firm is a modern-day form of bandatism striking back at colonial power in the form of Francisco and his foreman Reginaldo. The reason for their grievance and need for vengeance is encapsulated at the start of the film, which begins with a montage of black-and-white photographs, accompanied first by foreboding organ music and then the low beat of a drum. There is then a menacing clicking sound similar to that created by castanets which intensify, as does the beating of the drum, to a crescendo. This will mirror the tempo of the film as it slowly propels its way to the explosive denouement when, off-screen, Clodoaldo and Claudio kill Francisco against the backdrop of firecrackers being set off to echo the bullets they are firing into his body.

The first photograph shows the side front of a car on the left before a fence looking out onto the fields with a town in the distance. This must be where Antonio and his uncle were murdered by Reginaldo and that the dispute was 'over a fence', a land dispute, that Clodoaldo and Claudio witnessed. There is also a photograph of a tall foreman standing powerfully at the centre of all the workers he controls, exploits and oppresses. Again this seems to be a reference to the role of Reginaldo and those in a similar position before him in supporting their colonial bosses. Brazilian bandatism was born out of this violent history, illuminating the role of the security firm as modern-day bandits.

The reference to bandatism is explicitly made in the film when Clodoaldo and Fernando first meet with Francisco to get his endorsement for working in the area. As they enter the building the shot frames them behind a myriad of iron bars defending the entrance, as though they are entering a prison rather than an expensive apartment block, which to some extent they are. The main door to the actual apartment after a lift ride upstairs is also protected by iron bars. The maid, Luciene, lets them in and goes to get Francisco. They have been very pensive in the lift and still are as they wait to see him. They exchange nervous looks but do not talk. The bandits have to get the trust of the coloniser and master they will kill, and this scene is an important contrast with the final scene when they do. From their point of view, we are shown a luxurious kitchen with its many cupboards, a mixture of mostly white colours but also black. The doorway that leads into the next room is shrouded mainly in darkness with only a small shaft of light penetrating. This is the prophetism emerging through the chiaroscuro technique that light will soon be shed on what has happened once the truth emerges.

After a few more tense seconds with the shot lingering on the view of the kitchen, Francisco eventually emerges from the darkness into the light; it is as if he has kept them waiting deliberately to display his power. He greets Clodoaldo respectfully by shaking his hand but ignores Fernando, who is

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black, and, being further down the class structure, is not even worthy of a handshake. This may be the first time Clodoaldo has seen Francisco since he had Reginaldo kill his father, but he carefully conceals his true emotions. Francisco slightly admonishes them for 'barging' into his street without saying hello first, but Clodoaldo quickly responds by explaining that is why they are there now. However, they have already shown some form of bandatism against Francisco by starting the work prior to asking him, a small act of defiance on the road to an even greater one, his murder and their revenge.

Clodoaldo wants Francisco's blessing on the job they want to do there and offers him a leaflet to explain it. Francisco abruptly refuses the leaflet as he arrogantly enunciates that he owns more than half of all the property in the area. Coloniser and colonised, master and servant, stand before each other with only the bandits knowing what is happening. Clodoaldo is deferentially calling Francisco 'sir', but Francisco is suspicious and asks who told them about him. Clodoaldo replies, Mr Anco, Dr Fernanda, just about everyone. Clodoaldo is much better with the act than Fernando, who gives Francisco slightly vicious looks. Francisco admits he does not call the shots round here anymore, indicating a loss of grip on the power he had before the rise of the Brazilian middle classes. His business now is back in his land with his sugar mill in Bonito and that he just lives here, but we are immediately transported back to the images at the start of the film and the generations of the people who are missing that were exploited there. Their labours here are congealed in the condominiums that are rising up, dominating the area and increasing the wealth of Francisco even more through his possession of the land.

Francisco notices that Fernando is quiet, asks Clodoaldo if he speaks, and Clodoaldo orders him to. Fernando is truculent, uttering, 'yes sir I can talk', because being black he is not normally allowed to. Francisco observes that he has got a blind eye and questions whether that is good for a watchman, totally unconcerned that this could be seen as being rude. He displays his arrogance and power which exude throughout the scene, making his fall even greater and the revenge of the bandits even sweeter. Fernando replies that he probably sees better than Francisco does, implying that he knows about the murder of Clodoaldo's father and uncle in the past. We then get the explicit reference to bandatism because Francisco remarks, while laughing, that the famous Brazilian bandit Lampião also had only one eye and could probably see better than him but was shot down all the same. Then Fernando quickly responds by saying, 'but before that he took so many with him'. This raises a laugh from Francisco who comments to Clodoaldo that he likes his mate. Fernando is not amused and glares at Francisco with barely concealed contempt.

Lampião, whose real name was Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, became a bandit out of the disputes that flared up in Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s over land after his father, a subsistence farmer, was killed by the police, who

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were part of the rule of the more prosperous regional landowners.[39] He and his fellow bandits used violence to engage in extortion against police and landowners through often very vicious means. The security firm themselves are modern-day bandits extorting protection money under the guise of providing a service for wealthy people and engaging in acts of vengeance against wrongdoing. Indeed, land ownership and its concentration into a small rich minority has been, and still is, an ever-present problem in Brazil and is closely linked to 'socioeconomic inequality, rural poverty and social exclusion'.[40] Moreover, 'urban land occupation patterns are also highly concentrated', so 'people leaving rural areas face a process of urban exclusion and poverty'. A similar fate may have befallen Clodoaldo and his brother Claudio after the deaths of their father and uncle. They might have had to leave the area and suffered the problems mentioned earlier and that is why they now seek justice on their own violent terms. The security firm represents the private fusing into the public as the 'social – or – political – immediate' and the resulting 'absurdity' and 'crisis' as the social stages of an earlier time prophetically permeate the present. The 'archaic myth' from which this society has emerged is now related to the 'intolerable', the power of the colonising and land-grabbing rich epitomised by Francisco, which is being challenged by modern-day bandatism in the form of the security firm.

Additionally, Lampião was da Silva's nickname and translates into English as 'lamp'.[41] He was called this because he could fire a rifle so rapidly that it created almost continuous light in the darkness. This corresponds with the theme of light being shed on what has happened in the past with the death of Antonio and his brother. Incidentally, Lampião's eldest brother was also called Antonio which again prophetically shows how the myths of the past coexist in the present.[42]

Fernando, as part of the people who are missing, has also been brought to life through his 'speech-act' and as part of a 'collective utterance' on behalf of other minorities against their oppressor. As we have just seen, Francisco asks Clodoaldo if Fernando speaks, but of course given his low-class status as he is black, even lower than Clodoaldo, he can speak only when he has been spoken to. Given the opportunity to perform a 'speech-act', he does so in a truculent manner indicating a moment of 'aberration' and 'crisis'. Nevertheless, Fernando is admonished for this by Clodoaldo when they depart.

Clodoaldo remonstrates with Fernando for being stupid because if Francisco had not given his consent then the job would have been lost. At this stage, the viewer thinks this is because they just want the work, but it is part of the plan to use the presence of the security firm to extort money from the rich and gain access to Francisco in his apartment to kill him. Then they can engage in a 'speech-act' overtly and make a 'collective utterance' on behalf of all the oppressed when they have Francisco cornered and at their mercy.

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This is probably why Filho shoots this scene with close-ups and intercut shots from both sides' point of view, as though a type of equality is present even though it is clear that Francisco is the one who thinks he has power over them, for now at least. It could also be a prophecy that although there is a demarcation between them as they stand opposite each other indicating the symbol of the fence, the intercutting of shots suggests this fence will be breached when Clodoaldo and his brother finally confront Francisco, which it will.

Francisco asks Fernando his name, calling him 'boy', and he states his full name as Fernando Gomes do Nascimento. Francisco also asks Clodoaldo to do the same and he states Pereira dos Santos. Clodoaldo has used two different surnames as he said Anjos in an earlier scene. Nascimento is his real surname as he is the son of Antonio Jose do Nascimento, so they have taken a risk here by using the surname. We also find out later that the brother, their uncle, was called Everaldo José do Nascimento. Clodoaldo has disguised his surname but Fernando, who is perhaps a relative, has not. That Francisco does not recognise the surname shows that he has no guilt, as he cannot even remember its significance after all this time. His lapse in memory will cost him dearly though as Clodoaldo and Claudio will tell him at the end that they 'remember', bringing the 'multiple threads' of this story to its denouement and the memory of injustice preserved in his murder.

Francisco again shows his power by saying they are 'dismissed' and hopes that they do a good job; they will but it will be in killing him. He retreats into the darkness of his past and commands the maid to open the door for the 'boys', a task unsuited to his status. Francisco's use of the term 'boys' when they are grown men also suggests his power and status but more menacingly for him is that Clodoaldo was a boy when he saw his father and uncle being killed. He would not have been able to do anything about it then except cry, but now he is a man he can and will do something as the bandits bite back.

The next scene reinforces the image of Francisco as colonial master reaping the rewards of his and his families' wealth created on the backs of workers and through land-grabbing. He enters the living room and we see the splendorous nature of his apartment. The wide-angle shot shows semi-darkness on one side and semi-light on the other separated by a column in the middle of the room. Darkness and light follows him throughout the film in terms of his dark past and the light that will be shed on it. Francisco ascends to the next floor, further indicating the luxurious layout of the apartment, and he opens his mobile phone to make a call.

Francisco is telephoning João, who is then shown on the roof of an apartment block with customers. The wide-angle shot shows the myriad number of condominiums and a visible sign of the family's wealth. João proclaims, 'bless you grandpa', which is incongruous given Francisco has just met one of the sons of the father he had killed. João is closing the deal and the people

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are renting in 'Windsor Castle'. Francisco asks João if he knows about the security men, which he does as they visited him and his uncle Anco. João assumes they went for some 'grandpa hand-kissing', as though Francisco is a king overlooking his subjects, and the reference to 'Windsor Castle', a residence for the British monarchy, would suggest that.[43]

The true nature of Francisco is symbolically revealed in a scene at night. We see him ready to leave his apartment and there is a cut to him walking towards the end of the street. One of the security guards asks Clodoaldo whether it is Francisco but Clodoaldo, realising it is, orders him to ignore him. The plan means this is not the right time to kill him and he wants his brother there when doing so. As Francisco wanders down the street, he sets off security lights at each of the properties he passes moving from darkness to light and back again continuing the chiaroscuro technique. He goes for a swim in the sea and the camera pans right to reveal a sign warning that bathers in this area are at a greater than average risk of shark attacks. Unperturbed, we see him dive head first into the rolling waves. The dark and light sequence again is indicative of the light that will be shed on his crime, but for the viewer this is still unclear, hence the moments of darkness. Nevertheless, the swimming in the sea with the possible attack by sharks shows us that he is symbolically a shark among sharks, recalling his disreputable past that accounts for his current wealth. Moreover, as he has no fear of swimming in the vicinity of a possible shark attack he thinks he is untouchable, but given what will happen to him that is his biggest mistake. He is in a 'trance' of his own making and cannot recognise the 'aberration' and 'crisis' that are about to engulf him from the modern-day bandits.

His demise begins visually by an aerial shot of the tower blocks that is accompanied by the sound of an engaged tone on a phone. The camera begins a slow zoom towards the building he lives in and then we are shown a close-up of Francisco ringing the security firm. He is in his gated castle but the world of the oppressed in the form of the modern-day bandits outside is looming in on him. There is a recording telling him to leave a message after the tone. He looks very worried and frightened and asks 'Mr. Clodoaldo' to call him on that number. The power seems to have transferred as it is Francisco who seems deferential to Clodoaldo by calling him 'Mr'. The camera stays on his face which is riddled with doubt and fear because he knows Reginaldo has been murdered. Leaving his phone on answerphone was deliberate by Clodoaldo as he knew Francisco would be ringing him because of Reginaldo's death, so the mobile phone is a weapon in the modern form of banditry.

This also relates to the first time we meet Clodoaldo when João is with his uncle Anco and they see him on surveillance television. Eventually, they go outside and he informs them that he and his friends are offering a private security service for the street. The shot has them on opposite sides

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of the fence, so it is 'over a fence again', indicating that their interests will conflict, which of course they will as Clodoaldo and his brother will enact revenge on the family. Clodoaldo specifies a fee and describes the deal as a kind of partnership or collaboration, but João is suspicious and asks if that means if they decline they are less safe. Clodoaldo denies this and that it is all about money. He quotes his own father saying, 'We all have the right to choose what to believe in'. As his father is Antonio who was murdered by Francisco's foreman Reginaldo, this is probably why it happened. He defied Francisco and paid the price.

Anco asks if they carry weapons and Clodoaldo will not divulge but identifies that their main weapon is a mobile phone. João also half-jokingly asks Clodoaldo that, if he came across a thief, if he would throw the phone at him and then go and get his gun. Clodoaldo will not say whether he has a gun or not but he clearly has as he will be using it to kill Francisco. Moreover, it is his use of the mobile phone by not responding to Francisco's calls that will allow him to do that in modern-day bandatism.

The killing of Reginaldo in Bonito is not shown. Instead, a scene opens on the street; the camera is held from a distance and begins to zoom into a marquee that the security firm uses as their station. A motorbike arrives driven by Clodoaldo with his brother as passenger. They all greet each other and are smiling. Francisco's maid, Luciene, joins them, so she is also in on the plan. Clodoaldo's brother is given the security uniform jacket to wear as though it is a coat of honour, and Clodoaldo and Claudio pat each other on the chest for a job well done. The camera continues to zoom in and is accompanied by menacing music. They are all finally framed together in the shot, a bunch of bandits with one coloniser and master gone and one more to go.

The prophetic link with the 'juxtaposition' and 'compenetration' of past and present is enhanced further because Lampião also had a female bandit companion named Maria Bonita as his accomplice and women were a major part of his group.[44] The security firm is a microcosmic symbolic remembrance of classic bandatism. It is of no surprise Luciene would be eager to support their endeavours. She is treated contemptuously by Francisco when working as his maid. Her disdain for the rich is also evident when she enters a house to have sex with Clodoaldo who has got the keys while the owners are away. She looks around and pronounces, 'fucking white house', a 'speech-act' with white implying purity when it should be black for the way the rich oppress the poor.

There is a birthday party in Anco's house for his niece, a band is playing and a woman is talking to Francisco. He nods but does not seem to be listening to her and looks troubled, mulling over who could have killed Reginaldo. They all sing a happy birthday song to the niece. The words are mainly about the importance of having a house which brings happiness and shelter, but

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mainly for the rich. She is thirteen, so something is going to be unlucky for someone and that is Francisco.

Francisco again looks troubled but is clapping to keep up appearances. He decides to leave and approaches Clodoaldo who is outside in the middle of the street with his brother Claudio. Francisco relates how he has been constantly ringing him and leaving messages but ominously Clodoaldo is aware of this and requests a talk to Francisco too. Claudio stands slightly aggressively with his arms folded staring intently at Francisco. Clodoaldo introduces him as his brother Claudio who shakes Francisco's hand and calls him 'sir'. Francisco summons Clodoaldo to his apartment in thirty minutes as he has something he wants to discuss with him. Clodoaldo concurs and looks at his brother; as they walk away Claudio rubs his hands together almost in glee that they will now get their revenge on Francisco. The shot pans back and Luciene, Francisco's maid, partly hidden, a person who is missing, has been watching the proceedings and will not be in the apartment: the final act of vengeance by the bandits will be achieved.

There is a cut to the two brothers in the lift. There is a white letter on the back of the lift between them with its text indistinguishable but it seems to be an official notice, so perhaps it is symbolic of them serving notice on Francisco. Claudio stares menacingly ahead. Clodoaldo standing at his side looks pensive. Claudio gulps. Then they both make eye contact and it cuts to them approaching Francisco's apartment door. The scene mirrors the scene at the start, except this time Clodoaldo has brought his brother. As they wait outside, the light sensor goes off and Claudio waves his hand to bring it back on. The chiaroscuro technique through the security lights is moving from darkness to lightness as Francisco's dark history will be revealed.

Francisco has to open the door himself compared to last time indicating his impending downfall and is surprised that Clodoaldo has brought Claudio, but Clodoaldo explains that his brother will now be working on the street. Francisco opens the iron gate and lets them in, locking it behind them. It becomes dark outside as the automatic light sensor goes off and inside Francisco takes them through the kitchen which is also mainly in darkness. Referring to the birthday party, he says he hates them with children crying and that type of music. Clodoaldo and Claudio were only children when their father and uncle were killed, so they know all about crying after what Francisco had done. This time he takes them into the living room where they can talk this over much better. This is in contrast to the scene at the beginning when he conducted the discussion in the kitchen. They were not worthy enough to enter the inner sanctum of his castle then but he is in a weaker position now than he was at the start and seems more contrite but only because he is afraid after Reginaldo's death.

There is a double seat that Clodoaldo and Claudio will sit on which is bathed in semi-light but darkness surrounds the seat opposite them where

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Francisco is going to sit. Dissimilar to the first meeting, there is now a space of about a yard between them and the battle lines have now been metaphorically drawn. The scene is shot with intercutting close-ups again but we are aware of the distance between them, indicating the conflict that is about to commence. The television is on showing a war film and Francisco switches it off. The war he thought was over between him and Antonio and his brother will now return to haunt him and be re-enacted but with Francisco defeated this time.

He relates how he has heard of the killing of Reginaldo who had worked for him in Bonito for many years and who would have given his own life to protect his. Reginaldo was retired and became a born-again Christian ten years ago, so it seems that he was trying to atone for his sins, unlike Francisco. As Francisco recounts this, Claudio looks to his right at a painting which seems to be Reginaldo. A similar portrait was displayed when João and Sofia visited Francisco in Bonito to reinforce the symbolism.

Francisco declares this an act of vengeance and asks them to do some prevention work on his personal security. He doubts anything will occur but wants to be safe rather than sorry, which causes Clodoaldo to nod half-mockingly in agreement, knowing full well that something will happen as they are about to kill him. Clodoaldo asks him if the death of Reginaldo has something to do with Francisco. Francisco intervenes requesting them to guarantee his personal security. Clodoaldo understands that he wants him to do what Reginaldo did for him but Francisco just wants them to be his security people. Clodoaldo is mischievously implying that he knows Reginaldo killed at his behest and now he will be killing at his bidding also, but this time it will be Francisco on the receiving end. Clodoaldo still plays along as though he is ignorant of Reginaldo's murder of his father and uncle. He asks whether Reginaldo's death was related to Francisco or not, which of course it is as Francisco must have given the original order. Francisco becomes annoyed and rebukes Clodoaldo for interrogating him as it is none of his business, but the private and the political are now fused and it is the business of the security firm in their role as bandits and the righting of wrongs. Claudio is looking at Francisco sinisterly in a close-up but then there is a cut to a shot from behind Francisco of the whole room with the two brothers sitting in front of him. The illumination in the room is of two lamps, so the reference back to the bandit Lampião is symbolised as these two modern-day bandits are about to shed the final light on this matter and get their revenge.

There is a silence for a moment and then the shot cuts to a close-up of the two brothers who turn to look at each other. Claudio comments to Clodoaldo, 'You see how things turn out?' In a close-up, Francisco looks at them puzzled. Claudio then turns to Francisco and tells him that he and his brother saw Reginaldo last Thursday. Clodoaldo exhales a breath of air and looks

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menacingly at Francisco. It is a weight off Clodoaldo's chest after having kept all that anger abated for so long. Francisco begins to look worried. Claudio stipulates, 'April 27th 1984'. Claudio asks Francisco if he remembers the date. Claudio waits for some recollection of the date from Francisco but none is forthcoming and he shakes his head slightly in puzzlement. Claudio remembers and Clodoaldo was only six years old and he remembers. There is a close-up of Francisco and it is now starting to dawn on him what is going on and he asks them if they are Antonio's boys. Clodoaldo admits they are. Francisco lowers his head and stares down as though he is looking into an abyss. The people who are missing, the unliving, have been given a 'speech-act' as a 'collective utterance' against all those who have suffered at the hands of an oppressor and exploiter. He raises his head and stares back at them both sternly but is clearly fearful. They are boys no longer. They mention their uncle as well and Claudio states, 'over a fence'. Francisco jumps up and they do too and by their faces it is clear they are going to kill him and the fence has now been breached. His death, like Reginaldo's, is captured off-screen with the setting off of firecrackers that are symbolic of the gunshots that are killing Francisco. The bandit descendants of Lampião have taken their revenge and the lamps finally shed light on the darkness of Francisco, the coloniser and master, to signal his final demise. Violence has begotten violence as the compenetration of the myths of the past inform the present.

CONCLUSION

Deleuze's political theory of film illuminates our understanding of *Neighbouring Sounds* through his approach to Third World cinema and especially the work of Rocha. A voice has been given to the minorities, the people who are missing, against the coloniser and master in the form of Francisco. Their 'speech-acts' and 'collective utterances', often articulated from the side of the coloniser and master by João, stand as an affront to their treatment by the middle classes in Brazil. Filho has invented these people anew, a 'not-yet', in their oppression and exploitation. This 'aberration' and 'collective identity crisis' of their existence, the 'trance' they are in, offers them the possibility of a new form of subjectivity if only they could unite their singularities and multiplicities. Within the Latin American context and the 'archaic myths' of the past it seems that bandatism with its cycle of violence, as Deleuze notes with Rocha's films, is the only way to break the 'trance'. However, Filho's resurrection of the people who are missing, his foregrounding of those at the margins of existence, shows a society in 'aberration' and 'crisis', an 'intolerable' world where, through the power of film, the message is that we must overcome oppression and exploitation in all its various guises.

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NOTES

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image* (London: Continuum, 2011) and *Cinema 2. The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2012) are the classic studies but his most overt engagement with politics and film is in *Cinema 2*, pp. 207–15.

2 Discussions of the political dimension to Deleuze's understanding of cinema are not extensive. The main exceptions are Laura U. Marks, 'A Deleuzian Politics of Hybrid Cinema', *Screen*, 35, 3, Autumn, 1994 and *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC; and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 55–56; D. N. Rodowick, *Gille Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC; and London: Duke University Press, 1997), chapter 6 and particularly, pp. 151–54; Felicity Colman, *Deleuze and Cinema. The Film Concepts* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), chapter 11 and Paola Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze. Cinema and Philosophy* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. xi–xv.

3 Colman, *Deleuze and Cinema*, pp. 148–49.

4 Glauber Rocha, 'History of Cinema Novo' in Michael T. Martin (ed.) *New Latin American Cinema Volume Two: Studies of National Cinemas* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

5 Oliver Kwon and Steve Solot (eds), *Brazilian Cinema Today: Essays by Critics and Experts from across Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Latin American Training Centre, 2015), p. 9.

6 Ibid., pp. 9–10.

7 Ibid., p. 10.

8 David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 1–19 and David Martin-Jones and William Brown (eds), *Deleuze and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 1–2 and 4.

9 This is the aim of Martin-Jones's *Deleuze and World Cinemas* and the Martin-Jones's and Brown's edited collection *Deleuze and Film*.

10 In Martin-Jones's *Deleuze and World Cinemas* and Martin-Jones's and Brown's *Deleuze and Film* there is no mention of Rocha or Brazilian cinema in general. Of the other books on Deleuze cited earlier, only Rodowick, *Gille Deleuze's Time Machine*, p. 141, and Colman, *Deleuze and Cinema*, pp. 2, 11, 157 and 159, mention Rocha but there is no discussion of contemporary Brazilian cinema.

11 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, pp. xi–xii.

12 Rushton, *Cinema after Deleuze*, p. 5.

13 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. xii.

14 David Deamer, *Deleuze's Cinema Books. Three Introductions to the Taxonomy of Images* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2016), p. xxviii.

15 Coleman, *Deleuze and Cinema*, pp. 148–49.

16 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 208.

17 Ibid., pp. 208–9. Deleuze does not mention Bloch who invented the notion of the 'not-yet' as we saw in chapter 4 but as Rodowick notes there seems to be an implicit utopianism here that is realisable. See Rodowick, *Gille Deleuze's Time Machine*, p. 154.

18 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 209.

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19 Ibid., pp. 209–10.

20 Ibid., p. 210.

21 Deleuze references Yilmaz Güney's *Yol* (1982) here as an example.

22 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 210.

23 Ibid., pp. 210–11.

24 Ibid., pp. 211.

25 Ibid., pp. 211–12.

26 Ibid., p. 212.

27 The only film released in 1982 by Chahine was named *Hadduta Misriya*, *An Egyptian Tale*, so maybe when it was released the French version was translated differently.

28 Ibid., pp. 212–13.

29 Ibid., p. 213.

30 Ibid., pp. 213–14.

31 Timothy S. Murphy, 'The Test Is Company: A Deleuzian Speculation on Beckett's *Sociendum*' in S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė (eds) *Deleuze and Beckett* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 128.

32 Ibid., p. 129; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 103.

33 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 214–15.

34 Ibid., p. 215.

35 Ibid., p. 51.

36 An interesting comparative analysis of the two films could be made but that is for another study.

37 Thanks to Sharon Garratt for making this connection.

38 'Mama Lisa's World. International Music and Culture'. Available at: http://www.mamalisa.com/?t=es&p=2536. Accessed 21 February 2017.

39 Billy Jaynes Chandler, *The Bandit King: Lampião of Brazil* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1978), pp. 21 and 201.

40 Bastiaan Philip Reydon, Vitor Bukvar Fernandes and Tiago Santos Tellesb, 'Land Tenure in Brazil: The Question of Regulation and Governance', *Land Use Policy*, 42, 2015, p. 509.

41 Chandler, *The Bandit King*, pp. 32–33.

42 Ibid., p. 22.

43 In an interview Filho refers to Francisco as being like a 'king in a castle'. See Carmen Gray, 'High Society: Kleber Mendonça Filho on the Architecture of Loathing', *Sight and Sound*, 6 February, 2014. Available at: http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/high-society-kleber-mendonca-filho-architecture-loathing. Accessed 24 February 2017.

44 Chandler, *The Bandit King*, pp. 149–50.

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Chapter 6

Alain Badiou: Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*

Alain Badiou's main writings on film are collected in his aptly named *Cinema*, containing essays and interviews from 1957 to 2010.[1] The book begins with an interview where Badiou reflects on his engagement with film in the different stages of his life and political commitments.[2] He rejects the idea that cinema is simply entertainment because more than any of the other arts, it 'really guided your entry into the contemporary world'.[3] Of all the arts, 'films have a more intense availability, circulation, ability to capture the imagination' and are global in scope as we learn about the lives of people from different nations making cinema a 'profound art form' offering us an 'informal education', a 'school for everyone'.[4] For Badiou, 'cinema supplies a formal power, which is put at the service of a universal value: human existence, freedom' by affirming 'human presence' where even a fleeting filmic moment renders the human visible.[5] Cinema's hybrid nature, its 'impurity' by drawing on all of the other arts, means it 'uses and magnifies them, according them a distinctive emotional power' and making it a 'seventh art'.[6]

Interestingly, Badiou also mentions how cinema allows us to come into contact with the 'Other', those people whose experience is hidden from the wider world, and he cites John Ford for doing justice to American farmers, for example, Kenzi Mizoguchi for doing justice to Japanese prostitutes and today Chinese cinema doing justice to Chinese workers who would otherwise be hidden from sight.[7] He claims that in France, people are under the illusion that they live without workers but 'a great' Chinese cinema shows them they are not by asking the question: 'What is becoming of our factories and workers?'

I want to consider Badiou's comment about cinema doing justice to the plight of the Chinese working class here. Badiou is an avowed Maoist who still affirms the pivotal event of the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1969

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'because it made an attack on the communist state itself to revolutionise communism. It was a failure but many interesting events are failures', he contends.[8] He does not mention which Chinese directors that he thinks are doing this and there is no discussion of Chinese films either in his work or in the commentaries of others.[9] To that end, and to fill a gap in the literature on using Badiou's theories in relation to Chinese cinema with a focus on the Chinese working class, I will analyse Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* (2013) nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, with Jia winning the award for Best Screenplay.[10]

Jia is part of what has been designated as the 'Sixth Generation' of China's film-makers[11] or the 'Forsaken Generation' as they are the 'youngest children of Maoism' and bridge the gap between the past and the post-socialist present.[12] Their work is typified by an identification with the 'aesthetic social margins' and a resistance to the 'political commercial mainstream by producing, [mostly] outside the state system'.[13] Additionally, they focus on 'individual perceptions in fragmentary images and narratives' while 'claiming truth and objectivity as their primary goals'. Against the Chinese state, they 'train their camera on a wide array of gritty, disquieting, and heart-wrenching images of contemporary Chinese life'.[14] Their films offer a 'critical understanding and responsible agency so that pains might be understood, wrongs could be addressed and things would become better, however slightly and gradually so'.[15] Jia is seen as an 'arch-representative' of this movement with his focus on 'China's here-and-now' while also remaining 'intensely interested in the loss of identity and the undermining of basic social values by China's headlong plunge into market capitalism and cultural assimilation'.[16]

Jia's *A Touch of Sin* is a testament to this. He depicts China as a 'globalised economic power player suffering a new and violent Cultural Revolution of money-worship in which a cronyist elite has become super-rich in the liquidation of state assets'.[17] The film discloses the contemporary world of China to a global audience and offers them an education to show and do justice to those suffering inequality, injustice and exploitation. Unsurprisingly, the film was banned in China even though it was partly financed by state-owned enterprises in Shanxi province and Shanghai.[18]

The film constitutes four stories but my focus here is on two of them. The first is about Dahai, who is in dispute with the village chief and the local boss Jiao as they have corruptly seized assets that were collectively owned to enrich themselves. Dahai attempts to get the workers to join him in his revolt but they seem to have accepted their fate. He then begins to use the normal political and legal channels to expose the corruption but the powers of the local state frustrate him and he chooses to take matters into his own hands.

The other story I focus on is that of Xiaohui and his experience of working in the factories of modern-day China. After causing an accident to a fellow

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worker and thereby forfeiting his wages and work-time to him, Xiaohui leaves and eventually takes a job in a factory in another town. The awful conditions and monotony of the work he and his co-workers suffer exposes the underbelly of China's economic 'success' story with devastating effects on Xiaohui. I now want to consider Badiou's understanding of the relationship between political theory and film and then apply this to the plight of Dahai and Xiaohui.

BADIOU

For Badiou, the key question for cinema is, 'What is the subject of a film? What does the film ultimately give expression to?'[19] Answering this question allows us to define the 'true nature of its artistic proposition'. Badiou indicates that the film's subject is not its story or plot but 'what the film takes a stand on, and in what cinematic form it does so' because 'its artistic organisation . . . affirms its subject'. Badiou indicates that this is what remains in the viewers' minds when they leave the cinema, often without them realising it. Cinema is a 'metaphor for *contemporary* thought' just as tragedy was a metaphor for Greek thought, and cinema is perhaps playing the same role in the contemporary world.[20] Cinema offers a 'thinking that's grasped in the mobility of its reflections, a thinking that absorbs human presence in something that exceeds it, that takes it over and projects it all at once'. Cinema is a 'representation of the world in which human presence is affirmed over against an extremely powerful exteriority . . . against which the hero rises up in order to confront and vanquish it'. Badiou thinks this human presence is so prevalent in cinema that it defines what cinema is about, that this is its subject. Following Jean-Luc Godard, Badiou contends that cinema is able to show the 'indifference of nature, the aberrations of History, the turmoil of human life, and the creative power of thought', which is why it is a form of education.[21]

Badiou then links this understanding of film with his notion of 'inaesthetics' in philosophy, the idea that philosophy does not 'have to produce the thinking of the work of art because the work of art thinks all by itself and produces truth'.[22] Film itself is a 'movement of thought' that is linked to its 'artistic disposition' and is 'transmitted through the experience of viewing the film, through its movement' that 'transmits the film's thought', rather than what is said or the organisation of the plot, and has a 'universal' moment. Badiou concedes it is often very difficult to identify this 'individual element' because film is 'a combination of things that makes or remakes the world with an extraordinary complexity'. This is heightened because directors are often at the mercy of chance occurrences that can be positive in the shooting of a film and so give it its 'movement and reconstitution'.

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Of all the arts, cinema is the 'one that has the ability to think, to produce the most absolutely undeniable truth' because it is 'steeped in the infinite of the real'. For Badiou, the reason for writing about film is because it has produced some effect on him, and he means any film, not just those considered as 'part of the pantheon of auteurs'.[23] He understands this effect through the way these films bear witness to time and wants to reciprocate what they have given to him as an 'ongoing debt' to 'this incredibly generous art, the subject matter of which is our times, so torn to strife'.

For Badiou, the most important aspect of cinema is the acceptance and reworking of 'the material images of things'.[24] It contains everything that makes up the 'modern social imaginary': 'cars, pornography, gangsters, shoot-outs, the urban legend, different kinds of music, noises, explosions, fires, corruption'. This 'infinite complexity' is accepted and assimilated by cinema, producing 'purity' from an 'impure art'. Cinema does this in many ways from producing the 'world's noise' while also inventing a 'new silence'.[25] It can offer the reproduction of 'restlessness' while inventing 'new forms of stillness' and 'accept the powerlessness of our speech' while also inventing a 'new conversation'. At the outset the materials are all similar and this is why 'cinema is a mass art because it shares the social imaginary with the masses' who can see themselves in it as it is 'contemporary with their own lives'.[26]

Yet Badiou recognises that 'mass art' is a paradoxical notion because 'mass' is a political category of 'activist democracy, of communism', an 'eruption and evental energy', which is opposed to 'representative and constitutional democracy' because of Mao's edict that only the masses make universal history.[27] Conversely, art is an 'aristocratic category' because it demands education and discernment to be appreciated.[28] Cinema as a mass art developed in a paradox with the avant-garde arts of the twentieth century forging 'impossible relationships, between aristocracy and democracy, between invention and familiarity, between novelty and general taste'. Cinema as the 'seventh art' borrows from these other six arts their 'generic humanity'.[29]

For Badiou, the democratic nature of cinema means that it gives us the '*possibility of rising*'.[30] Any person may view a film from the lowest of values, 'sentimentality', 'vulgarity' or even 'cowardice', but a film will always give them the chance to 'rise' above this and 'arrive at powerful, refined things'. Engagement with the other arts is more difficult because there is a 'fear of falling', so cinema is the true democratic art because even when we go to watch a film to relax, 'rising' is always present as a possibility. The impurity of cinema contains the possibility of purity that is unforthcoming with the other arts. For example, Badiou continues, if you go and see a bad painting there is no chance that it can become a good one and 'rising' is

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impossible because you have already been lowered by its inferiority. You become a 'fallen aristocrat', but at the cinema, you are a 'democrat on the rise', displaying the paradoxical relationship between aristocracy and democracy and art and non-art. This accounts for the political significance of cinema as a democratic 'mass art' because it 'achieves a cross between ordinary opinions and the work of thought' that does not operate anywhere else.

So a 'great film' contains a 'lot of victories, only a few defeats for a lot of victories', hence their 'heroic' nature, and why our relationship to it is one of 'participation, solidarity, admiration, or even jealousy, irritation, or hatred' rather than 'contemplation'.[31] Assessing the victories and defeats we are moved from tears of joy to fear and rage as we 'extract a little bit of purity from what is worst in the world'.

Badiou relates this to moral philosophy because both begin with the 'impurity' of 'human existence' in the belief that an idea can emerge from 'its opposite, from ruptures in existence' in a process of 'struggle' and 'sharing'. Cinema is an 'art of the great figures of humanity in action', offering a 'universal stage of action' that confronts 'common values' via 'ethical figures' and 'heroes' in the 'battle between Good and Evil' in a 'moral mythology'.[32] This is why cinema can often be unbearably obscene and violent.[33] Badiou approvingly cites the directors David Lynch and Takeshi Kitano in this regard as 'they have the ambition to take what is worst in the contemporary world as their material' to create an 'artistic synthesis of great purity'. In Kitano's gangster movies, for example, Badiou explains that the images we see are almost unwatchable due to the violence of the relationships and darkness of the stories. Nevertheless, 'something luminous occurs' that transmutes rather than negates the material into a form of 'alchemy, as though something terrible and terrifying were changing into pure, undreamt-of simplicity'.

Cinema is a 'lesson of hope' instructing us that 'something can happen even though the worst can prevail' because even in a world of 'abjection: violence, betrayal, obscenity . . . thought can triumph' not everywhere and all the time 'but victories do exist'.[34] For Badiou, the 'idea of a potential victory' is a crucial issue for our times because 'we are the orphans of the idea of revolution' that has disappeared, so we often assume that victory is not possible and become resigned to our fate.[35] In cinema this is not the case as it shows us maybe not the overall victory but individual ones that tell us not to 'despair'. That is why we 'love' cinema because it is a 'struggle against the impure world' and a 'collection of precious victories'.

Politically these struggles occur through an 'event' which Badiou defines as 'something that brings to light a possibility that was' previously 'invisible', 'unthinkable' or 'ignored'.[36] It 'proposes something to us' as a 'rupture' and the 'truth procedure' is how the 'event is grasped, elaborated, incorporated and set out in the world'.[37] Making this possibility 'real' is the way we

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discover ‘truth’ and this requires an ‘effort’ which is by a group for politics or an individual in artistic creation. Similarly, a political event is the ‘apparition of a possibility’ that was not previously perceived such as the ‘Republic or workers’ power’ with the creation of the ‘Paris Commune’. For Badiou, ‘a political event today, whatever its scale, is a local opening up of possibilities’.

Badiou sees the state as the vehicle through which these possibilities are opposed as it claims to have the ‘monopoly of possibilities’ and ‘pronounces that which is possible and impossible’. This, for Badiou, is the fundamental definition of the state rather than simply an institution of repression.[38] The irony is that this state power wants everyone to accept that their way of doing things is the only possible way. Nevertheless, Badiou contends that when a political ‘event’ occurs, a possibility emerges that eludes this overriding power. There is an unsettling of the state’s control over what is and what is not possible. People suddenly begin to imagine a different possibility and if there are a number of them they debate it and may make new organisations. Badiou concedes that they may make ‘immense’ errors in doing this but the importance lies in making the possibility of the ‘event’ appear. He sees all forms of creation occurring in this manner as a transformation of ‘what has been declared impossible into a possibility’ and the wresting of the possible from the impossible. This then leads to the actuality of preparing for an event which for Badiou ‘means being subjectively disposed to recognising new possibilities’.[39] Given its unforeseeable nature a person needs to have a disposition ready to greet an event and maintain a critical stance to possibilities offered by the status quo. A ‘state of mind’ should be developed in awareness that the ‘order of the world or the prevailing powers’ do not have an absolutist control over the possibilities’, and that the ‘construction of new truths’ are possible.[40]

Expanding on this issue of preparation for the event, Badiou identifies two ways to accomplish this. The first is by ‘remaining truthful to a past event’ and the lessons it has imparted to the world. The ‘prevailing order’ resists this at all cost by discrediting and rejecting the event’s claim to offer new possibilities. Their propaganda attempts to convey the message that nothing really happened or, the preferred option, that the result was not a ‘new possibility’ but a ‘new regression’ and a ‘new horror’. For Badiou, ‘political subjects’ must reject this and maintain a ‘fidelity to past events’ because they are at the ‘interval between the past event and the coming event’ rather than in opposition to them.

The second way of preparation for an event is related to the first and involves criticising the ‘established order’ by showing that even their control of the possibilities is ‘insufficient’. This ‘critical task’ involves exposing the possibilities they offer us as being ‘inhuman’ because they do not provide the ‘social collectivity’ and ‘living humanity’ that ‘do justice to that of which it

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is capable'. The possibilities the established order offer will not 'mobilise the collectivity's capacities'.[41]

Badiou's 'fidelity' is also to the 'event' of 1968 because it was based on a 'politics of freedom' in a 'political distance' from the parliamentary state and electoral politics. So politics itself 'exists only if the forms of local revolt establish their distance from the institutional channels of the demand' and is valid in any circumstances. Additionally, politics exists only if there is a 'basic minimum involvement of the working-class and the common people'. Although Badiou accepts that this does not necessarily need to be informed by class because that could imply linkages with certain political parties, the lack of 'popular or working-class figures in the arena of politics' has shown that the result is a politically entrenched liberal bourgeois hegemony.

This is all part of Badiou's 'communist hypothesis' or the 'Idea of communism' consisting of the 'political', 'historical' and 'subjective'.[42] The political relates to a 'political truth' which is a 'concrete, time-specific sequence in which a new thought and a new practice of collective emancipation might arise, exist and eventually disappear'.[43] The examples Badiou gives are the 'French Revolution, from 1792 to 1794; the People's War of Liberation in China, from 1927 to 1949: Bolshevism in Russia, from 1902 to 1917' and the 'Great Cultural Revolution . . . from 1965–1968', each of which constitutes a 'truth procedure'.[44] The historical refers to 'political sequences' as a 'time frame' within which 'a truth procedure is inscribed in the general coming of Humanity, in a local form whose supports are spatial, temporal and anthropological'. Finally, he refers to the subjective aspect as a 'mere human animal' who decides to 'become part of a political truth procedure' and a 'militant of his truth' in 'the making in a given world'.[45] For Badiou, this is when a person rejects the 'selfishness, competition, [and] finitude' that the 'animality' of individualism creates.[46] While preserving individual characteristics, the person also becomes 'through incorporation, an active part of a new Subject'. This 'decision' or 'will' is a 'subjectivation' as a person 'determines the place of a truth with respect to his or her own vital existence and to the world in which this existence is lived out'. For Badiou, following Marx and Mao, this is why communism is 'first and foremost a *movement*' rather than a 'state power' or 'party-state' and being so means that we can 'approach the question of the state and power again in a completely different way'.[47] At the core of this for Badiou is the abolition of private property as it is the 'untouchable dogma' and 'sacred cow of capitalism' that 'is crushing our societies like a steamroller'.[48]

Badiou's 'hope' is that communism as a movement 'will get us out of the usual circuits, the traditional political channels' by giving meaning to the 'communist Idea'[49] and the achievement of the 'pure Idea of equality'.[50] For Badiou, equality is a principle that must be absolutely affirmed as an aim

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of acting politically by attacking the way the state treats people unequally.[51] Alternatively, Badiou points to an ethics that does not recognise the 'other' simply as 'other' but as '*recognising the Same*'.[52] Against an ethics of cultural relativism, Badiou endorses a 'genuine ethics' as 'processes of truths, of the labour that brings *some* truths into the world'.[53] For Badiou, 'differences are what there is' but 'every truth is a coming-to-be of that which is not yet' so the 'Same' is 'what *comes to be*' as this '*truth*' which is the '*same for all*': '*indifferent to differences*'.[54] Ethics then 'does not exist' because there is 'only the *ethic-of* (of politics, of love, of science, of art)'.[55] The 'some-one' engages in this by being a 'becoming-subject' with an impregnated 'truth'.[56] So the 'ethic of truth is the principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process' and the someone as a '*subject*' through 'fidelity' affirms this search for verisimilitude.[57]

A demand for justice, 'through which a philosophy designates the possible truth of a politics', can be made against the 'power and opinions' of the 'empirical instances of politics' mired in untruth.[58] For Badiou, a 'politics worthy of being interrogated by philosophy under the idea of justice is one whose unique general axiom is: people think, people are capable of truth'.[59] Moreover, justice is how 'philosophy attempts to *seize* the egalitarian axiom inherent in a genuine political sequence', as in 'Mao's thesis concerning the immanent self-education of the revolutionary mass movement.[60]

Given the film's focus on the condition of the working class in China today, I will conclude this section with Badiou's own thoughts on this issue. Reflecting on the state of workers in China in 2013, he notes that 'hundreds and thousands of men and women are transported almost forcibly from the countryside to the cities and treated horribly'.[61] They are 'like nomads of the interior, whose movement is controlled according to extremely stringent standards'. The 'state capitalism' of China which is 'officially communist politically' and 'fiercely capitalist economically' ensures this via the 'privatisation' of state assets.[62]

Badiou's notion of the 'void', which he defines as 'an unpresentable yet necessary figure' who is the 'non-counted', illustrates the effect of this on the workers.[63] They are 'void' in the sense that they are seen as having no 'political expression or relevance' despite doing all the work, but for Badiou the opposite is the case because the places in which they labour, the factories, '*can* become evental sites' when 'something unforeseeable' or 'unknowable happens'.[64] He cites the Apple Corporation as an example of this as they alone employ or rather exploit '1,400,000 Chinese workers in its factories in China'.[65] They are treated as a 'void' as though they are 'disappearing' but as he indicates 'there have never been so many workers in the world', they are just not counted by those in power. However, they do fight back

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and Badiou gives as an example how 'violent strikes break out every day in China' and around the world in general offering the possibility of a 'new political subjectivity'.[66] As a way forward, he recalls how factories were organised in Maoist China, not as businesses, but as 'real communal life-centres' offering 'education and healthcare systems'.[67] He accepts that the experiment then was 'unsatisfactory, largely for political reasons' but it still offered the possibility of 'new forms of collective life' and that 'something else is conceivable'.

Conversely, Badiou accepts that since the 1980s there has been a domination of global stability and expansion of capital unaffected by any of the political innovations preceding it.[68] With the event not revived, the only possibility is a 'fidelity' to its earlier forms and the resurrection of its 'novelty'. He alludes to how Maoist practices developed long before 1968 and were the embryonic portents that paved the way for receiving the event, and that unpredictability is in some sense present today.

With the main ideas of Badiou's understanding of the relationship between political theory and film outlined, I now want to apply his theories to *A Touch of Sin*. Badiou asks what is the film's subject, what does it give expression to and take a stand on, and, in Jia's hands *A Touch of Sin* is an indictment of Chinese capitalism. The film shows us the inaesthetic truth of Chinese society and thereby the film's subject: What type of society has China become? I will now explore this inaesthetic truth and the universal moments that emanate from the film by beginning with the story of Dahai.

DAHAI

Dahai is the cinematic 'hero' who affirms a 'human presence' in an 'inhuman world' against the 'extremely powerful exteriority' of the village chief and boss Jiao. Dahai rises up to 'confront' and 'vanquish' their corruption. When we first meet Dahai, he is shown sitting on a motor bike tossing a red apple in the air that he has obtained from a truck that has overturned. In Chinese culture apples are meant to symbolise peace,[69] but as the apples are scattered everywhere, war, not peace, will ensue between Dahai and those in control of the 'possible'. The driver is on the floor dead, covered with a sheet and being observed by some workers. There is then a close-up of Dahai as he blows on the apple ready to eat it and an explosion goes off from a mine behind him – a symbolic omen of the volatile events to come. Similarly, the redness of all the apples makes them look like a sea of blood that will be shed as Dahai's story unfolds. The dead body is also a harbinger of the corpses to come in a world that is 'so torn to strife' in modern-day China.

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In a subsequent scene, Dahai is riding his motorbike and snow has fallen heavily. The coldness of the environment mirrors the glacial world that Dahai and his fellow workers inhabit, and also the pollution in China that produces inclement weather by privileging profit maximisation over environmental concerns. He stops by an arch that has the words, 'Black Gold Mountain' emblazoned on it. The black coal that is being dug from the mine is the golden source of profit for the village chief and the local boss Jiao, based on the exploitation of the workers. Dahai drives into the village and after being framed in the shot in close-up there is a cut showing a statue of Chairman Mao on a podium with Dahai just on the edge of the frame. Mao's right arm is raised upwards almost in salute as though he is endorsing what Dahai is going to do in terms of fighting corruption and the power of the state in favour of 'communism as a movement', as was attempted during the Cultural Revolution. Dahai is a microcosmic example of a 'militant' of 'truth' rejecting the 'animality' of individualism with the selfishness it engenders and exposing how the local state is treating people unequally. He is offering a 'genuine ethics' and trying to bring some 'truths' into an 'impure world'.

A blue truck with a number of men in it is under the statue and comes towards Dahai. They have got a painting in the truck but it is not visible until the truck turns round and reveals a picture of the Madonna, the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus. The shot frames the picture in the centre with Mao's statue on the left. As they carry on driving, Mao's statue goes out of shot but as the painting is turned away so the picture is hidden. Mao's statue returns to the centre of the shot presiding over all before him as the truck exits the frame on the left and Dahai has already gone off to the right. Mao is a symbol of the communist past, Mary and Jesus of innocence and a desire for good over evil with the current state of a corrupt China straddled between them.

In the next scene, a number of workers are shown eating rudimentary noodles in an impoverished room on the site of the mine. Dahai begins a discussion with two of them about the chief's A6 motor car. Dahai claims the car belongs to all of them as the chief sold the state-owned coal mine so he could afford it. One of them begins to mock Dahai by saying that no wonder the wheels are shiny as they must belong to him. The other worker suggests that if Dahai was born during the war years he would have been a general. One worker recognises that Dahai is on the side of 'communism as a movement' and that he would have been a great leader for achieving that in the past, but as the local state has a tight grip on power and what is 'possible and impossible', he cannot see a role for that now.

Dahai can and pronounces that he plans to report the chief and the new boss Jiao to Beijing and then they will be 'hauling sand in prison', but one of the workers retorts that he will be attacked by the chief's men before even getting

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to Taiyuan. Dahai explains he has been studying law and as the chief has sold off property that was collectively owned and bribed to do so, he should get imprisoned for twenty years. Dahai reminds the worker that his boss, Jiao Shengli, is also rich and that he will accuse him of polluting and covering up accidents in the mine so once this truth is out the state will close it down. Dahai declares, 'Believe it!' The other worker suggests that if the coal mine had gone to Dahai he would be no different but Dahai disagrees. Jiao's Maserati is parked in the yard unused and when Dahai is goaded to drive it off, sell it and buy everyone a drink, he laughs because he does not want the car, he wants justice. Dahai is beginning to develop a 'state of mind' to question the local state's power and encourage the workers to imagine 'new possibilities'. Yet the refrain from one worker that he would be no different still shows the presence of the 'impossible' against the 'possible'. Fired by the injustice of the local state in the form of the village chief and boss Jiao, the 'event' is emerging via Dahai.

Dahai, through the symbolism of Mao's statue, is preparing himself for an 'event' by being truthful, showing a 'fidelity' to the past events of the initiation of communist China, and the creation of the Cultural Revolution with its demand for democracy against the Chinese state. He is also readying himself for the 'event' by criticising the 'established order' to emphasise 'social collectivity' and a 'living humanity' as a real 'possibility'. That Jiao does not even use the Maserati shows the decadence and waste that is firing Dahai in his demand for justice for both himself and his fellow workers. Moreover, Dahai is attempting to inspire the workers to engage in an ethics of '*recognising the same*' in a situation where they are treated as the 'other', a mere means for the enrichment of the village chief and Jiao. Dahai's 'fidelity' to an 'ethic of truth' means he is a 'becoming subject' and his task is to try to bring the other workers into this 'truth procedure' via a 'local opening up of possibilities'. Additionally, Badiou's disdain for the selling off of state assets and the pernicious consequences of privatisation is captured nicely in this scene and subsequently as it is exposed for what it really is – a corrupt process to enrich the few and rob from the many.

The village chief enters the room and asks if all the migrant workers are present as the police are there for an investigation. He stands in the doorway behind Dahai who is seated to the right of the frame looking sternly downwards reflecting his lowly position compared to the power and authority of the chief. The boss has his hands in his pockets and looks cocky. One worker asks him what is wrong and he informs them that there has been a murder in Shibawan, so the migrants need checking. He abruptly commands them to hurry up and get outside, and, as evidence of his power, they immediately do.

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Dahai is now enacting a 'truth procedure' as he stands up, follows the chief and reminds him that when he sold the coal mine off he promised yearly dividends for the workers. They both become framed in the shot antagonistically opposite each other and now at the same height, suggesting they are both now on a more equal footing than before. The chief explains that he only made that remark in private and he does not have time for this now. Dahai presses him further by telling him he must then explain that to the Discipline Commission. The chief seems unperturbed, moves forward threateningly and warns Dahai that he has picked the wrong time for a fight and will be a loser all his life. Dahai has a cigarette in his mouth and spits it out in disgust while the chief turns his back on him and walks away. Undeterred, Dahai follows him out and shouts, 'you won't discuss it?' to which the chief replies that he talks too much. Dahai is attempting to start a 'new conversation' against the 'powerlessness of speech' that the local state has imposed on the workers and villagers. The chief clearly knows what he has done is wrong after being confronted with the 'truth procedure' enacted by Dahai, but he chooses to reject 'sameness' and embrace difference and inequality through the corruption he has been complicit in.

In the next scene, Dahai is at a desk writing a letter to the Discipline Commission. He cannot reason with the chief verbally, so his recourse is now the written word to a higher authority than the local state. There is a picture of a tiger on a sheet bearing its teeth, eyes narrowed as though it is about to pounce on its prey. Within Chinese culture the tiger is the king of all the beasts and symbolises a powerful energy,[70] presaging what Dahai himself will soon be doing in his tigerish demand for justice.

He tries to send the letter but the woman behind the counter in the post office needs the full address. She is protected by vertical wooden bars and symbolically reinforcing how Dahai is not only on the opposite side of the fence to those in power but also imprisoned by them. Dahai becomes suspicious and questions whether the chief gives her 'kickbacks' or if she is Jiao's mistress but she thinks he is mad. He replies that she must be in league with them and shouts at her twice that there is 'no justice' and walks angrily away shouting 'no justice' for a third time as he comes out on to the street. The snow has mostly disappeared.

Dahai is making the demand for justice against the 'power and opinions' of the untruth of politics plied by the local state as exemplified in the actions of the village chief and Jiao. Dahai is driven by the 'hope' that 'people think' and are 'capable of truth' and he is attempting to '*seize* the egalitarian axiom in a genuine political sequence'. Through the 'event' of his own 'truth procedure', he has attempted the Maoist 'self-education' of the workers who either, as we saw in a previous scene, presume he will be as corrupt as them, or more positively, realise that he is exposing the reality of what has occurred. Just

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as the snow has now thawed so has the frozen acceptance of the 'impossible' melted from Dahai into the demand for the 'possible', for 'justice'.

A bus approaches taking locals to act as a welcoming party for boss Jiao who is arriving on his new private plane from a trip to Hong Kong. They have been told that they will all get a bag of flour for doing so, further emphasising the hardship for the workers and villagers compared to the wealth and decadence of Jiao and his associates. Dahai also feels this and asks if it is not enough to live on the earth. As he faces the camera, his face a mixture of disgust and anger, he moves to the back of the bus and sits behind an accountant named Liu and asks him if his accounts are up to date. Dahai is continuing his 'truth procedure' in the search for equality and justice. Liu looks uncomfortable and tries to turn away but Dahai is persistent and remembers when boss Jiao acquired the coal mine he promised 40 per cent of the profits would go to the village. Liu stares ahead trying to ignore him but Dahai continues, pokes him with his finger and asks him how much fourteen years' dividends amount to. Liu cannot ignore him anymore, reminding him that back in 2001 the village committee signed to sell the coal mine so they must keep their word. Dahai cites Jiao's wealth as evinced in the plane but Liu disingenuously responds that is because Jiao is a hard worker. Dahai accuses him and the chief of taking bribes. The conversation is conducted with Dahai behind the vertical yellow hand rail indicating that they are clearly on opposite sides: truth for Dahai and lies for Liu in the untruth of the 'empirical instances of politics' of the local state. Liu has had enough, arises and asks to be let off the bus. Dahai shouts that 'devils' like him are more 'evil' than the village chief and Jiao but Liu departs. A man has been sitting behind them listening to the conversation and now Dahai tries to engage him but he turns away.

Dahai is trying to become a new subject and confront those such as Liu who have sinned against their community, while also trying to show the villagers, who have suffered through this corruption, that they need to fight back. The militancy of his truth is the source of this but the local state's power over the workers and villagers militates against this through the 'monopoly of possibilities'. This is why Liu is more evil than the chief and Jiao because he has the possibility of bringing them to justice. He could join forces with Dahai in 'communism as a movement', an 'ethics of truths', by realising that their difference can be overcome through the realisation of their 'sameness' as sufferers of injustice and inequality. Liu's failure to do so, to remain in the realm of untruth, means that he is complicit in the exercise of the 'monopoly of possibilities' himself and thereby beyond redemption.

In the next scene, the chief is instructing the villagers on how to welcome Jiao. A group in traditional costume start to play music and the other villagers shout the greeting of 'welcome' as they were instructed. Jiao and his wife disembark the plane dressed in expensive clothes and wearing sunglasses as

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though they are movie stars. The chief commends Jiao for reaching a 'new level'. Jiao replies that they shall 'progress together', which causes the chief to laugh, and offers further evidence of their corruption. As Jiao then goes to greet the locals, Dahai jumps from the crowd and congratulates him. Jiao thanks him but tries to get away as Dahai requests that he funds his trip to Beijing to file accusations against him and the chief. Jiao agrees but Dahai also wants to discuss the village economy, causing Jiao to depart. Dahai angrily asks one of the locals what he is staring at and as they leave one of Jiao's henchman beats hits him on the head with a shovel. Dahai stands dazed as blood starts to come down his face and he falls to the floor. The henchman then hits him with the shovel like it is a golf club causing another henchman to jokingly ask him if he is playing golf. The irony is that golf in China is the preserve of the super elite as it is extremely expensive to play and this is a further example of the vast inequalities present in Chinese society.[71] Golf was also banned by Mao in 1949 for being a 'sport for millionaires',[72] emphasising a 'fidelity' from Dahai's predicament to a past that rejected these disparities in wealth.

There is then a cut to Dahai sitting in a hospital bed, leaning forward with a bandage circled round his head. Two men from Jiao's company appear with flowers and a large bundle of cash that they put on the bed in front of him as compensation. The shot is a close-up of one of the men with the other in the background and the side of Dahai's head to the left of the frame. A steel bed pole separates them to reinforce the recurring theme that they are on opposite sides. The camera stays focused on the man and nothing is heard from Dahai. The man presumes this is because he has not offered him enough money, so he puts another bundle on the bed while saying 'case closed' before they both leave. There is then a close-up of Dahai who has his left hand to his left ear and is grimacing in pain. He stares at the money on the bed, moves his hand from his ear and lets out a deep sigh. His sole aim to demand justice against the money-grabbing corruption of the chief and Jiao means that trying to buy him off with the same commodity shows that they operate in the realm of untruth whereas he is in the realm of 'truth'. Dahai is a beacon of light in the darkness of Chinese capitalism. The next shot indicates this as he is shown standing to the right of the frame behind a glass window, partly illuminated by the bed lamp to the right of him, and staring into the gloom of blackness ahead.

He leaves hospital, walks back to another town and goes to see his sister but she is out getting food, according to his nephew, who does not recognise him anyway, indicating that he has not been part of his life but is just a distant uncle. The nephew is concentrated on his homework at his desk. Dahai points to something and utters 'animal' and is told that the father is out hunting animals on a mountain. Dahai will soon be hunting the animals himself in

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the form of the chief, Jiao and his henchmen. As he turns to leave, his sister appears with the food. She is surprised to see him and he reveals that he has been in town for a few days.

The cut is then to his sister sitting on the edge of a bed and Dahai on a chair by the window facing her. She reminds him that a while ago she introduced him to a woman from Wangchun but he did not date her as arranged. She then berates him for never thinking about himself and for making allegations. However, he cannot go against his 'truth procedure' that the 'event' of the corruption and greed by the chief and Jiao has unleashed in him. He is doing this not just for him but on behalf of all the workers and villagers that have been and are being exploited.

His head is bowed, the palms of his hands on either leg. She explains that even if his accusations are successful he will grow old but he counters that he is already old and past caring. She suggests that he is being silly and that he is only middle-aged, meaning he still has a good life ahead of him. He is suddenly overcome with emotion and leans forward to grab her hands but she reminds him that her son is here and pulls away. He starts crying, admits it is his fault and she concurs, calling him as 'hopeless' now as he was at school, reinforcing the chief's jibe earlier that he is a 'loser'. She adds that there is more to life than getting rich and asks him if he wants to be like Jiao. He is getting more upset and affronted that she can compare the two of them and think it is jealousy rather than justice for the truth that is driving him. She asks who else could she compare him to given Jiao and he were classmates. She states, slightly aggressively, look what Jiao has made compared to them there, but she either does not realise or care that this was done through corruption, the injustice of which is what motivates Dahai.

She also reminds him that he has his own place back in Wujinshan but she and her husband do not even have that where they live. She suddenly lightens the mood by changing the subject, advises him to open a restaurant or shop, earn money and get married and 'stop caring' about what others do. The import of her accusations seem to be that Dahai does not realise how lucky he is compared to other people including herself, but she fails to see that as a 'militant of truth' it is other people and not just himself that he is concerned about. This is evinced when he then forewarns her to wait and see because he can be more evil than the village chief or Jiao.

Dahai is now the cinematic 'hero' who will create a 'moral mythology' in the 'battle between Good and Evil'. As we saw earlier, Badiou praised the directors Lynch and Kitano for taking what is 'worst in the contemporary world as their material' to create an 'artistic synthesis of great purity' through an almost unwatchable violence. Jia is doing the same here with the 'material' that is the corruption, inequality and exploitation symptomatic of

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modern-day China, that will be violently put asunder by the 'ethical' figure of Dahai' resulting in a 'pure, undreamt-of simplicity'. He is an 'orphan' of the 'idea of revolution' that has disappeared but will be aesthetically reignited through terrifying means.

To emphasise this, the next scene has him walking towards the camera but then there is a cut to his point of view. He is approaching the statue of Mao with his right arm raised again saluting Dahai for what he is about to do. As he walks back, he is being mocked by one of the chief's henchman who calls him 'Mr. Golf' in reference to the way he was beaten. A Chinese play is being performed in front of him and someone in the crowd shouts, 'Mr. Golf', when they see him. He looks forlorn, weary, and downtrodden and shuffles away. The actor on the stage in traditional dress is relating the story of the outlaw Lin Chong, a character in the novel *The Water Margin*,[73] who unleashed his sword and in anger killed two henchmen. Chong became an outlaw because there was no other recourse open to him to fight the injustice and tyranny of the government. Rebellion was his only option as it is for Dahai who is about to become a modern-day Lin Chong and kill a few henchmen himself due to the corruption of the local state.

Dahai is back in his room and takes the bandage off his head. He walks over to his wardrobe and stairs in the mirror. The shot shows him reflected with the mirror image of him much darker than the real him suggesting his heroic moment to get justice has arrived. He opens the wardrobe, pulls out a shotgun, loads it, turns suddenly and points it at the image of the tiger that is on the sheet on the chair from earlier and is now reflected in the mirror as he was. A tiger's growl is then surreally heard. Dahai the tiger is now on the loose with his powerful energy and ready to seek his prey.

We then see him walking towards the village with the tiger-print sheet wrapped around the shotgun with part of it flapping in the wind similar to a flag. He visits Liu the accountant and conceals the shotgun under the sheet. He sits down at Liu's table and orders him to confess how much the village chief has embezzled. Liu considers him ridiculous, so Dahai takes the shotgun from the sheet, points it at him and compels him to confess. Liu removes his glasses and dares Dahai to shoot him. Dahai pulls the shotgun back and slumps in his seat, his eyes blinking furiously and staring downwards in contemplation. This is a defining moment in Dahai's pursuit for truth and justice because he feels he has exhausted all political and legal means in his 'truth procedure' and in his attempts to wrestle the 'possible' from the impossible'. For him, violence is now the only aesthetic answer.

Liu arrogantly assumes he is too much of a coward to kill him and the provocation, no doubt exacerbated by previous insults with the chief calling him 'a loser' and his sister saying he is 'hopeless', proves too much as Dahai suddenly lifts the shotgun and shoots him in the head. Liu's wife comes running

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in so he shoots her also. He wraps the shotgun back up in the sheet and goes to try to find the chief. His henchman, who has already mocked Dahai, does so again by calling him 'Mr. Golf'. Dahai enquires where the chief is and the worker explains that he is at the temple, but Dahai then menacingly asks him what he called him. The worker repeats, 'Mr. Golf', mischievously asking him if that is not his foreign name. Dahai calls him a 'little bastard' and shoots him in the chest. The worker falls backwards to the floor, the camera shot lingers on the blood seeping out from his body similar to the symbolic blood of red apples at the start declaring that any possibility of peace would be over and war would begin.

The next shot is of Mao's statue again, the symbolic link to the communist past, with the exploited workers from the mine standing around it. Behind the statue on the right in the distance is Dahai walking towards it with the shotgun over his shoulder. As he passes, one of them questions if he is going hunting. His answer is that he is 'hunting animals', turns right and heads down the street. Dahai is rejecting the chief's and Jiao's 'animality' based on 'selfishness' in this 'inhuman' world where the 'possible' cannot be spoken. Violence now seems to be the only voice left in the 'battle between Good and Evil' because the individualism of Chinese capitalism negates a Maoist response based on collectivist struggle.

The chief comes out of the doorway to the temple and Dahai points the gun at him. Dahai commands him to move by motioning the shotgun to the left. The chief appeals to him to calm down, not to be impulsive and that they can talk and sort it out. Dahai again uses the shotgun to motion him to the right and shoots him also.

He is next seen running to where a man had beaten his horse earlier in the film and is doing the same now. Dahai shoots him and bellows, 'bastard!' He continues his walk and comes to Jiao's car which is open and gets in the back seat. Jiao gets in, unawares, until the shotgun appears behind his head and he hears the trigger cock. He asks if it is Dahai and realises it is once he turns his head round slightly. He reasons that they can fix this, 'just say', as the chief did earlier, but the time for talking is over and Dahai cannot and will not be bought off as he is a 'militant of truth'.

The shot stays with the shotgun pointed close to the back of Jiao's head. There is then a cut to the outside and the front window of the car is blown open and blood spurts out on to the floor. Dahai is left in the back seat, blood is spattered everywhere around him with the nozzle of the shotgun pointing upright and the end of the barrel in line with the top of his head. He is staring ahead and then smiles. There is then a cut to the horse which is now free. It plods on to the highway, passed two nuns and then three police cars pass it on the way to the mine.

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The nuns are a reference to the start of the film via the Madonna, the image of innocence and the battle between good and evil. The horse in Chinese culture has a number of meanings but one that is relevant here is *Tian ma* which translates as 'heavenly horse'.[74] Dahai has given the horse its freedom, and with the presence of the nuns, this points us to a divine justice that has been achieved, albeit by violent means. Dahai's 'fidelity' to a lost innocence and a Maoist communist past has been aesthetically reasserted in the corrupt Chinese capitalism of the present.

XIAOHUI

Xiaohui's predicament is emblematic of the horror Badiou expresses over the way workers are treated in China as the 'void'. We are first introduced to Xiaohui by a tracking shot in a shirt factory moving from one boy to the next on a production line as they quickly and robotically iron white shirts. The camera moves upwards to reveal Xiaohui wearing a T-shirt with the word 'Attractive' emblazoned across the top of it with an image of a large pair of trainers underneath, but there is nothing attractive about the mundane work he and his co-workers have to do.

There is then a shot to an earlier part of the production process as another boy is cutting the material ready to make the shirts. Xiaohui comes over to him and picks up his mobile phone and is told to keep his hands off it. Xiaohui is looking for Global Positioning System (GPS) on the phone as he wants to find his way to visit his friend in Dongguan. A phone with GPS is more expensive, so the other boy jokingly advises Xiaohui to get a BMW, as if they could ever afford anything like that. They talk about the best way to get there but the other boy carries on working as Xiaohui plays on his phone. The other boy turns to look at him and is not paying attention to his task. He lets out a scream and the camera pans down to show that the cutting machine has caught his hand and blood seeps onto the white of the cloth.

Xiaohui is then in the office of the foreman who is happily eating a noodle-based dish while everyone else is working. He informs Xiaohui that what has happened is Xiaohui's fault as small talk when working is against company rules. He asks Xiaohui if he agrees but does not get a reply. The foreman specifies that the company will cover the medical fees but Xiaohui must pay for the working time lost. Xiaohui is out of shot while all this is occurring, almost as though he is not there, a 'void' who does not count as the foreman dominates the frame. It will take two weeks for the other boy's hand to heal, so Xiaohui will lose two weeks' wages and work for the other boy. Finally, Xiaohui is shown in close-up, staring down, silent, saddened and realising the debt he will accrue, out of one 'void' and into another.

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Jia is answering Badiou's question of 'what is becoming of our factories and workers?' in this story, as 'a great' Chinese cinema exposes their plight that would otherwise be hidden from sight. Treated as a 'void' by the Chinese state, these workers have no 'political expression or relevance' despite their labour being the source of profit. As Badiou indicated earlier, there have never been so many workers in the world but those in power deny their existence even though their riches are totally dependent on them. Jia brings them in from the 'void' and onto our screens through the 'mass art' of cinema to show the 'undeniable truth' of what befalls Chinese workers today. The 'hope' is that, as viewers, we affirm our 'solidarity' with them and grasp the '*possibility of rising*' to a higher level of empathy and understanding.

In the next scene, Xiaohui is being driven on the back of a motorbike. He has a white shirt over his 'Attractive' T-shirt and a blue bag containing his meagre belongings. We discover that he is running away from the debt problem rather than just visiting his friend. He is now on the train and a close-up shows him with the mobile phone he has stolen from the injured worker, all portents of his eventual demise.

He is then walking in what first appears to be the idyll of the countryside only for the camera to then pan out the shot to show nondescript enormous white buildings crammed together ahead of him. These are both the factories and the living quarters of the workers that serve them. A monstrous collection of edifices juxtaposed with the relative beauty of the countryside and a further example of environmental destruction in the pursuit of profit. A cut takes us inside to a canteen with young men and women all in blue overalls, the workers are having their lunch. A long shot shows them all at the regimented tables as though they are in a prison. There is then a cut to the balcony outside and Xiaohui is talking to his friend who has brought him some food. The symbolism of the balcony is poignant because he will throw himself off from the one outside his accommodation when in despair later.

Xiaohui recounts what has happened to him and his friend observes that it means he is basically working for the other boy for nothing which of course he would be. Xiaohui confesses that he has in fact run away and that is the reason why. As he got paid recently he has some money. His friend advises him to come and work here as the factory is recruiting. Pay is 1,200 yuan plus meals and a bed. Xiaohui discovers that most people earn 2,500 yuan. So the firm takes all the meals and accommodation from that and training is one week with no pay, meaning that the employees work for nothing even before they start, exacerbating their 'void'-like existence.

Xiaohui does not look enthused and asks if there is anything else on offer. His friend suggests that he could be a waiter in Changping in a night club and that the 'johns' are from Hong Kong and Taiwan. They tip well but he would have to work nights. Xiaohui takes the job but becomes disillusioned after

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falling in love with one of the sex workers. He realises that given her line of work any relationship between them is impossible, so he heads back to see his friend to get a job at the factory.[75]

All the workers are in a room with their uniforms on and a disco is taking place, so even their leisure time occurs in or around the factory. Xiaohui informs his friend that he has nowhere to go and asks for a job. His friend cautions him to think carefully because he cannot just leave as it would have recriminations for him. A cut shows Xiaohui on the balcony smoking a cigarette and maybe contemplating his suicide for the first time.

There is then a cut to a shot of Xiaohui sitting on the lower level of a bunk bed. The room is tiny and has other bunk beds squeezed together with a small space to walk in and out between them showing the awful conditions in which the workers are meant to live or rather exist between shifts. The camera captures Xiaohui on the left of the shot from behind with the door onto the balcony that he will throw himself off from in the centre, a dominating image of doom. He is staring straight at it as though he is again contemplating suicide.

Three workers come in from their work and do not even say hello. They look exhausted and are getting ready for a sleep before their next shift. Xiaohui is now in his 'Attractive' T-shirt again so he is back to where he started in a situation where the word 'attractive' is not only incongruous but also an indictment of the situation he is in. He takes it off and puts his blue uniform shirt on and then attaches his identity badge to the pocket. He stares ahead vacantly and looks completely broken. What is left of his identity is subsumed and negated under the auspices of corporate Chinese capitalism that treats its workers as a 'void'.

A cut takes us outside to show a wide-angled long shot of where the workers live. Across each balcony are clothes hanging out to dry. A sign on the wall pronounces, 'Oasis of Prosperity', which is beyond irony given their squalid conditions and alienating work. Xiaohui comes into the shot with his back to camera as it is the building on the other side that we have been looking at from his point of view, but it must be the same on his side also. This foreshadows his jumping off the balcony later.

The next scene cuts to the factory, and a tracking shot shows lines of people at their work with the incessant audible hum of the machinery as they carry out their tasks, resulting in an eventual close-up of Xiaohui. His supervisor comes to welcome him to the 'Fortune 500 Company' and advises him to work hard after patting him on the shoulder as though he is his friend rather than his superior. As an incentive, he informs Xiaohui that top-class employees win trips to Taiwan and a visit to the headquarters. He wishes Xiaohui good luck and walks away. This scene is shot with a close-up on the supervisor dominating the frame with Xiaohui barely visible on the left, a 'void' that does not count.

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For Xiaohui and for the rest of the workers there will be no fortune made here for them; rather, they will be making a fortune for the company on the backs of their labour. The idea that a trip to Taiwan to see a factory, no doubt similar to theirs, as some kind of reward when all it would do is act as a further testament to the exploitative situation they find themselves in is even more risible.

It is now night-time, Xiaohui is in town and has just been to a cash machine. His phone rings and it is his mother asking for money even though he had only recently sent her some. He informs her that he has changed jobs and does not get paid until the end of the month and that he is broke. So with the week of unpaid training that means he will have given five weeks of free labour to the firm in advance, a further indictment of how the workers do not count.

His mother accuses him of lying but he asks her why would he and he has just been to the bank and he has no cash in his account. She then admonishes him for wasting money. He tries to reason with her that he cannot live on nothing and half-jokingly, but more in desperation that she might understand his plight, explains that he is not a bank robber. She persists so he holds the phone away from his ear but starts to cry due to the pressure bearing down from him from all sides and deepening his alienation.

In the next scene Xiaohui is asleep at a table. He is awoken and rebuked for trying to skive off work but it is related not to this factory but the original one where the shirts were made. The worker who injured his hand has caught up with Xiaohui and he has his two associates bring them to him. He has a metal bar and lifts it ready to hit Xiaohui with anger and hatred in his face, but then suddenly he stops, drops the bar to the floor and departs. Left alone, Xiaohui picks up the bar and the camera follows him from behind as he walks on the ground between the tall accommodation blocks. He looks up at them and goes towards the one where he is housed. Iron bars are symbolic of being in prison and there is no need for the injured worker to hit him with it as Xiaohui is already trapped behind the bars of the factory and the awful life that accompanies it.

There is a cut to him sitting back on his bunk bed. The shot is from behind and opposite him, so the irons from the bed look like prison bars, which again are emblematic of the prison he is in and the bar he was nearly beaten with. He is in semi-darkness and vacantly staring ahead. He stands up, discards the iron bar on the top bunk and walks out the door at a pace. He climbs on the balcony and falls face-first to the ground. One of the other workers is shown from behind staring downwards as though transfixed. The words ‘Oasis of Prosperity’ on the property opposite are an ironic reminder of the reality of factory work in modern-day China where workers are treated as a ‘void’.

Xiaohui’s story and fate confirms Badiou’s concern with the way Chinese workers are treated in modern-day China. The extreme ending for Xiaohui

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is also not simply an aesthetic device but an actuality in China. It is representative of the notorious cases of eighteen suicides that occurred in the Taiwanese-owned Foxconn factories that manufactured iPhones for the Apple Corporation, mentioned earlier by Badiou for its heinous working practices.[76] Although attention to these issues has tended to fade, there is still evidence that the health and well-being of workers is being subordinated to intense demands for productivity increases under strict conditions of work.[77] While the 'suicides can be seen as an extreme form of labour protest to expose an inhumane workplace', workers are using other methods to resist as Badiou desires them to and offer 'evental sites' and the possibility of a 'new political subjectivity' in terms of 'work slowdown, strikes, riots, massive suicide threats and lawsuits'.[78] Moreover, this has been facilitated organisationally by 'text messaging and online group discussion services' allowing for 'faster organising and more face-to-face meetings in factory dormitories and other private spaces'.[79] Xiaohui had no recourse to any resistance in the film but the horror of his predicament can only instil in any compassionate viewer a 'human presence' against the 'powerful exteriority'' of Chinese capitalism. Badiou's 'hope' for a better world where workplaces can be organised in line with the Maoist ideal of 'real communal life-centres' offering 'education and healthcare systems' is the antidote, albeit too late for Xiaohui.

CONCLUSION

Badiou's reverence for cinema as an educator for the masses and as a vehicle to engage with worlds we might otherwise not know about in a process of 'sharing', in particular the current predicament of the Chinese working class, is exemplified in Jia's *A Touch of Sin*. Relating Badiou's political theory to the film has exposed a number of 'universal' moments that reveal a 'human presence' amidst the inhumanity of Chinese capitalism. Dahai as a 'militant of truth' conducting a 'truth procedure' in pursuit of the possible against the 'impossible' exposes inequality in his demand for justice with his 'fidelity' to a Maoist communist past. Badiou's disdain for the 'traditional political channels' is borne out by Dahai's impotence when attempting to use them to stop the corruption of the village chief and Jiao. Endorsing Badiou's notion of 'communism as a movement', he has readied himself for this 'event' and seeks other workers to join him, but ultimately they are under the spell of the 'monopoly of possibilities' controlled by the local state. In film, the 'heroic' response to this is a violent confrontation with good overcoming evil and a victory of sorts with the achievement of a 'purity' bathed in the blood of the corrupt.

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Xiaohui is representative of Badiou's deep concerns with the treatment of Chinese workers in the hidden world of China's factories today where workers are treated as a 'void', those who do not count. Appalling living and working conditions to supply the world with commodities are exposed in the film as an indictment of Chinese capitalism as exemplified in Xiaohui's tortured and short life. His 'defeat' in death, a victim of an uncaring system, can, though, offer us an aesthetic representation of 'hope' that things do not need to be this way, and those in power can be exposed for the injustice and inequalities they perpetuate. Badiou, as we have seen, is enough of a realist to admit how difficult it is to achieve a more just world given the power of those enriching themselves at the expense of the many. His 'hope' is that we should not 'despair' and 'communism as a movement' will develop from 'evental' moments leading to a world where private property is abolished, equality ensured and the abusers of power brought to account. Jia's *A Touch of Sin* shows a 'fidelity' to this aim in its own 'evental' moments as it takes a 'stand' and gives 'expression to' the condition of the Chinese working class today.

NOTES

1 Alain Badiou, *Cinema* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).
2 Ibid., p. 7.
3 Ibid., p. 1.
4 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
5 Ibid., p. 6.
6 Ibid., p. 7.
7 Ibid., p. 8.
8 Quoted in Stuart Jeffries, 'Alain Badiou: A Life in Writing', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2012. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/may/18/alain-badiou-life-in-writing. Accessed 8 November 2013.
9 See, for example, Alex Ling, *Badiou and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
10 The title of the film seems to allude to *Orson Welles' A Touch of Evil* (1958). Peter Bradshaw refers to it as 'Wellesean', while not mentioning an actual film but the title and content suggests that connection. Peter Bradshaw, 'A Touch of Sin Review – "A Shotgun Blast at the Heart of Modern China"', *The Guardian*, 15 May 2014. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/15/a-touch-of-sin-review-jia-zhang-ke-china. Accessed 14 July 2017. The opening sequence with the bomb explosion, Quinlan as the corrupt Sherriff and the general issues of law and justice that permeate the film show similarities with *A Touch of Sin*.
11 Nikki J. Y. Lee and Julian Stringer, 'Ports of Entry. Mapping Chinese Cinema's Multiple Trajectories at International Film Festivals' in Yingjin Zhang (ed.) *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 243.

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12 Qi Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 184.

13 Yingjin Zhang, 'Chinese Postsocialist Cinema 1979–2010' in Zhang *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, p. 59.

14 Ibid., p. 73.

15 Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema*, p. 184.

16 Jerome Silbergeld, 'Cinema and the Visual Arts of China' in Zhang *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, p. 406.

17 Peter Bradshaw, 'Cannes Film Festival 2013: *A Touch of Sin* – First Look Review', *The Guardian*, 17 May 2013. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/17/cannes-touch-of-sin-review?INTCMP=SRCH. Accessed 8 November 2013.

18 J. T. Quigley, 'No China Release for *A Touch of Sin*, Director Banned from Award Ceremony', *The Diplomat*, 25 November, 2013. Available at: http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/no-china-release-for-a-touch-of-sin-director-banned-from-award-ceremony/. Accessed 11 March 2017.

19 Badiou, *Cinema*, p. 11.

20 Ibid., p. 17.

21 Ibid., pp. 17–18.

22 Ibid., p. 18 and Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. ix.

23 Badiou, *Cinema*, p. 20.

24 Ibid., p. 229.

25 Ibid., p. 230.

26 Ibid., p. 230.

27 Ibid., pp. 234–35.

28 Ibid., p. 235.

29 Ibid., p. 237.

30 Ibid., p. 239.

31 Ibid., p. 231.

32 Ibid., pp. 239–40.

33 Ibid., p. 230.

34 Ibid., pp. 231–32.

35 Ibid., p. 232.

36 Alain Badiou and Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 9.

37 Ibid., p. 10.

38 Ibid., p. 11.

39 Ibid., p. 12.

40 Ibid., p. 13.

41 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

42 Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 173 and 195.

43 Ibid., p. 173.

44 Ibid., p. 174.

45 Ibid., p. 175.

46 Ibid., p. 176.

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47 Alain Badiou and Peter Engelmann, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), pp. 49–50.

48 Alain Badiou and Marcel Gauchet, *What Is to Be Done? A Dialogue on Communism, Capitalism, and the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p. 116.

49 Ibid., p. 59.

50 Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 100; cf. Ling, *Badiou on Cinema*, p. 111.

51 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 98. Cf. Oliver Harrison, *Revolutionary Subjectivity in Post-Marxist Thought: Laclau, Negri, Badiou* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 108–9.

52 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 25.

53 Ibid., p. 28.

54 Ibid., p. 27.

55 Ibid., p. 28.

56 Ibid., p. 46.

57 Ibid., pp. 44–45.

58 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 97.

59 Ibid., p. 98.

60 Ibid., p. 99.

61 Badiou and Gauchet, *What Is to Be Done?* p. 57.

62 Ibid., pp. 119 and 116.

63 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 55.

64 Frank Ruda, 'Factory/Worker' in Steven Corcoran (ed.) *The Badiou Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 123.

65 Badiou and Gauchet, *What Is to Be Done?* p. 57.

66 Ibid., p. 58. For a detailed discussion of Badiou's notion of subjectivity see Harrison, *Revolutionary Subjectivity*, chapter 4.

67 Badiou and Gauchet, *What Is to Be Done?* p. 113.

68 Badiou, *Cinema*, p. 110.

69 Jacqueline M. Newman, 'Chinese Food Symbolism: Fruits (Part I)', *Flavour and Fortune*, 3 1, Spring, 1996. Available at: http://www.flavorandfortune.com/dataaccess/article.php?ID=27. Accessed 31 March 2017.

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71 Scott Cendrowski, 'What It's Like Playing Golf in China', *Fortune*, 25 October 2016. Available at: http://fortune.com/2016/10/25/golf-china-elite/. Accessed 31 March 2017.

72 Dan Washburn, *The Forbidden Game: Golf and the Chinese Dream* (London: Oneworld, 2014), pp. 4–5, although no primary or secondary source for Mao is cited.

73 Shih Naian, *The Water Margin: The Outlaws of the Marsh* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2010).

74 Qizhi Zhang, *An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (London: Springer, 2015), p. 104.

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75 I intend to explore this aspect of the film separately in a future article provisionally titled ‘Badiou and the Event of Love in Jia Zhangke’s *A Touch of Sin*’.

76 Jenny Chan, Ngai Pun and Mark Selden, ‘Dying for an iPhone: The lives of Chinese Workers’. Available at: https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/8826-Dying-for-an-iPhone-the-lives-of-Chinese-workers. Accessed 14 April 2017.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

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Chapter 7

Jacques Rancière: Gavin Hood's *Rendition*

Jacques Rancière proposes a 'radically enabling and egalitarian call to intellectual, political and aesthetic exploration'.[1] In relation to political theory and film this centres on his core ideas of the police and politics, consensus and dissensus and the emancipated spectator. For Rancière, the police encompass all those who are involved in formal politics and ensure the consensus of the status quo is maintained against real politics that arises from dissensus and a challenge to the system. Film offers us an exploration of these conflicts and, as emancipated spectators who are open to aesthetic experience, allows us to see the world differently. Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007) offers an illuminating way to explore Rancière's ideas as it was the first mainstream Hollywood film about the CIA's practice of extraordinary rendition that enabled the United States to kidnap terrorist suspects and fly them to countries to be interrogated and tortured.[2] As part of the war on terror in a post-9/11 world, the film focuses on a thirty-four-year-old Egyptian chemical engineer, Anwar El-Ibrahimi, who has lived in the United States since he was fourteen years old. On a flight back from a conference in South Africa to his hometown of Chicago, he is kidnapped and hooded as he gets off the flight. After being interrogated by CIA officials about phone calls that he has meant to have received from a known terrorist, Rashid, he is flown to an unnamed North African country, where he is both questioned and tortured by the police chief, Abasi Fawal. The order to do this has come from the CIA's anti-terrorist boss Corrine Whitman, and her agent, Douglas Freeman, oversees the investigation abroad, but is new and inexperienced in his role. Isabella, Anwar's pregnant American wife, endeavours to find out what has happened to her husband by enlisting a former college boyfriend, Alan Smith, who works for a liberal politician, Senator Hawkins. Whitman denies all knowledge of the case despite ordering Anwar's rendition, and the film follows the fortunes of

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all these characters exposing the murky world of US politics in the war on terror.[3] I will now outline Rancière's discussion of politics and film and then apply his key ideas to *Rendition*.

RANCIÈRE

Rancière argues that politics has to be understood in relation to its antithesis which is the police.[4] The police, whom he refers to as a 'symbolic constitution of the social', divide up what is 'sensible' through an implicit law that defines how people can participate in a community and how they perceive it.[5] The police do so by 'counting', a process of allotting people into roles and functions that are determined by population, race, wealth, employment and so on.[6] The police exist in formal politics, parliaments and its associated political parties, the legal system and the bureaucracy. People in their roles and occupations, in their 'modes of doing', relate to these institutions in their 'modes of being'.[7] For Rancière, the 'essence of politics consists in disturbing this arrangement' by 'counting' the 'part of those without part', the 'in addition', that makes up the whole of the community and not just those identified in their various roles and functions by the police. Politics deviates from the status quo creating political subjects that '(ac)count for the unaccounted'.[8] When political disputes emerge, then politics intervenes in 'the visible and the sayable' through its separation from the police and offers two possibilities: its continual disappearance because it is denied or its claim on the 'political logic as its own'.[9] Politics does this through 'dissensus' which is 'a gap in the sensible' rather than a 'confrontation between interests or opinions'.[10] A demonstration is political, for example, because it is a 'clash between two partitions of the sensible', so the 'political subject' is an 'operator' of a particular 'subjectivation and litigation through which politics comes into existence'.[11] Politics is 'always of the moment', 'its subjects are always precarious' and it can become manifest anywhere in a variety of contexts.[12] The essence of politics 'resides in the modes of dissensual subjectivation that reveal a society in its difference to itself'.[13] The basis of this is a form of equality that 'gnaws away at any natural order' because a political subject comprehends that the police command and make others obey.[14] Knowing that puts the political subject as equal with the person ordering them because 'everyone is of equal intelligence'.[15] An 'equality of intelligence' thereby undercuts 'any justification for the hierarchical divisions of the police order'.[16]

Rancière contrasts this with 'consensus' which is not, as generally presumed, about 'peaceful discussion and reasonable agreement', but for him is the end of politics, its reduction to the police and a 'return to the normal state of things – the non-existence of politics'.[17] The 'practices of the state'

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consist in suppressing politics with its slogan that commands: 'Move along! There's nothing to see here!' as it breaks up demonstrations and resistance that questions or challenges its rule.[18] Consensus involves resolving conflicts by 'learned expertise and the negotiated adjustment of interests' to eradicate dissensus and fill any 'gaps between appearance and reality, law and fact'.[19] Consensus gives rights on this basis but dissensus displays the gap between their formal existence and their use when required, meaning that they 'become the rights of those who have no rights' because they 'cannot enact them': 'humanitarian rights'.[20] Rancière does not interpret these rights as completely empty because their existence offers the possibility for others, such as humanitarian organisations, to use them to help those who suffer 'inhuman repression'.[21] Negatively, he recognises that they can also be appropriated by those, like the US government, in their war on terror against the 'Axis of Evil', for their own domination of the world in the name of 'humanitarian interference'.[22] Rancière notes how the term 'infinite justice' was applied to this strategy and immediately rejected by the US government as being inappropriate. He, though, considers it apt because it encapsulates their contempt for International Law that forbids interference in the domestic concerns of other states. Moreover, it abolishes any distinctions 'between law and fact, legal punishment and private retaliation, justice/policing and war' into a 'stark ethical conflict between Good and Evil'. For Rancière, this ushers in a 'new reign of ethics' that dissolves 'legal distinctions and political intervals of dissensus', resulting in the 'consensual policy and humanitarian police' that erases politics.[23] I will now link Rancière's politics with his understanding of film.

Rancière declares his relation to film as a 'politics of the amateur', meaning that he is not a specialist in film theory or a professional cinema critic but someone who loves the cinema.[24] The amateur watches films while perceiving and being affected by their stories and images and then debating them.[25] Cinema is an aesthetic art that blurs the boundaries between the so-called elitist art and popular entertainment and the destructive attempt to classify artistic and non-artistic pleasures, leading to a 'multiplicity of modes of emotion and remembrance'.[26] The 'politics of the amateur', who is not a dilettante, embraces this process rigorously from a singular interpretation of films in a 'distribution of the sensible' to create a 'common world'.[27] This is why Rancière emphasises a 'cinematic fable' where there are no hierarchies and all interpretative mechanisms inform each other when considering the 'multiple character of cinema'.[28] The result is a 'fable that tells the truth of cinema' by extracting it 'from the stories narrated on the screen'.[29]

For Rancière, film does this in terms of its 'double power' residing in the 'conscious eye of the director and the unconscious eye of the camera'[30] as it 'records the infinity of movements' to create an intense drama on the screen.[31]

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Cinema is eclectic in playing with a myriad of different art forms and techniques that create a 'sensorium'[32] towards which the 'radical innocence of the art of the moving image' converges[33] into, what he calls *The Emancipated Spectator*.[34] Rancière advocates that directors, like all artists, should encourage their spectators not to receive their knowledge passively but to 'venture into the forest of things and signs' and evaluate what they have seen.[35] The emancipatory aspect of spectators themselves, and we are all spectators, resides in their 'power' to 'translate' what they have observed through an 'interplay of associations and dissociations' as we 'recognise the knowledge at work' in all of us.[36]

'Aesthetic experience has a political effect' by offering a 'multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible', rather than telling us what should be done.[37] Rancière refers to this as political because 'an emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker',[38] as the 'aesthetic rupture' experienced leads to a 'free gaze', a new way of seeing the world.[39] Direct political action does not necessarily emerge from this, rather there is a movement from one sensible world to another.[40] New capacities and incapacities and new forms of tolerance and intolerance emerge along with changes in what we sense, see, think and feel.

For Rancière, the impact on our consciousness when we experience an aesthetic moment is diffused, a rupturing that makes us question and resolve to change the world. So film-makers politically utilise the sensations of speech and vision from our lives and return them to us via the cinematic experience like love letters.[41] Nonetheless, cinema is not the equivalent of these inspirations for a film but the place where they are explored.[42] It is 'the surface on which an artist tries to cipher in new figures the experience of people relegated to the margins of economic circulation and social trajectories', and doing so can 'open up new passages towards new forms of political subjectivation'.

With the link between Rancière's politics and his understanding of film made, I will now apply this framework of the 'politics of the amateur' to analyse *Rendition*.

ISABELLA AND ALAN: CONSENSUS AND DISSENSUS

Isabella's initiation into politics against the consensual power of the police and what is 'sensible' emerges from the rupture of Anwar's rendition. She is a wealthy, happily married mother and has the trappings of middle-class American life, as depicted at the start of the film when playing soccer with her son, Jeremy, in the front garden of their big house. She is not completely devoid of an awareness of the possibility of dissensus because she has married Anwar,

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who is an Egyptian Muslim, against the wishes of her parents. They would clearly have preferred her to marry someone more suitable and part of their white, Christian, middle-class background such as Alan, who she rejected in favour of Anwar. When she elicits Alan's help, they initially have to negotiate this awkward truth. She was going to invite him to the wedding but he admits he would have declined. He enquires what her father said about her marrying Anwar and she states, 'I'm sure you can imagine', reinforcing her father's racism. The police 'count' people in their various roles and her father also 'counts' Anwar only by his race. Anwar is a 'part of those without part' and so offers a rupture to the consensus on the path to dissensus having married their white daughter. With Alan, who is also part of the police, his disapproval seems more to do with her choosing Anwar over him, but the implicit racism against her choice of a non-white suitor is still a possibility.

The first shot of Isabella when she is waiting on a sofa outside Alan's office is from some distance. She is barely distinguishable and it takes two cuts to clearly see it is her. As Alan approaches, he is with a colleague talking about getting another senator to approve a bill he and Senator Hawkins are attempting to get passed. The symbolic distance between Isabella and the world of the police is getting closer. It is indicative of her privileged background that she can gain access to the consensus and the 'normal state of things'. However, she will soon be told to 'move along' when she attempts to rupture it by her dissensual demand to know Anwar's whereabouts.

After some investigations, Alan discovers that Whitman has the power to endorse moving someone covertly. When he phones her office and mentions Anwar's name, he is rebuffed and told to submit his enquiry in writing. The line goes dead, as dead as the deadly silence in the consensus for the war on terror once it is dissensually challenged. Alan is part of the police and the consensus but sparked by his compassion for Isabella, he is beginning to intervene in what is 'visible' and 'sayable' and engage with the politics of 'dissensus'. He operates between the two perspectives as he begins to explain extraordinary rendition to Isabella, how it started under Clinton and, although it should be used in exceptional circumstances, 9/11 gave it a whole new life. Isabella denies that Anwar could be a terrorist. Alan thinks there must be some reason he has been abducted and questions why Anwar has not applied for American citizenship. Alan is now affirming the consensus of rendition by the police that goes against the liberal democratic assumption of someone being innocent until proved guilty. Isabella invokes the values of consensus in terms of liberal justice by citing Anwar's Green Card and his payment of taxes as evidence of his legitimacy and appeals to Alan's previous trust in his character. The scene exposes the clash between the consensus on liberal justice, which is now a form of dissensus, and the new consensus on the war on terror brilliantly by exposing American 'society in its difference to itself'.

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Appeals to the old consensus are now treated as dissensus as Alan pursues the new consensus line by interrogating her about Anwar's background and any religious or extremist connections. Isabella is affronted and repeats a mantra throughout that Alan 'knew him' and he has not changed. Alan maintains that he still had to ask and reinforces the consensus of rendition by doing so, even though he will now move into dissensus as he attempts to find the truth.

The whole scene is conducted in a bathing colour of ice blue reflecting the coldness of the conversation and the problems that the consensus for the war on terror from the police has created for making people doubt each other. Isabella is appealing to liberal justice in terms of Anwar being a model citizen. She will soon discover that counts for little under the consensus of rendition implemented by the police as part of the 'infinite justice' for the war on terror. Such appeals are instead treated as dissensus and roundly denied. As they walk, government buildings are in the background, representations of US democracy that are mired in the transgression of human rights in the dubious use of rendition and the torture that accompanies it. To reinforce this, there is then a cut to Anwar, bloodied and screaming in pain and anguish, imprisoned in the semi-darkness of his cell.

The consensus for the war on terror then infects Isabella when she is talking to Nuru, Anwar's mother, on the phone. She initially hesitates but wonders if there is anything unbeknown about Anwar. The paranoia and doubt precipitated by the war on terror forces even her to make sure Anwar is exemplary, as Alan has earlier. She bridled then, so it is even more of a condemnation of the distrustful atmosphere created by the consensus that she has partially succumbed to this herself.

She interrogates Anwar's mother just as she has been interrogated by Alan and his mother is mystified. Isabella mentions Egypt when he was younger and whether he knew anyone there. The mother is as astonished at what Isabella is implying as Isabella was with Alan. Isabella closes her eyes in shame for thinking that way as an agent of the consensus and apologises. She now has to rely on Alan.

Although firmly embedded in the police and the consensus, Alan's pursuit of the truth is moving him towards dissensus and a rupture of what is 'sayable' by attempting to expose the reality of rendition and the contempt for the law through 'infinite justice'. This becomes more evident when he approaches Whitman at a black tie event he attends with Senator Hawkins. Alan has discovered that the FBI and Interpol have nothing on Anwar; he has travelled abroad extensively and has posed no problems for immigration. Moreover, he recognises that Anwar has disappeared without any form of judicial review and informs Hawkins he wants to go public about it. As they are both framed in the centre of this shot, beyond is a sign explaining that the event is for the orphans of the Rwandan genocide. The juxtaposition between

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something that can be seen as positively humanitarian with the reality of rendition shows the incongruity of the US' approach to terrorism enacted negatively by the 'humanitarian police'. Alan assures Hawkins that when the truth emanates he will be on the right side of it, but a close-up on Hawkins indicates he is unconvinced and will remain within the consensus.

When Alan approaches Whitman, she is shown in a long shot from where he is, so he has a prolonged walk to get to her, indicating her untouchability and power. He confronts her about Anwar's rendition and threatens to go to the press when she denies knowing anything about him. Alan has now moved into dissensus and reiterates Isabella's points about Anwar's good character, adding that has been detained without any charges and extradited. He is confronting the consensus for the war on terror through 'infinite justice' epitomised in Whitman. He demands that Anwar should be brought back to the United States and tried if guilty or released if not. Alan is still part of the police and consensus but is moving into a politics of dissensus by revealing society to be in difference to itself over the issue of rendition. He is making a 'gap in the sensible' and Whitman must counter this to reaffirm the consensus within the police that rendition is acceptable to ensure 'infinite justice'.

She does this by patronisingly calling him 'honey' and uses a utilitarian justification of the ends justifying the means. She declares that the war on terror is a 'nasty business', but there are over 7,000 people still alive in London tonight because the United States got information that way. He can sleep at night for being proud to save one man while 7,000 people die but she has grandchildren in London so she is glad she is doing this job and he is not. He ripostes: 'Unless your grandkid is El Anwar El-Ibrahimi'. The discussion illustrates Rancière's condemnation of the appeals to 'infinite justice' and the appropriation of humanitarian principles in a 'stark ethical conflict between Good and Evil', as enunciated by Whitman. When she advises Alan to consult the 9/11 commission report to justify rendition, he appeals to the American Constitution to justify his dissensual response. A close-up of Alan's face shows him with a wry smile, convinced he has done a good job but it is the task of the police to reassert the consensus and force him to 'move along' as they will soon do.

The conflict between the appeals to consensus and dissensus is further encapsulated in Alan's dialogue with Senator Hawkins in his office. Hawkins presents Alan with the evidence from Whitman that Anwar received calls from Rashid but Alan treats the evidence as circumspect. The grubby nature of the consensus of American politics emerges as Hawkins tries to convince Alan that defending Anwar is not advisable as they have got to get a bill passed and this will hinder that. He angrily shouts at Alan that the business of formal politics is always about compromise and if he does not understand that then he should join Amnesty International. The basic liberal values that are

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meant to govern American politics as the universal rights of the individual, expressed in a humanitarian organisation, are here rendered redundant on the altar of political expediency. Alan is still promoting a dissensual approach by explaining that he knew Anwar and that he was a 'solid guy', but Hawkins rejects that defence and recalls that they said that about Mohammad Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers who crashed a plane into the North tower of the World Trade Centre in 2001. He warns Alan that if he keeps pushing this issue national security will be invoked and they will be declared 'bin-laden lovers'. The notion of any form of liberal justice has now been replaced by 'infinite justice' in the consensus for the war on terror.

Alan is confronted by the dilemma posed by the consensus and the police, of which he is still a part, despite his dissensual behaviour. Moving into a politics of dissensus has given him a 'political subjectivation' that reveals society in difference to itself. He knows that the police command and make people obey, but the glimmer of hope raised here is that he will resist that power and do what is right. However, his complicity in his 'mode of doing' will put his 'mode of being' to the test.

When Isabella visits Alan's office to see how he has been progressing, the shot shows him at his desk, looking out of his partition window to see Isabella walking towards him. They sit opposite each other across a table at the other end of the office to make it less formal but the initial partition of the first shot indicates that he is now on the side of the consensus. His abrupt advice is that she needs a lawyer and recommends one by placing a business card on the table. He relates that Anwar has links with a terrorist group called El-Hazim but the evidence is classified and he is now unable to help. The irony that she should consult a lawyer makes a mockery of Alan's discussion with Hawkins, given appeals to justice no longer apply with the consensus for the war on terror. Despite her pleading with him not to be one of those people who just turns the other way, he does. He flirted with the dissensus on the side of justice but because he wants to preserve his livelihood and his position within the police, he chooses to embrace the consensus and his 'mode of being' and 'doing'. Alan's plight exposes how the cost of challenging the consensus ultimately closes off any form of dissensus unless we are prepared to challenge the might of the police state. Later, he shreds the material on Anwar that Isabella gave him and joins a party for passing the bill. The formal politics of consensus has defeated the politics of dissensus and a 'return to the normal state of things' is reaffirmed. Alan's pursuit of the truth and justice was an intervention into what was 'sayable' but foundered on his own role in the police in maintaining the consensus through denial. It is now left to Isabella to confront the apex of the police in the form of Whitman.

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Isabella is waiting outside Alan's office. The long shot that was used when Alan first met Whitman is repeated here, and the distance again suggests her invincibility and power against those deemed beneath her. Hawkins passes Isabella on his way to Whitman, so Isabella follows him and confronts Whitman and states her name. Whitman thinks she has not heard properly and Isabella repeats that her husband is Anwar, demanding to know where he is. Whitman controls herself but is surprised and looks disdainful, not only by the mention of Anwar's name but also because Isabella is a white, Christian American married to an Egyptian Muslim. Moreover, Whitman also looks downwards towards Isabella's pregnant stomach and perhaps is reinforcing the racist reaction of Isabella's father against those who only 'count' in a negative manner to the sanctity of the consensus.

Isabella pleads with Whitman to let her talk to Anwar but she is arrogantly unforthcoming, epitomising the 'move along' edict of the police which is made overt as two policemen escort Isabella out. She is framed in close-up in the centre of the shot in between the burly bodies of the two policemen. Their badges of authority on their arms making a mockery of the injustice she and Anwar are suffering from the 'infinite justice' imposed by the war on terror. She screams again to Whitman to at least confirm he is OK but she walks off. Isabella screams at the policemen to take their hands off her, which they do and she shuffles away distraught. Isabella's dissensus has been conquered by the consensus that controls what is and what is not 'sayable' as portrayed by Whitman and the physicality of the police that orders her to 'move along'. Isabella has discovered that the rights she has been appealing to are the 'rights of those who have no rights' as they are there but cannot be enacted due to the power of 'infinite justice'.

After confronting Whitman, Isabella walks past a window at the airport and is framed with the White House beyond her. She suddenly bends over indicating she might have a problem with the baby. The White House is meant to symbolise democracy but the film is again showing the US descent into totalitarian tendencies and the affects that can have on the lives of ordinary people. We are left to ponder at this point whether the stress has brought on a miscarriage, but we do not find out the answer until the end of the film, when Isabella and Anwar's house is shown with Jeremy playing football outside. Anwar arrives in a taxi, the son drops the ball, runs to him and is picked up and hugged. Momentarily, there is no sign of Isabella but she then comes out with the new baby showing that she did not miscarry because of the miscarriage of justice, and the family are at one again. How this occurred means we need to turn to another member of the police that is confronted with the consensus/dissensus dichotomy and that is the CIA agent Freeman as a spectator of Abasi's torture of Anwar.

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FREEMAN THE EMANCIPATED SPECTATOR

As a CIA agent, Freeman is clearly embedded in both the police and its upholding of the consensus, but in his role as a spectator of torture he moves into the realm of dissensus. He emancipates not only himself but also Anwar, justifying his name of Freeman as in 'free man'. He becomes an emancipated spectator from within the internal dynamics of the film, and we as viewers have that possibility also via his observations and evaluations of the use of torture. Freeman will move from the periphery of the consensus to its violent heart. This journey begins when he is driven to meet government officials and is briefing a new CIA operative, Dixon. Freeman describes himself as the 'pen-pusher' and Dixon as the 'knuckle-dragger' who will be the main contact for Abasi. Freeman is thrust deeper into the world of the police as Dixon is killed in a bomb blast when they reach the main square. Freeman has Dixon's blood all over him, symbolising that he has blood on his hands as part of the police. This will worsen as he takes on Dixon's role and moves from a police 'pen-pusher' to police 'knuckle-dragger', but what he experiences will also move him from the consensus to the dissensus.

Freeman is then shown in the hospital surrounded by the injured as dead bodies pass him on trolleys. A doctor appears informing him that Dixon is dead. Freeman is now framed in the middle of the shot indicating that he will now be centre stage in the consensus in the war on terror. He phones his CIA boss, Lee Mayer, informing him of Dixon's death. Mayer is shown from behind walking along a dimly lit corridor in a basement symptomatic of the dark labyrinths of power. This is the secret world of the consensus that is the CIA as the police in the war on terror. When the shot returns to Freeman, he is now on the right side of the frame indicating his centre status as a police 'knuckle-dragger' might not last, but for now he accepts it. Mayer is still walking and his face is briefly shown but then he goes into darkness, exposing the murky world the police inhabit as the staccato sounds of his shoes click ominously on the floor. Freeman has Dixon's dried blood on his hands, implying again that he will have blood on his hands when he replaces him. Nevertheless, even as a 'pen-pusher', he was still in the consensus of the CIA and endorsing the US war on terror, the full horrors of which he will soon see as a spectator of Anwar's torture.

There is a cut to Mayer standing outside the plane Anwar is about to be sent on explaining Freeman's background to Whitman. She doubts his experience and questions whether he could cope with the situation. Mayer reassures her that he is a good analyst, reinforcing his 'pen-pusher' status. She ripostes that a good analyst is 'not a jackal', admitting the need for a real 'knuckle-dragger' and exposing the appalling practices of the police in their pursuit

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of 'infinite justice'. Whitman's suspicions and intuitions are right because Freeman will move from consensus to dissensus as an emancipated spectator. Mayer's response is that they do not have the numbers to replace him, so she reluctantly relents, but this expediency will result in a rupture to the consensus for the war on terror and her demise.

Freeman arrives at the CIA office in his bloodied clothes. An aerial shot shows him descend a spiral staircase to the basement and the subterranean offices of the CIA abroad from where they uphold and reaffirm the consensus based on 'infinite justice'. He is about to be taken on a journey down to the depths as a spectator into the dark world of torture by the police. He returns to his office and is followed by a female Arabic colleague who he is having a clandestine relationship with. He is now clearly in a delayed state of shock and has difficulty trying to take his bloodstained shirt off, symbolising the difficulty he will have moving from consensus to dissensus. Similarly, he gets a clean shirt but clean clothes will not protect him from his descent into the dungeon world of torture inflicted by the police.

Freeman then goes to meet the Interior Minister, Saeed El-Dalizi, who is astounded when Freeman proclaims he is replacing Dixon. Saeed reminds him that he is not a case officer and while Freeman agrees, he adds that maybe he can finally use his gun. Saeed realises that Freeman is not fully aware of what he is letting himself in for, and neither is Freeman as his joke about the gun attests. His observations of the torture perpetrated by the police will begin to change his perceptions and put him on a dissensual and emancipatory path.

When Freeman first meets Abasi at the detention centre where Anwar is being held, Abasi offers Freeman some whisky. Freeman refuses but Abasi gives him a glass anyway and almost orders him to drink it to steel himself for what he is about to see. Freeman ignores it but alcohol will soon be his only solace when he is torn between the pillars of consensus and dissensus as a spectator of torture. Freeman has the option not to observe but chooses to do so. Abasi senses he is not embedded enough in the extreme end of the police by warning him not to intervene. Abasi and Freeman descend to the dungeon world of the police where the torture is enacted, an indictment of the operations of the CIA and the consensus for the war on terror in the 'pursuit of 'infinite justice'.

Anwar is sitting on a chair stripped naked and shaking with fear. He sees Freeman while claiming to Abasi that he has not been told what he has done, wants his clothes back and demands to see a lawyer. Anwar is appealing to the values of the consensus of liberal justice that previously served him and his family well in the United States, but are irrelevant in the consensus for the war on terror as Isabella discovered earlier. Such claims are a form of dissensus and must be denied. The police 'count' people in their various roles and now Anwar only 'counts' as a terrorist.

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Shots repeatedly show Freeman, a spectator in the shadows, who looks as perplexed as Anwar with the line of questioning taken by Abasi who eventually viciously hits Anwar. A contemplative Freeman does not seem impressed by what he has observed and is already doubting the consensus he is a part of. Abasi washes the blood off his knuckles in a Shakespearean Lady Macbeth moment, 'a little water clears us of this deed', and offers Freeman some. Anwar can be heard screaming from his cell but Abasi is impervious. Freeman refuses because he has not got blood on his hands yet; Abasi senses his disapproval and shows him the bombing equipment that is being used by the suicide bombers, a belt laced with nails and bolts to maximise human damage. Abasi uses the same utilitarian, ends justifies the means, argument that Whitman made earlier as a vindication for the torture that is being implemented in the name of 'infinite justice'. She used the number of people who would have been killed without rendition and particularises it to her grandchildren as a further rationale. Abasi particularises it by pointing out to Freeman that this is what killed his friend Dixon and then universalises this by denoting what they do as 'sacred' because it saves lives, immorally using holy words to justify the unholy use of torture. Alan tried to undermine Whitman by suggesting she would think differently if one of her grandchildren was in Anwar's position. Freeman's response is that Dixon was not his friend. Freeman appears not to agree with acts of vengeance as a basis for justice, so it is irrelevant whether he was his friend or not. He is concerned that justice should be done for all people and his first experience of seeing torture is starting to undermine that. The discussion again illustrates Rancière's condemnation of the appeals to 'infinite justice'. Abasi's justification for torture and the appropriation of humanitarian principles in a 'stark ethical conflict between Good and Evil' usher in a 'new reign of ethics' that dissolves rather than affirms legality. As an emancipatory spectator, Freeman has translated what he has observed into a 'free gaze' and a new way of seeing the violent actions of the police. His initial experience is a rupture that is moving him into the politics of dissensus and a new way of seeing the world.

The next scene evinces this further because when his girlfriend begins to undress him to have sex, he tries to push her away because he wants to get cleaned up, indicating that he has felt dirty while watching Anwar being tortured. She persists but his mind is now so troubled that he refuses given what he has seen and as Anwar is still imprisoned. A shot then shows Freeman staring upwards into space, unable at the moment to intervene in what the police determine as 'visible' and 'sayable', but uncomfortable about it nevertheless. This increases when he is a spectator at Anwar's next bout of torture when he is waterboarded, another degrading example of the 'infinite justice' employed by the police.

The horror of the process is graphically depicted to alert us and Freeman, as potential emancipated spectators, to the reality of the process of rendition

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and the truth of the consensus for the war on terror. The suffering of Anwar as he gurgles for breath with the cascading water flowing onto a towel over his face is shocking but Abasi, as the emblem of the police, is unmoved because of his belief in 'infinite justice' to combat terrorism. Freeman is still a spectator in the shadows watching the waterboarding and an emancipatory moment emerges. He intervenes in the interrogation to state that the torture is not working and requests to be left alone with Anwar. At this point it seems Freeman has seen the futility and barbarity of torture, but the power of the consensus for the war on terror sees him interrogate Anwar, who appeals to his sense of empathy by mentioning if he has a family and is met only by silence. He fires expletives at Freeman who suddenly lunges forward, grabbing Anwar round the neck and demanding him to explain the phone calls. Freeman is choking him and repeats the question but Anwar utters that he cannot. Freeman becomes explicit in the torture and enforcing the consensus himself in doing this. He has momentarily been reduced to the violence of the police and the logic that torture can be justified, but his doubts and his move into dissensus develop further when he first speaks to Whitman.

He is smoking from a shisha pipe and appears slightly inebriated. He is trying to cope with the reality that the consensus for the war on terror through the pursuit of 'infinite justice' might be mistaken. He may also feel guilty for his own complicity with the choking of Anwar. When Whitman rings him their discussion exposes the conflictual nature between consensus and dissensus. He reports that Anwar is not cooperating but is told that his job is to ensure he is 'helped along', a euphemism for the violence inflicted by the police. He doubts Anwar has any information and recounts the futility of the torture process by Abasi. Freeman's dissensus is now confronting the consensus enforced by Whitman. Her concerns at the start that he might not be a 'jackal' to enforce the consensus resurface here. She accepts he is new to this role, but when he describes it as his 'first torture', she rejects that the United States engages in torture. He has just witnessed that the United Sates does engage in torture by proxy. He is exposing a gap 'between appearance and reality, law and fact', a moment of dissensus that Whitman is attempting to deny. The cut back to Freeman after she abruptly hangs up sees him roll the mobile phone on his forehead, eyes closed and clearly doubting his involvement in 'infinite justice'. The phone is the main cause for Anwar's predicament, so it is as though Freeman is now symbolically connecting to his innocence. This is evinced further when a future scene returns to the same place showing Freeman on the balcony downing shots with the empty glasses on the table, indicting he has already had a few and seems the worse for wear. He is clearly deeply troubled by what is occurring and his movement from consensus to dissensus and a spectator who will be emancipated increases.

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The next torture scene shows Anwar strung up on chains by his arms receiving electric shocks. Freeman is again spectating from the shadows as Abasi interrogates Anwar further. Abasi resorts to psychological torture by contending that if Anwar died there today nobody would miss him. Intercut shots with Freeman show he is increasingly uncomfortable as Abasi conjectures that Anwar's wife would remarry and his children would call another man father, so why is he doing this to himself? The inhumanity justified on the basis of consensual 'infinite justice' again causes Freeman to intervene on the side of dissensus to order them to stop, and his role as an emancipated spectator increases. Anwar's confession is elicited by the threat of further electrocution and even though Freeman exposes its illogicality, Abasi is happy to accept it to confirm the need for 'infinite justice' and reaffirm the consensus. For Freeman, his movement from consensus to dissensus is accelerating and his realisation that Anwar is innocent is soon confirmed. Freeman discovers that a list of names of fellow terrorists Anwar provided was the 1990 Egyptian soccer team, showing the futility of torture because when a person's will is broken, as Anwar's has been, they will confess to anything.

Freeman's affirmation as an emancipated spectator is confirmed when he visits Saeed, the Interior Minister, to request release papers for Anwar so he can assist him to escape. Freeman explains why Anwar must be innocent but Saeed ignores him and recites a saying, 'Beat your woman every morning, if you don't know why, she does'. Freeman does not know what that means. Saeed warns him that if he does not have the stomach for it he should get reassigned. So his doubts earlier about Freeman being suitable for the sharp end of police work and ensuring the consensus have been confirmed. Freeman recites a saying too from *The Merchant of Venice*: 'I fear you speak upon the rack, where men enforced do speak anything'. The Shakespearean link back to Abasi washing his hands of this deed shows the two end points of the torture process from either side: no need for conscience and its worthlessness for attaining truth. Freeman challenges Saeed to provide clear evidence that torture ever produces legitimate intelligence, which he does not. Freeman is now fully part of the dissensus and against the consensus for the war on terror by declaring that, if you torture one person, you create a thousand new enemies. Freeman realises his career is over and to his credit sets about freeing Anwar to him get back to the United States, which he does. Freeman tells his story to *The Washington Post*, a symbol of constitutional due process since the Watergate scandal, to further protect Anwar and affirm the dissensus against 'infinite justice'.[43] The crack in the consensus for the war on terror is then encapsulated with Whitman's impending downfall as she reads the headlines picturing Anwar with the story of extraordinary rendition, and how a CIA man freed an unlawfully imprisoned man. Freeman, as the emancipated spectator, has ruptured the consensus of the police and intervened in what is 'visible' and 'sayable' in a politics of dissensus. The catalyst was his

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move from 'pen-pusher' to a supposed 'knuckle-dragger' and the evaluation that accompanies the role of an emancipated spectator, to give him a new 'free gaze' on the world and invigorate in him a force for the good.

CONCLUSION

Rancière's political theory of film offers an enlightening understanding of this movie. The police are represented by the officials of US politics and their bureaucracy in stopping Isabella from discovering the truth. Even Alan, who crosses the boundary between consensus and dissensus, succumbs to the power of the police to ensure his own 'mode of being' and 'doing' within it once Whitman and Senator Hawkins assert their authority. However, all of the characters were part of the consensus beforehand, even Isabella and Anwar with their comfortable middle-class lifestyle and Freeman, a 'defender of the free' as a CIA agent. Yet what happens to Anwar acts as a rupture to this consensus of the US activities in the war on terror and their pursuit of 'infinite justice'. Anwar, Isabella and Freeman begin to question that consensus and move into the politics of a dissensus. The film's added power is to leave us 'to exercise our moral judgments on what we see being done on our behalf'.[44] We are asked to be emancipated spectators, to make 'associations and disassociations', consider issues of 'tolerance and intolerance' as we have a 'free gaze' that gives us a different view of the world like Freeman has. The 'sensorium' of the cinematic experience allows us to explore cracks in the consensus and problematises our political subjectivation as a resistance to the police's edict to tell us to 'move along'.

NOTES

1 Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 161.

2 Peter Bradshaw, 'Rendition', *The Guardian*, 19 October 2007. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/oct/19/thriller. Accessed 4 December 2013.

3 There is a sub-plot centred on Fatima, the daughter of Abasi, who has disappeared and is being drawn into a world of Islamic extremism by her boyfriend Khalid, but I do not focus on that here.

4 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 36–37.

5 Ibid., p. 36

6 Ibid., pp. 35–36.

7 Ibid., p. 36. Cf. Samuel A. Chambers, 'Jacques Rancière and the Problem of Pure Politics', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 10, 3, July 2011.

8 Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 35.

9 Ibid., pp. 36–37.

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10 Ibid., p. 38.
11 Ibid., p. 39.
12 Davis, *Jacques Rancière*, p. 79.
13 Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 42.
14 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 16; cf. Todd May, 'Wrong, Disagreement, Subjectification' in Jean-Phillipe Deranty (ed.) *Jacques Rancière. Key Concepts* (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2010), p. 77.
15 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 101; cf. Yves Citton, '"The Ignorant Schoolmaster": Knowledge and Authority' in Jean-Phillipe Deranty (ed.) *Jacques Rancière*, p. 31.
16 May, 'Wrong, Disagreement, Subjectification', p. 77.
17 Rancière, *Dissensus*, pp. 42–43.
18 Ibid., pp. 42–43 and 37.
19 Ibid., pp. 71–72.
20 Ibid., p. 72.
21 Ibid., p. 74.
22 Ibid., p. 74.
23 Ibid., pp. 74–75.
24 Jacques Rancière, 'Remarks by Way of a Postface' in Paul Bowman (ed.) *Rancière and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 185.
25 Ibid., p. 186.
26 Ibid., pp. 191–92.
27 Ibid., pp. 192–93.
28 Jacques Rancière, *The Intervals of Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), pp. 7–8
29 Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 6.
30 Ibid., p. 9.
31 Ibid., p. 2.
32 Ibid., p. 174.
33 Ibid., p. 171.
34 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009).
35 Ibid., p. 11.
36 Ibid., pp. 16–17.
37 Ibid., p. 72.
38 Ibid., p. 73.
39 Ibid., p. 71.
40 Ibid., p. 75.
41 Ibid., p. 81.
42 Ibid., p. 82.
43 Thanks to Lawrence Wilde for making this connection.
44 Phillip French, 'Rendition', *The Observer*, 21 October 2007. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/oct/21/reesewitherspoon.drama. Accessed 4 December 2013.

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Chapter 8

Julia Kristeva: David Fincher's *Fight Club*

Julia Kristeva's notion of 'intimate revolt' is the psychoanalytical basis on which she explores how subjects try to resist the 'society of the spectacle' as propagated by the media to silence and diminish a questioning outlook on the world. 'Intimate revolt' means subjects must open up their psyche to re-create themselves, both consciously and unconsciously, in a process of conflict in the pursuit of a more authentic life with all the advances and dangers that can entail. Doing so exposes subjects to their 'Other' but it is here that the possibility of revolt occurs, both psychically and socially, in the realm of political possibility. Film offers us the imaginary of fantasy in this process and I use Kristeva's notion of 'intimate revolt' as the basis for analysing David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999).

The film centres on an unnamed narrator who lives a wealthy lifestyle working as an accident assessor for a car firm. An insomniac, he goes to self-help groups for relief and meets Marla Singer whom he has a relationship with. The turning point in his life is when he meets Tyler Durden, who despises the materialism of capitalism and acts as a saboteur in the many menial jobs he does. Together, they set up Fight Club where men agree to open combat until one of them submits. This then leads to a collective under the banner of Project Mayhem with the intention of bringing capitalist society to an end. As the film progresses, we eventually learn that Tyler is the narrator's unconscious, a creation that has allowed him to live out his fantasies, but of which he has been unaware. The catharsis for his schizophrenia occurs through a violent act that allows the narrator to realise he is Tyler Durden and that the 'Other' Tyler is a creation of his own psychosis. Once revealed to his conscious self, the 'other' Tyler disappears leaving the real Tyler to reaffirm his own identity. I will now expand on Kristeva's notion of 'intimate revolt' and her discussion of film and then apply this to *Fight Club*.

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KRISTEVA

For Kristeva, 'intimate revolt' involves the subject in a 'protest against already established norms, values and powers'.[1] The moral and aesthetic dimensions of 'doubt and critique' fight against the 'society of the spectacle', the mass media that is engulfed in cultural degeneracy. Revolt means opening one's 'psychical life to infinite re-creation' that continues and recurs even though mistakes may be made and dead ends reached when doing so in a process of conflict.[2] The conflict results in a 'jouissance' that is not of the narcissist or egoist type created by consumerism or the 'society of the spectacle', but that which is crucial to 'keeping the psyche alive'. 'Jouissance' preserves the 'faculty of representation and questioning' that makes us human[3] and involves erotic and psychical pleasure.[4] The demands on the subject are great because 'jouissance' seeks an ethics that arises when traditional mores and laws are 'shattered in order to give way to the free play of negativity, need, 'desire' and 'pleasure' before being reconstituted.[5] For Kristeva, 'Fascism and Stalinism stand for the barriers that the new adjustment between a law and its transgression comes against'.[6] The 'subject-in-process'[7] pursuing 'jouissance' seeks both a 'new ethics' and a 'new sociality' based on 'pleasure and violence' in the movements between transgression and the law.[8]

Psychoanalytically, Kristeva denotes Freud's discovery of the unconscious as the place where life finds its meaning and the psyche is 'dependent on the Other', which is 'only possible if the psyche is capable of revolt'.[9] An understanding of psychosis then emerges as subjects question themselves and their own truths by confronting a 'psychical reality that endangers consciousness and exposes itself to the pulse of being'.[10] Subjects have a drive to pursue pleasure and affirm their lives but they also have a 'death drive', which is a 'tendency to return to the inorganic state and homeostasis' – an equilibrium of identity.[11] This can occur both destructively outward towards the world and destructively inward in a loss of self.

Revolt is realised not just psychically but also socially and has profoundly political implications that cause a crisis and advancement in the subject's search for meaning.[12] The outcome is 'another politics, that of permanent conflictuality'. The crisis in its most extreme form for the 'subject-in-process' is the 'painful testimony' of schizophrenia where the 'corporeal, natural' and 'social' are beset by 'drives' that become meaningful in 'entities, experiences, subjects and ideologies'.[13] They are then '*dynamited*' as the 'dynamic of the drive charges, bursts, pierces, deforms, reforms and transforms the boundaries the subject and society set for themselves'.[14]

Schizophrenia can then result in '*revolutionary practice*, the *political activity* whose aim is the radical transformation of social structures' and which 'sets ablaze and transforms all laws'.[15] On the political left, this can

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create a 'different kind of subject' that is 'capable of bringing about new social relations and thus joining in the process of capitalism's subversion' on the path to Marx's 'true realm of freedom'.[16] On the political right, it is also possible that the schizophrenic subject could take a more fascist direction, although Kristeva seems more optimistic for the left variant at this point as evinced in her endorsement of Marx.

For Kristeva, this is why psychoanalysis has been attacked, denigrated and marginalised both in the past and today.[17] Previously, it has been resisted because it confronts people's desire to avoid the truth about themselves and make them open to revolt. Presently, the hostility centres more on how modern materialist, technological society based on efficiency, resulting often in depression and stress, seeks to discredit these psychical considerations or reduce them solely to biological deficiencies. The object of the psychoanalysis of 'intimate revolt' then is to 'contemplate the rebellious potentialities that the imaginary might resuscitate in our innermost depths' and 'preserve the possibility of their appearance' in the social world.[18] With the notion of 'intimate revolt' explained, I will now examine Kristeva's understanding of film.

The core aspects for understanding film that emanate from her work are rooted in her psychoanalytical approach that examines the imaginary, how a subject views the world both consciously and unconsciously, through fantasy.[19] For Kristeva, the imaginary offers the 'most immediate, most subtle, but also most dangerous access to the intimate' through fantasy.[20] Fantasies, which we all have, can be both 'seductive and terrifying' and the imaginary appears through them. Additionally, the imaginary emerges through cinema because 'we are a society of the image'.

Following Freud, Kristeva posits two aspects that arise when we engage in fantasy.[21] The first is that fantasies 'present us with a particular reality that is distinct from perceptual reality' as the subject imagines something and has an illusion.[22] Desire is the reality of this illusion which itself is 'strong, steady, persistent, and subject to its own rigorous logic'. The subject takes this realm of fantasy, a 'psychical reality', very seriously even though in the everyday world it is diminished and underestimated.

The second aspect relates to how these illusions are 'transitional organisms, hybrid constructions – between the conscious and the unconscious – that play with both repression and the return of the repressed'. In this interchange within the mind, fantasy admits the desire of the subject but in a distorted manner. Desire becomes inverted from pleasure into pain and manifests itself as a tortuous physical symptom rather than a psychical one. For Kristeva, unconscious fantasy makes us comprehend the psychical world as a varied amalgam of 'drive/preverbal representation/organic reaction/verbal representation'. Endorsing Freud, she explains that fantasies are not only biological, such as instinctual impulses or symbolic formations like parental

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control, religion and moral ideology. They are also part of all psychical life and the 'various regimes of fantasy', whether conscious or unconscious.[23] Kristeva concludes that the phantasmatic configures the whole life of the subject because 'all fantasies have corresponding structures and mirror unconscious fantasy'.[24]

She identifies art and literature as the most fertile places to formulate these fantasies rather than the 'society of the spectacle', which only limits and destroys the phantasmatic faculty.[25] For Kristeva, the media appears to offer us a 'paradise' of veritable fantasies, stimulates us to produce them and act as creators of our own imaginary. In reality, the media inundates us with images which can echo with our fantasies and placate us, but overall they cannot liberate us from the 'new maladies of the soul' due to the absence of 'interpretive words'. Furthermore, the media stops us in creating our own imaginary world because of the stereotypical nature of its images. Art and literature are the antidotes to this outcome because they are the 'allies of psychoanalysis' and 'open the verbal path to the construction of fantasies and prepare the terrain for psychoanalytical interpretation'.[26] Cinema as an art form 'has assumed the universe of fantasy as a right' and whose image is the 'central place of the contemporary imaginary'. She recognises that cinema in its negative moments can undermine fantasy when it becomes stereotypical, but overall it is a medium where many fantasies are deployed and experienced because it is the 'apotheosis of the visible'.[27]

For Kristeva, a 'certain' or 'other' cinema illustrates that it is meditative, condensed and acts as a substitute for fantasies. She refers to this as the image of the 'thought specular', which is present in great cinematic art from Eisenstein to Godard. She explains the 'thought specular' further by considering patients who suffer from psychic and somatic problems that they cannot grasp or verbalise, recommending that they should illustrate their drives as 'gesture and image' in a 'psychodrama'. She contends that this psychodrama is a specular act as the patients show themselves before becoming an 'I' that can defer their actions and 'acceding to the statement of the subject'.[28] The gaze produces a 'specular synthesis at the borders of the sadomasochistic drive'.[29] For Kristeva, the specular is the 'final and very efficient depository of aggressions and anxieties and as brilliant purveyor-seducer'.[30] 'Specular seduction' is a 'diversion of facilitation (rhythms, somatic waves, waves of colour, erogenous excitations)' where 'incomplete images converge' and the 'I' is finally constituted as identical to oneself. As part of this process, the 'seductive and terrifying specular endlessly celebrates our identity uncertainties', 'transforms the drive into desire' and 'aggression into seduction'.

The 'thought specular' refers to the visible signs that both designate and denounce fantasy that impact on the subject in relation to the object.[31] Cinema 'projects . . . modified fantasies' that enter our 'psychical lives where

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the imagination lets itself be controlled by fantasy', as the 'thought specular'.[32] From its origins, cinema has both 'projected the specular (imagination/fantasy) by making itself the bold revealer of our psychical lives, more seductively more frighteningly than the other arts' and 'assumed the power of thinking the specular'. Cinema does this by utilising the visible, protecting fantasy while demonstrating it not just in a dreamlike manner but through its main themes, structure and logic. With Kristeva's main ideas outlined, I will now apply them to *Fight Club*.

THE NARRATOR'S INTIMATE REVOLT

In Kristeva's terms, the narrator in *Fight Club* is a 'subject-in-process' who is 'opening his psychical life to infinite re-creation' through conflict as part of his 'intimate revolt'. His 'jouissance' is currently abated by his egoistic and narcissistic commitment to consumer capitalism fuelled by the power of the 'society of the spectacle'. His insomnia is the somatic manifestation of his psychosis that as yet he cannot fully comprehend until he creates his own 'psychodrama' in his own 'thought specular', the 'Other' Tyler Durden.

The insomnia has deprived the narrator of sleep for six months. He describes its effects as making everything unreal and far away as shots show him at work using a photocopier with a coffee from Starbucks at his side, its logo emblazoned in a close-up. Shots from his point of view show him watching his fellow employees who are also using other photocopiers with their Starbucks cups. His voice-over describes insomnia as a place where 'everything is a copy of a copy of a copy'. His sleeplessness is producing in him an attempt to keep his 'psyche alive' and stimulate his 'jouissance' to be more critical and offer an ethical stance against the consumerism represented by the Starbucks brand. Moreover, the mundane nature of work is captured in the use of the photocopiers with their monotonous sounds. For the narrator, this unreal world where everything is copied and replicated is a feature of his insomnia, but it also exposes how the other workers are sleepwalking through their lives as cogs in the machine of capitalism, unable to face this truth about themselves and be open to revolt. The narrator is not either yet but he is beginning to question the 'established norms, values and powers' of the 'society of the spectacle' on his journey of 'jouissance'. This intensifies when he considers his consumerism further.

He explains that like many people he had become enslaved to the 'Ikea nesting instinct'. He sits on the toilet with his catalogue ordering various items of furniture that he thinks will define him as a person and is deeply embedded in the 'society of the spectacle'. As he is initially defecating as he makes these observations, the suggestion is he is talking shit and he knows

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it. He uses a knife to eat from a condiment jar. Later, as he begins to question himself further and he has blown up his apartment, he reflects that he is embarrassed to have a house full of condiments and no food when he sees the jars littered on the floor in the street. As a 'subject-in-process' the trappings of consumer capitalism begin to appear to him for what they are, a denial rather than affirmation of his identity.

Despite this, he attempts to deal with the physical manifestation of his insomnia by vising a doctor, but as a 'subject-in-process' the narrator is not facing his psychosis yet. He wants to hide from it by seeking medication to overcome its debilitating physical manifestation. After pleading that he is in pain, the doctor advises him to attend the self-help group on testicular cancer if he wants to see what real pain is. As the doctor is framed in the shot and mentions pain, for a millisecond the image of the 'Other' Tyler flashes barely perceptively on the screen to the right. The narrator's 'intimate revolt' is starting to emerge.

The detour and denial of this truth is the self-help groups he visits. They are held first in a high school gym, and then in various rooms in the St Christopher Episcopal Church. At his first meeting, he writes the name Cornelius on his name sticker and attaches it to his shirt. In the *New Testament* in Acts 10, Cornelius is a centurion who is directed by an angel to seek Peter and is so overwhelmed that he converts to Christianity.[33] When the angel appeared, he told Cornelius that God had heard his prayers and about his gifts to the poor.[34] The narrator will also be overwhelmed by the 'Other Tyler' who will soon appear. He will convert the narrator not to Christianity but to a movement of 'jouissance' against the 'society of the spectacle' that powers capitalism. The 'poor' that he will be asked to help are those who will not confront the truth about their lives and resist the need to be open to revolt.

The narrator listens intently as Thomas, one of the group members, recounts how he wanted children with his wife but due to his cancer she has had one with somebody else. He cries and is comforted by the main organiser of the group who then makes them all go into one-on-ones. He asks them to 'open up' just as Thomas has. The emphasis on opening up means that they are confronting their innermost fears of the testicular cancer and its physical and emotional effects. This type of opening up will be of little use to the narrator as his is a psychosis that will need a different form of remedy, both in his own mind and in the real world. The only remedy the cancer sufferers have is managing the stark realities of their eventual death, although Bob, who the narrator is paired with, will seek a similar route along the path offered by the 'Other Tyler' in Project Mayhem. For now, Bob, who has huge breasts as side effects from his medication for abusing steroids as a body builder that resulted in his testicles being removed, hugs the narrator. Bob recounts his tale of woe, how he owned his own gym, did product placements and that his

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own children have disowned him. The narrator is touched and has his turn hugging Bob. The narrator has been asked to cry but cannot, although he is upset, but eventually he does and as he pulls back he leaves a stain of tears on Bob's shirt that resembles the Turin shroud. Choral religious music has also been playing to reiterate the religious theme as in a voice-over the narrator declares that losing all hope was freedom. He has had his own conversion through the therapy of the group which seems to work as the cut to the next scene shows him in bed fast asleep, his insomnia apparently dissipated.

He is now 'addicted' to self-help groups in general and a shot sees him looking at a huge list of them on a board. A close-up shows two at the top titled 'Glorious Day' and 'Taking Flight' and as the camera pans down there is another one called 'Learning to Soar'. In a voice-over as he is attending the various groups, he concedes he is not dying or ailing but he is the 'warm little centre that the life of this world crowded around'. He affirms himself through hugs and tears and has never felt more alive. The leader of one group asks them all to close their eyes and imagine their pain as a white ball of healing light when entering the secret path to their cave to meet their power animal. Jack fantasises that his cave is made of ice and a penguin appears, says, 'slide', and then slides past him giggling.

The significance of the penguin can be contrasted with the names of some of the support groups earlier because two of them alluded to flight, which the penguin cannot do despite it being a bird and having wings.[35] The narrator also cannot 'fly' because he is trapped in the world of consumer capitalism. He is beginning to reject it but only through avoidance, which is why he goes to self-help groups and can now sleep. From a Kristevan perspective, he is denying his 'jouissance' but his 'Glorious Day' will arrive once the 'Other' Tyler fully appears. For now, all he can do is 'slide' further into denial rather than confront his psychosis. Also, the way the penguin states, 'slide', sounds like it is saying, 'it's a lie', to reinforce that he is deluding himself about his problem. This is evident when he is leaving one of the groups after a session and he smiles as his voice-over proclaims that every evening he dies but every evening he is born again and resurrected. This continues the religious theme as though he is the risen Christ but his newly constructed world is about to come crashing down with the arrival of Marla.

Marla begins attending all the groups and he is annoyed that she is also living his lie as there is nothing wrong with her, just as there was nothing wrong with him, except his psychosis that is. Marla confronts him with the reality of what he is doing so he is unable to cry and his insomnia returns. He goes four days without sleeping but explains that with insomnia one is never asleep or awake. He declares that if he had a tumour then he would name it Marla. The cave that he is asked by the group leader to go into in terms of finding his power animal now contains Marla, and she also instructs him to 'slide'

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which again sounds like, 'it's a lie'. The lie he is living is soon to be exposed because the 'Other' Tyler is now ready to emerge from his unconscious as his 'subject-in-process' journey to 'jouissance' is immanent.

THE 'OTHER' TYLER DURDEN

Kristeva's insights are also evident when considering the 'Other' Tyler Durden. Various shots show the narrator in his job flying to numerous states and drifting in and out of consciousness exacerbated by the excessive travelling. He stands slumped against the rail of a moving walkway at the airport as his voice-over wonders if waking up in a different time and place could make you a different person. Suddenly, the 'Other' Tyler goes past behind him to affirm that you can. After a few scenes showing the narrator doing his job, he is explaining the formula he uses for recalling cars and then is shown relating this to a passenger next to him on a plane. In a voice-over, he recounts that every time a plane takes off or lands he 'prayed' for a crash or mid-air collision which he fantasises as happening. A cut hears the ding of the seatbelt sign; his wake-up call to confront his unconscious has been sounded. He is shown staring straight at the camera slightly perplexed and blinking, his fantasy has not come true but another has. As the camera pans right, the 'Other' Tyler is revealed and the fantasy of the crash has been replaced by a far more potent fantasy. The narrator's unconscious has crashed into his conscious self that will be part of his 'intimate revolt' and give free play to 'jouissance' against the cultural degeneracy of the 'society of the spectacle' perpetrated by capitalism.

After the 'Other' Tyler has read out instructions for passengers sitting by an emergency exit which they are, the narrator balks at the level of responsibility saying he is not up to that job. The job he is not up to is not carrying out the instructions for an exit, but the task of allowing full reign of his conscious self to engage in an 'intimate revolt' against capitalism; although for but that will begin to change now. His own questioning of himself has brought him into contact with the 'Other' and he will now revolt against the 'society of the spectacle' that has caused his insomnia and general alienation. Through the 'Other' Tyler, he will expose himself to the 'pulse of being', both psychically and socially, in his search for a 'new ethics' and 'another politics' in a process of conflict with all the dangers and advances that entails.

The narrator begins to interrogate himself via the 'Other' Tyler by asking what he does for a living, which only reaffirms a denial of the self and the power imposed by the 'society of the spectacle' that defines people by their jobs. The 'Other' Tyler will disabuse the narrator of these misperceptions as their 'relationship' progresses. Ironically, after the narrator observes that they

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have the exact same briefcase, intimating further they are the same person, the 'Other' Tyler explains that he makes and sells soap, 'the yardstick of civilisation'. The 'Other' Tyler is meant to be representative of anti-consumerism and yet he is an entrepreneur selling his soap to department stores. However, the narrator later justifies this by saying that they were selling rich women their fat asses back to them as the soap is made from liposuction operations, so it is a subversive act against the 'society of the spectacle'.

The narrator meets the 'Other' Tyler for a drink after his apartment has been blown up and the journey to 'jouissance' and the opening up to 'intimate revolt' begins. As if to keep a sense of proportion for his loss, the 'Other' Tyler hilariously considers that a woman cutting his cock off could have been worse. The narrator agrees but still mourns the loss of his possessions because he was close to being 'complete' as he had bought the best of everything. The 'Other' Tyler is ready to confront his consumerism, sarcastically sympathising with his loss but persuades the narrator to admit that they are consumers and mere 'by-products of a life style obsession'. The 'Other' Tyler is uninterested in crime, murder or poverty, but is attentive to the trappings of consumer culture. He cites celebrity magazines, a plethora of TV channels and labelled designer clothes, the artefacts of the 'society of the spectacle', that have caused the narrator's psychosis and schizophrenia. The 'Other' Tyler advises the narrator to reject all this, embrace being incomplete and imperfect and allow chance to determine life. He becomes sardonic again and describes the narrator's losses as a 'tragedy' as they were ways to cope with modern living. The narrator is starting to revolt because he denies it is a tragedy and declares, 'fuck it all', but relapses into his previous existence by reflecting that his insurance should cover it. The 'Other' Tyler retorts with, 'the things you own end up owning you', but leaves him to make his own decision. The narrator is still in conflict with himself but his questioning is raising the issue of being more authentic through an 'intimate revolt' between his conscious and unconscious. He has been subsumed by consumer capitalism but is now recognising it as the source of his psychosis which will dramatically change his identity.

Further examples of the narrator's growing disdain for the 'Society of the Spectacle' through the 'Other' Tyler emerge when they look at advertising for Calvin Klein underwear. They laugh at the male models with their six-pack stomach muscles. The narrator feels sorry for guys going to gyms trying to look like designers said they should and questions if that is what a man is meant to resemble. For the 'Other' Tyler, 'self-improvement is masturbation' and he prefers 'self-destruction'. The advertising industry that powers the 'society of the spectacle' not only puts pressure on women, but also puts pressure on men to conform to a certain stereotype in a sort of body fascism, which dictates what you are meant to look like and what to wear. The

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'self-destruction' the 'Other' Tyler seeks is through fighting in Fight Club but in its own way that becomes the inverse image of the needs generated by advertising. Fight Club's macho culture steeped in physical violence is itself a form of self-improvement through self-destruction and destruction of the 'Other'.

The 'Other' Tyler continues the narrator's path to 'jouissance' as a 'subject-in-process' when he gives a speech at a Fight Club meeting. He criticises the negative effects and delusions generated by the 'society of the spectacle' to ensure the continuation of capitalism. The 'Other' Tyler forces them to confront the truth about their lives by exposing them as a wasted generation pumping gas, waiting at tables and being slaves with white collars. Advertising is attacked for making us chase cars, clothes and work in jobs we hate to buy 'shit that we don't need'. He refers to them as the middle children of history with no purpose or place. They have no Great War or Great Depression and as victims of the 'society of the spectacle', he designates their war to be 'spiritual' and their lives to be one of great depression. He exposes the fallacy of the American Dream that through television indoctrinates us to believe that one day we will be millionaires, movie gods and rock stars, when the reality is the majority of us will not. The 'Other' Tyler thinks we are slowly learning that fact and 'we are very, very pissed off' to which the other men cheer in agreement.

Another scene has similar sentiments. The 'Other' Tyler looks straight into camera to tell us as viewers that you are not your job and it is not about how much money you have in the bank. You are not the car you drive and you are not the contents of your wallet. You are not your khakis. You are the crap of the world. So he is acting as their and our collective unconscious, encouraging everyone to become 'subjects-in-process' in the pursuit of 'jouissance'. The 'society of the spectacle' and consumer capitalism must be rejected not only psychically but also socially. This will now take a violent course, not just among themselves in their Fight Clubs, but against the 'society of the spectacle' and consumer capitalism as their 'intimate revolt' becomes a social revolt.

SOCIAL REVOLT

Kristeva's framework illuminates how the narrator as the 'Other' Tyler is on a path to social revolt in the pursuit of his 'jouissance'. He has already blown up his own apartment as a physical act of 'intimate revolt' against the artefacts of the 'society of the spectacle' that it contained. When the narrator is describing the rebellious activities of the 'Other' Tyler, they are initially of a non-violent nature in a number of jobs he does in the evening. One 'shit job' was as a part-time projectionist responsible for changing one reel to

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the next, which he does because it offers him 'interesting opportunities'. He splices pornographic images, such as a large penis into family films, causing people to be shocked and reducing one little girl to tears. What his subversion of family entertainment in the cinema implies, except for being comical, is unclear. The narrator refers to the 'snooty cat' and the 'courageous dog' with their 'celebrity voices' in a disdainful manner. So perhaps it is an attack on the dream factory of Hollywood that is pedalled to children that life will always turn out for the best. The 'Other' Tyler, of course, thinks that is a load of 'cock' as the inserted phallus suggests.

The 'Other' Tyler also works as a banquet waiter at the luxurious Pressman Hotel. He secretly adulterates the food by urinating into it and is described by the narrator as 'the guerrilla terrorist of the food industry'. His social revolt here is clearly more political because it is against the rich who dine there, and the narrator describes him as having a 'class action lawsuit' with the hotel over the urine content in their soup. He begins to encourage further rebellious actions from the Fight Club members against the 'society of the spectacle'. They change the messages on advertising hoardings, smash expensive cars, feed pigeons to make them defecate on new cars on garage forecourts and blow up a computer shop. The 'Other' Tyler also targets individuals who have attempted to evade the truth about themselves as in the 'human sacrifice' scene.

'Intimate revolt' is avoided by a man named Kessel who had initially trained to be a veterinary surgeon. The 'Other' Tyler uses the threat of death to make him open his life to psychical and social 're-creation'. Kessel is terrified and sobs; under interrogation he first just splutters 'stuff' when asked what he studied, but as the 'Other' Tyler threatens him further he replies biology but does not know why. The 'Other' Tyler is acting as though he is Kessel's unconscious that is breaking through and making him confront his denial of 'jouissance' and the assertion of his more authentic self. Kessel eventually explains that he did not fulfil his 'jouissance' because of the excessive schooling needed. The 'Other' Tyler uses the threat of death to make him go back and study. The narrator is horrified by what he has seen and doubts the point of it, but his 'Other' Tyler justifies his actions by making Kessel re-evaluate his life and become again a 'subject-in-process' just as the narrator should. The 'Other' Tyler anticipates this new life for Kessel who he thinks will now appreciate even the little things in life more. The narrator begins to see what the 'Other' Tyler means by admitting that he had a plan which was beginning to make sense. It meant not being afraid or distracted and allowing things that do not matter to 'truly slide', as the penguin suggested in the narrator's fantasy earlier. It also implies not living life as a 'lie' in the other way 'slide' was uttered.

Kessel has now opened himself up to an 'intimate revolt' as he will become a veterinarian and care for animals which the 'Other' Tyler approves of.

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Nonetheless, the 'Other' Tyler does not want us to be defined by our occupation but here he seems to be endorsing that, yet it is the nature of the job that is important. There is an ethical basis in this instance asking us to become a 'subject-in-process' and pursue our 'jouissance'. The political implication is that this might make us a more caring and questioning person about where our lives and the lives of others, even non-human animals, are heading in an instrumental world. However, this affirmation takes a more sinister turn with the creation of Project Mayhem.

Kristeva proposes that an 'intimate revolt' can involve a 'jouissance' which operates as a transgression of the law and can develop a 'new ethics' and a 'new sociality', but the danger in this process is that it can lead to fascism. Project Mayhem has certain fascist traits. All the members, named as 'Space Monkeys' by the 'Other' Tyler, undergo an arduous initiation to show their commitment and are equipped with black attire, shave their heads and resemble neo-Nazis. The 'Other' Tyler orders them to sacrifice themselves for the 'greater good' of 'Project Mayhem'. The narrator ponders on what the 'greater good' might be but for now trusts the 'Other' Tyler and the army he has created. Nevertheless, when he sees they have a set a mid-storey floor of the Parker-Morris building alight, he questions their activities and starts to challenge his unconscious as the 'Other' Tyler. The Space Monkeys only respond with the mantra created by the other Tyler that the first rule about Project Mayhem is that they do not talk about Project Mayhem, which was the same rule they had for Fight Club. Parker-Morris advocated greater living space for working people in the construction of new homes in the 1960s, much of which went unheeded, so perhaps that is the reason the Space Monkeys set it on fire as the shot shows two apartments next to each other that would, if knocked through, make a larger one.[36] The conflict in the narrator's psyche is now evolving as he is creating his own ethics about what is a right course of action to take when rebelling against the 'society of the spectacle'. The quasi-fascist route is clearly troubling his conscious self as evinced in the death of Bob who the narrator met at the self-help group and joined 'Project Mayhem'.

The 'Other' Tyler has left leaving the narrator to reflect that he was dumped by his father and now he has been dumped by Tyler, which could also be part of his descent into schizophrenia. Bob was part of a group of Space Monkeys that were assigned by the 'Other' Tyler to attack a piece of corporate art and a franchise coffee bar but the police arrived and they shot Bob in the head. The other 'Space Monkeys' are explaining this to the narrator back at the house with Bob's corpse on the table causing the narrator to vomit once he sees Bob's head. The narrator is his conscious self here and is shocked at their actions even though his unconscious self as the 'Other' Tyler has sanctioned them. He is almost remonstrating with his other self by telling

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them this was inevitable, casting doubt on countering consumer capitalism and the 'society of the spectacle' in this way. The Space Monkeys decide to bury Bob in the garden as he is a piece of evidence but the narrator is horrified as Bob was his friend and a person, not simply evidence. The collective power of the group against the individual is now even stronger because the narrator is told that Bob died serving 'Project Mayhem', which as we saw earlier the 'Other' Tyler declared to be for the greater good. When the narrator mentions Bob's name, the emasculation and denial of identity is furthered, because he is reminded that in 'Project Mayhem' no one has a name. The narrator attempts to reaffirm Bob's identity by stating his full name and saying that his death is on all of their hands. One Space Monkey then agrees with the narrator and explains that in death a member of 'Project Mayhem' has a name and they all start to chant Bob's. The narrator has now been confronted with the reality of what they and the 'Other' Tyler have been doing and his psychosis will soon be challenged. The unleashing of 'Project Mayhem' is a reflection of the mayhem in his own mind that has resulted in 'revolutionary practice' against the social structures of the society of the spectacle. The truth of his own schizophrenia has made him deny it in the form of the 'Other' Tyler but his path to 'jouissance' has resulted in violent consequences that he now rejects. Nevertheless, his path to a realisation of his schizoid self is increasing and with it his possible liberation from psychosis and an affirmation of his own identity.

Before this, at Fight Club, the narrator has severely beaten a handsome man with blond hair that the 'Other' Tyler commended after one of their guerrilla activities on a Police Commissioner. The narrator described himself then as having an 'inflamed sense of rejection', so he was angry with his unconscious 'Other' Tyler and now transfers that onto the blond man. The 'Other' Tyler asks him where he went 'psycho boy' and the narrator responds by saying he wanted to destroy something beautiful. There has been a mention earlier in the film of psychopathy when the narrator's boss finds the rules of Fight Club in the photocopier. The 'intimate revolt' here though is far more important because his own unconscious has accused him of being a psycho and this has infiltrated his conscious self. The truth of his schizophrenia is emerging as he searches for the meaning of his identity in the conflict between his conscious and unconscious self of the 'Other' Tyler.

This becomes further evident when the 'Other' Tyler disappears after the 'near-life experience' in the following scene when he crashes the car he is driving. The narrator begins to interrogate the 'Other' Tyler for the first time, heightening the conflict between his conscious and unconscious in terms of an 'intimate revolt'. The narrator is affronted he has not been included from the beginning about Project Mayhem but his unconscious 'Other' Tyler reminds him that he has been, which of course he unknowingly has. The narrator's

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dependency on the 'Other' is forcing him to question his own identity further as he is confronted with the truth about his situation. His unconscious as the 'Other' Tyler is beginning to leave him as he is told to forget about him and their friendship. To force him to do so, the 'Other' Tyler drives the car towards other cars and lets go of the wheel.

The scene symbolically represents the 'death drive' which the narrator, through the 'other' Tyler, is outwardly expressing with the possible destruction of the car and himself. Inwardly, the 'death drive' is a tussle between the affirmation of his life and its destruction with a loss of self, as epitomised in the unconscious 'Other' Tyler who asks the narrator what would be the last thing he would do if he knew he was going to die? The narrator is at the mercy of his unconscious both outwardly and inwardly and cannot answer the question. The 'Other' Tyler persists and is still driving dangerously so the narrator blurts out that he would do nothing. The 'Other' Tyler judges his life to be worth nothing then, calls him pathetic and insists that the reason he blew his apartment up was because to reach rock bottom you have got to stop trying to control everything and let go. He takes his hands off the steering wheel. After being hysterical and telling the 'Other' Tyler to stop, the narrator now acquiesces as the car crashes over a cliff. The 'Other' Tyler declares that they have had a 'near-life experience' in contrast to a 'near-death experience'.

The 'death drive' has resulted in a challenge to the narrator's identity that outwardly manifested itself in the possible destruction of the car and himself, but inwardly an inclination that he and the 'Other' Tyler are in the same psyche. Part of his self has been lost to the 'Other' Tyler, but the internal 'death drive' between the unconscious and conscious is bringing his identity towards 'homeostasis'. Unsurprisingly, the following scene, after the 'Other' Tyler gives one of his homilies on the importance of getting back to a natural state, the narrator awakes in the morning to discover that he has gone. The 'death drive' has furthered the questioning of his identity as an 'intimate revolt' and his journey to discover his schizophrenic truth now intensifies.

The narrator discovers that the 'Other' Tyler has been flying around the United States on the air tickets he gets from his job, so he traverses the same route. After visiting a number of bars, his conscious and unconscious come into further contact as he experiences a state of perpetual déjà vu, not realising that is because he has visited them as the 'Other' Tyler. He asks himself again whether he is asleep or not, whether he has slept and if the 'Other' Tyler is his bad dream or is he the 'Other' Tyler's. He is now confronting a 'psychical reality that endangers consciousness' and exposing himself to the 'pulse of being'. When a bartender informs him after questioning that he is Tyler Durden, the 'homeostasis' comes even closer but he still seems unsure of his identity. It is reconfirmed when he rings Marla from his hotel room and he then turns to find Tyler sitting in a chair.

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The confrontation between the conscious narrator and his unconscious 'Other' Tyler has resulted in the 'painful testimony' of his schizophrenia. The 'Other' Tyler acts as though he is the narrator's psychoanalyst as he gets him to admit they are the same person. Intercut shots from earlier scenes show him in place of the 'Other' Tyler or show that the 'Other' Tyler was not there. The narrator's memory intermittently returns to him but he is still in denial as he professes not to understand. The 'intimate revolt' of his unconscious is too strong and divulges how the narrator created the 'Other' Tyler as a way to change his life because he could not do it on his own. His protest against the prevailing norms of the 'society of the spectacle' and the inanities of consumer capitalism was channelled into his unconscious and manifested in insomnia and the 'Other' Tyler, because he was too afraid to face the truth about himself. The 'Other' Tyler explains that he is smart, capable and, most importantly, he is free in all the ways that the narrator is not, which is why he created him and why people do this every day. They talk to themselves and see themselves as they would like to be. They do not have the courage the narrator had to just run with it and now, little by little, he is becoming Tyler Durden. The truth is still too much for the narrator and when he calls the 'Other' Tyler insane, he is told, quite rightly, that he is, and faints, awakening next morning seemingly unaware of what has been revealed to him. Even when he returns home, he asks himself if he has been Tyler longer and longer.

The unleashing of his 'jouissance' has had the political ramification that he, as the 'Other' Tyler, and the Space Monkeys, have planted bombs to blow up the headquarters of the major credit card companies. The intention is to erase the debt record then we all go back to zero and that will create total chaos. The 'Other' Tyler reappears when the narrator goes to try to stop the bombings. The narrator is now developing a 'new ethics' by arguing that Project Mayhem has never been about murder. The 'Other' Tyler rebuts this with his own 'new ethics' to justify the explosions as all the buildings are empty of people and they are not killing anyone, rather they are setting them free. Jack's riposte is that Bob is dead by being shot in the head but the 'Other' Tyler reveals his true nature by stating that if you want to make an omelette you have got to break some eggs. So lives are expendable in the greater good that is Project Mayhem. The narrator begins to realise that he is talking to his unconscious as he tells the 'Other' Tyler he is not listening to him because he is not there. We are then shown the 'Other' Tyler holding the gun in the narrator's mouth. The 'Other' Tyler is counting down to the explosion and ready to celebrate the collapse of financial history and the restoration of economic equilibrium, but there is another equilibrium that needs achieving and that is the narrator's psychical 'homeostasis'.

The resolution of the narrator's schizophrenia is in this final violent confrontation with the 'Other' Tyler. The conversation between the narrator's

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conscious and unconscious is revealing because he tries to convince himself that the 'Other' Tyler is just a voice in his head, but the 'Other' Tyler retorts that the narrator is a voice in his. The mental torture of schizophrenia continues as the 'Other' Tyler attempts to convince the narrator to go along with the bombings or go back to his 'shit job' and the artefacts of the 'society of the spectacle' as an 'Ikea boy'. The 'intimate revolt' has reached its mental terminus because the narrator can be free only from the 'Other' Tyler through a sadomasochistic act. He shoots himself through the side of his face and the 'Other' Tyler disappears forever. Out of the window all the buildings start to explode, so equilibrium has been reached in the psychical and the social and a new process of 're-creation' has begun.

CONCLUSION

Kristeva's psychoanalytical critique of the 'society of the spectacle' powered by consumer capitalism through her notion of 'intimate revolt' offers an illuminating understanding of *Fight Club*. The film grasps the sheer awfulness and seductive power of a materialist world and how anyone can fall under its mystical spell without even realising it. The film is both 'seductive and terrifying' to our imaginary because it allows us to identify with those who fight back against consumer capitalism but with the realisation that the terrifying outcome can be mayhem, destruction and death as it was for Bob, and as the narrator himself realises when his 'jouissance' goes awry. Because film is the 'thought specular', we as viewers are allowed the fantasy where we can play out our own 'psychodrama' imagining ourselves as the narrator and the 'Other' Tyler rebelling against the system. Even so, it also brings with it normative considerations, just as the narrator brought forth a 'new ethics' and 'new sociality' from his own psychosis. The revolutionary outcome is certainly problematic, so we need to consider our own responses to what we have seen and how that relates to our own lives. The 'Other' Tyler states that first rule about Fight Club is that we do not talk about Fight Club but because cinema is the 'bold revealer of our psychical lives', we do need to talk about *Fight Club* and its offer of 'intimate revolt' for a saner world.

NOTES

1 Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt. The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 3–5.
2 Ibid., p. 6.
3 Ibid., p. 7.

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4 Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 16.

5 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 23; cf. Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva. Unravelling the Double Bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 185.

6 Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 23. Cf. Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, p. 185.

7 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 22.

8 Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, p. 185.

9 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, pp. 7–8.

10 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

11 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 16. Cf. McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, p. 64.

12 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, p. 11. Cf. Cecilia Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 110–11.

13 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 102–3.

14 Ibid., p. 103.

15 Ibid., pp. 104–5.

16 Ibid., p. 105.

17 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, p. 11.

18 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

19 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, pp. 63–64. The main texts exploring Kristeva's understanding of film are as follows: Katherine J. Goodnow *Kristeva in Focus. From Theory to Film Analysis* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010); Frances Restuccia, 'Kristeva's Intimate Revolt and the Thought Specular: Encountering the (Mulholland) Drive' in Kelly Oliver and S. K. Keltner (eds) *Psychoanalysis, Aesthetics, and Politics in the Work of Julia Kristeva* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009) and *The Blue Box. Kristevan/Lacanian Readings of Contemporary Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2012).

20 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, p. 63.

21 Ibid., p. 65.

22 Ibid., p. 65.

23 Ibid., pp. 65–66.

24 Ibid., p. 66.

25 Ibid., p. 67.

26 Ibid., p. 68.

27 Ibid., p. 69.

28 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

29 Ibid., p. 70.

30 Ibid., p. 72.

31 Ibid., p. 74.

32 Ibid., p. 74.

33 *Behind the Name*. Available at: https://www.behindthename.com/name/cornelius. Accessed 3 July 2017.

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34 *BibleGateway*, 'Cornelius'. Available at: https://www.biblegateway.com/quick search/?quicksearch=Cornelius&qs_version=NIV. Accessed 3 July 2017.

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36 Owen Hatherley, 'If We Don't Want to Live in Shoeboxes, We Need to Bring Back Housing Standards', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2014. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/07/live-shoeboxes-housing-standards-minimum-space. Accessed 5 July 2017.

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Chapter 9

Slavoj Žižek: J. C. Chandor's *Margin Call*

Slavoj Žižek uses the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan to show their efficacy for comprehending the human condition and how films contribute to the understanding of our identity.[1] Žižek utilises the Lacanian notions of, and movements between, the Symbolic, Imaginary and the Real as part of this investigation of the self. The Symbolic refers to the rules governing our everyday lives and the way we present ourselves to each other. This appearance acts as a cover for the Imaginary which already conceals a hidden reality of virtuality, which becomes manifest through the rupture of the hidden reality of the Real. Dealing with the Real can be traumatic and we often attempt to repress it by inventing a lie, a fetish, to cope but the Real can still return as a 'repressed trauma' that we have to deal with. Doing so means engaging in *jouissance* (enjoyment), which is both positive and negative, as we seek to reposition ourselves in relation to these different moments of our identity. Politically, the act of rupture can disturb the status quo requiring from the right the need to equilibrate the Symbolic and the Real to ensure the continuation of capitalism. I apply Žižek's ideas to J. C. Chandor's *Margin Call* (2011) to offer an aesthetic insight into the financial crisis of 2008. The film focuses on a Wall Street investment bank on the brink of bankruptcy as it attempts to reconcile the Symbolic order with the Real in dealing with this trauma.

The film begins before the crash with a number of brutal sackings already being implemented as the firm seeks to downsize its operations. Eric Dale, a middle-aged financial risk assessor, is one of those fired but as he is escorted from the building he leaves a memory stick with a new and aspiring employee, Peter Sullivan. He discovers that the firm could go bankrupt because it has been purchasing and selling on worthless mortgages. The drama of how to deal with this trauma is played out among the acts of the various subjects of

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the firm, from Dale and Sullivan to their boss Will Emerson, the head of sales Sam Rogers and his superior, Jared Cohen. Sarah Robertson, the only notable female presence in the macho world of finance capitalism, is the senior risk assessor who is instrumental in getting Dale dismissed. Finally, there is the calculated, all-powerful CEO John Tuld, who is flown in by helicopter to oversee the crisis before the markets open in the morning. The bank survives as Tuld makes the decision to pass on their worthless stock to trusted traders as quickly as possible once the market opens. Rogers is disgusted at doing so but capitulates. Tuld has no such qualms, as survival for both himself and the bank is the key. I will now expand on Žižek's core ideas before applying them to *Margin Call*.

ŽIŽEK

Žižek has a tripartite understanding of human beings that he derives from Lacan which are the 'Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real.'[2] Žižek uses the analogy of a chess game to show that the Symbolic refers to the rules one adheres to when playing the game; a knight, for example, is defined by the moves it can make. The Imaginary is the way in which we can use our imagination to envisage a game with similar rules but in which the names of the pieces are different, so a knight might be referred to as a runner, for example. Finally, the Real is all the contingencies that operate in relation to the game from the players' intelligence to any interventions that unnerves a player and so ending the game. All of these moments interact with the each other in forging and maintaining human identity.

Expanding further, Žižek argues that the Imaginary and Symbolic mediate between each other, with the Imaginary relating to the 'seen' while the Symbolic 'redoubles the image' onto 'what cannot be seen', that which obscures or blinds us to the image we are observing.[3] This 'redoubling' of the image means that the Symbolic generates the 'appearance that there is a hidden reality beneath a visible appearance' that the Imaginary conceals, which Žižek terms 'virtuality'. Virtuality exists but only in its 'real effects and consequences'.[4]

For Žižek, the 'Real' is the concealed part of our sense of reality involving self-doubt and uncertainty as we move dialectically from one perspective to another and the 'parallax' is the way we identify the gap in this movement.[5] Our conceptions of reality are always incomplete because they rest on the internal contradictions generated by these tripartite moments that are at the basis of our identity. Psychoanalysing this identity involves specifying the 'symptom . . . which disturbs the surface of the false appearance' that emerges from the 'repressed Other'.[6] With the death of a loved one, for

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example, you might repress the death as 'Other' by trying not to contemplate it, but it returns in the symptom as 'repressed trauma'.[7] This contrasts with the 'fetish', which is the 'Lie' allowing us to cope with 'the unbearable truth', that is, the death of a beloved. You rationally accept the death but adhere to the fetish that allows you in some way to disavow it and so deny the harsh reality of mortality. *jouissance* ('enjoyment') is this journey of the self in its positive and negative moments and so has a 'traumatic character' engendering a 'violent intrusion that brings more pain than pleasure'.[8] '*Jouissance'* is the 'ultimate injunction that regulates our lives', commanding us to 'Enjoy!' by realising our potentialities in a myriad of means 'from intense sexual pleasures through social success to spiritual self-fulfillment'.[9] '*Jouissance'* can create great demands on a subject in terms of uncertainty, discomfort and excess stimulation and all politics depends upon and exploits it as an 'economy of enjoyment'.[10]

For Žižek, psychoanalysis discerns these moments as disruptive forces, and the role of politics is to reassert order and stability into this psychosis of the subject and the world.[11] The subject is a political possibility to be realised through the act of rupture.[12] The act is a break from the world of representation and contact with the Real that leaves the subject in a bereft state where the world suddenly lacks meaning and results in trauma, loss and damage of the self. To escape this dilemma, the subject needs to find a new way to relate to the situation it finds itself in.[13] Politically, this act can manifest itself as a challenge to the social order or by finding new ways to rectify and reaccommodate oneself to it. For Žižek, this is as much a possibility for a politics of the left as well as the right.[14] For the left, the response to the rupture attempts to position the Real to the Symbolic through a process of struggle by those who have been excluded from society.[15] On the right of the spectrum, the rupture that occurs means the subject attempts to equilibrate the situation to overcome the contact with the Real that has broken through the Symbolic realm, and so ensure the continued existence of the system.[16]

The dominant system the right wants to maintain is liberalism and Žižek expounds that its basic paradox is its anti-ideological and anti-utopian stance, which is to present itself as the 'politics of a lesser evil' that wants to create the 'least worst society possible'.[17] Liberalism rejects any possibility of positing a positive good because that is the 'ultimate source of all evil', whereas their aim is to stop a greater evil occurring. Žižek sees liberalism as being typified by a deep pessimism about human nature, designating people as selfish, envious and dismissive of any attempt to create an altruistic and good society as it will descend into terror. The cost of the liberal critique of the 'tyranny of the Good' is to turn it into its opposite. The principle of the new global order, the liberal claim to desire nothing but the lesser evil, begins to replicate the features of the enemy they are supposed to be rejecting. For

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Žižek, the global liberal order, with its rejection of utopias, ironically presents itself as the best of all possible worlds in favour of its own 'market-liberal utopia'. The realisation of this vision will occur once everyone in society adjusts to the market mechanism and the universality of human rights. This ushers in the dawn of a 'New Man' who is free from any ideological baggage but is really representative of the 'ultimate totalitarian nightmare'.

Žižek argues that the problem with this liberal view is that it is dependent on a process of socialisation that it also undermines.[18] In the social exchanges in the market, individuals meet as free rational subjects, but they are also the product of complex prior processes that involve Symbolic debt, authority and trust in the 'big Other which regulates exchanges'. The 'big Other' operates at the Symbolic realm and is 'society's unwritten constitution', a 'second nature of every speaking being' that directs and controls their acts as though they were 'puppets' but which they seem oblivious to.[19] Market exchange relies on people participating 'in the basic symbolic pact' and displaying an 'elementary *trust* in the Word'.[20] Žižek adds that obviously the 'market is a domain of egoistic cheating and lying', but, as Lacan indicates, a lie can function only if it presents itself as, and is taken to be, the truth, which has to be already established. In market exchange, people pay and get what they paid for, so there is no permanent bond between them.[21] The presupposition of liberalism is that there is only a 'momentary exchange between atomised individuals who, immediately afterwards, return to their solitude'.

This is epitomised in the financial crash of 2008 and Žižek notes how the crisis showed explicitly that 'it is Capital which is the Real of our lives'. The act of rupture broke through the Symbolic order, demanded a response from political elites throughout the world and received it with a huge bailout in public funding.[22] The 'titans' who caused it were the chief beneficiaries of the bailout by governments. These 'creative geniuses' were not helping the ordinary masses; rather it is the masses through their taxes who were supporting these gods of the financial world.[23] So the very core of capitalism is 'driven by a perverted *eros*, by a lack which becomes ever deeper the more it is satisfied'. The superego of capitalism is, therefore, 'the more profit you amass, the more you need'.

The conclusion Žižek draws is that capitalism is not dependent on the egoistic greed of individual capitalists because their greed is subordinate to the impersonal striving of capitalist reproduction.[24] A capitalist who is devoted to capitalism's drive for incessant reproduction will put everything, even the survival of humanity, at stake to ensure the reproduction of the system as an end in itself, rather than for any pathological gain. A capitalist is therefore someone who 'faithfully pursues a universal goal, without regard for any 'pathological' obstacles' and needs the system to continue in order to survive. With Žižek's ideas outlined, I will now apply them to *Margin Call* beginning with the identity of Eric Dale.

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ERIC DALE

Eric Dale is a messenger of the Real that will rupture the Symbolic realm of financial capital represented in the firm. He is deeply embedded in the 'big Other' and a 'puppet' of its everyday regulations but his job as a risk assessor shifts him from one perspective to another. His parallax view is identifying a gap in this movement that is currently obscured by the interaction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, which is the virtuality of the worthless stock whose 'real effects and consequences' will soon appear. Dale has only partially discovered the 'unbelievable truth' and for the moment it is his 'repressed Other' that is unable to surface as a 'symptom'. His 'fetish' is to carry on as normal and pursue his *jouissance* but his sacking will be a rupture of the Real into his personal Symbolic world. He will no longer be the agent of the Real, but his personal crisis sees him at its mercy as the Symbolic realm of the rewards from financial capitalism are rescinded.

The opening shot is a portent of this with an emergence from darkness as the swirling wind of the Real brings into sight the towers of Wall Street in the distance, accompanied by doom-laden music and the voice-over chatter of traders in the Symbolic realm of the 'big Other'. The incessant clang of the trading bell from the New York Stock Exchange that opens and closes business sounds the alarm for the crisis of the rupture of the Real, which is about to follow as the screen dissolves to a foreboding traumatic black.

A cut then shows the emissaries of another Real, the people who are implementing the first rounds of dismissals to those deemed unfit to continue serving the firm. Sullivan and his colleague Seth Bregman seem shocked that it is being done in full view of everyone, showing their inexperience of the Real. Emerson is also surprised they have not seen this before, advising them to keep their heads down. He is chewing nicotine gum to stave off his addiction until he can get outside to smoke, but his habit is emblematic of the addiction he, and they, have towards capitalism and the craving to repeatedly make money to ensure the continuation of the system and their lifestyles.

The agents of the Real executing the dismissals are shown walking among the traders who are glued to their computer screens, clinging to the Symbolic realm of the 'big Other', hoping it is not them. Dale will be the focal point of this but the firer misidentifies him as Sullivan on the general trading floor and has to be directed to Dale's office. His initial misidentification is symptomatic of the atomised nature of market relations. He has been with the firm for nineteen years, is head of risk assessment in his department with his own office, but to the agent of the Real he is just another name on the dismissal sheet to put a line through. He barely has an identity now and soon he will have none at all once he is sacrificed on the altar of the Real as his usefulness to the firm is over, that is, until they realise their mistake.

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The swirling wind of the Real finds Dale in his office working studiously at his computer. He is analysing the data that will lead to the rupture of the Real that he can only partially see as the Imaginary is obscured by the redoubling of the Symbolic. The shot perfectly captures how his own identity will be ruptured as the Symbolic world of his everyday life outside work is represented on the right of the frame with pictures of himself and his family on his desk. His open office door is just visible in the background as the agent of the Real appears to puncture the happy picture, and send him into a trauma and a loss of self as evinced in the trance-like state he is in as he goes to meet his doom.

As he begins to leave the office, he turns back slightly to look at his desk. The camera stays in position with the photographs framed in the foreground on the right. It seems he is thinking about the consequences for his family and he sneaks another look back through the window as he exits to reinforce his concerns. The harshness of the rupture of the Real is contrasted with the love of his family. He could also be looking back because he has his analysis on the screen, the other love of his life, which is his work as a risk assessor and the remuneration that brings but will now be lost. His humiliation is exacerbated as he walks past the traders and is escorted into a glass-walled office in full sight of everyone. The surviving traders are safely ensconced in the Symbolic realm of the 'big Other' but they can see the effects of the Real in the way he is being treated and the realisation that one day it could be them. For now, they are still part of the 'market-liberal utopia' but Dale has descended into the market-liberal dystopia where he no longer counts.

The reorientation of the Real with the Symbolic for the firm is also captured in the interchange between Dale and the two agents of the Real who are firing him. They use euphemistic language that hides the hidden reality that he is being brutally sacked. They refer to 'extraordinary circumstances', that his being 'let go' is 'nothing personal' as the majority of the floor are also being 'let go' today, ignoring why he is not part of the surviving minority. The main firer is pictured in imposing close-ups and robotically enunciates that given the sensitive nature of his work, his involvement with the company will end immediately. He is perplexed, so the second firer elucidates that they are apologising for what is about to happen. He mentions that he is working on something important but he is told it has been taken care of as part of his 'transition', but it clearly has not as he takes it upon himself to give the information to Sullivan. The only 'transition' Dale is experiencing is the passage to unemployment.

A burly security guard appears in the doorway, the iron fist of the Real behind the Symbolic euphemisms should they not have the desired effect. The second firer gives him a brochure incongruously titled 'Looking Ahead' with a yacht at sea on the front. There will be no yachts or future for Dale

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once he is thrown on the scrapheap of capitalism but his own partial penetration of the Real will be his revenge once Sullivan has completed the analysis and the Symbolic order is ruptured.

Once Sullivan completes Dale's work and the 'unbelievable truth' is exposed, they need to find Dale. The realm of the Real has broken through and Emerson is in a state of trauma. Dale has not gone home and Bregman, a little belatedly, reasons that as he has three kids he is unlikely to after being sacked. Dale was, until now, forgotten about, but, as the provider of the path to the Real, he suddenly becomes of value again to equilibrate the Symbolic and the Real. The recognition that he has children and the impact his sacking would have on them was of no concern to anyone before. Bregman has now mentioned it so it shows that some of them do have compassion but they repress it to allow them to engage in the atomised world of market relations in their liberal utopia. The 'fetish' that allows them to cope with this will take different forms and for Dale, the supposed family man, we discover it takes the form of frequenting lap dance clubs.

This revelation occurs when Emerson suddenly realises where Dale will be and sends Sullivan and Bregman to go in pursuit. The viewer is unaware where until they are subsequently shown in the centre of a shot siting at a bar with scantily clad women going back and forth. The people there have not seen Dale, implying that he was a habitual visitor. Dale's character, that might have evoked sympathy earlier in terms of his mistreatment, reveals a 'repressed Other' whose *jouissance* finds a form of satisfaction away from the Symbolic safety of his family life. Women are treated as objects to be ogled at and are the 'fetish' that allows him to cope with the ruthless world of financial capitalism. The solace he normally finds there is unavailable tonight as he knows that he will not inhabit that world anymore as a supposedly failed risk assessor and victim of the Real.

When they eventually find Dale outside his house, Emerson engages in conversation to persuade him to return to the firm. Dale is in reflective mood now that the Real has ruptured his Symbolic order. He recounts that he was once an engineer and built a bridge twenty-two years ago that saved people years of their lives by going the direct, rather than circuitous, route home. The rupture of the Real seems to have made him reassess his life and offered him a parallax view of the gap between a world in which he contributed to usefully as an engineer and the Symbolic realm of financial capitalism, the purpose of which he now seems to doubt.

Emerson pleads with him to return but then warns him when he resists doing so that he will lose his severance package. Dale attempts to remain in the Real despite the uncertainties he and his family face so he refuses. Emerson considers him a better man than him as he would take the money. As regards Dale's bridge anecdote, Emerson suggests that some people like

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driving the long way home. Dale's story implies that he did something useful once and Emerson recognises that, as a better man than him, there is some integrity to his character because he cannot be bought off with money. Emerson's point that some people would rather take the long way home might indicate that they want to avoid their mundane everyday lives, and as Dale stops off at lap dance clubs after work he is one of them. So maybe he is not a better man than Emerson after all. He will soon succumb to the Symbolic order once the firm warns him what his Real world would resemble if he does not return. Before that, I now turn to his initial nemesis who ushered in the Real and reduced Dale to his current traumatic state and that is the ice-cool figure of Sarah Robertson.

SARAH ROBERTSON

Robertson was an emissary of the Real for the first bout of sackings but this new, more powerful Real that Sullivan has exposed, via Dale's work, is heading towards her like a juggernaut out of the Imaginary and rupturing her Symbolic order. In a meeting with Jared Cohen to review Sullivan's analysis, Robertson clings to the Symbolic side of her identity by trying to deflect attention from her being instrumental in sacking Dale. Cohen and Robertson are readjusting to this new Real and the atomised realm of impersonal market exchange they inhabit means they are presenting a Symbolic front to each other, but one of them will lose the game. That Cohen has an advantage is evinced when Emerson describes him as being a 'killer', and she was the one who made the mistake of sacking Dale. Cohen is also only forty-three years old, so he has risen rapidly to a senior position. He is also male, a distinct advantage in the sexist world of financial capitalism, and typified by Dale referring to Robertson as a 'cunt' when he was fired.

Cohen is also more appreciative of the effects of the Real as he has suggested dumping the worthless stock and called Tuld in anticipation that he will approve of his plan. The battle lines between Cohen, the 'killer', and Robertson have now been drawn but it is clear from the opening exchanges that Cohen seems best positioned to deal with the Real. The distrust between them is palpable and just as mistrust can undermine market transactions, so it can threaten how they can agree to equilibrate the parallax gap that has now been exposed between the Symbolic and the Real.

Cohen and Robertson enter a lift and stand either side of a cleaner and they talk across her as though she is invisible. Two 'titans' of financial capital are ready to lock horns, towering above the representative of those at the bottom and whose taxes will bail them out when the Real and the 'big Other' of the Symbolic order is reconstituted. The theme of a productive occupation also

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reappears here in the work that the cleaner does. She cleans but they engage in the 'egoistic cheating and lying' of the grubby world of money-making presented as truth. There is a tense discussion between them that exposes their Symbolic representation to each other that hides the Real of their intentions. Cohen, though, has already reaccommodated himself to this new Real by scheming to get her fired. She senses his betrayal, warning him not to even think about 'fucking' her on this because he must know she will take him down as well. The Symbolic realm is now shattered by the Real of the situation between them in the dog-eat-dog 'market-liberal utopia' they inhabit. She is saying this as she is leaving the lift. The alarm sounds that the door is closing as a metaphorical signal for the impending end of her career with the firm rather than his. Cohen the 'killer' has readjusted himself to the trauma of the Real by transferring the 'repressed Other' of the 'symptom' of his own ruin onto the 'fetish' that it is all Robertson's fault. He will be aided in that by the master of coping with the Real, the CEO John Tuld.

Robertson is in her office and framed in near-darkness suggesting her gloomy fate. There is a lamp on with a red shade over it, so blood is about to be spilt. An empty chair to the right awaits an occupant and a knock at the door shows that it is Tuld, an agent of the Real. He requests if he may come in, as if he could not, and she is polite saying of course and invites him to sit down, joining in with the Symbolic charade disguising the atomised world they inhabit. He picks up a small cuddly toy from her desk and smiles at it letting out a chuckle revealing his human side despite what he is about to do. It is a lion but unfortunately for Robertson she is about to be thrown to them just as she did to Dale. He comes to the blunt truth that he needs a head to feed to the traders and the board. When she asks if it is her or Cohen, he immediately chooses her. She attempts to defend herself by recalling the warning she gave last year to both him and Cohen so she did have sight of the Real but he advises her against it. He leaves telling her they will sort her severance out downstairs and wishes her good luck, which she will need in the cut-throat world of liberalism. As the messenger of the Real, Tuld has crashed into Robertson's Symbolic world but she was as ruthless when imposing the Real on Dale. Cohen the 'killer' was one step ahead of her in responding to the trauma and the only fetish left for her trauma is the severance package she will receive to make her feel worthy again. She can pursue her *jouissance*, albeit with her name tainted throughout Wall Street, and her ignominy is complete as she is replaced by Dale.

Robertson and Dale have both confronted the Real and have been its emissaries. Robertson coped with the first rupture by passing her trauma onto her fetish that is Dale as his Symbolic world foundered around him. Dale's partial penetration of the Imaginary that was hiding the virtuality manifested in the worthless stock resulted in, via Sullivan's extra work, the 'hidden reality'

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behind the Symbolic appearance. Dale's trauma made him question his life, as his reference back to being an engineer testifies. Ultimately, though, the 'market-liberal utopia' he has inhabited for nearly two decades made him readjust and equilibrate the Symbolic and the Real so both he and the system continue. For Robertson, with or without her, the Symbolic order of the system will persist until its next rupture from the Real. I now want to turn to the character that seems more susceptible to rethinking his identity, and questioning the system when faced with the trauma induced by the Real's rupture of the Symbolic, and that is the head of sales, Sam Rogers.

SAM ROGERS

Rogers's parallax view mediates between the Symbolic and the Real wherein he begins to expose the gap between his acceptance and criticism of the 'market-liberal utopia' of financial capitalism. After the first bout of dismissals, he is shown with his fingers over his eyes in obvious tearful torment, staring out of the window. At first it seems he is upset about the sackings that have taken place and Emerson enters thinking this also. Emerson has run out of nicotine gum and will kill someone in about ten minutes if he does not get one. He momentarily forgets the number of his co-workers that have been metaphorically murdered in the 'bloodbath' of their dismissals, as he has called them, on the altar of the Real. Rogers then utters that he is upset because his dog is dying. The incongruous juxtaposition between the sackings we have just witnessed with people humiliated, in general, and Dale, in particular, while Rogers is more concerned about his dog could not be clearer. The vet has diagnosed that the dog has a tumour and will die. Rogers has been paying $1,000 a day to keep the dog alive, showing that money is always present even in emotional calculations in the Symbolic world of market exchange.

On a personal level, the dog is the 'fetish' that allows Rogers to cope with the 'unbearable truth' of what his job entails. He is divorced and evidently alone so the dog is his only form of emotional empathy. Now the 'repressed trauma' of her eventual death is the 'symptom' he has to confront. As his tears testify, the impending death of the fetish and onset of the Real will leave him a bereft and damaged self. The irony of the dog is also symbolised in the dog-eat-dog world of finance capitalism that he has survived in for decades, but the dog's demise will make him question that once the Real of the worthless stocks ruptures the symbolic world he inhabits.

Rogers's personal trauma contrasts with the public trauma where he coaches the traders to equilibrate themselves to the new Real and the Symbolic, unaware as of yet that there is another Real of the worthless stocks arriving to rupture that perceived stability. This emerges with intercut shots

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showing Sullivan, who has stayed behind to investigate what is on Dale's memory stick, and Rogers driving to the vets. Rogers is intermittently enveloped in darkness and light to emphasise his increasingly ambiguous status in relation to the Symbolic order, even though he is instrumental with his pep talks to the traders to ensure its continuation. Sullivan is shown scribbling down calculations from the information on the screen. A cut shows a close-up of Rogers kissing the head of his dog which is looking dolefully ahead. Rogers pulls back in tears with his hand to his head while the dog lies inert on the table in front of him. A cut to Sullivan has him in close-up, his face in horror as he now realises the 'unbelievable truth' that Dale was discovering.

Sullivan has penetrated to the Real that the Imaginary has concealed and which the Symbolic order has redoubled, to reveal the 'hidden reality' of the virtuality of the worthless stocks. Sullivan's parallax view has identified the gap in the movement between the Real and the Symbolic in the symptom that will manifest in the trauma of the bankruptcy of the firm unless action is taken. The juxtaposition with Rogers tenderly caring for his dog and his own personal trauma is an interesting contrast, because he is losing his fetish that allows him to cope with the brutality of what he does in the egoistic world of financial capitalism. The much bigger problem that Sullivan, via Dale, has unearthed will require a more robust response that no fetish can cope with, so the 'repressed trauma' must be confronted for the Symbolic and the Real to be equilibrated. Another 'bloodbath' will have to be enacted and it emerges when Tuld holds a crisis conference with all the 'titans' of financial capitalism present.

THE CRISIS CONFERENCE

Prior to the conference, Cohen is in his office with Rogers. Cohen is slightly out of focus with the streets illuminated from below as he describes what has happened as 'bizarre' and like a 'dream'. A close-up is on Rogers to the left of the screen and Cohen is in the background out of focus again and dreamlike, but the sharp accentuation on Rogers's face is accompanied by him announcing that it seems they have just woken up. The scene is brief but sums up succinctly the rupture of the Real into the dreamy world of the Symbolic order of financial capitalism that the crisis conference will now have to deal with.

The scene also encapsulates Tuld's power as they are all gathered nervously around the conference table with him at its head. Their Symbolic world has been shattered by the Real but that still needs to be explained to Tuld. Sullivan eventually does so after Tuld requests to be spoken to in plain English as though he was a small child or a golden retriever. He smiles ominously saying it was not brains that got him where he was, implying that it was by

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being ruthless as the ‘market-liberal utopia’ demands. Tuld’s confidence and power as a real ‘titan’ permeates the scene with intercut shots of his nervous subordinates round the table reinforcing his domination over their fate. After Sullivan’s explanation, Tuld summarises in the plain English that he has been demanding and concludes, ‘what you are telling me is that the music is about to stop and we are going to be left holding the biggest bag of odorous excrement ever assembled in the history of capitalism’. Sullivan smiles slightly nervously and would not put it like that but using his analogy the music is just slowing, if it stopped, it would be even worse than the model was predicting. Tuld’s power seems momentarily dented with this assessment. He relates that the reason he sits in this chair and earns all the big bucks is because it is his job to predict what happens when the music stops as master of the Real, but tonight he does not hear a thing, only silence. Tuld has now been presented with a parallax view of the gap that the rupture of the Real has caused in the Symbolic order of financial capitalism that the firm represents. The worthless stock concealed in the virtuality of the Imaginary has been hidden by the redoubling of what cannot be seen and now returns as a traumatic event that has to be faced. After some discussion, the equilibration between the Real and the Symbolic will be to sell the worthless stock.

The trauma is to be dealt with by the trust in the ‘big Other that regulates exchanges’ through the market, which is really a ‘domain of egoistic cheating and lying’, but, as Lacan said, functions by presenting itself as the truth. For Rogers, the plan appears to go against the rules of the market and human decency, but as Tuld reminds him they are offering stock at its current price so they are not technically cheating, they are just being ‘first’, that is, ruthless. For the firm, the Real and the Symbolic will equilibrate and the fetish to overcome the ‘trauma’ is the ‘Lie’ that the stock is of value. At the moment, only they know about this ‘hidden reality’ that they, as good capitalists, accommodate themselves to in whatever way they can to ensure the survival of the firm, themselves, and the capitalist system.

TULD’S TRIUMPH AND ROGERS’ DEMISE

Tuld is facing the trauma via the fetish that is the ‘Lie’ about the stock. Rodgers is trying to avoid it but it will still come back as a ‘symptom’ of the ‘repressed Other’ and bankrupt the firm, so he goes along with the plan. Before he goes to rouse the traders, he is shown outside smoking a cigarette slumped against a wall, staring vacantly down with a pained expression on his face. He looks like a broken man, a damaged self, bereft of the fetish of his dog. A conversation then occurs between himself and Sullivan in which the atomised world of market exchange seems to be momentarily suspended.

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Sullivan knew Rogers's son slightly and mentions that he seemed a nice guy. Rogers agrees that his son is. It seems a touching moment amidst the instrumental lives they live in the Symbolic world of financial capitalism. For Žižek, though, the 'market-liberal utopia' is based on a deep pessimism about human nature and this is borne out because the real reason he is asking about his son is to find out whether he has warned him about the impending crash. Rogers has never even thought about it as the Real has penetrated his psyche so much with the death of his dog as his fetish that self-preservation is all he can think about. Sullivan mentions that it could probably be considered illegal, so the intimation is that maybe he wants to warn a family member also. So even the most basic human conversations are tinged with self-interest and with Rogers it is now all-consuming to the point of forgetting about his son.

They then discuss the morality of selling the worthless stock and both agree that they do not know who they are doing this all for. The trauma they are facing means that they are repressing the Real of their lives. Theirs is a world of self-interest and dog-eat-dog for survival so they should have no qualms about the sale and they know why they are doing it. They need to ensure the continued existence of the firm and their own livelihoods in the Symbolic world of financial capitalism. It is disingenuous of them to protest their ignorance, especially as this becomes clear in the next scene.

Rogers outlines to the traders what is happening, what they need to do and the lucrative bonuses they will get if they meet their targets, even selling to their mothers if need be. They will probably lose their jobs if they do it properly and they will be hated by those outside but their talents will be used for the greater good. The greater good is the survival of the firm and capitalism itself, which he conveniently forgot about in the previous scene. Rogers is attempting to present himself as the trader with a conscience but he is deluding himself by clinging onto this 'fetish'. It is a 'Lie' and will be exposed as such in a subsequent scene with Tuld.

The traders are getting to work and there is a voice-over of Emerson selling the worthless stock interspersed with aerial shots of Wall Street and the trading floors. He knows the buyers so they trust him unaware that he is armed with the Real that will bring their Symbolic world crashing down around them, and the infliction of their own 'trauma'. As the morning progresses, the rupture of the Real is out and eventually the bell rings signalling the end of trading. The current Symbolic order has exposed the market for the 'domain of egoistic cheating and lying' it attempts to deny through the 'big Other' that regulates exchanges. The traders are to be dismissed immediately to ensure there are no loose ends. Rogers is safe but still goes to see Tuld as he cannot bear the brutality of the 'market-liberal utopia' any longer and wants out. He passes the new batch of sacked workers carrying their boxes of possessions, victims of the Real.

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This penultimate scene is the equilibration of the Symbolic with the Real for the firm and Tuld. The act of rupture and psychosis it has produced has been dealt with. For Rogers, the continuing problems between his Real and Symbolic self mean the fetish of his dog is over as it is dead, so he can recover only by leaving the firm and taking his severance. The discussion between them shows how Tuld has a greater grasp on the Real and Symbolic, and without his fetish, Rogers is deluding himself about the nature of the financial system and his own role in it. Tuld reminds him that he has been putting people out of work for decades and that he could have been digging ditches instead. Rogers is self-pitying and responds that at least he would have had something to show for it but Tuld has exposed his hypocrisy and related his Symbolic self with the Real. As an affirmation of the 'market-liberal utopia' they have been, and are still part of, there is a tremendous speech by Tuld that encapsulates the operations of capitalism perfectly.

Tuld recites the history of financial crashes with special attention to the ones that he has survived. As he says, that is the way the system works so they 'react' to it and make money if they are right and suffer if they are wrong. For Tuld, there will always be a percentage of 'winners and losers, happy fucks and sad sacks, fat pigs and starving dogs in this world' and so the system goes on. Rogers has been trying to repress this 'trauma' but it is the 'unbelievable truth' of the Real that Tuld is now forcing him to confront and which his whole working life has been a part of. A close-up of Tuld sees him smile knowingly as that is the Real of what they do and Rogers needs the money, so he reluctantly capitulates to see out his notice.

The final scene sees Tuld a broken and damaged self as he goes to his former family home late at night to dig a hole in the garden to bury the fetish that was his dog. He said earlier to Tuld that if he had dug ditches instead of being a trader he would have had something to show for it, but all he has now is the grave for his dog. His wife still lives at the house and as an indication of his own trauma and self-interest he has not even knocked at the door to tell her what he is doing. She has even called the police thinking it is an intruder, which technically he is as she reminds him he does not live there anymore. He is now a completely atomised self that is bereft of a fetish. He discovers from her that his son's firm got hammered but got out alright in the end, Rogers says good. He has completely forgotten his son could have been a victim when this was mentioned to him by Sullivan, and it resonates with his instruction to the traders to even sell the worthless stock to their mothers if they have to. Tuld was right to expose him as a hypocrite. Rogers has reconciled himself to the new Symbolic order but with the 'fetish' of his dog now over he needs a new 'fetish' to cope with the 'trauma' of the fallout from the crash. That fetish is the same one for all of these 'titans' of the 'market-liberal utopia': money.

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CONCLUSION

Žižek's psychoanalytical approach as applied to *Margin Call* illuminates the psychosis of financial capitalism that resulted in the 2008 crash. Exploring the parallax view of these subjects has shown how they try to cope with the symptom of financial ruin and cling to the fetish of money which is crucial for their own salvation. They pursue their own *jouissance*, saving themselves and their wealthy lifestyles from the trauma that has invaded their Symbolic world. This results in a dog-eat-dog environment where some of them must be scapegoated for the greater good of the firm that stands as a Symbol for the greater good of the capitalist economy. The presence of the 'repressed Other' as the meltdown of finance capital forces their political reactions to ensure the status quo must be restored just as, in reality, the political elites ensured that it would for the world economy as a whole. Theirs is a 'market-liberal utopia' which regenerates itself from the clashes between the symbolic and the Real while dragging the rest of society in its path, the 'ultimate totalitarian nightmare' from which we all need to awake.

NOTES

1 Žižek uses films to illustrate his points throughout his writings. His two main specific works that apply Lacan to film are, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (Seattle: The Walter Chapin Simpson Centre for the Humanities, University of Washington, 2000) and *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For a sustained analysis of his contribution to film studies, see Matthew Flisfeder, *The Symbolic, the Sublime and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

2 Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), pp. 8–9.

3 Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 691.

4 Ibid., pp. 691 and 69.

5 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 4–7.

6 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. ix–x.

7 Ibid., p. x.

8 Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 79.

9 Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 30.

10 Kelsey Wood, *Žižek. A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 4.

11 Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, p. 963.

12 Todd McGowan, 'Subject of the Event, Subject of the Act: The Difference between Badiou's and Žižek's Systems of Philosophy', *Subjectivity*, 3, 1, 2010, p.

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10. Žižek does not appear to use the actual term ‘rupture’; McGowan does not cite textual evidence for the term, so he seems to be imposing it on the narrative but it does appositely capture the manifestation of the act.

13 McGowan, ‘Subject of the Event’, p. 11.

14 Ibid., pp. 19–20.

15 Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 102; McGowan, ‘Subject of the Event’, pp. 19–20.

16 McGowan, ‘Subject of the Event’, p. 20.

17 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 38.

18 Ibid., p. 40.

19 Ibid., p. 8.

20 Ibid., p. 40.

21 Ibid., p. 41.

22 Ibid., p. 334.

23 Ibid., p. 239.

24 Ibid., p. 335.

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Chapter 10

Conclusion

The richness of the relationship between political theory and film has hopefully been established on the journey from Adorno to Žižek. The diversity in the thinkers discussed and the differing ways their ideas illuminate the films analysed have raised a number of issues over the oppressions people face in their respective societies and the hope that they can overcome them. From my own perspective, this is the value of a political theory of film because it can further a critical stance to the status quo and in particular capitalist relations in their various guises. I say further, because as Benjamin pointed out, we all have an 'evaluating attitude' when we see a film, which is the democratic nature of the medium. The role of political theory is to increase our perceptions and capacity for critical thought without stifling the capacity to be in, Rancière's term, 'a politics of the amateur' when watching and then debating a film. Against this is Adorno's worry about the invidious power of the culture industry that indoctrinates the masses and usurps the possibility for critical reflection by acquiescence to the status quo. However, as was shown with *Monsieur Verdoux*, there is a capacity for subversion through the very mechanisms the culture industry adopts, as Chaplin did, and Adorno's notion of heterodoxy exposed. Similarly, a viewer watching Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* is presented on one level with an interesting comedy but the political messages against right-wing Tea Party Republicanism and the decadence and disparagement of the lower orders are present. Political theory elucidates that further by exposing how Blochian dreaming can capture a world that affirms Gil's more authentic self that we might identify with. In *Neighbouring Sounds*, we can see how lower classes in Brazil are badly treated but that also can be enhanced by Deleuze's notion of the 'people who are missing' to heighten that awareness in the various scenes that were illustrated. *A Touch of Sin* brings the brutal and corrupt reality of contemporary Chinese society to

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the viewer, but Badiou's notions of 'event' and 'fidelity' to Maoism suggest other possibilities and a different world from the one depicted on the screen. This also is why a film such as *Rendition* is so important as part of the mainstream of cinema by showing the audience the complexities and debates over the war on terror. Rancière then highlights that understanding further by his notions of 'consensus' and 'dissensus' and the operations of the police. *Fight Club* can be seen on many different levels, on the most basic as a glorification of violence. Kristeva's psychoanalytical approach takes that further in a number of ways to expose the dangers on the psyche that consumer capitalism poses for people. Similarly, on one level, *Margin Call* is just an aesthetic account of the 2008 crash but the viewer is shown how most of the traders have no scruples in ensuring their survival and exposes the true nature of the dog-eat-dog world of liberalism. Zizek's Lacanian analysis elucidates that further by exposing the psychosis of the system and the psychic strains of dealing with the trauma of the Symbolic and the Real.

The political theory of film is about enhancement and further elucidation to expose the various political dimensions within a film, whether they have been seen or where they have been missed, and this book has been a contribution to that endeavour.

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