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ACTING AFTER THE NEW WAVE:
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Since the new wave, every time there was a fine and powerful film, there was a new exploration of the body in it.

-Gilles Deleuze

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INTRODUCTION

> The direction of actors is simultaneously the *sculptural* exploration of human *form*, and the *moral* or *political* exploration of human *freedom*.
>
> -Jean-Luc Godard

This dissertation is situated in the period that French cultural historian Pascal Ory has dubbed "*l'entre-deux-mai*," or the inter-May period – the long decade bounded on the one side by the ultimately unsuccessful student protests and mass strikes of May 1968 and on the other by the election of François Mitterrand, the first socialist president under the Fifth Republic, in May 1981.[1] If this periodization is first and foremost political, it is also designates a rather distinct era of French filmmaking. This period can perhaps only be described as post-New Wave, a designation whose lack of descriptive content is, as we will see, significant. One emblematic sign of this break would be the close of Jean-Luc Godard's "first period" with *Weekend* (1967) and his subsequent abandonment of narrative with films like *Le Gai savoir* and *Un film comme les autres* (both 1968), followed by his turn to collective filmmaking with the Dziga Vertov Group. While filmmakers like François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol continued making films across this transition without significant transformation, clearly there was a sense within French film culture that the energy of the New Wave had dissipated and that new models had to be sought out and new forms invented. This was intensified by the fact that the Hollywood-obsessed cinephilia of the original New Wave films now

[1] Pascal Ory, *L'Entre-deux-mai. Histoire culturelle de la France, mai 1968-mai 1981* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983).

seemed somewhat anachronistic, given both the decline of Classical Hollywood filmmaking across the 1960s and the growing anti-Americanism of an increasingly politicized film culture. As if to signal this desire for a new direction, in 1968 *Cahiers du cinéma* published back-to-back issues dedicated to innovative but underexposed French filmmakers (Jacques Rivette, Philippe Garrel, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Marc'O) and emerging American independent filmmakers (Andy Warhol, Shirley Clarke, John Cassavetes, and Robert Kramer, collectively classified as "non-Hollywood, and even anti-Hollywood, but also non-underground").[2]

Thirteen years later, in May and June of 1981, *Cahiers* published two special issues on "the situation of French cinema," which surveyed over 40 respondents from the French film industry, and combined in-depth interviews with directors, actors, and cinematographers with critical assessments from the editorial staff in an attempt to take the pulse of the current state of cinematic affairs and to retrospectively give shape to the previous decade – a period implicitly framed as beginning in 1968.[3] What emerges, however, is above all a sense of confusion, a feeling that the '70s sprawl out behind them like a landscape without landmarks or orienting features – a lack that is especially palpable in relation to role that the New Wave had played in giving a shape and coherence to French filmmaking during the first half of the 60s. Despite the fact that the late '60s and early '70s saw the emergence of a number of significant French directors including Maurice Pialat, Jean Eustache, Philippe Garrel, Marguerite Duras, Jacques

[2] *Cahiers du cinéma* 204 (September 1968), "Cinéma français, zéro de conduite: Rivette, Pollet, Garrel"; *Cahiers du cinéma* 205 (October 1968), "Quatre Américains: Shirley Clarke, John Cassavetes, Robert Kramer, Andy Warhol"

[3] For example, in the survey question: "What French film has most impressed you since 1968?" *Cahiers du cinéma* 323/324 (May 1981), "Situation du Cinéma Français I" and *Cahiers du cinéma* 325 (June 1981), "Situation du Cinéma Français II – La Production, La Technique."

Doillon, Luc Moullet, André Téchiné, and Paul Vecchiali, Serge Daney's introductory essay laments that the '70s produced "no tidal wave, no movement, no school: almost an aesthetic desert."[4] If, from the vantage point of the early-'80s, the '70s appeared shapeless and hard to define, contemporary cinematic events were in the process of instituting a shift that would lend the period a sort of retroactive consistency. Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva*, released in March of 1981, seemed to inaugurate something new in French cinema. A glossy thriller influenced by the aesthetics of advertising, it was the first shot in the cinematic offensive that came to be known as the *cinéma du look*, viewed by some critics as a direct attack on the heritage of the New Wave. Writing in 1982, Fredric Jameson recognized it as an epochal event, "the first French postmodernist film," noting that it has been granted "the privilege of a historical *conjuncture*":

> May 10, 1981, the date of the first left government in France for thirty-five years, draws a line beneath the disappointing neo-romantic and post-Godard French productions of the 1970s, and allows *Diva* […] to emerge (rightly or wrongly) with all the prestige of a new thing, a break, a turn."[5]

Serge Daney judged it, retrospectively, to be "a film which inaugurated the eighties rather well, being at the same time vacuous and insular and in the end without any grandeur."[6] The *esthétique publicitaire* of Beineix and other filmmakers of the era such as

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[4] Serge Daney, *La Rampe: Cahier critique 1970-1982* (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, 1996), 189. Nicole Brenez, writing sixteen years later, would reverse Daney's valuation by viewing the heterogeneity of the decade in a much different light: "for America, the French cinema stops with the *nouvelle vague* and, necessarily, nothing follows. It wouldn't be hard to prove the contrary; after the *nouvelle vague* came the essential, a cinema which, in its totality, was permeated by a vital need to experiment, to allow authors to exercise their inventiveness to the utmost, to not fall back on any single solution, to formulate every question to the point of total delirium […] and the inadmissible." *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin (London: BFI, 2003), 22.
[5] Jameson, "*Diva* and French Socialism," in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75.
[6] Daney, *L'Exercice a été profitable, Monsieur*, 1991. Tr. Stoffel Debuysere at http://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=1521

Luc Besson did not, of course, destroy the inheritance of the New Wave or become the sole stylistic option for French filmmaking. It did, however, epitomize what was seen as a fundamental transformation in image culture – a change presaged by the growing influence of television vis-à-vis cinema, and which would come to be understood in terms of the rise of postmodernism. In other words, the '70s exhibits the messy uncertainty of a transitional period – inchoate and in flux, hard to characterize on its own terms yet not allowing itself to be assimilated into what came before or after.

Rather than try to assert an overriding style or movement characteristic of the '70s, or, conversely, to approach the era through a loosely connected assortment of themes or trends, this dissertation offers an account of French cinema from 1968 to 1981 that focuses primarily on what I want to claim is a heightened attention across this period to the human body and its movements, gestures, and postures.[7] In this way I aim to simultaneously expand our knowledge of a strikingly neglected chapter in film history and to contribute to of our understanding of performance in cinema – an area that has always presented a particular difficulty for film studies.[8] If the Deleuzian motto, borrowed from Spinoza – "We do not even know what a body can do" – can stand as an all too accurate assessment of a blind spot in film theory, it also points to the

[7] The idea of the post-New Wave as a cinema of bodies is not without precedent, the most notable of which is Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. The section of the book focused on the body in cinema passes through Cassavetes, Carmelo Bene, and Chantal Akerman, but focuses above all on post-New Wave French cinema: Eustache, Garrel, Doillon, and the '70s work of New Wave figures like Rivette, Godard, and Varda.

[8] To date there is only one book in English focused exclusively on this period: Alison Smith's *French Cinema in the 1970s: Echoes of May*. Jill Forbes's 1992 book *The Cinema in France After the New Wave* deals with both the '70s and '80s, but it remains the best overview of my period in English.

unexplored territory that some of the most interesting films of this era sought to explore.[9]

While one of the main aims of this dissertation is to use the films of the post-New Wave period to gain a more complex understanding of the aesthetic functioning of film performance, it also seeks to think about the ways in which moving bodies offer an opportunity to engage with the historicity of cinematic images. Bodily movement is not only culturally conditioned but historically variable as well, and cinema gives this dimension of historical change a visibility that it has never before had. But if cinema registers, as well as manipulates, the ways in which corporeal movements and bearing change over time, how do we read the gestural archive that it has compiled? And what do we expect to learn from this engagement with the history of movement? I believe that attending closely to the details of performance and bodily movement can shed a light on significant domains of historical experience that would otherwise remain inaccessible. While I want to suggest a larger claim for the historical value of the whole range of human movement captured since the invention of cinematography, there is a certain logic in grounding and testing this proposition in the films of the post-'68 period. For, if the subtleties of bodily movement – the details of how exactly people walk, stand, smile at a given point in time – might run the risk of appearing historically trivial, the period I am investigating was engaged in enlarging the scope of what kind of activity might be understood as historically (and politically) significant. Alison Smith has summed up this tendency and its relation to the films of the '70s as follows:

> In a decade where there was an audience *expectation* that since 'tout est politique', films would have some socio-political relevance, this extension of the field of politics allowed film-makers the scope to insert their social awareness into the treatment of very varied stories. The importance of the working of wider political and social forces on apparently insignificant

[9] *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 189.

> incidents of ordinary life was sometimes referred to as 'historical' thinking. This is a phrase to which Godard gave great importance in *Tout va bien*, and a concept which is fundamental to understanding the aims of the most ambitious films of the 1970s.[10]

If an awareness of "the working of wider political and social forces on apparently insignificant incidents of ordinary life" was characteristic of the engaged filmmaking of the '70s, then it seems eminently reasonable to focus in on the micro-level of the performance of everyday actions and gestures as a potential site of political analysis and action. At the same time, the certainty implied by the phrase "historical thinking" is belied by the sense of confusion and disorientation that is characteristic of the decade, especially as May '68 recedes into the past. If there is a new awareness of the present *as* historical, it is accompanied by a tortured uncertainty concerning the shape of history in the ongoing present. In Serge Daney's words, "for French cinema, the '70s will have been the *post* decade par excellence: post-New Wave, post-68, post-modern."[11] The era is, in other words, strongly marked by feelings of *afterness* – haunted by political failure, deferred dreams, and a sense of aesthetic belatedness, while remaining uncertain about the positive claims to be made for the content or direction of the present.

It is because of this fact, I want to argue, that gesture and bodily movement can offer us such a valuable mode of access to the historical experience of the post-'68 moment, offering insight into the peculiar historical temporality of the period and the particular affective states that are attendant on this fact. For if, as Lauren Berlant has argued, "change is an impact lived on the body before anything is understood, and as

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[10] Alison Smith, *French Cinema in the 1970s: Echoes of May* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 13.

[11] Daney, *La Rampe*, 189. Or again, as Jean-Pierre Léaud's character says in Jean Eustache's 1973 film *La Maman et la putain*, "There was the Cultural Revolution, May '68, the Rolling Stones, long hair, the Black Panthers, the Palestinians, the underground. And then for the past two or three years, nothing."

such is simultaneously meaningful and ineloquent, engendering an atmosphere," then we might seek out the inchoate effects of May '68 precisely in the ways that the event makes itself felt in the movements of bodies, both exerting pressure on them and eliciting creative, if tentative, responses.[12] In a chapter of their book *Cruel Optimism* on "History and the Affective Event," Berlant theorizes how we inhabit the historical present by introducing the concept of intuition, an embodied "process of dynamic sensual data-gathering through which affect takes shape in forms whose job it is to make reliable sense of life. […] Intuition is where affect meets history, in all of its chaos, normative ideology, and embodied practices of discipline and invention."[13] Given the extent to which this intuition is mediated by bodily practices, and thus produces a sense of "being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing," it makes sense to look at the ways in which the orchestration of movement, gesture, posture, and voice that constitute cinematic performance operate at this intersection of affect and history.[14] Indeed, in the films I examine here performance is nearly always engaged in attempting to feel out a collective situation and to make some provisional sense of it, to provide it a form that might exceed our understanding.

If on the one hand the body is engaged in the processing of historical changes that cannot yet be verbalized, it is important to remember that the body also functions as a powerful discursive object. Reflecting on his film criticism, and that of his confederates at *Cahiers du cinema*, from the mid- to late-'70s, Serge Daney noted that "a word ('body') had allowed everyone to disengage in due course from political jargon. Barthes, again, had been the first. A great use and a great abuse will be made – in

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[12] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 39.
[13] Ibid, 52.
[14] Ibid, 64.

Cahiers and especially in these texts – of the word 'body.' Not completely without reason, however."[15] As this dissertation will show, it was not only in the domain of film theory that the idea of "the body," and other related concepts, took on a heightened rhetorical significance during the 1970s. Yet while Daney describes the idea of the body as offering something of an off ramp leading away from politics (or at least from a sterile and abstractly theoretical political discourse), I am more interested in the ways in which conceptions of the body, of gesture, and of action become invested with political meaning, attached to fantasies of what they might be able to offer or make possible. A significant part of the drama of the following chapters will emerge from the projections, conflations, and incongruities that arise between the material bodies of actors (or people more generally) and the various fantasies in which "the body" is imbricated.

While the post-'68 period in France throws questions of the politics of cinematic performance into an especially sharp relief, I want to point to some ways in which the work of this dissertation might suggest methodological principles that possess a more general applicability for thinking about acting and the body within film studies. The first of these is the principle that our conception of cinematic performance should be anchored in an awareness that the body and its movements are deeply embedded in social and historical structures, and that the body therefore exists at the intersection of larger (and supposedly "impersonal") social forces and our everyday experience of the world, where ideology is indiscernible from – or, rather, takes shape as – deeply felt and enacted modes of being. As Pierre Bourdieu has written, the culturally transmitted norms of corporeal bearing – what he terms "bodily hexis," an element of his larger

[15] Daney, *La Rampe*, 111.

conception of *habitus* – amount to "political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*."[16] This is not to say, of course, that cinema simply reflects these ways of being in the world as they exist. Cinema itself possesses, or incorporates, a set of practices (including regimes of actor training, theatrical or otherwise), norms, and technical mediations, that have their own capacity to shape the body and its movements. These too demand to be taken into account across a range of scales, from broad historical norms of performance to the particular work of directing an actor in an individual film or even a single shot. To speak of the political aesthetics of performance, then, means to think about the dynamic relationship between the cinema as a means of reproducing, constructing, and experimenting with modes of corporeal movement and the social field in which the most inconspicuous and intimate details of our bodily inhabitation of the world are invested with political significance.

Secondly, this dissertation issues a challenge not merely to attend more closely to acting and gesture, but to consider what it would mean to take these things seriously as fundamental elements of cinematic *form*. In an early unpublished article on the actor, which I will discuss in detail in the second chapter, Jacques Rivette points in this direction when he proclaims that "far from submitting the actor to one or several 'components' of the film, everything must be ordered according to him, starting from him, who gives everything its *raison d'être*."[17] Positioned as the central element around which all else will take shape, the work of the actor in Rivette's conception thus occupies the role of what Russian formalist critics would call the dominant, which

[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 93-94.
[17] Jacques Rivette, *Textes critiques*, ed. Miguel Armas and Luc Chessel (Paris: Post-éditions, 2018), 325.

Roman Jakobson has defined as "the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure."[18] In most of the films that I consider in detail here, a claim could be made that it is some axiomatic decision about performance – from the reliance on withdrawn posing in *Détruisez-vous* to the unfettered improvisation of *Out 1* to the casting of Normand peasants in *Moi, Pierre Rivière* – that ultimately determines the formal choices of the film. It could perhaps be countered that these are all rather marginal films, limit cases certainly not representative of the normal way of going about things. I certainly do not mean to say that performance always and everywhere occupies this role – part of the usefulness of the idea of the dominant is that it is historically variable and allows us to think about the internal relationship between elements of a work within particular historical, geographic, and generic coordinates, rather than as something eternally fixed. (In Jakobson's example, the dominant of Czech verse varies from rhyme in the 14th century, to syllabic pattern in the 19th century, to "intonational integrity" in the 20th century.[19]) Yet I would propose that the centrality of performance to cinematic form is not only a matter of a few anomalous cases, and deserves to be investigated more thoroughly in a number of historical and geographic contexts. Rivette again offers a suggestive hint in this direction with his observation that "Gabin could be regarded as almost more of a director than Duvivier or Grémillon, to the extent that the French style of *mise en scène* was constructed to a large extent on Gabin's style of acting, on his walk, his way of speaking or of looking at a girl. […] Anthony Mann's *mise en scène* is definitely influenced by James Stewart's style of

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[18] Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 41.
[19] Ibid, 42.

acting."[20] In the final account, though, it is almost certainly less important to engage in pedantic arguments about precisely when acting or gesture occupies the role of the dominant, then to build a conception of cinematic form in which these elements are included among the ranks of more familiar components such as editing, framing, and camera movement.

Finally, a few words on the arrangement of the dissertation and the selection of materials covered in it. This dissertation does not pretend to offer a comprehensive account of French cinema in 1970s, or even of the role of the actor during this period. The films that will receive the most sustained analytical attention – Serge Bard's *Détruisez-vous* (1968), Jacques Rivette's *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1971), and René Allio's *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur, et mon frère* (1976) – are not exactly "typical" of the period, even if they all relate in one way or another to larger cinematic tendencies within it. Nor, with the exception of Rivette, are my central filmmakers those who might first spring to mind as the defining talents of the decade. A different version of this dissertation might have focused on similar questions by looking at the work of, for instance, Jean Eustache, Maurice Pialat, and Marguerite Duras. Instead, the films that occupy me here were chosen because of the light that they shed on particular formal, historical, and political problems that become bound up in, and worked out through, particular ways of acting. We might think of the chapters that follow, with a nod to Erich Auerbach, as constituting something like "Scenes from the Drama of Post-New Wave French Cinema."[21] While the dissertation does not offer a sustained

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[20] "Six Characters in Search of *Auteurs*: A Discussion about the French Cinema" in *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 37.
[21] Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

historical narrative of the period, the chapters are arranged chronologically (at least as concerns their primary object), and can be imagined as forming a series of concentric circles radiating outward from the central event of May 1968, the effects of which will continue to reverberate even as we move away from it.

The first chapter, "Exemplary Gestures, Revolutionary Postures, and the Forms of Rupture," is situated in the direct lead up to those events, and in their immediate aftermath, a period of condensed action lasting from March to June of 1968. Examining a famous photograph taken during the demonstrations of May, a short documentary shot in June of a woman protesting the end of the strikes and the return to work, and the films of the Zanzibar group, in particular Serge Bard's *Détruissez-vous*, the chapter works through several accounts of gesture (those offered by Flusser, Brecht, and Agamben) in order to think about the ways in which events are given shape through our corporeal response to them. In particular the chapter explores the peculiar gesture of posing, and the ways in which this action involves a negotiation between the body and recording media of photography or cinema. While the idea of cinema as a medium of gestures has enjoyed some popularity due to Agamben's "Notes on Gesture" (though as I argue here, this essay has frequently been engaged with only superficially), I suggest "posture" as an alternate category that deserves to be elaborated in order to develop and deepen our understanding of cinematic bodies.

The next chapter, "Spontaneity and Form: Political Action, Acting, and the Stakes of Improvisation," gravitates around Jacques Rivette's nearly 13-hour film *Out 1: Noli me tangere*, shot in the spring of 1970. Of all of the filmmakers of the New Wave, Rivette was the one to most insistently put the work of the actor at the center of his cinema, a commitment stretched to its breaking point with *Out 1*. Almost entirely improvised by its cast, the diffuse narrative centers around two experimental theater troupes, two

isolated grifters who cross paths with them, and a shadowy conspiracy in which they all become entwined. Rivette's mobilization of improvisation, especially his incorporation of extended scenes of improvised theatrical rehearsals, must be understood in relation to the vital theatrical experimentation of the era. Starting in the mid-'60s, there was an eruption of avant-garde theatrical work characterized by what the critic Bernard Dort called "the insurrection of the body" – a challenge to a conception of theater founded on the primacy of a pre-written text, in favor of one grounded in spontaneous physical action.[22] Through the story of The Living Theatre, and their monumental production *Paradise Now*, the chapter examines the liberatory political aspirations that attached to the theatrical avant-garde, and the contradictions that emerge when it is faced with the possibility of a more properly political revolution during the events of May '68. If Rivette draws on the energies of this mode of theatrical experimentation in order to generate the material of his own film, and to push the formal boundaries of cinema, he also views them from a certain distance. Rather than evincing a faith in an imminent moment of revolutionary action, the improvisatory grappling of his actors serves to figure the thwarted utopian promises of 1968, and the desperate effort to maintain an attachment to the possibilities of that moment.

As the events of 1968 grew more distant and hopes of any sort of radical change dimmed, a number of people turned their gaze towards the more distant historical past – some in the hopes of gaining a perspective that would help them to diagnose the failures of that moment and find resources for a new way forward, others seeking to reconnect with the traditions of a more rural French past that had been significantly effaced by the massive explosion of postwar industrial development, *les trente glorieuses*,

[22] Bernard Dort, "1967, ou l'insurrection du corps," in *Théâtre reel: Essais de critique, 1967-1970* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 233.

that was now coming to an end. Accordingly, the final chapter turns to the profusion of historical films that were produced in the mid- to late-'70s and the attendant debates they spurred over the politics of historical representation and popular memory. The chapter enters into this moment through an examination of *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur, et mon frère* (1976), René Allio's film recounting a case of matricide in the Normand countryside in 1835, adapted from a collection of archival documents published by Michel Foucault and a team of researchers from the Collège de France. At the heart of Allio's conception of the film was the decision to use a cast of non-actors from rural Normandy, close to where the events depicted in the film had taken place nearly a century and a half earlier. While this decision is tied to a political commitment to give voice to a rural population that has lacked the power to represent itself, it rests on assumptions about the continuity of ways of life outside of the metropolis – above all, a faith in an uninterrupted transmission of gestures and ways of speaking by which the body of a contemporary Normand peasant might act as a point of contact with or access to the historical past. If earlier chapters explored fantasies of the body as an engine for the production of historical rupture, as the source of new and unforeseen modes of acting and being, we conclude with something quite different. Here, the body is imagined as an accumulation of history's traces and a source of continuity with the past.

Though these chapters do not form a tidy narrative of the post-'68 decade, they do, I hope, give a sense of some of the historical sweep of that period, of the ways in which particular political and aesthetic questions presented themselves and made themselves felt to those living on in the wake of '68.

CHAPTER ONE

Exemplary Gestures, Revolutionary Postures, and the Forms of Rupture

> Our starting point is a certain moment of historical coalescence – a gesture […] which is supercharged with historical meaning, round which significance clusters."
>
> -T.J. Clark

> We "read" gesture, from the slightest movement of facial muscles to the most powerful movements of masses of bodies called "revolutions." I don't know how we do it.
>
> -Vilém Flusser

After May: An Exemplary Scene

What does it mean to film history? In what sense would it be possible for cinema to not only bear witness to the unfolding of contemporary events but to adequately disclose the essence of a historical moment? This question take on a particular urgency with regard to the events of May 1968, a month in which a relatively small group of student protests at the Sorbonne quickly escalated into a nationwide political crisis, when over 10 million French workers went on strike in an expression of dissatisfaction with the government of Charles de Gaulle. For a short period, at least, it seemed possible that an almost spontaneous uprising would lead to radical political changes, and for many people, especially the young, there was an intense feeling of everyday life being saturated with historical significance. In an interview given in July of that year, Jacques Rivette claimed that only one film "on the May 'events'" had lived up to the demands of that revolutionary moment. A film of the barest means — consisting

mostly of a single nine-minute take recorded with direct sound — Jacques Willemont's *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* nevertheless managed, according to Rivette, to distill the essence of what was at stake in the recently concluded events at the same time that it conveyed their affective force, making it "a terrifying and painful film […] the only film that was really revolutionary."[1] Yet this brief fragment of direct-cinema does not present one of the storied highlights of the May protests — the night of the barricades, the occupation of the Odéon theatre or the Sorbonne — but something later and apparently more banal. We see a group of workers assembled outside, as their foreman calls them to return to their factory. Shot, as an introductory voiceover informs us, at 1:30 pm on June 10th at the Wonder factory in Saint-Ouen, outside Paris, the film captures the aftermath of three weeks of worker strikes and factory occupations which have just ended as the workers' union has voted by a margin of 560 to 260 to return to work. But somehow this single reel of film, shot on the fly, manages to rise above the status of mere reportage. Showing us the confusion and anger of a moment when the demands of the May 1968 uprisings seem to be visibly unraveling, the film captures not just an isolated event but, in Rivette's words, "a moment when reality is transforming itself at such a rate that it starts to condense a whole political situation into ten minutes of wild dramatic intensity."[2]

The dramatic condensation to which Rivette refers organizes the chance encounter of camera and filmed subjects into a scene. A conflict where different ways of being together in the world are at stake — that is, a political conflict — is given form

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[1] Jacques Rivette, "Time Overflowing," in *Cahiers du Cinéma, 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 320. The interview, conducted by Jacques Aumont, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, and Sylvie Pierre, took place on July 27, 1968 and originally appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma* 204 (September 1968).
[2] Ibid.

and made visible in an arrangement of bodies on screen.[3] As the film opens, this conflict between competing parties is made painfully palpable in a juxtaposition that prefigures the ensuing confrontation. As we hear the foreman calling "Wonder employees, please go in," the camera is fixed on the banners strung out above the factory: "The Struggle Continues"; "We Are Not Yielding – We Are Not Going In." After the camera tilts down to observe the crowd in the street, there is a cut and the camera is now within the crowd, witnessing a dispute that has started to break out between a female factory worker and a representative from the union trying to persuade her to return to work. He tells her to calm down, leading her through the crowd past the camera, which soon turns left, catching them again, this time closer and less obscured by the crowd. As the confrontation plays out, all the attempts to defend the return to work, to justify ending the strike and cajole her to come back to things as they were, are met by her obstinate refusal. Whatever happens, she will not go in to the factory, the "shithole," the prison — she will not return to work.

The solicitations of the union rep and the protests of the worker play out not only in words but also in gestures. As he assures her that they're all in this together, and that she must submit to the decision of her fellow workers, he reaches out and makes a small gesture back towards himself as if drawing a connection between them, then rests his

[3] Regarding the scope of the political, and its relationship to the aesthetic, Rivette claims in the same interview that his recently completed film *L'Amour fou* "is a deeply political film. It is political because the attitude we all had during the filming and then during the editing corresponds to moral choices, to ideas of human relationships, and therefore to political choices. […] The will to make a scene last in one way and not in another — I find that a political choice." When the interviewers interject, "So it's a very general idea of politics…" Rivette emphatically responds, "But politics *is* extremely general. It's what corresponds to the widest-ranging point of view one can have regarding existence. […] I think that what is most important *politically* is the attitude the film-maker takes with regard to all the aesthetic – or rather, so-called aesthetic – criteria which govern art in general and cinematic expression, in triple inverted commas, in particular." Ibid, 321.

hand on her shoulder as if to console her. When she tells him to go in to the factory and see what a dump it is, she turns and gestures towards it with one of her arms, which have until then remained folded at her waist – a gesture that also seems to be aimed at the camera, as if imploring the filmmakers to enter in her place and record the squalor that she is describing (fig. 1.1).[4] These gestures speak clearly. We could understand them as utterances in their own right, functioning almost as linguistic statements, or working in concert with the spoken word to add rhetorical effects of emphasis or suggest a sense of intimacy.[5] And indeed, the union representative, trying to convince the woman to "calm down" and "act reasonably," seems to be a practiced rhetorician — his hands move constantly as he speaks to her. A minute later, when a man wearing a suit, presumably also a union spokesman, takes over defending the decision to go back to work, he accentuates every phrase by waving his right fist up and down, the index finger extended (fig. 1.2).

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[4] As Kristin Ross has noted, this is precisely what the camera cannot do, since the film "is the result of a purely contingent meeting of the world of film and the world of work: it is only because the workers are outdoors, on the factory esplanade, that they can be filmed — the space of production, of workers working, has always been largely ruled off limits to the camera by factory management. Only when they are not working can workers be filmed." *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 138-139.

[5] This corresponds to the most common definitions of gesture. As Adam Kendon writes in his authoritative study, "There is a wide range of ways in which visible bodily actions are employed in the accomplishment of expressions that, from a functional point of view, are similar to, or even the same as expressions in spoken language. At times they are used in conjunction with spoken expressions, at other times as complements, supplements, substitutes or as alternatives to them. These are the *utterance uses* of visible action and it is these uses that constitute the domain of 'gesture.' *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-2.

Figure 1.1: ***La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*** **(Jacques Willemont, 1968)**

Figure 1.2: ***La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*** **(Jacques Willemont, 1968)**

If these sorts of gestures seem adequately accounted for by thinking of them as utterances, much of what is significant in this confrontation, this encounter between these bodies, lies outside this realm. Rather than reading gesture as the expression of an intention to say something, we could look to the work of Vilém Flusser, for whom "gestures are movements of the body that express being. The gesticulating person's way of being in the world can be read in them".[6] Following the suggestion of Flusser, then, we could view this scene not merely as the stage for a number of small, discrete gestures that the participants employ to supplement their verbal argument, but as a glimpse of the bodily expression of a more fundamental mode of relating to the world – we could title this scene "The Gesture of Refusal." What is most striking in the worker's gesture of refusal is her posture, her comportment. She stands straight with her arms crossed, even as she cries. This is not just a matter of a making a conventional gesture that signifies refusal – though that codified connotation is not unimportant, especially in front of a camera. Her posture, her crossed arms, are an attempt to hold herself together and to hold herself apart – to refuse acknowledgment of the consoling hands that reach out to silence her. Under a banner that proclaims the maintenance of a collective refusal (*WE ARE NOT* YIELDING, *WE ARE NOT* GOING IN) she must remain alone in order to sustain her fidelity to those promises. As the shared demands of May break apart, the gesture of refusal becomes simultaneously a gesture of dislocation.

What does it mean to read this scene in such a way – to put the weight of the post-'68 period on the frame of this woman and her desperate efforts to resist the return to things as they were? Does the act of locating a whole historical transition in the brief

[6] Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, tr. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 55.

interactions of these figures turn the actors into mere ciphers, stand-ins for larger social agents ("the workers," "the party," "the unions") and forces? And what kind of shape is given to history itself in the conflation of political event and dramatic scene? If these questions all demand to be worked through in detail, I also want to acknowledge the fact that the film has repeatedly compelled viewers to see in it something more than just mute, uncompounded actuality. Jean-Louis Comolli, writing in 1969 on the growing infiltration of direct cinema into fiction filmmaking, and vice-versa, noted the paradox that while *La Reprise du travail* gives us a single take with "no other editing or manipulation, just the event utterly raw," it creates an effect "equivalent to that produced by the most controlled of fictions."[7] Describing in terms strikingly similar to Rivette's the way in which "the total situation of worker-boss-union relations of May and June is crystalized and symbolized, and all in one take," Comolli proceeds to offer a suggestive comparison. "Everything is to such a degree exemplary," he writes, "so much 'truer than the truth,' that the only possible reference is the most Brechtian of *scenarios*."[8]

Although Comolli does not elaborate on this point, the reference to Bertolt Brecht is worth pursuing further. For, as it happens, Brecht's interest in the exemplary is itself largely thought through the category of gesture. One of the central categories of Brecht's theory, *Gestus* (often translated as geste or gest), is related to, though not precisely congruent with, the idea of gesture – in the gloss offered by John Willet,

[7] Jean-Louis Comolli, "The Detour Through the Direct," in *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Christopher Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul/BFI, 1980), 227-228. Originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma* 209 and 211 (February and April 1969). Although the film technically consists of two shots, it is nearly always referred to as a single take film, presumably due to the power and tension of the much longer second shot, which takes up most of the film's duration.
[8] Ibid, 228.

Brecht's English translator, "'*Gestus*' […] means both gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions."[9] Although the notion of *gestus* remains somewhat elusive, its conceptual force comes from the way in which it condenses apparently abstract forces or ideas onto the level of an individual body or set of bodies, so that a simple corporeal action can express the contours of an entire set of social relations.[10] As Fredric Jameson has described this operation, "*gestus* clearly involves a whole process, in which a specific act — indeed, a particular event, situated in time and space, and affiliated with specific concrete individuals — is then somehow identified and renamed, associated with a larger and more abstract *type* of action in general, and transformed into something *exemplary*."[11] Importantly, this does not mean that the level of the concrete act or gesture is merely illustrative of the larger, more abstract level. Rather, "the theoretical viewpoint required by gestus is […] one in which several 'levels' are distinguished and then reassociated with each other" in such a way that they "are called upon to comment on each other, in a circular process in which each level none the less enriches the previous one."[12] To read the action of *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* as an exemplary scene, in other words, does not mean to reductively transform it into an icon that simply stands in for or symbolizes the unraveling of the utopian aspirations of May. Instead, it means to begin unfolding the manner in which "abstract" historical forces and the most inconspicuous and intimate

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[9] *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and tr. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 42.
[10] On the slippery nature of the term, see for instance Patrice Pavis's comments in "On Brecht's Notion of *Gestus*": "if we insist on making an excursion (incursion) into the unknown land of the *Gestus*, we do so at our own risk, justified solely by the fact that the term itself, although in abundant use in Brecht's 'theoretical writings,' remains very vaguely and contradictorily defined." In Pavis, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 39.
[11] Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), 103.
[12] Ibid.

details of our bodily inhabitation of the world ceaselessly feed in to one another, an operation that "changes our conceptions of what a simple physical gesture is, and what counts as a historical event at the same time."[13]

The Gesture of Posing

Monday, May 13th 1968 marked a turning point in the month's events – the moment when the still localized unrest of Parisian students erupted into an unforeseen political crisis that was felt at every level of French society. Several nights earlier, on Friday the 10th, the student demonstrations that had been growing for the previous week in the Latin Quarter came to a head when demonstrators began throwing up barricades to "occupy" the neighborhood against the large police presence amassed in the area. As the students dragged cars, wood beams, fencing, whatever they could find, into the streets and pulled up paving stones to fortify these spontaneous constructions, there was a mood of "laborious, almost meticulous exaltation. A contagious enthusiasm, almost a joy."[14] If this act was improvised, it built itself not just from the materials at hand in the street, but from the iconography of the French historical imagination, in which "the barricades" are the privileged synecdoche of revolutionary insurrection. Whether or not they were concerned with these historical overtones, the riot police reacted fiercely to this action. At 2:15 am they began to lay siege to the student positions. As they advanced, shooting tear gas grenades, truncheons raised, students responded by hurling paving stones and, eventually, Molotov cocktails. Cars were set on fire in an attempt to slow the progress of the cops, but they continued to advance,

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[13] Ibid, 100.

[14] *Le Monde*, May 12-13, 1968. Tr. Mitchell Abidor, https://www.marxists.org/history/france/may-1968/night-barricades.htm

beating back students, who retreated and fled to take refuge in the surrounding apartment buildings. The fighting continued through the night, and by the time it was over, hundreds had been hospitalized or put in jail. Police continued patrolling the neighborhood, looking for protestors who had taken shelter in strangers' apartments. As dawn rose the Latin Quarter itself was "a spectacle of desolation […] Almost everywhere in this chaos, and adding to these nineteenth century images those of a cataclysm of the twentieth, one can see the carcasses of burned cars, vehicles with their windshields reduced to pieces."[15] Shocked by the magnitude of police violence against the demonstrators, the leading unions and leftist political parties, some of whom had previously been suspicious or openly contemptuous of the student protestors, called for a one day general strike and a mass public demonstration in solidarity with them.

On Monday, May 13th over one million people marched through the streets of Paris. Among them was Caroline de Bendern, a British model who had spent the previous year in New York City, where she had fallen in with the scene that circulated around Andy Warhol and The Factory. Upon moving to Paris in early 1968 she began spending time with a group that congregated around the critic and poet Alain Jouffroy. It was after meeting up at Jouffroy's apartment with some of these friends that de Bendern went out into the streets and joined the mass of people coursing through them. Though she was not used to participating in this kind of political action, de Bendern found herself impressed by the "atmosphere" of the event, which "wasn't aggressive, but cheerful, with a feverish feeling of liberty."[16] At some point, amidst this collective elation, bodily fatigue set in. Tired of walking, she climbed up onto the shoulders of

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Caroline de Bendern. "Caroline de Bendern Remembers…" In Sally Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 2007), 213. These reminiscences are excerpted from de Bendern's unpublished memoirs.

Jean-Jacques Lebel, and hoisted up the Vietnamese flag he had been carrying:[17]

> I waved it wildly, laughing, until suddenly, I realized that we were surrounded by photographers. Instinctively, my reflexes as a model were awakened: "I have to steady myself." That's when my body stiffened, my arm tightened, I became serious and then I let myself be trapped in the role. […] For a brief moment, I thought about the French Revolution, then about art reproductions of these events; representing people flourishing flags, like statues. Perhaps for a moment, I took myself for one of them. And then, I felt a wave of emotion, my heart was beating furiously, as I froze in my pose, above the crowd. Below, the photographers were shooting. I felt a vague uneasiness: "What was I doing there?" But it disappeared in the rapid succession of thoughts that went through my head.[18]

One of the resulting photographs, taken by Jean-Pierre Rey, came to assume an iconic status (fig. 1.3). Published later that month in a *Life* magazine photo spread on the events, it began to circulate, becoming more and more prominent as an icon of mass protest in the ensuing anniversary commemorations of May '68 (fig. 1.4). Much of the appeal of the photograph no doubt lies, as de Bendern herself realized, in its power to condense an event into an image that resonates with an entire history of French revolutionary iconography (fig. 1.5). As later commentary around the photograph would make explicit, she had become, for an instant – an instant frozen and indefinitely extended for as long as the image maintains its currency – the Marianne of '68. In embodying this role, she gives form to a diffuse, intuited sense of the past repeating or returning in the present. Time takes on a particular shape in her outstretched arm. But if the analogy between 1968 and 1830 (or 1789, or 1871) seems to express itself so self-evidently in the photograph, de Bendern's recollection of this moment reinserts the still

[17] Lebel was a French artist widely credited with introducing the idea of the Happening in Europe. He was also heavily involved with the Living Theatre, and participated in the occupation of the Odéon Theatre that began May 15th.
[18] De Bendern, 213, translation slightly modified.

image, and the iconic role that she takes on within it, into a flow of thoughts, emotions, and reflexes that complicate what we see, blurring the distinction between exemplarity and contingency. Rather than dwell here on the gesture of raising aloft the flag, and the iconographic and historical significance that it bears, however, I want to focus on another gesture, or gestural element, that overlaps with, or undergirds, it. For not only does de Bendern hold up the flag, but she also, faced with the cameras, stiffens herself, freezes – in short, she poses.

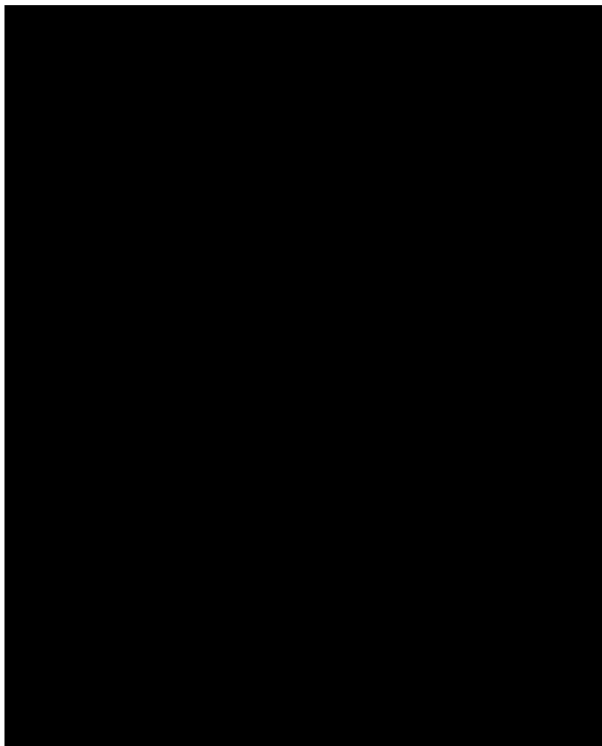

Figure 1.3: Jean-Pierre Rey, Photo of Caroline de Bendern, 1968 [image redacted]

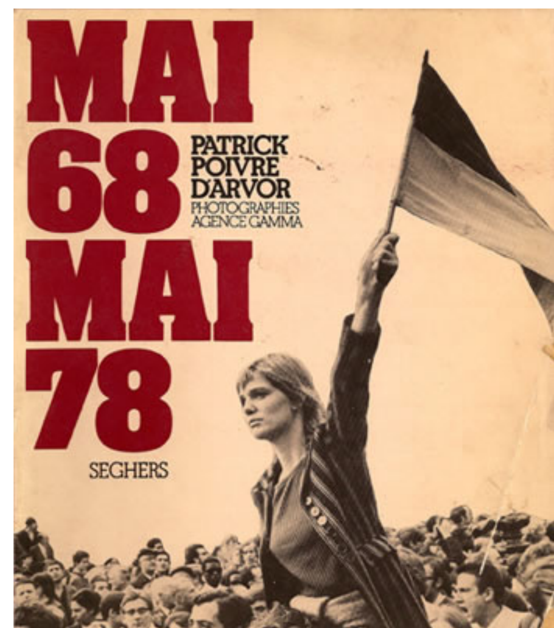

Figure 1.4: Cover design of *Mai 68, Mai 78*

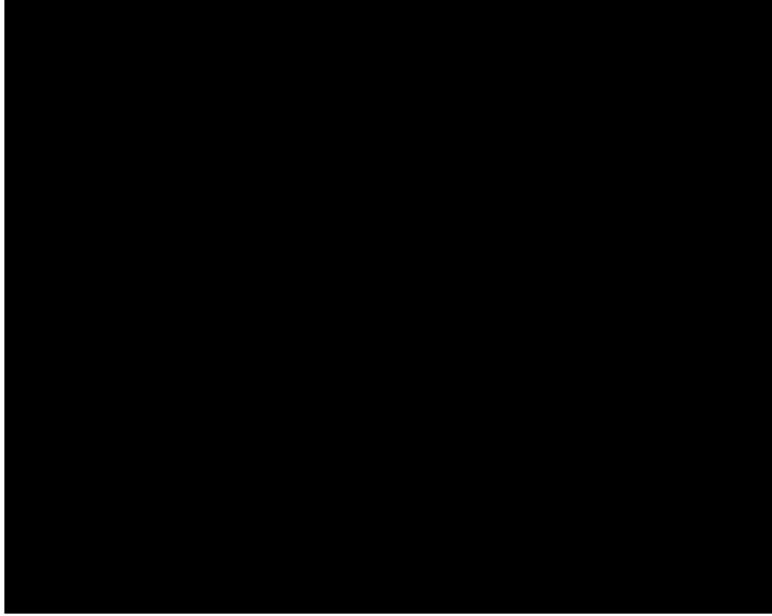

Figure 1.5: Eugène Delacroix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830 [image redacted]

We could define posing as the gesture of becoming image – or, from a different angle, as the becoming-image of gesture. To pose is not only to prepare for the image that will be taken of (or from) you, but is already to turn your body itself into an image. For Roland Barthes, the mere presence of a camera was enough to provoke this inevitable, discomfiting metamorphosis: "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I instantly constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself into an image."[19] At stake here is not just the success or failure of the two-dimensional object that will be the artifact of the encounter, but the whole process of affective management that is put into play by the negotiation between body and image. Significantly, for Barthes, the gesture of pulling himself together into a pose – stilling himself, becoming image – does not lead to a corresponding sense of affective composure or coherence. Quite the contrary.

[19] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 10.

The compulsive self-modulation of posing creates a proliferation of adjacent identities, uncomfortably and uncannily supported by a single body, so that he feels that "I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares)."[20] However, if posing can be a scene of anxious concern over one's own distance from oneself — a distance only narrowed by the ceaseless ruse of self-impersonation — it isn't always experienced this way. It is just as possible that the gesture of posing can function as, and feel like, an achievement of mastery and self-cultivation. To become an image would then be to create an idealized self that asserts its independence and inviolability. Dick Hebdige has analyzed the way that teenage mods in the mid-'60s sought "to impose systematic control over the narrow domain which is 'theirs' and within which they see their 'real' selves invested, the domain of leisure and appearance, of dress and posture. The posture is auto-erotic: the self becomes the fetish. There is even a distinctive mod way of standing. […] fractions of youth now aspire to the flatness and the stillness of a photograph."[21] Notice that in this case, even in the absence of a camera, the model of the photograph works to provide a distinctive corporeal form of being in the world. What were originally the material properties of a technological medium – "the flatness and the stillness of a photograph" – become available as bodily techniques tasked with managing the self's exposure to the realm of sociality.

[20] Ibid, 13.
[21] Dick Hebdige, "Posing…Threats, Striking…Poses: Youth, Surveillance, and Display," *SubStance*, Vol. 11, no. 4 - Vol. 12, no. 1, Issue 37-38 (1982/1983), 78-80.

In addressing what is distinctively "mod" about a particular way of posing, Hebdige hints at the way that this gesture is embedded in a set of concrete social relations. Even if one of the aspirations of the posing he describes is precisely to assert control over the mode of self-presentation, to lay claim to an exaggerated *individuality*, this attempt takes place through a collective form tied to a group identity. A manner of posing – and, this implies, a manner of relating oneself to images – is something that is encountered and learned socially, becoming available as a shared possibility of comportment, but one linked to definite social distinctions and positions. It can thus be understood in terms of what the French sociologist Marcel Mauss has called "techniques of the body," those forms of apparently spontaneous but in fact learned corporeal movement or bearing that exhibit "a social idiosyncrasy."[22] That is, the expansive domain of bodily actions, from method of digging to style of walking, that "do not vary just with individuals and their imitations; they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges."[23] If de Bendern has the model of Marianne in the back of her mind (or, more to the point, latent in her body) when she takes up her pose, we also need to understand her gesture in terms of the fall back into a practiced but unpremeditated manner of being for and relating to the camera – the moment where, as she says, "instinctively, my reflexes as a model were awakened." Thus, while it might be tempting to locate the exemplarity of this image in its embodiment of an iconic pose of popular revolution, its historical resonance lies even more in the way in which it condenses questions concerning historical action and how we comport ourselves in relation to images. Indeed, in some ways the ostentatiously

[22] Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques," in *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979), 100.
[23] Ibid, 101.

citational aspect of the pose is what risks marking the image with a failure to be adequate to its historical moment — mere revolutionary kitsch, an all too obvious illustration of Marx's famous comments about the farcical tendency of revolutions to offer play-acted versions of the past, to "timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language."[24] However, if there is something slightly ridiculous in the spectacle of a British model and heiress becoming the face of the French uprising by presenting herself as an ersatz Delacroix, I want to take seriously the idea of posing as a form of political action. Furthermore, since it involves a navigation between body and image, the gesture of posing allows us to think about the aesthetic potentialities of revolutionary action. In fact, I will argue, some of the most interesting cinema of this period employs various forms of posing in search of a representational mode adequate to the particular problems posed by May '68.

Still/Moving: The Cinematic Pose

If the May 13th photograph of Caroline de Bendern represents her most famous entry in the visual archive of the events, it is not her only one. Over the course of 1968 she appeared in four films, most notably Serge Bard's *Détruisez-vous*, which was shot in and around the University of Paris at Nanterre that April, while it was closed following the March 22nd student occupation that would soon act as the catalyst for the May

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[24] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." In *Political Writings Volume 2: Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach. London: Verso, 2010. 146. Significantly, Blanchot, excoriating the condition of "political death" that characterized contemporary France, sees it as embodied in Charles de Gaulle, who is figured as "an actor, playing a role borrowed from the oldest story, just as his language is the language of a role, an imitated speech at times so anachronistic that it seems to have been always posthumous. Naturally, he does not know this. He believes in his role, believing that he magnifies the present, whereas he parodies the past." (90)

uprising.[25] Significantly, Bard's film is, like the May 13th photograph, predicated on de Bendern's penchant for posing. However, as we will see, the gesture of posing in *Détruisez-vous* gives shape to the historical event of May in an entirely different manner. In contrast to the proliferation of the iconic photograph, the images of Bard's film have led a relatively clandestine existence. In this respect *Détruisez-vous* is representative of what would become known as the "Zanzibar films," a body of sixteen films (give or take) made in 1968 and 1969, of which it is the earliest.[26] The films owe their existence to Sylvina Boissonnas, an heiress with radical sympathies who gave money with few if any conditions to artists and aspiring filmmakers who fell into her circle.[27] If the most iconic artistic production of the period was explicitly designed to be instrumental in the political struggle – such as the agit-prop posters created by the Atelier Populaire and the short unsigned Ciné-tracts produced by a collective of filmmakers – these films evince a radicalism which bears a rather more ambiguous relation to direct political action, to the extent that they might appear at first like a retreat from politics into the refuge of the aesthetic. The films seem to maintain a strange distance from the events even as they circle obstinately around them. Nevertheless, as one of the Zanzibar filmmakers, Patrick Deval, has testified, May 68 is absolutely central to the films – even those, as in the case of *Détruisez-vous*, that were shot prior to the events. In his assessment, "[t]he

[25] The other films were Bard's *Ici et Maintenant* and *Fun and Games for Everyone* (a roughly hour-long film shot at a gallery opening of paintings by Olivier Mosset), both filmed in November, and Mosset's 8mm short *Un film porno*. For a firsthand account and analysis of the March 22 events and the movement that grew out of them, see Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit's *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, tr. Arnold Pomerans. New York: McGraw Hill, 1968.
[26] In 1977 Louis Skorecki lamented that the Zanzibar films were "practically invisible" and in danger of "becoming mythic." Qtd. in Shafto, 19. Originally in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 276 (Mai 1977), 51.
[27] Although Sylvina's brother Jacques Boissonnas provided the funds for *Détruisez-vous*, she financed the rest of the films.

films shown under the label *Zanzibar Productions* were fomented around May 68. Before, prophetically, during, factually and after, melancholically."[28]

The confrontational title of *Détruisez-vous* ["Destroy Yourself"] itself reveals a desire to bear the mark of May '68. Taken from a piece of graffiti ("Aidez-nous, détruisez-vous" — "Help us, destroy yourself") painted on a wall of the École des Beaux-Arts during May, the title is a reminder that situates the film's production in the lead-up to those events, and seems, along with a title card identifying it as a "FILM TOURNÉ EN AVRIL 1968," to make a claim for its prophetic vision. Indeed, as a recent dropout from the University of Nanterre and a habitué of Parisian avant-garde circles, Serge Bard was well positioned to witness the nexus of political and cultural energies that were soon to produce an eruption of collective activity. After participating in the March 22nd movement occupying the University of Nanterre – an event that brought Daniel Cohn-Bendit to prominence and helped instigate the wider uprising in May – Bard received funding from Sylvina Boissonnas's brother Jacques and began filming around, and sometimes on, the university grounds. The film he shot – although filming was completed in April, it was edited after May – is clearly indebted to Godard's *La Chinoise* from the previous year. Set in a milieu of student radicals, the film has only the barest semblance of a narrative. In Sally Shafto's estimation:

> [W]hat seems to be going on here is that Thierry (played by Thierry Garrel, and mute in all his scenes) is being expelled from the revolutionary cell, just as Henri is ousted from the group in *La Chinoise*. De Bendern tries weakly to defend him but all of her interlocutors systematically dismiss her. Her sole female companion, Juliet Berto (also one of the cell members in *La Chinoise*), manifests no sisterly solidarity. Before abandoning her, Berto tells Caroline that she says whatever pops into her head and that she would do better to be quiet.[29]

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[28] Patrick Deval, "A Transparent World Toward the Future: *Acéphale*," in Shafto, 196.
[29] Shafto, 193.

This précis is accurate, as far as it goes, but more important than what it tells us about the elliptical story hinted at by the film is what it suggests about its formal construction. The film unfolds not so much as a narrative, but rather as a series of extended orations and counterposed silences. While the events of May were famously characterized by "la prise de parole" [the capture of speech], a profusion of discussion and declarations, *Détruisez-vous* seems to provide something like the obverse side of the situation.[30] It lays side-by-side flowing speech and a gestural response that is obstinately mute.

Détruisez-vous opens with a nearly minute-long shot in medium close-up of Caroline de Bendern (fig. 1.6). Slightly offset from the center of the frame, she stares straight ahead into the camera, but her gaze cannot be said to confront us, since she projects a flatness that seems to address no one. Her face achieves a nearly perfect immobility, disturbed only by a momentary tremor at the corner of her lips – a hint of expression that she suppresses with a quick swallow. Over an hour later, in the penultimate shot of the film, we return to what seems almost to be the same image. Framed identically but now lasting nearly a minute and a half, de Bendern again looks forward, exhibiting only the most microscopic, almost imperceptible, facial movements. While the shots echo the famously blank face of the Kuleshov experiment, the legendary degree-zero of cinematic expression, it would be insufficient to approach them as if they were exhausted simply by noting their neutrality or what is lacking in them (be that movement, expression, emotion, or whatever). De Bendern's performance of a practiced stillness and inexpressivity, and the time and attention lavished on her face by

[30] Michel de Certeau famously claimed that "Last May speech was taken the way, in 1789, the Bastille was taken." *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, tr. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 11.

the camera, need to be comprehended not as a neutral signifying unit but as a complex aesthetic shaping of historical, affective, and bodily forces. To encompass all of this, this complicated knot of forces that mutually and reciprocally shape each other, we need to read what we see here as a *gesture*: both a corporeal gesture, and a cinematic one. She poses – a gesture whose force is not nullified by its stasis – and the camera is bound to her pose. The image does not merely show us a face and its movement (or lack thereof), it gives the face a specific cinematic form that results from the conjunction of camera placement, duration, and performative control. But it is not only cinematic techniques and parameters that give form to the face (as if it was some content to be shaped); the face, and the body – its gestures and postures – are themselves form-giving, exerting pressure on the shape of the film itself.

It might at first seem perverse to apply the concept of gesture — which is traditionally understood to entail corporeal movement — to an image of the body so conspicuously stilled. Yet grasping the ways in which an apparent lack of movement can be read as a gesture is essential to understanding how *Détruisez-vous* develops an aesthetic of flatness, stasis, and blockage in order to interrogate the possibility of revolutionary action (and even to complicate the idea of what might constitute an action in general). More importantly, unfolding what is gestural in this shot will allow us a way to begin working through the relationship between corporeal movement and mediated images.

Figure 1.6: ***Détruissez-vous*** **(Serge Bard, 1968)**

Recent writing on gesture in cinema has been inexorably drawn to Giorgio Agamben's provocative claim that "*the element of cinema is gesture and not image*."[31] While the appeal of this statement for those who want to legitimize the centrality of gesture to cinema is obvious, it has not been sufficiently interrogated or developed. The distinction between gesture and image, which Agamben seems to posit here with the certainty of an axiom, has in fact a more complicated and slippery status if we explore the way that it unfolds in his essay. The succeeding paragraph, discussing Deleuze's notion of the movement-image, paraphrases his claim that "cinema erases the fallacious psychological distinction between image as psychic reality and movement as physical

[31] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," 55. This statement stands, italicized, at the head of the third part of his essay. Whether this proposition is to be understood as a truth proven by the following paragraphs (as in, for example, Spinoza's *Ethics*) or, rather, as a point of departure that is complicated and transformed in its elaboration, is an important interpretive question, which to my knowledge has not been addressed.

reality," offering instead "images themselves in movement."[32] Following this, however, even as he claims that "it is necessary to extend Deleuze's argument and show how it relates to the status of the image in general within modernity," Agamben seems to tacitly revoke Deleuze's conception of the movement-image when he claims that "the mythical rigidity of the image has been broken and that here, properly speaking, there are no images but only gestures."[33] Simply put, if Agamben takes to heart the idea of images that are themselves in movement, what sense does it make to pose the dynamic gesture as that which annuls the image? Immediately, Agamben makes another turn, locating gesture as something internal to the image, even as the category of image seems to remain implicitly motionless. In this moment of the argument, he states that "every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the *imago* as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamis* intact (as in Muybridge's snapshots or in any sports photograph)."[34] This structuring polarity of the image, as that which suspends gesture — in the dual sense of stopping its motion and holding its force in reserve — would seem to be the source of a certain dialectical power wherein gesture and image are not opposed in a rigid dichotomy but rather exist in a productive tension. However, this suspension of gesture within the image seems to be a historical fact that is finally broken in modernity. Thus the cinema, in Agamben's telling, is situated as the redemptive fulfillment of "the entire history of art," which has continually given rise to "a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture."[35]

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 56.

In this final movement, the escape of gesture from the stasis of the image would at first seem to once again constitute the two terms as diametrically opposed, recapitulating the proposition that opens the section: "*The element of cinema is gesture and not image*." But it would be a mistake to accept this conclusion. Allowing the distinction between gesture and image to calcify, lending it an unbendable rigidity, would in fact be to erase the dynamic unfolding of the ideas that takes place between these two moments. For Agamben this would mean betraying the movement of philosophical thought itself, in which "the idea […] is not at all an immobile archetype as common interpretations would have it, but rather a constellation in which phenomena arrange themselves in a gesture."[36] If we are to think gesture philosophically — that is, gesturally — then it can't simply be opposed to the category of the image, but must rather pass through it, like the movement of a hand as it passes through space.[37] Furthermore, if we want to discuss seriously the role of gesture in relation to the "status of the image in general within modernity," it is not enough to heed the image's mute desire to break free of its stasis and become gesture. In addition, we must not forget a contrary and reciprocal aspiration. That is, the desire to transform our bodies and gestures into images. And this desire is given form by its own particular gesture – the gesture of posing.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] My reading of the relation between gesture and image in Agamben's essay aligns with William Watkin's recent examination of the structure of Agamben's philosophizing, which he claims hinges on the creation of a "zone or threshold of indistinction, inoperativity, indiscernibility, suspension or indifference" between the concepts Agamben investigates: "Giorgio Agamben's philosophical project is the making apparent and then rendering indifferent all structures of differential opposition that lie at the root of every major Western concept-signature or discursive structure." William Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), xi, xiii.

Returning to the opening shot of *Détruisez-vous*, then, we see not just a neutral, arid image but an action – the sustained gesture of de Bendern as she attempts to remain composed before the camera, becoming image-like herself. Clustered behind this gesture, but rendered inaccessible by the flatness and opacity of her expression, are an entire range of possible effects (and affects), from agency and coherence to disintegration, alienation, or anxiety. As the image unfolds she maintains her front, but the duration of her stillness draws attention to the most minor oscillations of expression, the tics and tremors that emerge involuntarily, as if time itself might wear her down or eat away at her composure, revealing a more identifiable emotional state or index of her subjectivity. The role of time here is paramount. While posing is a transmedial gesture, in the sense that it is affiliated with a whole set of various (but interrelated) historical practices including painting, sculpture, the tableau vivant, and photography, each act of posing needs to be understood in relation to the specific medium or *dispositif* in which it is embedded. The most paradigmatic cases of posing involve the subject's passage from movement into a stasis (whose duration could be extended, as with painting, or momentary, as with snapshot photography) that will give birth to a non-temporal image in which that stasis is eternally fixed. With cinema, however, the resulting image is itself temporalized. What would seem to be a paradoxical act – using a medium designed to capture and recreate movement in order to show a subject devoid of motion – becomes, in fact, revelatory. When time flows back into the image, we see not just the reified pose but also the very act of posing that undergirds it.

The apotheosis of this cinematic temporalizing of the pose, and the model to which Bard and de Bendern are clearly alluding here, is the series of Screen Tests that Andy Warhol produced between 1964 and 1966. The basic parameters that define these

films are close to what Bard employs in the opening shot of *Détruisez-vous*: "each Screen Test is the given length of a 100-foot roll of film, just under three minutes in the shooting, and each was to follow these guidelines (which were often violated): a stationary camera, with no zooming in or out, and a centered sitter, face forward, full in the frame, and as motionless as possible."[38] In their apparent simplicity, however, the films both allude to a number of vernacular genres of photographic portraiture and make exacting demands on the performer. "Conceived as filmic portraits (they were initially called 'stillies'), the Screen Tests are, in effect, photo-booth pictures, mug shots, and publicity images rolled into one. […] they were pure tests of the capacity of the filmed subject to confront a camera, hold a pose, present an image, and sustain the performance for the duration of the shooting."[39] The trial of the Screen Tests is essentially an amplification or exacerbation of the test that posing already is (as Barthes speaks about it, for instance). Unlike de Bendern's photographic pose at the march however, in the screen test there is no readily available "role" to fall into – as Warhol said, acting in his films was more challenging than in conventional cinema because "It's much harder, you know, to *be* your own script."[40] However, if they don't have a fully formed role, they might at least have a posture that can offer some level of support. Under the harsh glare of the spotlight and the impassive eye of the camera, the imperative to perform throws the filmed subjects – at least those who don't resort to mugging for the camera – back onto their habitual ways of holding themselves, even as it denaturalizes these modes of everyday self-bearing.

[38] Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 38-39.
[39] Ibid, 39.
[40] Qtd. in Foster, *The First Pop Age*, 165.

Revolutionary Postures, or, the Dandies of May '68

Posture, we could say, offers the corporeal shape of a potentiality for encounter or action. Whether passively acquired or achieved through rigorous training, imbued with shame or aspirational, our postures provide the form out of which our gestures emerge.[41] While referring first of all to a very material arrangement of the parts of the body, posture also implies a disposition — a tendency towards certain ideas, actions, or relations.[42] One distinct set of postural possibilities is quite apparent among the members of the Zanzibar collective, which, I will argue, has significant formal effects on their films. A hint at what these postural leanings entail can be found in the title of the Sally Shafto's book on the Zanzibar group: *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968*. If the films were, in Shafto's words, "characterized by a certain minimalism and by an extraordinary sobriety," there was, on the other hand, "a certain flamboyance in the personal styles of the Zanzibar participants."[43] The very conjunction of May '68 with the figure of the dandy is somewhat surprising. The dandy — a figure of cultivated artifice and insouciant irony, a master of self-presentation who appreciates style and surface above all else — seems incongruous with the serious demands of May '68, which held that society must be changed down to its very core. To come to terms

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[41] While the concept of *gesture* has attracted an increasing amount of critical interest in cinema studies over the last five years, to my knowledge there have been no sustained attempts to theorize the importance of *posture* for cinema or performance studies. This is striking in light of the fact that Deleuze builds his chapter on the body in *Cinema 2: The Time Image* around the repeated invocation of the "attitudes or postures" of the body. While Deleuze's mentions of posture are suggestive (and, significantly, centered on the films of the post-new wave in France) they remain somewhat undeveloped.

[42] This is evidenced by the turns of linguistic history: while *attitude* in English once had the primary sense of the pose of a statue or figure in a painting, it now has the sense, almost exclusively, of mental or emotional disposition. In French, *attitude* and *posture* retain a stronger affinity, although they can also take on the sense of a mental disposition. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides one powerful way of thinking about the relation of mental and corporeal dispositions.

[43] Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968*, 175-176.

with these films, then, and to better understand the moment from which they come, we have to think about the ways that a style, a posture or mode of bearing, shapes the potential for certain kinds of action, or even constitutes an action in its own right.

Baudelaire, in his classic account of dandyism in "The Painter of Modern Life," locates the essence of the dandy in a particular emotional style. "The characteristic beauty of the dandy consists, above all," he says, "in his air of reserve, which in turn arises from his unshakeable resolve not to feel any emotion. It might be likened to a hidden fire whose presence can be guessed at; a fire that could blaze up, but does not wish to do so."[44] Stanley Cavell offers a suggestive gloss on Baudelaire's definition of the dandy as a "figure […] staking himself upon a passive potency," nicely playing up one of the central tensions here.[45] In describing this posture of reserve as sort of self-wagering ("staking himself"), he makes clear the strategic element at work. The reserve of the dandy is clearly not mere disinterest. The potential political valences of this dandyism were not lost on the members of the Zanzibar group. In a sort of prologue to his 1967 film *La Collectioneuse*, Eric Rohmer has Alain Jouffroy speak at length to Zanzibar participant Daniel Pommereulle, who plays a character based closely on himself. Jouffroy explicitly evokes the French revolution as he holds forth on Pommereulle's personal style, as well as his art, while inspecting one of his pieces – a paint can whose exterior is studded with razor blades:

> You remind me of elegant people in the 18th century who were very concerned with their appearance and the effect they had on others. That was already a creation, the beginning of the Revolution. The distance established by elegance, from those who aren't elegant is crucial. It creates a kind of void around the person, and it's that void around the

[44] Qtd. in Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 55.
[45] Ibid.

> person that you create, with your objects too. But you could just as well do without your objects. You yourself are the can of paint surrounded by razor blades, as was Saint-Just. Razor blades are words. They could be silence. They could also be elegance…a certain yellow.

The "void around the person," the "distance established by elegance," are of course isomorphic with the "reserve" of Baudelaire's dandy, which, if it is explicitly defined as a form of self-composure, implies a mode of relation with others, who can guess at but never encounter his latent intensity. What is more interesting, however, is that the "passive potency" Cavell saw in Baudelaire's dandy here takes on a more actualized shape: if not quite the Revolution itself, at least its beginning.

The forms of affective management characteristic of the dandy manifest themselves throughout *Détruisez-vous*. If the neutrality of de Bendern's face in the opening shot is not precisely the same as Baudelairean reserve, it is related. We get the sense that de Bendern's character, less confident and composed than any other figure in the film, would like to have both the latent intensity of the dandy, and the force of will to tamp it down. Instead she is emotionally leaky, and the feelings she reveals are often confused and meek. In her screen test, however, confronted head-on with the camera, she presents a composure and blankness that suggests something more. As she shuttles between other characters, however, we begin to see in them the sort of cool, willful detachment that that people can deploy to create a void around themselves. Visible in the details of posture and the direction of gaze, this kind of affective void, distance, or reserve becomes inscribed in the details of cinematic form as well. In one memorable instant, de Bendern tries to convince an acquaintance of the value of revolution. She stands at such a distance from him that after she delivers a line, the camera pans left for fifteen seconds until he comes into frame. He gives her a sidelong glance, then shifts his gaze without responding. Even when characters do gather together, they seem to exist

without coming into any emotional or communicative proximity. This is seen most strikingly in a set of shots that are dispersed throughout the movie, showing de Bendern with a number of friends in a warehouse-like space. Each stands, or sits, in a distinct pose turned away from everyone else, immobile (fig. 1.7). The sense of stasis on view here pervades much of the film.

Figure 1.7: *Détruissez-vous* (Serge Bard, 1968)

It's Warhol, in fact — whose influence, Shafto argues, extends to the way this space "not only recalls but also recreates the Factory" —who provides one more link to the dandyish postures of the Zanzibar group.[46] The historian of dance Roger Copeland,

[46] Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968*, 193. De Bendern and Olivier Mosset were both frequent visitors to the Factory in 1967, and de Bendern was present at the Factory during the filming of *Bike Boy* and *Nude Restaurant*, both featuring her friend, and Warhol superstar, Viva. According to Shafto, "De Bendern recalls that upon her return to Paris at the beginning of 1968, Warhol was a frequent topic of

in an article that refers to “Warhol’s meticulously cultivated aura of dandified cool,” (and invokes Baudelaire’s already-quoted definition of dandyism as a desire not to be moved), proposes “seeing without participating” as the most “aptly phrased description of Andy Warhol’s mode of being (and seeing) in the world”.[47] Perhaps the most immediately striking evidence for the influence of Warhol’s “cultivated aura of dandified cool” on the personal style of the Zanzibar group can be seen in the figure of the painter Olivier Mosset, a friend of Bard’s who appears in several scenes of the film. Mosset had, in the previous two years, worked with Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni under the banner of BMPT, a group whose exhibition/performances, in Benjamin Buchloh’s estimation, “staged the most radical critique of the neo-avant-garde on the road to spectacularization.”[48] In his most conspicuous appearance in *Détruisez-vous* he stands beside de Bendern, engaged in an unmistakably Warholian pose, fingers raised to mouth as he stares ahead (fig. 1.8). Modeled on one of Warhol’s most famous self-portraits, which Warhol painted in various iterations from 1966 to 1967, the pose sets up a confounding play between interiority and objectification — it theatricalizes absorption (fig. 1.9). On the one hand it presents the artist as thinker. Significantly, though, thought is not figured as a turn away from the world. This is not the involuted posture of Rodin’s famous statue, bent over, chin resting on hand. This is the thinker as the one who looks outward, who sees and judges. But the look outward at the same time sets up a barrier against the world. The words that Stephen Koch uses to describe the gaze of the camera in Warhol’s films could apply equally to the look that

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conversation, and that Bard was particularly keen on listening to her account of life in the Factory.”

[47] Roger Copeland. “Seeing Without Participating: Andy Warhol’s Unshakeable Determination Not to Be Moved,” 31.

[48] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. “The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT.” *Artforum International* 46:9 (May 2008). 311.

Warhol gives in this pose: "It is a stare of distance, indifference, of mechanically complete attention and absolute contactlessness."[49] While the pose maintains hints of an inaccessible interiority, it also tends towards becoming pure surface — an endlessly reproduced icon whose multiplying iterations (both in new silkscreens and in the adoption of the pose by others) are the currency of Warhol's celebrity. In one of the *Screen Tests*, Ingrid Superstar playfully faces off the camera as a Warhol avatar, and even Warhol himself poses as Warhol (figs. 1.10 & 1.11).

Figure 1.8: *Détruissez-vous* (Serge Bard, 1968)

[49] Kenneth Koch, from *Stargazer*, qtd. in Roger Copeland, "Seeing Without Participating: Andy Warhol's Unshakeable Determination Not to Be Moved." In *Warhol Live: Music and Dance in Andy Warhol's Work*, ed. Stéphane Aquin (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Art, 2008), 30.

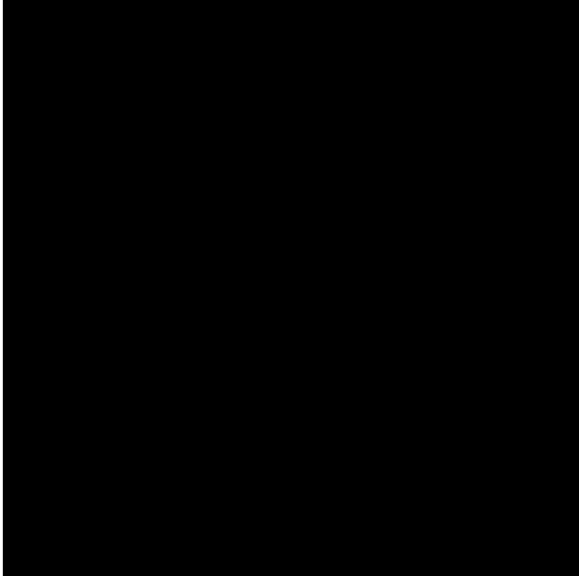

Figure 1.9: Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, 1967 [image redacted]

Figure 1.10: *Screen Test: Ingrid Superstar* (Andy Warhol, 1966)

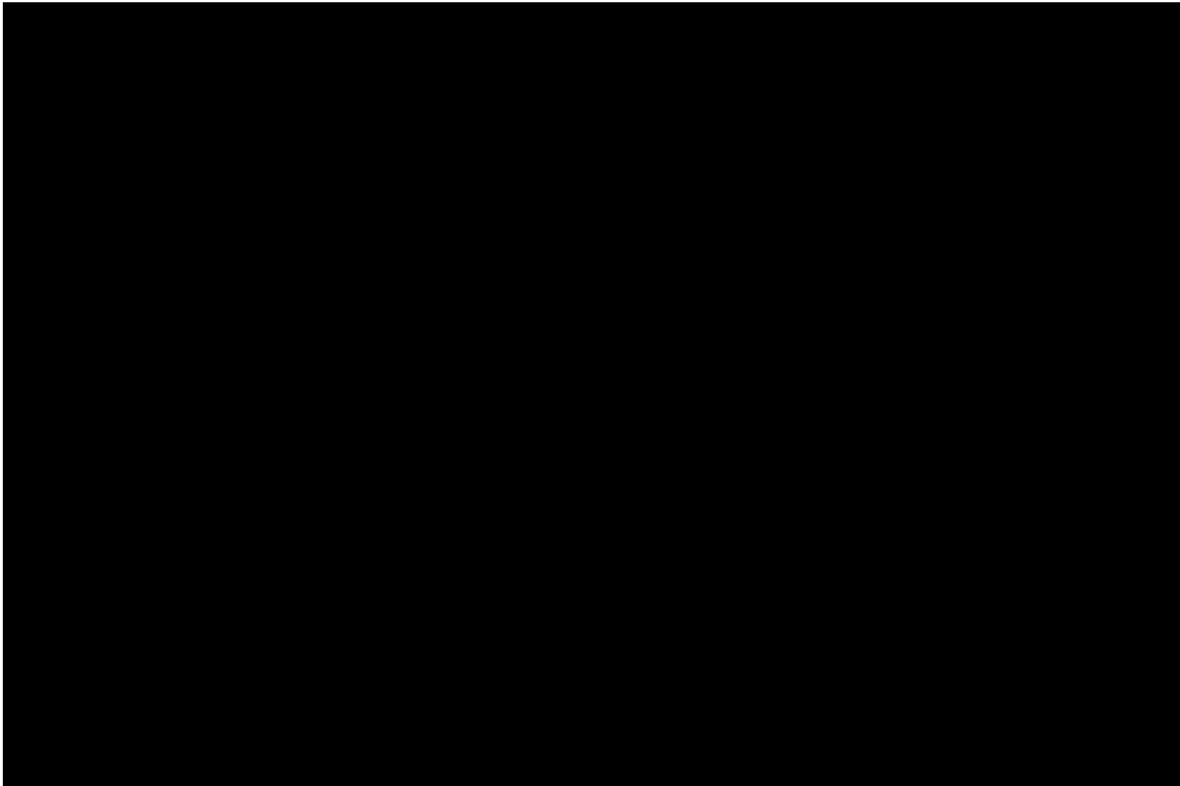

Figure 1.11: Billy Name, *Andy Warhol with self-portrait*, 1967 [image redacted]

Forms of Rupture

If Mosset's appropriation of the Warhol pose might initially appear to be a facile joke, or perhaps an improvised defense against the camera's gaze, it's undeniable that his engagement with Warhol was sustained. His friend, and older mentor to the Zanzibar group, Alain Jouffroy, had in 1964 been the first to exhibit Warhol's paintings in France, and Mosset himself had spent time at Warhol's factory when he visited New York in 1967. Even his utilization of the pose was ongoing — he can be seen employing it again in Serge Bard's *Fun and Games for Everyone*, shot in November 1968. Evidently, Warhol's own work, and perhaps especially the complicated position condensed into this characteristically Warholian pose, were important to Mosset's own conception of himself as an artist. Mosset's own paintings at the time consisted exclusively of a small black circle painted in the center of a white canvas, a motif that he would repeat with maniacal insistence for over half a decade.[50] While intimately related to the tradition of monochrome painting that was of vital importance to both the historical- and neo-avant-gardes, the black circle that stands on the white surface leads to its own hermeneutical complications, which are not without relation to Warhol's work.[51] If the black circle is also a zero, the numerical representation of *le vide*, (de Bendern notes that Mosset "had nihilistic leanings, and the word 'nothing' was very frequent in his vocabulary"), then it signifies the emptying that the canvas would seem to enact only at the same time that it marks the blank surface, introducing difference and communication.[52] As it approaches expressive nullity, it can't resist telling us that it has

[50] Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968*, 228.
[51] On the significance of the monochrome see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41-52; as well as Branden W. Joseph, "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 90-121.
[52] Qtd in Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968*, 212.

something to say – namely, that it is nothing. At the same time, Mosset's mechanical iteration of this design on canvas after canvas, which would seem to drain artistic production of any residue of creativity or subjectivity, causes this little impersonal trace to hypertrophy into a trademark, inscribing the owner's identity into the most anonymous geometric abstraction.

Bard's fascination with Mosset's paintings is evident. By the end of 1968 he would shoot another film, *Fun and Games for Everyone*, at the opening of an exhibition of Mosset's paintings at the Galerie Rive Droite. The cinematography, by legendary cameraman Henri Alekan, is pushed to the most extreme levels of contrast, so that the image is separated into zones of complete blackness and whiteness, achieving the stark dichromatic look of the paintings that hang in the background. But Mosset's iconic picture is already present in *Détruisez-vous* – only briefly on screen, but nonetheless, I would argue, exerting a pervasive if subterranean influence on the entire body of the film. About halfway through the film the painting is flashed on the screen for two seconds, framed so that we don't see the edges of the canvas. [fig. 1.12] Unlike in Bard's later film, the painting is not presented as issuing from the diegesis or even occupying a space (the gallery), but seems to exist only on the plane of the cinema screen. Although not diegetically motivated, it does seem to have resonance with what we have just heard on the soundtrack. Someone (Bard himself?) has been interviewing – or more accurately, interrogating – de Bendern about language, knowledge, and the revolution, cruelly drawing out her confusion and self-doubt:

> Can you also say nothing?
> -Yes.
> Why do you say things?
> -I don't know. I say them because I say them, just like that.
> For nothing? You always say things for nothing? You don't know what you're saying?
> […]

Why are you answering my questions?
-Because you're asking them.
And you answer even if you're not sure?
-Yes.

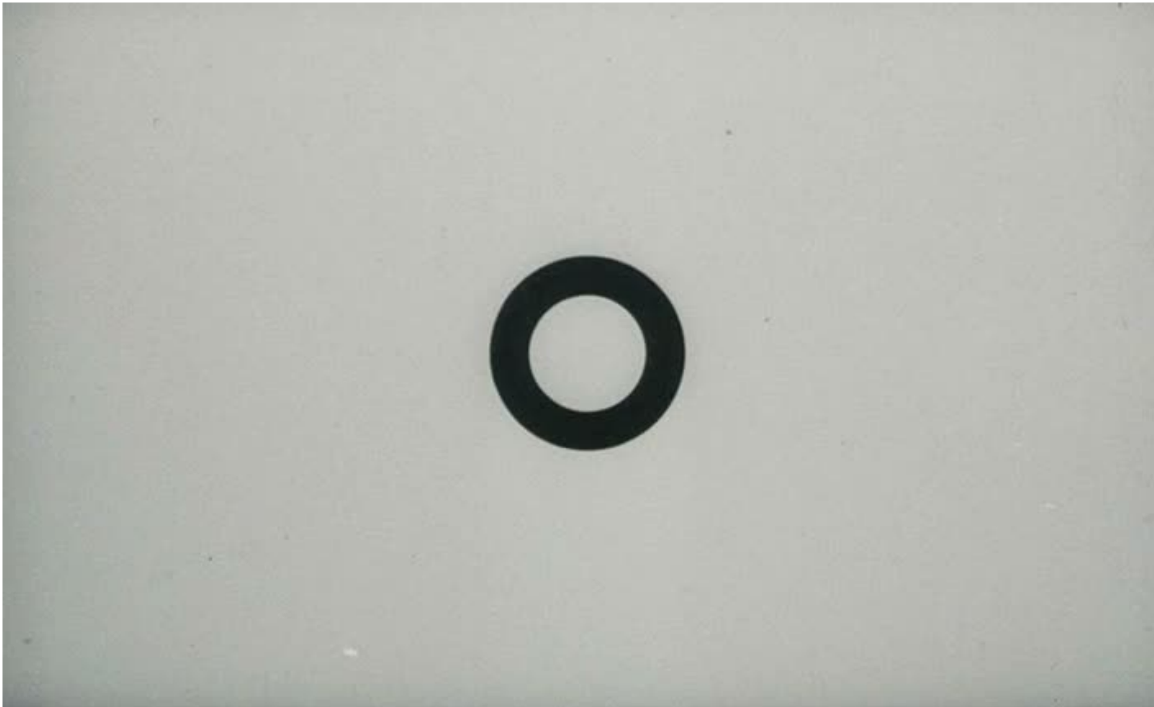

Figure 1.12: *Détruissez-vous* (Serge Bard, 1968). Untitled painting by Olivier Mosset.

Their entire conversation, excerpted here, lasts roughly three and a half minutes, and transpires (apart from a 30 second non-synchronized shot of de Bendern seated with her arms crossed) over a completely black screen. Just after this dialogue ends Mosset's painting appears on screen, and then the screen returns to blackness. After several seconds there is a burst of light. Blackness again. Over the next fifteen seconds the flashes of white light appear with greater frequency until they light up the screen (and the auditorium) with an aggressive strobing rhythm. Although this is not the first time that such an effect has appeared in the film, the way that this strobing light seems to emerge here out of Mosset's painting suggests that it is something like a cinematic

response to it, an attempt to incorporate some of the same concerns into a different medium. If Mosset approaches the zero-degree of painting, reducing it to the most primary set of tonal and signifying oppositions (white/black, ground/mark) Bard seizes on the most basic but abstract potentialities of the cinematic apparatus – the white screen and the black screen, or, more exactly, the possibilities of projecting light or not.

How can we understand this striking cinematic gesture, which recurs throughout the film, in relation to the gestures, postures, and poses of the bodies on screen? Given that the figures in the film repeatedly exhibit forms of withdrawal, affectlessness, impassivity, and stasis, the reduction of the screen to bare black or white could be seen as the ultimate extension of the blankness that the film's performances are tending towards. But this does not account for the visceral force of the strobing light. Erupting violently in the midst of the film's entropic mise-en-scène and flat performances, the blank screen and the strobing light are not just the remainder of representation but its absolute other. They do not, then, punctuate the film, — they puncture it, introducing gaps and holes that cannot be filled. In their simultaneous impoverishment of content and visceral force they are an inarticulate shriek of crisis, and it is significant that they first appear in the film accompanied by the overwhelming wails of a soundtrack layered with ambulance sirens. Like a chorus this strobing light, this almost imperceptibly rapid alternation of black and white, returns again and again throughout the film, both a signal that demands that we respond to the state of emergency, and a mute admission of the impossibility or inadequacy of representing the revolution that would be the only sufficient response to it.

At one key moment in the film, a character lecturing in a nearly empty auditorium proclaims that "the revolution is beginning even as I speak." At precisely

this moment there is a cut to the warehouse space previously mentioned. While one character walks across the length of the screen from right to left, the others barely move, stuck in poses of faintly theatricalized ennui. Is this the beginning of the revolution? Should we understand the lassitude of these bodies as the index of an inertia that borders on paralysis or as the sign of a disaffection so total that it will explode into revolt? If human action remains in a state of suspension throughout *Détruisez-vous*, the very form of the film — the way that it is riven and ruptured by explosions of light — suggests that these dandified postures of refusal do possess what Cavell described as a "passive potency."

While *Détruisez-vous* is often credited as being prophetic of the uprising that was soon to follow it, it's temporal relation to the event is in fact much more complicated than that. It does not simply foresee the imminence of revolt. Nor can its orchestration of vocal demands that lead nowhere, and young bodies stuck in mannered poses or wandering aimlessly, be understood as prefiguring some inevitable failure of May. Both of these readings would impoverish the work. Nor, again, does it figure the present as the repetition or return of a storied revolutionary past. Unlike the May 13th photograph of de Bendern, no one here could be mistaken for Marianne. The temporal complexity of *Détruisez-vous* owes something to its own history. If May '68 exerts an almost inescapable force as a historical boundary, an event that asks us to divide up time around it, marking a before and after, *Détruisez-vous* confounds this division. Filmed in April, it was only edited after the events of May. So while the footage of young people at Nanterre offers us the indexical fascination of seeing these students, so close to the events that were about to make history, how do we understand the temporality of the black and transparent film frames that flicker through the projector? Produced without the camera's lens, they seem not to be written on by history in the

same way, and we do not know when they were fabricated, nor even when they became conceived as part of the film's structure. If these blank images, black and white, rupture the film, from where (and when) exactly do they issue?

I earlier proposed that these bursts of light from the darkness were simultaneously a distress signal, a demand, and an admission that the response was beyond representation. This might at first seem to anchor them into the period of April '68, the position of pre-May, the pre-event. Yet is it not also possible that this distress and this demand are launched from the other side of that dividing line, affirming the exigencies of the movement while trying to prevent the foreclosure of its meanings and representations that would construct it as a past event, over and done with? In a voiceover that follows one of these episodes of flashing — again, from when does this voice come to speak to us? — we are told that "the only way out is to reach for the hidden recesses of loss." This is the rupture that the empty frames threaten and promise – both irrecuperable negativity and the possibility of escape. In its vertiginous temporality, the film gives a form to the event that recalls Maurice Blanchot's invocation for the perpetual continuation of the movement: "From this, here and there, today, tomorrow, others will perhaps derive a new and strong power to destroy. *Tomorrow was May*."[53]

[53] Maurice Blanchot, "[Political death]." *Political Writings, 1953-1993* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 91.

CHAPTER TWO

Spontaneity and Form: Political Action, Acting, and the Stakes of Improvisation

> Without spontaneity there would be neither event nor movement. Nothing would have happened. Power therefore regards spontaneity as the enemy. Spontaneity, however, is not a form of power.
>
> -Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*

Sprawled out in the middle of a bare, weathered wood floor populated by only a few stray props, a tangle of bodies writhes on the ground. The camera maintains, initially, a measured distance from this human pile, viewing it not directly but reflected in a mirror, which provides an impromptu frame to the unruly action. But soon the camera turns and approaches the group – an increasing proximity that results also in an increasing responsiveness to the filmed bodies and their movements. Among the mass of entwined limbs and torsos we can now make out six actors. Five of them form a tightly knit heap, while one remains just outside, clutching at a foot that extends from the pile and barking. As the actors grapple with each other, coalescing into a single group and rising together from the floor, a low hum of moans and grunts is punctuated by the emergence of language, a few isolated words ("*le feu*," "*soleil*") that are vocalized with escalating insistence, before merging into agonized screams. Finally standing, though still existing more as a clinging, interwoven mass than as discrete individuals, they are circled by the camera, which presses in on them almost as if attempting to merge with this collective body rather than simply to record it. As the screams give way

to a calming “ssshhhhh” from one of the women in the troupe, accompanied by a gentle cradling gesture, the group settles into a new formation and begins to sway back and forth, rhythmically moaning (fig. 2.1).

Figure 2.1: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971)**

These actions take up several minutes in the middle of an extended and mostly wordless scene of improvised theatrical rehearsal that will last almost forty minutes (interrupted only by several short cutaways to a character played by Jean-Pierre Léaud), dominating the first episode of *Out 1: Noli me tangere*, Jacques Rivette’s monumental 13-hour film. Like the rehearsal as a whole, we see here something that risks appearing as merely formless, incoherent flailing. Yet from the unplanned interaction of these bodies we witness a modulating series of new configurations of corporeal action come briefly into focus before dissolving. As the actors discuss the rehearsal in the following scene

we learn that they were in fact engaged in work on Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, trying to discover a way into the play through their own bodies rather than through the text. And though they seem somewhat dissatisfied with the results, we could see this sequence, in its improvisatory grappling, as a sort of *mise en abyme*, an embedded model of the film itself. For *Out 1* stands as perhaps the most audacious experiment into the possibilities of improvisation undertaken in film history, an attempt to create a massive narrative that would generate itself as it was being filmed, starting from a minimal set of initial conditions and coordinates, and ceding to the performers an incredible amount of responsibility for the direction the film would take. This decision was, at least in part, a political one. By the end of the '60s, Rivette's own development as a filmmaker had led him to increasingly question the position of the director as an all-powerful creative and expressive force, one who would work to realize his own vision. In an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma* given in July of 1968, he went so far as to suggest that the most pressing task at the moment was to destroy the idea of cinematic authorship:

> The only way to make revolutionary cinema in France is to make sure that it escapes all the bourgeois aesthetic clichés: like the idea that there is an *auteur* of the film, expressing himself. The only thing we can do in France at the moment is to try to deny that a film is a personal creation. … what is important is the point where the film no longer has an *auteur* […] And I think you can only get there by trying to be as passive as possible at all the various stages, never intervening on one's own behalf but rather on behalf of this something else which is nameless.[1]

In attacking the idea of the auteur, Rivette is not so much denying any organizing role to the director – throughout the same interview he constantly cites directors he admires, and speaks of the director as making moral and political choices in relation to what they

[1] Jacques Rivette, "'Time Overflowing': Rivette in interview with Jacques Aumont, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, Sylvie Pierre," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 319.

film, and how they film it. Rather, he is advocating a particular orientation of the filmmaker in relation to the act of artistic creation. Cinema should be, in this view, not a medium of expression but a field of encounter, where the act of filming will not be the realization of a pre-existing plan but a motor for producing the unforeseen. Central to this vision is the transformation of the relationship between director and actor, and a dependence on the actors' ability to engage in an act of collective creation without the support of a script – in short, to improvise.

This chapter asks us to consider what is at stake in Rivette's adaptation of improvisation as the foundation of his most ambitious film. This question will take us in directions that are political as well as aesthetic, leading us into the heart of historical debates about the relation of acting to political action. If *Out 1* is a forbiddingly singular object, both in its mode of production and in its duration, it is also a work that is deeply entangled in the aesthetic currents of its era. It is, as Adrian Martin and Cristina Alvarez López have described the film, "an extraordinary, synthesising document of many experimental movements in theatre, […] an immense corridor through which the history of contemporary, experimental theatre passes."[2] Accordingly, this chapter seeks to understand the sort of improvised performance we witness in this rehearsal not as simply a raw expression of spontaneity, but as a particular historical form, emerging out of the theatrical avant-garde in the mid 1960s. This form not only provides a framework that shapes what spontaneous action will look like, but also links certain ways of moving and interacting to a set of political aspirations, affective states, and ideas about the body and human action. Additionally, the chapter will trace some of the

[2] Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin, "Paratheatre: Plays Without Stages," *MUBI Notebook*, August 7, 2014. https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/paratheatre-plays-without-stages

intersections between cinema and this sort of historical performance form, as well as other improvisatory practices, taking Rivette's *Out 1* as the most profound point of contact. This encounter is far from simple. On the one hand, Rivette's use of improvisation will exert pressure on his own conception of cinematic form. On the other hand, Rivette's cinematic framing of these practices can be seen not just as an incorporation of improvisation but as a reflection on it and perhaps even as an implicit critique of certain ideologies of spontaneity attached to it. As in the previous chapter, we will see how a historical event – again, May '68 – can endow corporeal practices with an enormous political weight. This time however, we will stray further from that epicenter, telling a story that begins earlier and extends further beyond those events. As we will see, on this expanded timescale the relation of bodily action to political significance becomes more malleable. *Out 1*, shot in the spring of 1970, can thus be seen to pose the question of what is at stake in improvisation in a way that simultaneously harkens back to the spontaneity of the events of 1968 and makes palpable our distance from them.

"A Perpetual Improvisation" – Modern Cinema and the Aesthetics of Acting

To take the measure of Rivette's encounter with improvisation, and with the particular practices of the theatrical avant-garde, requires a deeper understanding of Rivette's conception of acting and its role within cinema. We can start to track the development of his thinking in an early unpublished manuscript, only recently made available in his collected critical writings. Written around 1950, "L'acte et l'acteur," demonstrates Rivette's longstanding investment in acting as a primary element of cinematic expression – perhaps even the primary element. Defining cinema as the reproduction of movement – and above all, of *human* movement – Rivette locates the

pleasure and power of cinema in its ability to provoke a kind of psychic mimicry within the spectator. This mimicry is capable of actually taking an embodied form, as when spectators leave the movie theater having adopted the gait of the star they've been watching.[3] But the true significance of cinema's reproduction of human movement is as a spur to the "dynamic imagination" of the spectator, making possible the "free play of impulses without the necessity of bodily actualization" and giving reign to "the intoxicating power of the mind over a movement liberated of all materiality."[4] In short, cinema affords its viewers the opportunity to "*penser le geste*."[5] Given this conceptualization of the spectator's relation to the moving image, it follows that the work of cinema must proceed through the actor, and the director's shaping of that actor. Indeed, Rivette does not shy away from offering a characteristically bold declaration of the primacy of acting in cinema: "Movement, gesture, act: such are the elements that the filmmaker uses. He must play the actor as his only means of expression."[6]

Of course these early thoughts on the importance of acting, written when he was making his first short films, cannot be transferred *tout court* to Rivette's position at the end of the '60s or into the '70s. Still, they offer a suggestive glimpse into his thinking, throwing into relief his later development while also clarifying certain continuities within his conception of cinematic performance. The starkest discontinuity concerns the

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[3] Jacques Rivette, *Textes critiques* (Paris: Post-éditions, 2018), 322. Rivette's example here resonates with Marcel Mauss's influential essay on "Les techniques du corps." Mauss relates that the idea of bodily techniques came to him while he was hospitalized in New York and, immobilized in his bed, was given to wondering where he had seen the distinctive gait of his nurses before. He then realized that he recognized their way of moving from the movie screen, and upon returning to France was struck by seeing that "American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema." Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," tr. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (1973), 72.

[4] Ibid, 321.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid, 326.

status of the actor, and in particular the characterization of the director's relationship to the actor. While the actor appears at the very center of this conception of cinema, endowed with the ability of "elevating movement to the dignity of gesture," they ultimately remain somewhat powerless, or rather instrumentalized. For while the director's power can only be manifested through the medium of the actor, the actor must ultimately serve the ends of the director. ("Only through the actor can the creator express themselves and reach the spectator.") For all of Rivette's emphasis on the cinematic actor as the "subject of acts," he seems to be strangely lacking in agency, referred to variously as "a gesturing machine" and a "higher marionette."[7] Significantly the word "*jeu*," – literally play, or game, but also the most common word for "acting" in the theatrical or cinematic sense – is used here with reference to the spectator and the "free play" of mental impulses, and of the director, who "plays the actor" as if playing an instrument, but never of the actor himself.[8]

Even more striking, however, is the way that this early text foreshadows Rivette's later development, laying out concerns that he will grapple with over the next several decades, and that are essential to understanding his aims in *Out 1*. The ultimate significance of this early reflection lies not merely in its impressionistic evocation of the actor's ineffable power, but rather in Rivette's insistence that acting lies at the center of any consideration of *cinematic form*. This conviction is expressed most clearly in his assertion that "far from submitting the actor to one or several 'components' of the film, everything must be ordered according to him, starting from him, who gives everything its *raison d'être*."[9] Positioned as the central element around which all else will take

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid, 321, 326.
[9] Rivette, *Textes critiques*, 325.

shape, the work of the actor occupies the role of what Russian formalist critics would call the dominant, which Roman Jakobson has defined as "the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure."[10] Though at this early point in his career (or in any case, in his writing) this idea remains somewhat vague, a still rather notional expression of acting as the bedrock of film form, it signals a principle that will mark Rivette's own development as a filmmaker, especially during the years of his most radical formal experimentation.

If the conviction that acting is at the center of cinematic form will represent something of a red thread winding through Rivette's thinking, we can also spot here several more specific ideas that look forward to his own work in the sixties and seventies. Already apparent in the 1950 text, for instance, is a desire to conceive of acting in non-psychological terms. While Rivette sees the power of the actor as stemming from the audience's identification with him/her, he is insistent that "the spectator's mechanism of identification with the actor is not so much psychological as dynamic."[11] By positing cinematic identification as a process that attaches to movements, not minds, Rivette suggests the basis for an alternative dramaturgy of the screen, in which the spectator is "primarily touched" not by the "actor-character, with such-and-such mode of thought, such-and-such mental universe" but rather by the "actor-subject of acts, node of gestures."[12] In other words, what Rivette introduces as a simple description of the nature of the spectator-actor dynamic in fact entails a

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[10] Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 41.
[11] Rivette, *Textes critiques*, 323.
[12] Ibid.

thoroughgoing reconceptualization of the significance of character/role ("each role is thus determined not by some psychological unity, but by a continuity of conduct, a homomorphy of gesture")[13] and of dramatic structure ("A film is a fabric of acts, where psychology (sociology, metaphysics…) will only ever occupy a parasitic place.")[14] This desire for a non-psychological approach to acting and to dramaturgy, however, was in want of actors who were capable of meeting those demands. When Rivette transformed his approach to cinema following his frustrating experience of making *La Réligieuse* (1966), he was inspired in part by the prospect of working with the actors from Marc'O's troupe, in particular Bulle Ogier and Jean-Pierre Kalfon, precisely because they embodied a mode of performance that did not seem bogged down in psychology.

> I wanted to make a film with them since I'd seen them together in Marc'O's plays. […] because they have a much more physical acting style than most French actors, who are deformed by a certain tradition, by the Conservatory and the traditional analysis of characters. Even certain very good actors, because of this, never attain a truly great stature. They are stuck in the psychological framework of the role, the framework of personality [l'armature du rôle psychologique, du rôle de caractère], by all the received ideas that come to them from this tradition of the literary analysis of texts and the logical explanation of characters. These are the residue of the official aesthetic of the 19th century, an aesthetic that is above all else an aesthetic of fear, which aims to rationalize everything, precisely in order to hide from itself what 'being' really is [pour justement se cacher ce qu'est réelement 'l'être']. It prefers to show itself the phantoms that —in its system — personality and sentiment are.[15]

Finally, the essay attests to the hope that the human body and its gestures, molded by the creative power of the filmmaker, will be the source of radically new experiences. In one of the final paragraphs of the text Rivette defines the filmmaker as a "creator of gestures" with the imperative to "compel the spectator to perform

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid, 326.
[15] Jacques Rivette, "Entretien sur *L'Amour fou*," *Positif* 104 (April 1969): 28.

unaccustomed acts [actes inhabituels]."[16] There are several things to note here. First is that via the mechanism of spectator identification already discussed, the filmmaker is granted the power to "play" not only the actor but also the audience, accomplishing an "intimate modeling of the spectator […] through the actor."[17] Another is the promotion of the *inhabituel* – the uncommon, the unusual, the unaccustomed – as an aesthetic value. We can start to see here a glimmer of Rivette's affinity for improvisation in a vision of art as a search for the unforeseen and the unexpected, an escape from habitual experiences and perceptions. He continues, drawing out the idea of the body and its movements as a privileged site for the production of the *inhabituel*. For the filmmaker, he says, "The human body is his material. Always malleable and ready for new expressions and infinite nuances. Gesture, always new, never identical to itself, even in the most obstinate repetition, *presents* itself in the instant, always virginal and fugitive and, like cinema, a perpetual improvisation."[18]

What should we make of Rivette's assertion that both gesture and cinema alike are matters of "perpetual improvisation"? From one point of view the ability of cinema to record and fix action, rendering it perfectly, mechanically repeatable, would seem to put it fundamentally at odds with the essence of improvisation — its unpredictable unfolding in time. Jean-François de Raymond's probing study of improvisation, for example, notes the difficulty, even the impossibility, of adequately accessing past instances of improvisation, given the ontological incompatibility between recording mediums and the improvised act: "typing, photographs, even cinema, provide neither reliability nor validity, since they transform the nature of the process whose traces are

[16] Rivette, *Textes critiques*, 327.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

deposited there, since they modify its status by recording the singular in order to better repeat it."[19] For Rivette, however, cinema's capacity for recording and repeating the singular does not simply alienate us from an experience of that singularity so much as it attunes us to singularity, revealing what is unique within the ordinary. This intuition was later borne out by his own experience. After directing an adaptation of Diderot's *La Réligieuse* for the stage in 1963, Rivette's own experience of working in the theater (a more conventional sort of theater, it should be stressed, than what we will be focusing on in this chapter), made him newly aware of the affinity cinema had for precisely what was unrepeatable and unforeseen in an actor's performance. "What you are looking to obtain, to capture in a film," he said, describing what he'd learned about the difference between the mediums, "is what the actor does only one time, what happens only one time. The work of theatre, on the contrary, consists partly in giving an automatism to the actor, a mechanism that he can retrieve each night."[20] In cinema, the autonomism of the apparatus substitutes for the autonomism of the performer, freeing cinematic performance to seek out the singular.

While "L'acte et l'acteur" is Rivette's most sustained piece of writing to focus on acting, we can see subterranean traces of the ideas expressed there throughout his critical writing of the '50s and '60s. These are felt most significantly, I would argue, in his efforts to grapple with an emerging "modern cinema" that represented a complete overturning of the aesthetic economy of classical cinema. Rivette's efforts to come to a critical understanding of modern cinema were also, of course, a way to prepare for his own coming work as a filmmaker, to position himself in relation to what he felt were

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[19] Jean-François de Raymond, *L'Improvisation: Contribution à la philosophie de l'action* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1980), 13.
[20] Rivette, "Entretien sur *L'Amour fou*," 36.

the essential duties of a new cinema that would have to do without the certainties of classical models. In an unpublished essay from 1961 attempting to define the task of modern cinema by way of a comparison of several important directors, Rivette ventures that what is lacking in the films of Luchino Visconti and Joseph Losey is “the feeling of individual adventure, of peril, and of risk.”[21] Their films were defined, he felt, by an overly premeditated vision that admitted no modification, that ruled out in advance the possibility of chance or accident. While making a film of course requires an intense amount of mental preparation and planning in advance, it is necessary that after this preparatory work “the film then makes the path step by step and in trembling and uncertainty, to regain the adventure of experience, to recapture the movement of personal and unforeseeable risk, always accidental.” [22] In this critique of the inadequacies of Visconti and Losey lies a definition of cinema that resonates with the vision expressed in his earlier essay on acting: “the cinema is always the unforeseen.”[23]

If Losey and Visconti stand in for a particular trap that modern cinema must avoid at all costs, Rivette situates them against a filmmaker who presented a more promising model. The courting of the unforeseen, the encounter with adventure and risk were, precisely, “the essence of Rouch’s films.”[24] In Jean Rouch, Rivette found an avatar of one promising strain of modern cinema, where documentary and fiction infiltrated each other and where a mercurial sensitivity to events as they unfolded resulted in new cinematic forms that would provide a wellspring of inspiration for the New Wave generation – in 1968 Rivette claimed that Rouch was “the force behind all French cinema of the past ten years, although few people realize it,” while also

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[21] Rivette, *Textes critiques*, 371
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

maintaining that "Rouch is contained in Renoir."[25] Crucially, Rouch began as an ethnographic filmmaker acting as something of an participant observer vis-à-vis the subjects he recorded and from there developed an even more interactive relationship with his actors, asking them to create their own roles and stories and enact them before his camera. The opening narration of Rouch's *The Human Pyramid* (1961) nicely hints at the way in which Rouch would serve as one model for *Out 1*: "Instead of mirroring reality the film created another reality. This story did not happen but the actors made up their lines and reactions during shooting. Spontaneous improvisation was the only rule."

While it is clear then, that Rivette's thinking about cinema had primed him for an encounter with improvisation, this engagement did not emerge in his own filmmaking until after he had made his second feature, *La Réligieuse*. The shooting of that film, adapted from the play he had directed, was an enormously frustrating experience for Rivette, involving a prolonged and meticulous planning stage and a rushed and stressful shoot where many of his rigorously constructed ideas proved unfeasible to realize in the time available. The radical overhaul of his own filmmaking practice that would follow *La Réligieuse* is often credited to his experience of interviewing Jean Renoir in order to make a three-part documentary on him for the series *Cinéastes de notre temps* in 1966. Distraught over the experience of *La Réligieuse* and impressed by Renoir attitude to cinema, he felt that "After a lie, here was the truth […] I therefore wanted to make a film, not inspired by Renoir, but trying to conform to the idea of a cinema incarnated by Renoir, a cinema which does not impose anything, where one tries to suggest things, to let them happen, where it is mainly a dialogue at every level,

[25] Rivette, "Time Overflowing," *Texts and Interviews*, 34.

with the actors, with the situation, with the people you meet, where the act of filming is part of the film itself.''[26] But if Renoir's example was key to pushing Rivette towards a cinema that was open to unplanned encounters and developed in dialogue with the actors, the turn in Rivette's filmmaking also needs to be understood within a wider frame of reference.

Indeed, the strength of Renoir's example perhaps struck home so resoundingly because of the ways in which it seemed in tune with contemporary aesthetic developments, thus confirming Renoir as an eternal modern. Or at the very least, Rivette's "idea of a cinema incarnated by Renoir" views him through the lens of contemporary avant-garde developments in art and theatre, and their stress on participation, open forms, and the incorporation of chance procedures. At this point we can only briefly sketch out a couple of the central points of this constellation as observed by Rivette, though we will return to some of these figures and movements shortly. I've already mentioned briefly Rivette's formative encounter with the theater of former *lettrist* Marc'O, and his admiration for the physicality of the actors in the troupe, particularly Bulle Ogier and Jean-Pierre Kalfon. This physicality, and the distance from a certain psychological tradition of French acting, were aided by the fact that the group generally did not begin from a written play but developed the material for their productions through a collaborative rehearsal process that relied on group improvisation.[27] Another key point of stimulation was the artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, who

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[26] Jacques Rivette, "Time Overflowing," Interview with Jacques Aumont, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni and Sylvia Pierre, in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (London: BFI, 1977), 11.

[27] In addition to borrowing actors from Marc'O's troupe, Rivette seems to have borrowed a plot point. In the group's breakthrough production of 1965, *Les Bargasses*, some of the characters end up staging Aeschylus's *The Persians*, anticipating the dueling Aeschylus rehearsals in *Out 1* (Michael Lonsdale's group is working on *Prometheus Bound*, while Michèle Moretti's takes on *Seven Against Thebes*).

we encountered briefly in the previous chapter, holding up Caroline de Bendern on his shoulders as she posed à la Marianne. Lebel was a point of contact between the older European avant-garde (his father was a friend and biographer of Marcel Duchamp, and he himself was associated with the surrealists before Breton excommunicated him in 1960) and some of the most important new art emerging in America. He was particularly close to Allan Kaprow, and proselytized for Kaprow's conception of the Happening in Europe, both through his writing and through his own series of public happenings (fig 2.x). Painter, poet, collage-artist, experimental filmmaker, stager of public participatory events, Lebel exemplified a kind of openness and boundary crossing that Rivette found compelling in part for the challenges it posed to cinema:

> The objective of Jean-Jacques Lebel seems to me to be one of the most stimulating that a filmmaker today could set himself. We know the importance of the 'open work' in the majority of contemporary expressions: to consider, head-on, without deviation or prevarication, the questions which the 'opening' poses to the world of aesthetics, ineluctably closed, it would seem, to the cinema — such a project is one that should become a reality.[28]

Through this series of encounters with the avant-garde, we can intuit in Rivette's thinking a shifting understanding of the task of modern cinema, away from a certain kind of medium-specificity. While once Rivette had written that modern cinema must develop "an idea of construction and narrative (non-novelistic), an idea of the direction of actors (non-theatrical), an idea of the shot (non-pictorial)," he now seemed to turn to a more open aesthetic that resonated with both a contemporary neo-avant garde that was embracing intermedia work in reaction against the legacy of a Greenbergian formalist understanding of high modernism and a Bazinian conception of the value of an impure cinema.

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[28] Jacques Rivette, "Open Work," in *Jean-Jacques Lebel: Barricades*, ed. Axel Heil, Robert Fleck, and Alyce Mahon (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2014), 158-159.

The first fruit of Rivette's radical re-orientation was the film *L'Amour fou* (shot in 1967 and released in 1968), which follows the disintegration of the relationship between a theatre director and his female partner as he is in the process of rehearsing Racine's *Phèdre.* Radicalizing the idea of non-intervention that he saw in Renoir, Rivette developed a number of strategies for displacing his own control in order to let the film develop in unexpected ways. For one, he hired a documentary film crew led by André Labarthe to film the rehearsals of the play as they saw fit. Rivette then worked this material, shot handheld in the style of direct cinema on 16mm film, into his own 35mm footage. Less immediately striking, but more consequential in terms of the evolution of his career, was the way that he worked with his actors. In the part of the film that takes place inside the theater, Rivette largely abandoned the direction of actors to Jean-Pierre Kalfon, who was both playing a director and actually directing the rehearsals for a play. In the part of the film set outside the theater, focused on Kalfon's romantic relationship with his partner, played by Bulle Ogier, Rivette worked with the actors from a more or less developed outline, sometimes working with them to produce dialogue on the day of a shoot, sometimes giving them free reign. In short, the principle of improvisation reigned.

It is *Out 1*, however, that most radically incorporated the improvisational techniques of the theatrical avant-garde. We witness the rehearsals and exercises of not one but two groups of actors, one led by a character played by Michèle Moretti (who, like Bulle Ogier and Jean-Pierre Kalfon, had come out of the improvisational theatre troupe of Marc'O) and the other (described in the opening paragraph) led by Michael Lonsdale, an actor who had spent time in the experimental theatre workshop of Peter Brook. Additionally, we encounter a number of characters not in these groups, but who

find themselves crossing paths with them – most significantly the characters played by iconic new wave actors Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliette Berto.

While Rivette devotes much of the film's length to observing the improvised rehearsals of the groups – it's only after about three or four hours that a story starts to come into focus – improvisation functions not only within these theatrical scenes, but also as a method of fabricating the narrative that slowly begins to emerge. Even compared to *L'Amour fou*, *Out 1* began filming with a skeletal narrative – essentially the idea that a secret society based on Balzac's *History of the Thirteen* would be involved in a conspiracy that would connect the characters. Suzanne Schiffmann, a close collaborator with a number of New Wave directors who was officially credited as co-director of the film, has detailed the work of creating some kind of structure to organize the shooting and give at least a slight orientation to the improvisations of the actors:

> When I arrived on *Out 1*, Jacques had already met with the three principal groups of actors, Bulle Ogier, Michael Lonsdale, and Michèle Moretti. The film didn't yet have a structure, but Balzac was already present. The actors didn't know much, except for the principle of improvisation. Once everyone decided what character they wanted to be in the film, we set about talking it over in the offices of Losange. Jacques said to me: Bulle wants to have a bookstore, Michèle a theater group, Lonsdale another theater group where they work on improvisation, we have to find a spot to rehearse…We had to start looking for sets. Then, to determine the order of shooting, it was necessary to know who wanted to meet who and, starting from that, try to inject a bit of fiction. […] During the film's preparation, we marked on a giant sheet of graph paper the meeting points of the characters, and then I traced a sort of chart, on which we more or less had the continuity of the story. We followed the chart: it's on that that the shooting was organized, and that we relied to inform the actors by telling them, "on this day you are going to meet so-and-so." They were aware of their own sequences. As we were shooting and the film was being made the actors had ideas, they knew a little better what had happened before, even if there was no dialogue written at all.[29]

The relatively open form of the diagram, with encounters described in only a word or

[29] Suzanne Schiffmann, qtd. in Hélene Frappat, *Jacques Rivette, secret compris* (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, 2001), 142-143.

two, provides a framework that enables spontaneous creation through the improvised interactions of the actors (fig. 2.2). And through this collective fabulation, the world of the story begins to open up for the viewer as well. The isolated groups and individuals that we have been introduced to begin to be connected to each other and to new characters, either on screen in the present or through what we hear of their past relations.

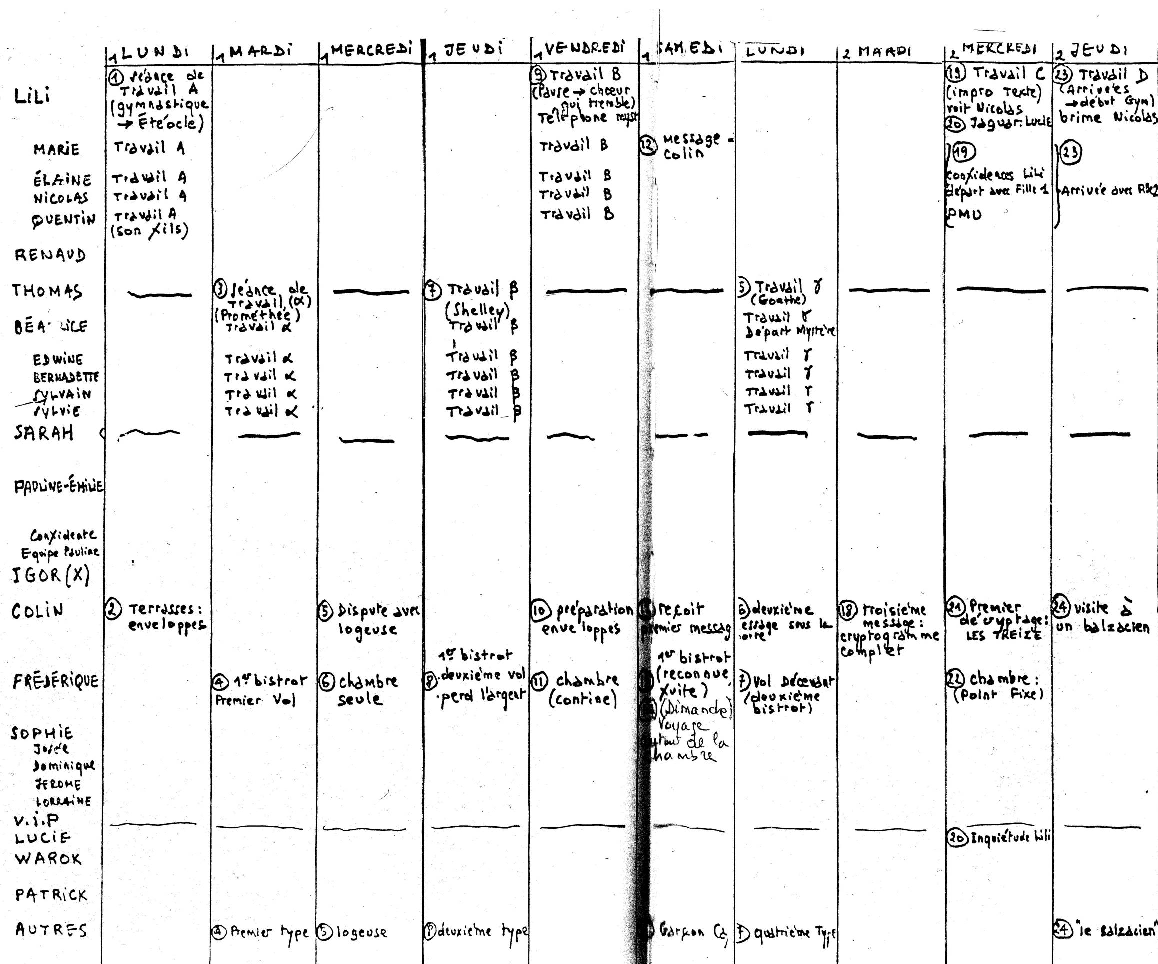

Figure 2.2: "We followed the chart…" Shooting Diagram for *Out 1*, reproduced in *Jacques Rivette, secret compris*, Hélene Frappat, 2001

If the principle of improvisation is central to Rivette's aesthetic project at this period of his career, what distinguishes *Out 1* is not only the unparalleled extent to which improvisation is used to generate its narrative. Perhaps equally significant is the way in which practices of improvisation are made to bear historical weight, allowing the film to engage in a reflection on the historical situation of early '70s France and the possibilities of political action and imagination in that impasse. Although the events of May '68 are never explicitly referred to, they haunt the film, registered as a pervasive feeling that the actions we witness occur in the wake of some momentous but unnamed event. An opening title card insists on the temporal specificity of the narrative, marking the story as commencing on "Le 13 avril 1970." As the plot develops, we learn that many of the central characters in the film were drawn together by shadowy circumstances two years prior – and that their collective plans to change the world soon came to naught, causing the group to dissolve and disperse. Yet if the historical reference is unmistakable, the film is quite rigorous in maintaining a refusal to identify this constantly mentioned past with the political upheavals of May '68. There is no mention of the barricades, the occupations, the strikes, nor of the Gaullist counter-demonstrations, the Grenelle Accords, or the rightwing parliamentary victory that followed. *Out 1* is committed, in other words, to abstracting the experiences of '68 even as it makes them its center of gravity. What remains is a sort of affective map of post-'68 Paris.[30] If the film itself remains tacit in its acknowledgement of the historical situation that it addresses, Rivette himself was not afraid to be more direct:

> Two years after '68, where are we? We're still waiting to find out. The film is an attempt to describe a general period of crisis on all levels, including the specific domain of the theatre where all the characters feel they are in a period of crisis and can do nothing other than wait for a time when action

[30] See Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

> will be possible again. Meanwhile, all they can do is, on the one hand, have utopian projects with results that are very…uncertain, increasingly uncertain as time goes on, and on the other hand, try to maintain a sort of fake enthusiasm and energy, but that's very difficult. It wears out as time goes on and the film describes that weariness that has no foreseeable end.[31]

If this was indeed a period of crisis on all levels, I want to argue that "the specific domain of theatre" is more than just one area among all the others in relation to the events of '68 but is in fact intimately connected to the central concerns of those events.

Political Action, Acting, and the Stakes of Improvisation

The events of the May '68 uprising in France have persistently been described using the language of theater. Writing in their immediate aftermath, the sociologist Raymond Aron famously dismissed the events as "psychodrama." They were, in his withering assessment, merely an "irrational […] episode" in which the masses gave in to the force of "affective reactions" which could only be given form through preconceived roles to be played out: "Inevitably, in a case like this, we all find our own models, imitate our masters and become actors."[32] The Trotskyist student activists Daniel Bensaïd and Henri Weber's altogether more positive book-length analysis dubbed May '68 a "dress rehearsal" [*une répétition générale*] for the revolution.[33] Meanwhile Jean-Jacques Lebel, an influential avant-garde artist, performer, and activist, was praising the revolutionary consequences of the "exciting socio-dramatic events" of May, arguing that the theatricality of May had already produced something valuable in

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[31] Archival interview shown in *The Mysteries of Paris: Jacques Rivette's "*Out 1*" Revisited* (Robert Fischer and Wilfried Recihart, 2015).
[32] Raymond Aron, "Reflections After the Psychodrama," *Encounter* (December 1968), 64-65. The article is adapted from Aron's book *La révolution introuvable*, later translated into English as *The Elusive Revolution: Anatomy of a Student Revolt*.
[33] Bensaïd, Daniel and Henri Weber, *Mai 1968: Une répétition générale* (Paris: Maspero, 1968).

its disruption of everyday alienation from experience: "The May uprising was theatrical in that it was a gigantic fiesta, a revelatory and sensuous explosion outside the 'normal' pattern of politics."[34] As these examples suggest, however, the common tendency to figure the events as some form of theater reveal not a shared consensus on the significance and character of the uprising, but rather an entire set of debates about just what sort of event May was, and what sort of action its actors were engaging in.

Was it a sound-and-fury simulacrum of political struggle, bound by some collective repetition compulsion to an outdated script? A preparatory performance setting the stage for the opening night of the revolution? A dramatic intensification of the present in which the stifled vitality of everyday life erupts into an unforeseen street theater? Across these divergent interpretations of May, the rhetorical theatricalization of political action serves to heighten fundamental questions about human agency, freedom, and historical change as they were coming to a head in that particular conjuncture. There is, of course, a venerable tradition of resorting to theatrical language in anatomizing a political upheaval. Aron's own book on '68 opens with an epigraph from Proudhon's journal during the 1848 revolution, excoriating France as "*une nation de comédiens*," while the title of Bensaïd and Weber's book evokes Lenin's claim that the 1905 revolution in Russia had been a "dress rehearsal" for the October Revolution.[35] But it would be a mistake to see theater as merely supplying a convenient stock of metaphors for the contentious actions of May. Rather, we must understand theater as a practice that itself interrogates, theorizes, and experiments with the possibilities of

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[34] Jean-Jacques Lebel, "Notes on Political Street Theatre, Paris: 1968, 1969," *The Drama Review* 13:4 (Summer 1969): 112.

[35] Raymond Aron, *La Révolution introuvable: Réflexions sur les événments de mai* (Paris: Fayard, 1968). V. I. Lenin., "*Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 13.

human action. And in the years surrounding 1968 new forms of acting were developing, quite conspicuously aiming to embody aspirations and impulses that were recognizably political.

Across the 1960s, the terms of theatre – what it in essence was, and what it should be – were themselves the subject of enormous dispute, both theoretically and as they were being instantiated in the experiments of theatrical practitioners. In France, this welter of alternative theatrical activity had reached a fever pitch by the middle of the decade, as a number of international avant-garde currents intersected and left their impression. At the 1966 Festival of the Theatre of Nations at the Odéon Theatre, Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory stunned Parisian audiences with the intense Artaudian physicality of their performance of *The Constant Prince*, which in accordance with his advocacy of "poor theatre" stripped away any extravagances of costume and set to focus on the exposed body of the actor. The Parisian artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, mentioned earlier, adapted the paratheatrical form of the Happening from Allan Kaprow and staged a series of his own scandalous, scatological transmedial events, as well as creating the Festival de la Libre Expression in Paris, which brought together emerging performance traditions including those associated with Fluxus, the Judson Dance Theatre, and the *mouvement panique*[36] (fig. 2.3). In early 1968 Peter Brook decamped from the Royal Shakespeare Company to Paris to engage in an open-ended experimental workshopping of *The Tempest* with a group of actors and directors from

[36] Lebel not only staged a number of his own happenings, but also authored a history and analysis of the new form: *Le happening* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1966). For the history of the festival he initiated, see Alyce Mahon, "Unbirth and Rebirth: The Festival of Free Expression, 1964-1967," in *Jean-Jacques Lebel: Barricades*, ed. Axel Heil, Robert Fleck, and Alyce Mahon (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2014), 40-69.

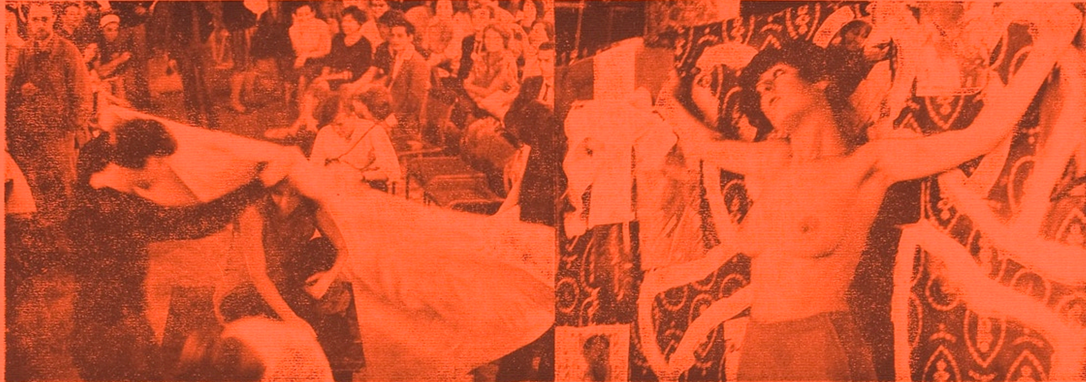

Figure 2.3: Poster for the Third Festival de la Libre Expression, organized by Jean-Jacques Lebel, April-May 1966. During *120 minutes dédiées au Divin Marquis*, Denise de Casabianca, Lebel's partner at the time and the editor of Rivette's *La Réligieuse*, participated dressed in a nun's habit, to protest the recent banning of Rivette's film.

England, France, the U.S., and Japan.[37] As varied as this constellation of names and moments is, they were often understood in relation to each other, registering as a signal that some fundamental shift was underway.

While this explosion of activity cannot be reduced to a unified movement, it was animated by certain shared tendencies. Central among these was an intense desire to interrogate and transform the possibilities of theatrical acting. Writing in early 1968 the prominent theater critic Bernard Dort suggested the direction of this transformation when he proposed that the previous year on the stage had been characterized by what he called "the insurrection of the body." The phrase, taken from Antonin Artaud, signaled the arrival of a number of theatrical groups and approaches united by their opposition to a traditional theater based on the primacy of the text. "Facing this dramaturgy founded on the text," Dort claimed, "another theater seeks to assert itself, not without some noise: it lays a claim to direct, physical action, simultaneously on stage and in the auditorium. To Brecht's name it opposes Artaud's."[38] This analysis was not confined to critical speculation. The theatrical director Marc'O – who was soon to move into film, and whose troupe of actors would become integral to French cinema over the next decade, and Jacques Rivette's films in particular – discussed his own work in strikingly similar terms:

> I consider there to be two kinds of theater. Until now, theater was founded on literature and thus on the word. It was a theater that obeyed a certain

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[37] See Arthur Horowitz, "Peter Brook's 'Experiment': The 1968 *Tempest*," in *Prospero's "True Preservers": Peter Brook, Yukio Ninagawa, and Giorgio Strehler – Twentieth-Century Directors Approach Shakespeare's* The Tempest (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 64-87. Participants in Brook's workshop included Delphine Seyrig, Glenda Jackson, Michael Lonsdale, and Joseph Chaikin.

[38] Bernard Dort, "1967, ou l'insurrection du corps,'" in *Théâtre réel: Essais de critique, 1967-1970* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), 233. Originally published in *Panorama mondial 1967*, ed. Robert Minder and Fernand L'Huillier (Bâle: Editions académiques de Suisse, 1968).

> conception of the text. That's to say, the text governed the whole presentation absolutely. […] And this is because the word was the primary material of the theater. You say 'Ionesco's theater,' 'Sartre's theater,' 'Beckett's theater.' To these theaters we oppose a theater centered on the active participation of all the collaborators, the producers, and then the public. The primary material is no longer the word, but the act.[39]

In contesting the central role of the text, this theater reconfigured the work of the actor. Several years earlier it had still been possible for an introduction to contemporary French theatre to confidently open with the pronouncement that "At the beginning of all theatrical creation is the word, that is to say, ultimately, writing. The actors who give the impression each evening of improvising the story that they are representing in front of the spectators will have all the more security, and therefore naturalness, when they are supported by a text of great literary quality and originality."[40] The actor posited here is an accessory to the script, and spontaneity is something to be emulated, not achieved: it is an effect that aims to conceal the fixity of the text, to create the impression of an open unfolding in time of actions that are repeated night after night. In contrast, by displacing the foundational position of the text in favor of "the act," of "direct, physical action," the new theaters of the sixties sought in part to move beyond the feigned spontaneity of scenic representation and create the conditions for an authentic event. This project, explicitly or implicitly, was rooted in a confidence in the body as a locus of spontaneity, and of spontaneity as a source of truth. Accordingly, acting was to become

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[39] Marc'O, qtd. in Jean-Pierre Berckmans, "La Route de l'hysterie," *Le Point* (February 1967): 27. In 1968 Pasolini made a similar distinction between two existing types of theater that he dubbed "Talk Theatre" and "Gesture or Scream Theatre," which he associated with Artaud, Grotowski, and the Living Theatre. Pasolini, however, advocated the creation of a third form that would ignore the traditions of both bourgeois theater and the avant-garde, which he proposed to call "Word Theatre." Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Manifesto for a New Theatre," trans. Thomas Simpson, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29:1 (Jan. 2007): 126-138.
[40] André de Baecque, *Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1964), 5.

less a vehicle for the representation of a preexisting text and instead to be approached as a liberatory practice, cultivating techniques of embodied spontaneity.

If the inspirations for the new theatrical current were diverse, French audiences and critics associated it above all with one group: The Living Theatre. Bernard Dort, identifying them as the "spearhead" of this corporeal turn, described them pithily as "at once a company and a phalanstery of Americans in exile."[41] As the allusion to Fourier hints, the European reception of the group's theatrical innovations was inseparable from a fascination with the utopian politics they tried to manifest as an itinerant artistic commune.[42] More than any other group of the era, The Living Theatre exemplified the promises and contradictions of the intertwining of theatrical and political action – a tension that would come to a head during their own involvement in the events of May '68. Led by the husband-wife team of Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the Living Theatre had operated out of a number of cramped New York loft spaces in the'50s, staging plays by luminaries of modernist poetry including Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, W.H. Auden and John Ashbery as well as work by pioneering playwrights like Brecht, Pirandello, and Cocteau. In this early period, their attempts to counter the dominant naturalism of the American stage took the form of an effort to "enhance the blossoming forth of poetry in the theatre […] The poetry of words, above all."[43] But if their early commitment was to the word, the trajectory of their development was oriented by a desire to open up spaces of unscripted action.

[41] Dort, "1967, ou l'insurrection du corps," 233.
[42] In the work of French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, a phalanstery is the proposed architectural form for communal living, a self-contained building that would house a community of roughly 1,600 members. See, for example, *The Utopian Visions of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
[43] Julian Beck, qtd. in Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), 27.

Indeed, Beck himself has narrated the history of the group as a conquest of spontaneity through the incorporation of improvisation – a story in which experimentation with theatrical practices and forms is inextricably linked with political desires and aspirations for new forms of living and being.[44] The Living Theatre's critical breakthrough, as well as their first tentative engagement with improvisation, came with their 1959 production of *The Connection*, the first play by an unknown writer named Jack Gelber. It depicted a group of heroin addicts, including several jazz musicians, waiting in an apartment for their dealer to arrive. Although the musicians on stage did in fact improvise jazz during the play, and there were several places that allowed for ad-libbed dialogue, the rest of the actors became unsatisfied with the feeling that they were feigning improvisation, while in fact remaining bound tightly to a script. It was with their next major play, *The Brig*, staged in 1963, that they had a revelation. Although this play, too, had a script, it set up a situation within which the performers could react to each other in ways that were not planned. Ironically, this improvisation-enhancing structure derived from a situation of radically diminished freedom: the play was set in a military prison, and interactions were governed by the rules set forth in the Marine Corps Manual. In contrast to the dilated period of waiting that gave *The Connection* its shape, *The Brig* was composed of a relentless succession of assaultive actions and reactions, as a group of guards bark orders at detained soldiers, striking them when they fail to comply fast enough. While this made for a harrowing experience for spectators, and an emotionally draining one for the performers, it also gave rise to an experience that would fundamentally determine the group's future direction. In Beck's words:

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[44] Julian Beck, "Improvisation: Free Theatre," in *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1972), 45.

> the action was bound by rules, but within those rules only improvisation was possible. [The author] provided a situation in which improvisation was essential. It was real. […] All the years that performers had been talking about reinventing each moment (the whole stack of evidence and exercises compiled by Stanislavski and his school), we had been fooling ourselves. Make it real: the real trip, physical, invented from moment to moment, reality, reality which is always changing and creating itself, the need for reality (life) in this period of alienation; improvisation as the breath that made reality live on the stage. It would never again be possible for us not to improvise. We would have to construct plays with forms loose enough so that we could continue to find out how to create life rather than merely repeat it.[45]

It is surely no coincidence that the play was filmed, in the style of direct cinema, by Jonas Mekas, who several years earlier had concluded his call for a "spontaneous cinema" by advising those who had been betrayed by "the way of life, the aims and purposes, of the previous generation […] to throw away all inhibitions and lose oneself completely in the spontaneous improvisations that lead into the inner regions of our being: where, after all, everything rests."[46]

After Beck and Malina found themselves in legal trouble with the IRS – a dispute that resulted in having their theater shut down, and both serving time in jail – the Living Theatre ended up decamping to Europe in 1964, where they would spend most of the remaining decade, continually touring. This move coincided with both a deepening of their experimentation with improvisation and with a transformation in their mode of living. The group was now functioning as a sort of travelling commune, dedicated to both practicing and preaching a particular brand of pacifist anarchism, tinged with a hodge-podge of esoteric spirituality but anchored by the belief that both their performances and their social arrangements were working to bring the

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Jonas Mekas, "New York Letter: Towards a Spontaneous Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 28, no. 3-4 (Summer/Autumn 1959): 121.

revolution.[47] As they became more outspokenly radical – constantly denouncing militarism, racism, capitalism, and all forms of social hierarchy – they also began to view their experiments with improvisation and spontaneous performance as inherently political actions, and to build productions that moved the improvisations further and further from a narrative or representational framework. In the work *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* they experimented with what they called "Free Theatre" – "Free Theatre means that anybody can do anything he wants to do. It means that 'anything that anyone does is perfect' – which they would later incorporate into the large scale structure of their play *Paradise Now*, which they would develop and debut in 1968.

In a short text laying out "The Seven Imperatives of Contemporary Theatre," Beck sketches the aesthetic and political aspirations of this period of the Living Theatre. The first couple of these imperatives, addressing the basic material conditions of this theatre, take the form of a general principle followed by a brief explanatory gloss: "In the Street: outside of the cultural and economic limitations of institutional theatre." "Free: Performances for the proletariat, the Lumpenproletariat, the poor, the poorest of the poor, without admission charge."[48] When it comes to talking about the parameters and aspirations for performance itself, however, this structure breaks down. The subordination of a prosaic explanation to guiding concept gives way to a paratactic

[47] Stefan Brecht offers a mordant breakdown of the constituents of their ideological bricolage: "With some inspiration from Paul Goodman, they have adapted the anarchism of Kropotkin (mutual aid, communitarian federalism), Proudhon (harmony of opposing forces) & Tolstoy (non-violence) by substituting for the scientism of the former two an Indian (Hindu, Yoga, Buddhist) & perhaps slightly Hebrew & Zen mysticism & for their ethical stance a psychology combining features of some of Wilhelm Reich's successive theories (sexual economy, character analysis, cosmic & personal orgone energy)." Stefan Brecht, "Revolution at the Brooklyn Academy of Music," *The Drama Review* 13:3 (Spring 1969): 48.

[48] Julian Beck, "The Seven Imperatives of Contemporary Theatre," *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1972), 40.

positioning of words and short phrases whose logical relation remains unarticulated. Thus we get, as the fourth imperative, "Spontaneous Creation: Improvisation: Freedom."[49] In this cluster of associated concepts the colon no longer signals an elaboration or explanation, but instead works to maintain a sort of ambiguous spacing, as if its function is to keep open possibilities for future explorations yet to be worked out. As if to define the relations among this constellation of terms would in itself be enough to limit their potency. In fact, the ambiguities hinted at here, especially between formal techniques and states of being, will prove to be of central importance to the politics of the Living Theatre.

In linking their use of improvisation to political values, Beck was in fact entering into a set of ongoing debates about the efficacy of spontaneous action that was also at the heart of debates about political action leading up to, and especially in the wake of, May '68. Of course, arguments about the respective values of spontaneity and organization in revolutionary activity have a long history on the left – the exemplary instance being the ongoing debate in the first decades of the twentieth century between Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg.[50] For Lenin, spontaneity was a force to be actively combatted. "We revolutionary Social-Democrats," he wrote in *What is to be Done?* "are dissatisfied with this worshipping of spontaneity, i.e., worshipping what is 'at the present time.'"[51] As he saw it, the fatal flaw of spontaneity – that is, of action that was not guided by theoretical knowledge produced by a vanguard of revolutionary activists – was that it was bound to revert to the familiar patterns of bourgeois ideology.

[49] Ibid.
[50] One sign of the liveness of the Lenin/Luxemburg debate at this moment in France is Godard's invocation of it in the title of *Vladimir et Rosa*, his burlesque reflection on questions of revolutionary action via the trial of the Chicago Seven.
[51] Vladimir Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: Bantam, 1966), 67.

For Lenin, spontaneous action is action that follows the path of least resistance, and thus is necessarily regressive, digging itself deeper into the grooves of those already established forms of behavior and social relation that organized struggle is committed to willfully overcoming. It is reactionary repetition that misrecognizes itself as unbridled revolt. Luxemburg, on the contrary, identified spontaneity with precisely the potential to forge unforeseen paths that were capable of opening onto new horizons of revolutionary possibility. Surveying the great moments of progress in the fight for Russian social democracy, she saw a history of unpredictable mass action that overstepped the bounds set by the organized plans of the movement's leaders. She praised, for instance:

> the mass strike that broke out 'of its own accord' in Rostov-on-Don, with its improvised *ad hoc* street agitation, open air popular assemblies and public addresses, all of which would have seemed, only a few years before, like a fantasy, like something unthinkable, even to the most enthusiastic Social Democrat. In all these cases, 'in the beginning was the deed.' […] The main features of the social democratic tactic of struggle are on the whole not 'invented': on the contrary, they are the consequence of a continuing series of great creative acts of experimental, often of spontaneous, class struggle.[52]

This debate on the relative value and efficacy of spontaneous political action took on a renewed urgency in the 1960s – in large part, no doubt, due to the increasingly administered texture of everyday life in postwar France as it was being transformed by technocratic modernization. When even the dominant political force on the left, the Parti Communiste Français, seemed to its more radical critics to be so comfortably ensconced within the current socio-political system, political contestation seemed to demand some new avenue to open up a way forward. For a significant number of

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[52] Rosa Luxemburg, "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy," [1904] in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 255.

radical thinkers in this situation, the hinge of revolutionary struggle was no longer the unequal distribution of material resources, but the alienation of everyday life under industrial capitalism, which robbed people not just of the value of their labor, but more importantly, of the possibility of free, meaningful, and creative action. In this context, the question of spontaneity was not only a matter of strategy. Rather, spontaneous action could be understood as valuable in its own right, as the reclamation of a quality that capitalism had stripped from human activity. In one of the most forceful defenses of spontaneity, the 1967 book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem annulled the traditional distinction between spontaneity and organization in favor of the former by declaring that the revolutionary act would be one of spontaneous creativity, and that "the organization of spontaneity will be the work of spontaneity itself."[53]

The Living Theatre endeavored to put this belief into practice. They spent the first half of 1968 creating what would become their most ambitious production, and the one that most radically attempted to work out a way of conceiving of acting as political action: *Paradise Now*. Beginning in January, Beck and Malina began to discuss their conception of a work that would deal with the idea of revolution. Their first attempts at staking out in this direction, as recorded in their working notes, hinge precisely on the problem of whether it's possible to envision, and thus set in advance, the program that will bring about the state of affairs that the title names. Sketching out the content of the piece, Beck muses: "Glimpses of the post-revolutionary world. Does that include glimpses of how to get there?" While Malina is decidedly affirmative – "It would seem

[53] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 178. Originally published as *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1967).

very unimportant to me if it didn't contain some suggestions of how to get there. For me it can't be political enough." – Beck's own answer is equivocal, slippery: "It has to. Because Paradise Now is How To Get There. Paradisial Events apart from the transitionary period. What is the object of the striving? Depiction of the state of being we imagine as desirable."[54] While ostensibly agreeing with Malina, Beck twists the direction of her thought. The politics that she demands as a necessary means of struggle are collapsed into the situation that they are supposed to make possible, as if embodying onstage "the state of being we imagine as desirable" is already to have achieved it. Paradise Now is How To Get There. Beck's comments clarify and amplify the ambiguity inherent in the work's title, the unsteady oscillation between a demand for what is missing (as students would write on the walls in May, "Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible") and a claim to have performatively instantiated it in the present.

If *Paradise Now* was to achieve its effect by exhibiting this desirable state of being, then clearly it would be vital that its performers act in a manner that prefigured the freedom and spontaneous creation of "the post-revolutionary world." Accordingly, the manner of acting would be central to the constitution of the work as a whole, its principal formal problem. In this initial discussion, Beck's thoughts on its potential form focus insistently on acting: "The Form. / The Acting Form as The Form. / The Acting Form as The Mise-en-Scéne [sic] / State-of-Being Acting as opposed to Enactment Acting."[55] In working out the relation between spontaneous performance and a form that would both enable it and emerge out of it, Beck and Malina thought back over their

[54] "*Paradise Now*: Notes," *The Drama Review* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 91. The discussion recorded here is dated January 27, 1968, from Arth-am-See, Switzerland.
[55] Ibid.

earlier experiments with freedom – the experiments with totally formless "free theatre" that they had attempted to wok into *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, the use of chance procedures they had used on occasion in their John Cage-inspired collaborations with Jackson Mac Low, and the initial thrill of spontaneity they felt when interacting with each other within the rule-bound structure of *The Brig*. While none of these models was entirely sufficient for what they wanted to accomplish, they were intrigued by the idea that *Paradise Now* could work as a sort of utopian inversion of *The Brig*, governed by certain rules, but the rules of a game rather than those of a disciplinary institution, so that "The rules should have something paradisial about them, as the rules in *The Brig* have something hellish about them. […] What the actors are doing shall always be paradisial. That is, it would always be a pleasure to do."[56] As they developed the conception of the play through extended discussions and rehearsals among all the members of the group – in Beck's estimation, about 100 such meetings between the beginning of February and the end of July – the shape that their actions would take began to emerge.

As if to mediate between the freeness of action that they wanted to encourage and their monumental ambitions for what they hoped the performance would accomplish, the Living Theatre ended up producing an immense structural scaffolding that would serve as a "map" of the work, which they handed out to attendees before the show (fig. 2.4). The performance would be divided into eight ascending "rungs," each concerning some element or stage of revolution – from "The Revolution of Cultures" to "The Permanent Revolution" – and each of which was in turn divided into three sections, "a Rite, a Vision, and an Action which lead to the fulfillment of an aspect of

[56] Ibid, 92.

The Revolution."[57] In addition, each rung was overlaid with various correlations from a number of different mystical systems, so that they corresponded to, among other things, the holy attributes given in the Kabbalah, the positions of the Chakras, the various hexagrams in the I Ching, and a particular color. The progression from rite, to vision, to action, is designed to move from actor to audience, with the Living Theatre performing the rite and vision before attempting to precipitate the participation of the spectators, leading them to action. The final section of the play, the "Action" of the eighth rung,

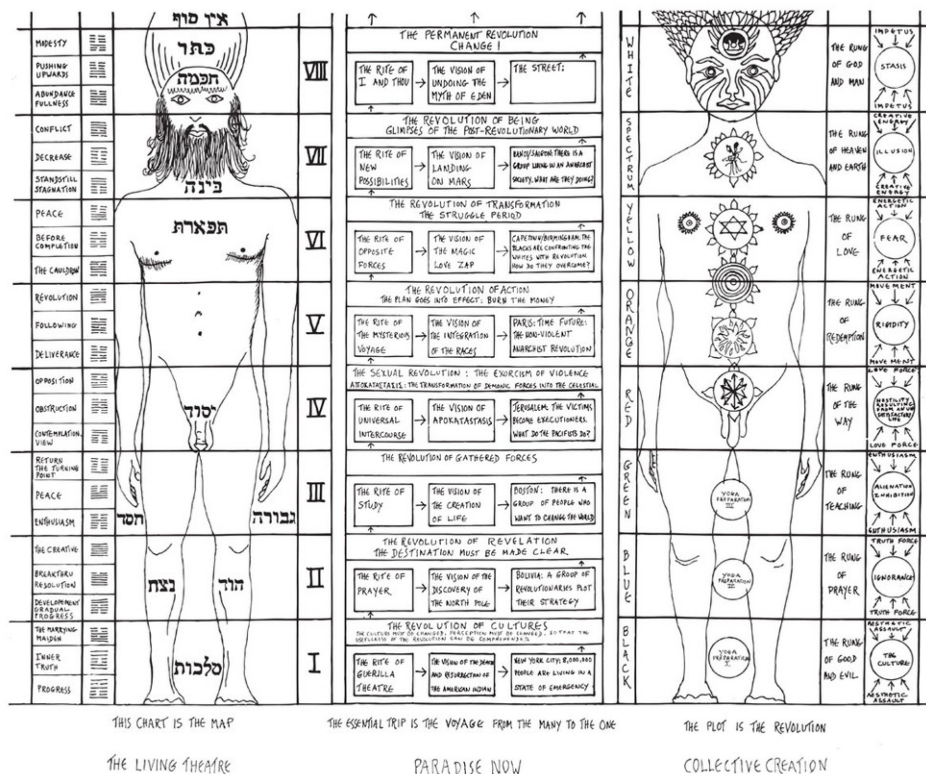

Figure 2.4: Chart given to audiences of *Paradise Now* (1968). Reproduced in *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*, Judith Malina and Julian Beck, 1971.

[57] *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre, Written Down by Judith Malina and Julian Beck* (New York: Random House, 1971), 5. It is important that the outline of the performance transcribed in this book is not a script in the traditional sense. As a prefatory note states, "Writing down 'Paradise Now' did not begin until six months after the premiere. This means that it was not read by the actors until more than a year later, when the writing was completed, more than fifty performances after the premiere." This volume also reproduces the map given to spectators. Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* gives a thorough summary of the action of the various rungs.

was titled simply "The Street." As the lights come up the auditorium, the actors head towards the exits with the audience, reciting a piece of text: "The theatre is in the street. The street belongs to the people. Free the theatre. Free the street. Begin."[58] The relation between acting and political action here is, if at times naively utopian, quite complex, rife with contradictions. Theater is, on the one hand, the place that makes possible the development and exhibition of free, spontaneous action, capable of awakening an audience to their own subjection and spurring them to change. At the same time it is what must be transcended for "real" action to begin. "At the end of the journey the actors' and spectators' bodies should be ready for action," that is, action outside the theatre, in the street.[59] Yet if this action takes place on the street, it is a street that has been transformed into a theater, the street as the site where revolutionary theater now takes place. Theatrical action both wants to dissolve itself into everyday life and to maintain, or even elevate, its exemplary position. If acting no longer works to imitate human behavior – to represent life as it is, characters and their psychology – it presents itself as something to be imitated, or at least as a model of liberated action: *this* is how to be free.

Paradise Now premiered at the Festival d'Avignon near the end of July. At the second performance, on Thursday, July 25th, things ended in an exhilarating fashion. "In the street, spectators surrounded the actors in a compact circle of about two hundred people. […] A humming sound rose spontaneously from the crowd, and as if propelled by an invincible force, it split into ranks and with linked arms marched the length of

[58] Ibid, 140.
[59] Ibid, 7.

two long streets before breaking up in front of the Cloister."[60] The next day the city of Avignon filed for an injunction against further performances of the play on the grounds that it was a disturbance to the peace. When the mayor demanded that the Living Theatre substitute a different play for their remaining performances, they withdrew from the Festival, issuing an eleven-point statement condemning the mayor, the Festival, and the commercial exploitation of art. Beck credited the success of the second performance in Avignon – the actual realization of the movement into the street that led to the Living Theatre being forced to withdraw from the Festival – to the presence of the *enragés*, French students who had taken part in the events of May and who had travelled to Avignon in the hope of shutting down the Festival as a way of extending the strikes and occupations of that month.[61] It was, we could say, an ideal performance. Not so much because of the exemplary way in which it brought to life its planned form, but instead by virtue of the way in which it exceeded it, spilling out beyond the theatre. If this moment was organized, insofar as it corresponded to the final stage of *Paradise Now*'s byzantine 24-part structure, it was still illuminated by the spark of spontaneity, an alignment of forces at once unpredictable and weighted with history. Not least the presence of, in Malina's words, "Parisian revolutionary kids who are so beautiful that they can write poetry on the walls and they can play *Paradise Now* like no other audience."[62]

That night may have offered a local glimpse, at least, of a realized paradise. Yet the dream that theatre would be the vehicle of revolution, and that acting would take on the force of political action, was far from being uncomplicatedly validated by the

[60] Biner, *The Living Theatre*, 213.
[61] "Containment Is the Enemy: Judith Malina and Julian Beck Interviewed by Richard Schechner," *The Drama Review* 13:5 (Spring 1969): 32.
[62] Ibid, 33.

events of 1968. The reality was more complicated, giving rise to a number of contradictions and confusions that were condensed in one of the more spectacular events of May – the seizure and occupation by protestors of the Odéon Theatre in Paris. Led by the aforementioned avant-gardist Jean-Jacques Lebel, on the night of May 15th a group of roughly 300 people left the Sorbonne and walked down the street to the Odéon, where they simply slipped into the theater as the evening's show was letting out. Among the occupiers were Julian Beck and Judith Malina, who had performed with the Living Theatre at the Odéon the previous year by invitation of its director, Jean-Louis Barrault. Recognizing Beck, Barrault offered the ironic greeting "Salut Julian! Wonderful happening, n'est-ce pas?" – an attempt at humor that was met by jeers from the crowd.[63] Although Lebel proposed that they rechristen it the Rosa Luxemburg Theatre, after that champion of revolutionary spontaneity, the occupiers had other ideas. Instead of giving it a new name, they opted to efface the one it already had, dubbing it alternately the Ex-Odéon, or the Ex-Theatre of France. Late into the night, after a series of debates and speeches, from, among others, Barrault, Beck, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the occupiers agreed that "the Odéon ceases for an unlimited time to be a theatre. It has become a place for meetings between workers; a room always open to the public for revolutionary creation; a place of uninterrupted meeting." Rather than a meeting of theatre and revolution, of acting and political action, they declared the necessity of suppressing the former in order to instantiate the latter. Yet Beck, recalling the event two years later, described this abolition of theater as a theatrical act: "The role-playing: everyone was in a trance and in the trance acting a divine play of holy

[63] Patrick Ravignant, *La Prise de l'Odéon: Récit d'un happening révolutionnaire, mai-juin 1968* (Paris: L'Éditeur Singulier, 2018), 41. Ravignaut's account and analysis of the seizure and occupation of the Odéon, in which he participated, was originally published as *L'Odéon est ouvert* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1968).

authorship, dizzily impelled towards their own liberation. The theatrical elements in the culture were providing patterns for action, great improvisation."[64] Is this figuration of the events as an apotheosis of theater, rather than a refusal of it, an instance of wishful thinking? An effort to overcome the contradictions at the heart of the situation?

Although the Living Theatre was energized by the events of May, and incorporated their experience into *Paradise Now*, which they positioned as an extension of what that month had made possible, their fellow revolutionaries were not always convinced their work was adequate to the task. When they performed in Geneva that August, a student protesting the Soviet invasion of Prague walked onto stage during a performance of *Paradise Now*, in hopes of interrupting the play and instigating a political discussion. Instead, the protestor found himself greeted warmly by one of the actors, while the others went on with the performance as if nothing had happened. As his fellow student radicals complained later, the free, spontaneous form of the performance actually acted to disable his intervention. As opposed to classical theater, they argued, "the Living [Theatre] is extremely dangerous, because with its open techniques it can integrate at every turn a political act in a way that makes it inoffensive at the level of the struggle against bourgeois society."[65] Rather than seeing in *Paradise Now* the transformation of acting into a means and model of political action, they accused the Living Theatre of at best being a substitute for politics, or worse, liquidating real political action by rendering it as mere spectacle. Things did not necessarily get easier when they returned to the US for the first time in four years that September. Although they embarked on a six-month tour enjoying a heightened visibility as

[64] Julian Beck, "The Occupation of the Odéon," in *The Life of the Theatre*, 91.
[65] Jean-Jacques Lebel, *Entretiens avec le Living Theatre* (Paris: Éditions Pierre Belfond, 1969), 199.

countercultural heroes, they still encountered skepticism about the efficacy of their vision of performative politics. In a scene from *Emergency: The Living Theatre*, Gwen Brown's 1968 film documenting the Living Theatre's return to the US, we see members debating with a group of black radicals who take them to task for being out of touch with the political realities of the country, where "non-violence is dead" and where revolution "is interpreted not in the creative, aesthetic sense, it's interpreted in terms of blood." Though the actors patiently try to press their case, they make little impression on their interlocutors who, clearly exasperated with what they see as the utopian naivety of Beck and the company, maintain that "the type of cultural revolution that the Living Theatre offers is something that cannot be accomplished now." Or, as a young woman argues vehemently to a naked member of the troupe backstage, "There's no possibility of making revolution by jumping up and down on the stage!"

Out 1 and the Forms of Improvisation

The case of the Living Theatre offers a window onto some of the energies and experimentation that animate *Out 1*, but that is not all that it shows us. It also, and perhaps more importantly, delineates some of the central problematics of performance leading up to and playing out in the wake of the events of 1968: the search for spontaneity and the risk of falling into cliché or incoherence; the desire to break down the barrier between actor and audience, but at the risk of thus encompassing both within the spectacle; the tension between prefiguratively embodying a revolutionary relationship to the world and becoming a substitute for politics. It thus serves to describe some of the contours of the impasse in which Rivette and his actors found themselves in the aftermath of 1968. Any account of *Out 1* – of its experiments with performance, duration, and cinematic form – must situate its singular achievements, its

risks and its failures, in relation to this impasse, which presents not so much a challenge that the filmmakers must take into account and seek to overcome, but is rather in some sense the subject of the movie, a historical situation that it wants to work through and give shape to.

To understand how *Out 1* tries to give a shape to this impasse demands that we attend to the ways that form emerges out of the improvisatory framework of the film. This is no easy task. In a survey of the trends and tropes of Rivette criticism, Douglas Morrey has noted the tendency of writers to not only dwell on his films' frequent openness of structure and gestures towards incompleteness, but to mimetically reproduce these qualities in their own analysis, with the result that "writing on Rivette is sometimes rather fragmentary, as though the author wanted to allude to an interpretation rather than develop it in full, maintaining some of the mystery that the films themselves relish."[66] In fact, what he's pointing to is not just a shyness about interpretation per se, but a common perception that the films must ultimately frustrate and disorder any attempt to subject them to sustained critical analysis. So for instance, as Morrey points out, one long article on Rivette, "is divided into twenty-two discrete paragraphs headed with cryptic keywords like 'Fantôme', 'Happening', 'Accidents' and 'Innocence,'" while "in an almost-comical parody of Rivette's narratives of non-completion, [Hélène] Frappat's *abécédaire* of the director begins enthusiastically with four entries under A and five under C, before rapidly running out of steam around the middle of the alphabet, jumping from P to S and then ending abruptly."[67] Perhaps inspired by Frappat's example, Mary M. Wiles organizes her dissertation chapter on

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[66] Douglas Morrey, "Secrets and Lies, or How (Not) to Write About Jacques Rivette," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 47, no. 2 (May-August 2010): 124.
[67] Ibid. The texts in question are Marc Chevrie, "Supplements aux voyages de J.R." and Hélène Frappat, *Jacques Rivette, Secret compris*.

Out 1 in the form of a somewhat arbitrary alphabetical "glossary of terms, which call attention to those places, personages, ideas that directly bear on our discussion of the film and its theatricality."[68] Acknowledging that this may appear to be a "partial schema," Wiles explicitly defends the decision by appealing to the authority of Rivette himself, "who throughout this film invokes order and systematicity through allusions to schemes transcribed in words, letters, charts, and graphs," which however "ultimately frustrate all attempts to achieve a fixed, definitive meaning or accomplish a definitive mapping of the text."[69] She even goes so far as to suggest that the subtitle of the film, *Noli me tangere*, "Touch me not," can be taken to "propose an ethics of reading available for *Out 1*, " and that, "respecting the film's injunction," she will not "attempt to secure a coherent meaning or to tie down the significance of filmic signifiers, for it is precisely the intention of the film to resist this."[70]

It's certainly worth applauding the desire to take the film on its own terms – to offer an analysis that is attentive to the way in which the film thwarts our attempts at understanding, rather than imposing a totalizing reading that would reduce or distort the film by trying to squeeze it through the interpretive grids appropriate to a more conventional narrative form. However, this attempt at a sympathetic engagement with Rivette's work, in its fear of committing any sort of interpretive or analytic violence against the film (is there perhaps a concomitant worry that the film itself wouldn't stand up under this kind of scrutiny?), ends by producing a mere list of allusions, influences, and associations that ultimately, and ironically, evades the responsibility of taking Rivette's formal concerns seriously.

[68] Mary M. Wiles, "Theatricality and French Cinema: The Films of Jacques Rivette," PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2002. 120
[69] Ibid, 120-121.
[70] Ibid, 120.

My intention here is not to make the film appear more tidy or coherent than it is. Nor do I want to offer a totalizing interpretation that attempts to exhaust the film's meaning. As Jean-Michel Frodon has written, "with Rivette, 'what does it mean?' matters little, compared to 'what is happening?'"[71] I will maintain, however, as I briefly suggested above, that the film is engaged in something like attempting to give a shape to the historical impasse of post-'68 France, and that the film's use of improvisation is significant to the way in which it approaches that task. In attempting to get a handle on the formal principles at work (or perhaps more appropriately, at play) in *Out 1*, I will begin with the initial observation that one strongly feels the competing centripetal and centrifugal pulls at work within the film. On the one hand, there is the centripetal force derived from the string of narrative that eventually emerges and begins to drive the movie forward, linking characters around the central mystery regarding a shadowy conspiracy that surrounds a group known as The Thirteen. On the other hand, a centrifugal force is felt not only in the way in which certain narrative threads fail to cohere or end up leading nowhere, but in the tendency for individual sequences to maintain a level of autonomy, registering as self-contained attractions as much as narrative units. In fact, many sequences seem to take the form of a particular improvisatory challenge to be faced, setting up an initial set of conditions among several parameters and then setting loose the actor, or actors, to make something happen. The distribution of these competing forces is not haphazard. The film begins in a strongly observational mode, recording the rehearsals of Micheal Lonsdale and Michèle Moretti's groups as they work on *Prometheus Bound* and *Seven Against Thebes*, respectively, and following Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliet Berto as they interact with

[71] Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le cinema français de la nouvelle vague à nos jours* (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, 2010), 387.

people on the street or in bars. It is only slowly that seeds of the narrative are planted, in the form of mysterious clues or interactions – Léaud, for example, receives a series of obscure messages that he will attempt to decipher, and that lead him in the direction of both theatrical troupes (figs. 2.5 & 2.6). The outline of a narrative begins to emerge (again, it is not until nearly three or four hours into the film that this outline really starts to come into focus), bringing disparate groups of characters into contact with each other and deepening the mystery of the group known as The Thirteen. As the nears the end, however, things begin to dissolve rather than to come together. Plot lines are left hanging or abruptly ended in ways that are inexplicable. Scenes begin to receive seemingly arbitrary formal manipulation. In an extended scene between Léaud and Bernadette Lafont at the end of episode 7, for example, their dialogue begins to be

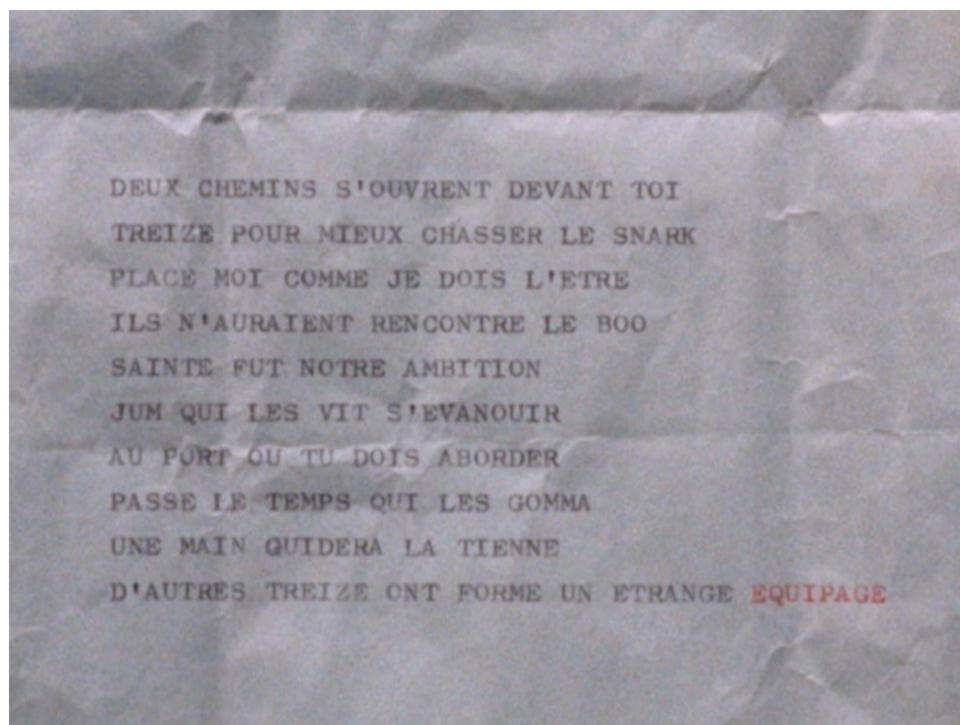
DEUX CHEMINS S'OUVRENT DEVANT TOI
TREIZE POUR MIEUX CHASSER LE SNARK
PLACE MOI COMME JE DOIS L'ETRE
ILS N'AURAIENT RENCONTRE LE BOO
SAINTE FUT NOTRE AMBITION
JUM QUI LES VIT S'EVANOUIR
AU PORT OU TU DOIS ABORDER
PASSE LE TEMPS QUI LES GOMMA
UNE MAIN GUIDERA LA TIENNE
D'AUTRES TREIZE ONT FORME UN ETRANGE EQUIPAGE

Figure 2.5: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971). Seeds of narrative.**

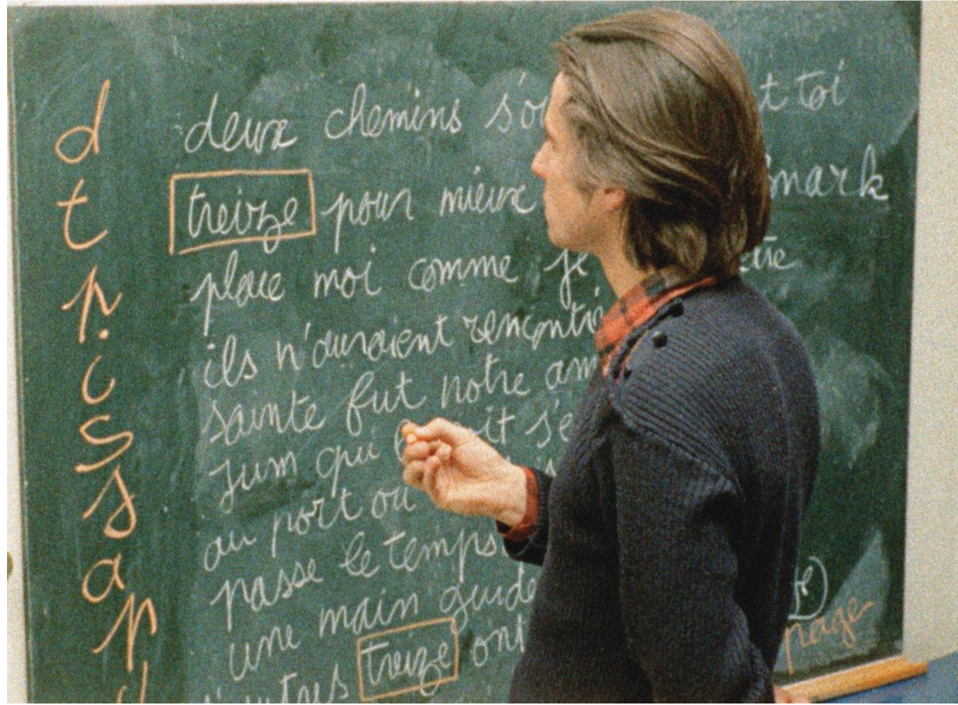

Figure 2.6: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971). Deciphering**

played back in reverse, rendering it indecipherable. I want to suggest that this large-scale shape of the film, a slow coming into focus before breaking apart and dissolving, bears a resemblance to the shape of many individual scenes, and has something in common with the act of improvisation itself, as a process of trying to find one's bearings and produce an orientation that will allow carrying on in the face of the unknown.

We can see this process at work in one of the key scenes of the film, a scene that comes perhaps closest of any to offering something like a commentary on the film itself. Quite late in the film, after the rehearsals of *Prometheus Bound* have seemed to exhaust themselves, we find Michael Lonsdale's character Thomas waiting for a meeting on the Allé des Cygnes, a narrow walkway on a manmade island in the middle of the Seine. Leaning against a fence smoking, he wears a white suede jacket with a fur collar draped over his shoulders like a cape. A man wearing a dark suit (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze)

approaches and shakes his hand. They seem to know each other but their rapport is somewhat stiff — the greeting of former intimates who have drifted apart. It is broad daylight — perhaps the businessman's lunch break — and the rendezvous appears innocuous, but Thomas glances over his shoulder, worried that they could be watched from the windows of the other man's office across the river.

The conversation that ensues touches, more directly than any other instance in the film, the central mystery that has set in motion the narrative, and around which everything has been circling: the existence and identity of a shadowy secret society known as the Thirteen. Yet the conversation between two characters who are, or were, members of the group, does not suddenly enlighten us — there is no sudden revelation of heretofore hidden information that would set in order the obscurity of what preceded. This is in part because the characters themselves, in significant ways, do not know what the group is. Or, more precisely, they cannot articulate what it was to become. Even the state of its existence is uncertain. "Do you regard it as completely over, or are we still keeping it alive?" Thomas asks. The reply that it is "dormant…it exists as a memory" is countered with the assertion that, on the contrary, the group has now "taken on a reality that I didn't suspect at the beginning."

Judged merely as narrative revelation, the discussion would seem comically inadequate, as if the audience were themselves the butt of Rivette's joke — strung along nearly ten hours before discovering that at the center of the plot is nothing but a hole. Doniol-Valcroze's character, much less interested than Thomas in the prospect of reactivating the group, contends that "you can't say that what we thought is embodied in anything precise, in support of anything precise." In response, the most that Thomas can say about the group's goals is that they had thought that "it might be one of the only ways to deeply resolve the problems that concerned us and to give meaning to our

lives, which would be completely committed to it." What is clear is the historical resonance of the group. It was started, then abandoned or left in suspense, two years previously — in other words, in the spring of 1968. In light of this, the very imprecision of the conversation that develops, the verbal grasping for the outlines of the thing being discussed, becomes enormously significant.

In trying to articulate his position, Thomas looks to draw a parallel between the vague political aspirations of the Thirteen and the theatrical experimentation that he has been engaged in more recently (and that we can infer has perhaps become a substitute for the Thirteen). Thomas explains that the group's work on *Prometheus Bound* is "a way to commit without knowing the ultimate end or goal. But what matters in my work is first of all to *do* something. And then, through that work you find out what the goal is." Thomas's explanation of his theatrical method, and ethic, clearly stands as something of a statement of purpose for Rivette's film itself. At least as important as the sentiment, though, is the halting delivery of the line, its uncertain unwinding, seemingly in search of a destination that is yet unknown. "*Je le découvre à mesure que j'en parle*," Thomas says at one point –"I'm discovering it as I talk about it." This calls to mind Kleist's formulation in his short essay "On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts While Speaking": "*L'idée vient en parlant*," Kleist proposes. "The idea comes while speaking," or "speaking brings about the idea."[72] In Kleist's text, the consequences of this fact are potentially world historical, as revealed by his narration of an event from the early stages of the French Revolution, when Louis XIV moved to disperse the Estates-General in June of 1789, and Mirabeau defiantly refuses, setting the stage for the formation of

[72] Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts While Speaking," in *Selected Prose of Heinrich von Kleist*, tr. Peter Wortsman (New York: Archipelago Books, 2010), 256.

the National Assembly and the abolition of the *Ancien Régime*. In Kleist's telling Mirabeau begins his response to the order to disperse by simply acknowledging that he had received the king's order. "I am convinced that in uttering these ordinary opening words," Kleist writes, "he had not yet conceived of the verbal bayonet thrust with which he concluded."[73] Mirabeau hesitates, repeats himself, buying time before "suddenly a rush of heretofore inconceivable concepts rolls off his tongue [...] and only now does he find the words to express the act of resistance to which his soul stands ready."[74] Thomas's goal is decidedly less grand, but his expression of it takes the same form. He wants to justify his work, to articulate what he's after, or rather to articulate the need to commit to doing *something* in the hope that it might lead to some undefined *somewhere*. Though the days of occupying the Odéon are over, he's trying to occupy some space and some time, to hold open the present in a way that the promise of that past might still break through.

In the previous section I dwelt on the peculiar temporal register of *Paradise Now*, and how its relationship to the posited historical break of revolution teetered between a demand to initiate the revolution and a desire to already inhabit, in the present, a post-revolutionary state. But through all of these complications, a general orientation to the improvised actions was clear: a heedless grasping towards a utopian future (even if that future harkened back to some imagined antediluvian past). In *Out 1*, the direction of improvisation is no longer only towards the future. While Rivette is undoubtedly interested in using the improvisation of his performers as a method for producing unforeseen moments – and, more daringly, to generate an entire film whose shape

[73] Ibid, 258.
[74] Ibid.

could not be known at the start – it also serves a retrogressive function, providing a way of anchoring to a past, and a sometimes desperate flailing to keep that attachment alive.

Let's return to the scene of rehearsal with which the chapter opened. In a conversation during the first (and for decades, only) public screening of *Out 1: Noli me tangere*, Rivette shared that in taking on the role of the theater director Thomas, Michael Lonsdale wanted to "resume the work carried out by Peter Brook in 1968," work in which Lonsdale had been engaged in Paris as part of an experimental theater workshop when the events of May broke out.[75] We can see the complications that this act of improvisation entails – at once a return to the past, and an attempt to bring the past into the present. We can also compare the image of this rehearsal to another image to which it bears an unmistakable resemblance, another shot of a mass of bodies grappling each other, taken from a film of The Living Theatre performing *Paradise Now* in late 1968 or early 1969 (figs 2.7 & 2.8). The formal similarities between these two images, and these two moments of performance, belie a different relationship to history, a different relationship to time. If the people engaged in the earlier performance experience their actions as part of a living struggle to produce a new future, those in the second are acting with the weight of those ideas and aspirations having foundered. But they return to the same forms, hoping that there is something to be found in them that outlives those historical and political failures.

[75] *Le Monde*, 14 Oct 1971 "Out 1: Voyage au-delà du cinema"

Figure 2.7: ***Paradise Now*** **(Marty Topp, 1969)**

Figure 2.8: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971)**

Coda: Improvisation Comes Apart

Throughout the film Bernadette Lafont's character Sarah, a novelist struggling to write her second book, has appeared withdrawn and taciturn, hanging around the edges of her scenes and evading the attempts of the other characters to engage her in the action. She radiates a sense of discomfort that we might suspect belongs as much to Lafont as to the character she is playing. Indeed, Lafont's own accounts of her time working on *Out 1* confirm her trepidation at the idea of acting in the film, since she had much less experience improvising than fellow actors like Michel Lonsdale and Bulle Ogier. Joining the film after it had already begun shooting, to replace the actress and singer Valerie Lagrange, Lafont confessed that she was confused why she had been asked to participate in a film where "everything was based on improvisation. But improv isn't my thing at all. To act I need texts. In my life I do improv!"[76] Her initial misgivings were intensified when she came to the set. Witnessing the theatrical practices of Lonsdale's troupe, which had been rehearsing together for months, she felt isolated and unmoored, sensing that "a terrifying theatrical ambiance had been created, but I didn't understand it right away. I hadn't had time to adapt to it, since I'd hardly arrived and Rivette shoved me in front of a camera and I felt lost. My role seemed so vague and unimportant that I felt useless. […] I was totally paralyzed, as if I was in front of a big house searching in vain for a door to enter."[77] In a scene near the end of the movie, however, Lafont comes into her own. If Lafont had initially felt paralysis before the task of joining in on the collective fabulation of *Out 1*, she developed over the

[76] *Bernadette Lafont: Une vie de cinema*, 118
[77] Ibid.

course of the shoot a certain mode of performative reticence which she ruthlessly employs here.

An establishing shot pans left following Ogier across the room until she climbs into bed next to Lafont, then back to the right until both can be seen reflected in a mirror at the right side of the screen (fig. 2.9). Rivette then cuts in to a closer, more straight-on view of the pair's framed reflection (fig. 2.10). Interrogating Ogier, prompting her to speak, Lafont looks on impassively, almost motionless, while Ogier's anxious energy finds an outlet in the impulsive play of her hands. Her words are accompanied by an uneasy repertoire of small gestures as she by turns rubs her chin, taps her fingers against her cheek, traces along her lips, pulls at her hair, and strokes the fabric of her shirtsleeve. She is trapped at the intersection of the implacable gazes of the camera and of her fellow actress, an effect that is reinforced by the sheer duration of the shot and that becomes inescapable when she turns to Lafont and asks accusingly "Why are you looking at me like that?" – a question that will become a refrain of the scene. After more than five minutes of this, the camera begins to slowly pan left until it has left behind the mirror to reframe Ogier is isolation. (Fig. 2.11) While Lafont remains offscreen for the remaining eight minutes of the scene, her acousmatic presence strongly invests the image, so that while the camera's position does not at all align with that of Lafont, there remains a liaison between them. Ogier not only continues to demand "why are you looking at me like that," but pushes back on Lafont's attempt to pry words out of her, telling her to stop asking questions and insisting that "there's no point saying the same thing ten times." By this point the division between the fictional scene and the scene of shooting has worn thin. As the repetitions pile up the scene begins to take on a haunted, oneiric quality, and the dissolving reality is further signaled by the bits of black leader

that begin to punctuate the image, a device that at once conveys a breakdown of the narrative and creates the impression that we are watching a series of repeated takes.

Figure 2.9: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971)**

Figure 2.10: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971)**

Figure 2.11: ***Out 1: Noli me tangere*** **(Jacques Rivette, 1971)**

The effect of this scene is unsettling. If improvisation holds out the promise of producing (or encountering) the unforeseen, this possibility is always tied to an attendant risk – that of falling into the reproduction of a stock of at-hand actions, gestures, and phrases, wallowing in clichés or simply repeating oneself. To witness this failure, or to see a performer being worn down by the imperative to improvise can set off an anxious discomfort in the viewer. While improvisation and spontaneity are often yoked together, they are not necessarily coextensive, the procedure of improvising not always aligning neatly with the aliveness to some inner impulse that we call spontaneity. Here we witness them coming apart.

Yet this is also one of the most powerful scenes in the film. The sense of paranoia, of dislocation, of psychological and affective unmooring that come to haunt the later parts of the film are expressed more profoundly here than they could be in any scene of "successful" improvisation. In a notebook of reflections on filmmaking, Rivette once

noted that "It's easy to make a successful film, all you have to do is refuse *a priori* any risk of error. But it's not a matter of eliminating error, but of integrating it."[78] This precept never applied more strongly than in *Out 1*. In submitting the actors to the intense pressures of perpetual improvisation, the "openness" of the film's design resulted not in some kind of reign of total freedom but produced, at least in some actors, feelings of intense anxiety. Yet if this anxiety, and the feeling shared by many of the actors of being disoriented during the production, were marks of the element of risk that Rivette had thought crucial to modern cinema, they also redounded to capturing the atmosphere of post-'68 France of which he was taking the measure. In the historical impasse I've described those moments where the actors come apart, where they don't align with themselves, where they fail to produce anything new, have a revelatory power that surpasses the most focused display of improvisational virtuosity.

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[78] Rivette, *Textes critiques*, 361

CHAPTER THREE

Archaeology and Anachronism: Embodying the Past in Historical Film

> The part played by the body in memory is comprehensible only if memory is, not only the constituting consciousness of the past, but an effort to reopen time on the basis of the implications contained in the present, and if the body, as our permanent means of 'taking up attitudes' and thus constructing pseudo-presents, is the medium of our communication with time as well as with space.
>
> -Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In the July/August 1974 issue of *Cahiers du cinema* Michel Foucault gave an interview to Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana, focusing on the recent emergence of a number of historical films related to the Holocaust and the occupation of France.[1] In a short introduction to the interview Bonitzer and Toubiana frame the problem by citing a number of recent films that aim to "rewrite history" – *Lacombe Lucien* (Louis Malle, 1974), *The Night Porter* (Liliana Cavani, 1973), *Les Chinois à Paris* (Jean Yanne, 1974), and *Le Trio infernal* (Francis Girod, 1974) – and suggesting that these films must be understood in relation to the ascendance of a new, post-Gaullist rightwing in France signaled by the election of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing earlier that year.[2] The unifying tendency in the films, they argue, is a cynicism vis-à-vis the heroic nationalist myth of French history exemplified by the French resistance and personified in the figure of

[1] Although he is not credited in the published article, the book *Foucault at the Movies* claims that Serge Daney also participated in the interview. *Foucault at the Movies*, tr. and ed. Clare O'Farrell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 217.
[2] Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana, "Anti-Retro," in *Cahiers du cinema, Volume Four. 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. David Wilson (London: Routledge, 2000), 159

Charles de Gaulle. The films are thus in line with an "emerging […] cynical ideology: that of big business, of the multinational and technocratic culture that Giscard represents," a ruling class ideology which is accompanied by the "disillusionment of the exploited classes."[3] The cinematic embodiment of this cynicism is found in what they term the 'retro style' [*mode rétro*], which they rather loosely characterize as "the snobbish fetishism of period effects (costumes and settings) with little concern for history."[4] But if the "false archaeology of history" carried out in these films is not necessarily faithful to the past, it is not indifferent to it either.[5] Rather, as Foucault will make clear in the interview, they serve a very particular function – not to reveal history, but to obscure it.

According to Foucault, this process of historical occultation is especially cunning since it poses as a bracing critique of false myths, tearing down, for instance, "a whole mythology of the war hero in the Burt Lancaster mould."[6] Yet this quite justified cynicism towards heroic depictions of war, or toward venerated national leaders like de Gaulle or Churchill serves an ultimately reactionary and demobilizing end. These films give us "an initial impression that historical untruths are being stripped away: finally we're going to be told why we don't all have to identify with de Gaulle or the members of the Normandy-Niemen mission, etc. But hidden beneath the phrase 'There were no heroes' is another phrase which is the real message: 'There was no struggle.'"[7] This erasure of the history of popular struggles is the unifying ideological task of the *mode rétro*, smuggled in under the cover of a cynical realism.

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 162.
[7] Ibid, 162.

What matters to Foucault and his interlocutors, of course, is not simply the importance of an accurate rendering of the past, but the role played by history in the present, as a site of struggle between rulers and the ruled. The revisionism of the films of the *mode rétro* needs to be understood in these terms, as constituting an attack on "popular memory" – not just the memory of the Resistance, but the memory of resistance itself. This idea of popular memory serves an important function, marking the way in which those who did not have access to the institutions of power, who were outside the apparatuses of officially sanctioned discourse, nevertheless possessed "a way of registering history, of remembering it, living it and using it."[8] However, Foucault argues, there exist a whole series of institutions and apparatuses that exist to combat the transmission of popular memory. The means of this attack have included popular literature and the educational system, but the war is increasingly waged through the "much more efficient channels" of television and cinema.[9] Moreover, in the twentieth century these efforts have become increasingly successful at snuffing out the once substantial historical knowledge that the working class had of its own struggles. The stakes of this battle over popular memory are immense since "it's within a kind of conscious dynamic of history that struggles develop," and "if you hold people's memory, you hold their dynamism."[10]

Foucault's discussion of the *mode rétro* as the site of a battle over popular memory points both to the increasing prominence of historical filmmaking as a genre in France during the 1970s, and to the central role that film held within intellectual debates over the politics of historical representation. While the interview focused primarily on the

[8] "Anti-retro," 161
[9] "Anti-Retro," 162.
[10] Ibid.

historical film as a covertly reactionary genre, the following years would see an increasing number of films that attempted quite explicitly to counter this trend by employing cinema in the service of recovering or constructing a tradition of popular memory, a task that must have seemed quite pressing given the dominance of the rightwing in French politics throughout the decade. Over the next few years both Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière would publish essays that looked at recent historical filmmaking in terms of political disputes between factions within the broader French left, and the attempts of those groups to lay claim to traditions of popular resistance and to construct an image of "the people" that might mobilize French voters.[11]

Jill Forbes, in her perceptive analysis of the emergence of the "new history film" in '70s France, argues that "its intellectual inspiration derived ultimately from the work of the *Annales* school which, during the 1960s, thanks to historians such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, had become widely known outside the confines of the university and the milieux of professional historians."[12] The importance of the *Annales* tradition is unquestionable, and Le Roy Ladurie, who would become the leading figure of the so-called "third-generation" of the *Annales* school, will play a particularly important role in this chapter. Yet while the *Annalistes* were at the cutting edge of academic historiography and wielded an enormous amount of intellectual influence and institutional power, the historical films of the '70s must be seen in the context of a much wider and more unsettled set of debates about the uses of the past. If the politicization

[11] Cf. Jacques Rancière, "The Cultural Historic Compromise," in *The Intellectual and His People*, tr. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2012) and Alain Badiou, "Le Cinéma révisionniste: Synthèse pour un bilan de films comme *1900*, *L'Affiche rouge*, *Mado*, *Le Voyage des comédiens*, *Le Juge et l'assassin*, et d'autres, faits ou à venir," in *Cinéma*, ed. Antoine de Baecque (Paris: Nova Éditions, 2010).
[12] Jill Forbes, *The Cinema in France After the New Wave*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 231.

leading up to and exploding out of 1968 produced a heightened sense of the historicity of the present, the political disappointments for the left that followed in the wake of 1968 resulted in a tendency to turn to the past in the hopes of finding models for action, or at least a diagnostic on where things had gone wrong. Jacques Rancière, who had spent the '60s as a prominent student of Louis Althusser, aiding in his attempt to elaborate an anti-historicist reading of Marx, wrote that "the inability of the far-left groups to build a new revolutionary workers' movement in the wake of the May revolt forced us to measure the gap between the actual history of social movements and the conceptual system inherited from Marx."[13] Rancière's response was to initiate "a research project that aimed to retrace the history of working-class thought and the workers' movement in France, in order to grasp the forms and contradictions that had characterized its encounter with the Marxist ideas of class struggle and revolutionary organization."[14] One result of this research was the publication of *Les révoltes logiques*, a journal devoted to the history of the workers' movement that existed on the margins of the institutions of academic history (fig. 3.1). In short, the officially sanctioned history that was produced by scholars associated with the *Annales* school must be

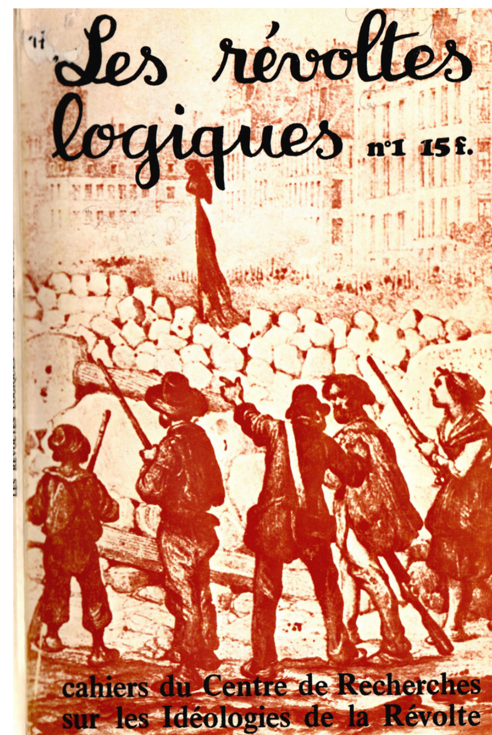

Figure 3.1: ***Les révoltes logiques*, no. 1, Winter 1975**

[13] Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, tr. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2011), 7.
[14] Ibid.

situated as part of a larger field of discourse and action, including the many individuals, groups and institutions that engaged in the production of historical knowledge as an avowedly activist social practice. In fact, despite his close ties to the French academic establishment, we could count Foucault himself among the latter group. Although he had never been fully accepted by the French historical establishment, having trained as a philosopher, after 1968 his historical investigations took on an increasingly open activist bent, emerging alongside his involvement with the anti-carceral movement and the gay liberation movement.

While Foucault's interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* initiated a wide-ranging set of debates about cinema and the political stakes of representing history, it also had one more direct and specific consequence, which would move Foucault from the position of a critic vis-à-vis historical film, to that of a quasi-participant. The meeting between Foucault, Bonitzer, and Toubiana initiated a set of events that would lead the filmmaker René Allio to direct a film based on *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur, et mon frère* [*I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother*], a collection of archival documents discovered and published by Foucault along with a team of researchers participating in his seminar at the Collège de France. Though the interview with *Cahiers* had focused predominantly on a critique of the reactionary ideological function of the *mode rétro*, there were a few brief references to more promising models for portraying history. Towards the end of the interview Bonitzer and Toubiana asked Foucault if he was familiar with Allio's *Les Camisards*, a film that had been released a couple of years earlier portraying the revolt of persecuted Huguenots in the south of France during the early 18th century. It was an example, in

their opinion, of "the direction film-makers should be taking" in representing history.[15] Foucault response was enthusiastic: "I like it a lot. Historically it's beyond reproach. It's a beautiful film, it's intelligent, it explains so much."[16]

The exchange was brief, and Foucault did not elaborate on his feelings about the film, but it proved to be fateful. According to Allio, before the interview had been published editors from *Cahiers* contacted him to relay Foucault's esteem for *Les Camisards*.[17] Allio, who had already been thinking about the possibility of adapting *Moi, Pierre Rivière* into a film, took the opportunity to arrange a meeting with Foucault. At least in Allio's account of the meeting, he did not intend to ask Foucault about *Moi, Pierre Rivière* as he had learned that Bonitzer and Toubiana were *themselves* at work on a treatment of it. Foucault, however, assumed that this was the reason for the visit and warmly encouraged him to make the film, and to sort things out with Bonitzer and Toubiana, who Foucault thought were too inexperienced to direct it themselves. Accordingly, Allio approached them and asked them to work with him on the adaptation, which he would then direct. (His notebooks will express a continual sense of irritation at the experience of collaborating with them.) It is the story of this production, and its complicated and sometimes contradictory entanglement with many of the competing strands of French historical discourse in the 1970s that will form the core of this chapter, giving us a window in the ways in which French films, and French actors, attempted to embody the past.

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[15] "Anti-retro," 171.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Allio's version of these events is recorded in his journals. *Les Carnets. I: 1958-1975*, ed. Gérard-Denis Farcy (Lavérune: Éditions l'Entretemps, 2016), 292-293.

"Truth-Strangeness-Difference:" From *Les Camisards* to *Moi, Pierre Rivière*

One of the earliest manifestations of this post-'68 turn to historical filmmaking was René Allio's *Les Camisards*, shot in the autumn of 1970, though not commercially released until 1972. Set in the early 18th century, the film relates the revolt of a group of Huguenots in the Cévennes region of southern France against the government forces that were attempting to forcibly convert them to Catholicism. What made *Les Camisards* stand out at the time of its release, and what made it something of a harbinger for the historical films of the coming decade, was "a will to show history as the movement and opposition of social forces, and not (as Hollywood cinema and its derivatives almost always do) as a succession of highlights or of 'historic' words attributable to 'great men.'"[18] In taking on the story of the Camisard rebels, Allio was determined to construct a narrative where the primary historical agent was not an individual but a collective.

The pursuit of a form that would represent the movement of history as one animated by collective action was quite directly tied to Allio's experience of May '68. His three previous films, *La Vieille dame indigne* (1965), *L'Une et l'autre* (1967), and *Pierre and Paul* (1969), all focused on contemporary urban, working class protagonists who are, for one reason or other, torn away from their everyday habits and social positions. With *Les Camisards*, Allio curiously sought to build on the lessons of May by turning to the past, and the countryside. From this remove, he aimed to create a film that "reflected what 68 taught us about popular struggles, about popular resistance; it presents the problem of the representation of popular struggle which clearly refers to

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[18] Jacques Aumont, "Comment on écrit l'histoire," *Cahiers du cinéma* 238-239 (May-June 1972): 64.

what Mao said on that subject."[19] While inspired by the direct experience of popular struggle during 1968, Allio's conception of history, and the work of representing history, can be traced to two principal sources. The first of these was Bertolt Brecht, who had served as a primary point of reference in Allio's earlier films, and in his work before that as a set designer for Roger Planchon at the Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne. The principal lesson that Allio took from Brecht – who we will return to below – was that the goal of historical representation was not to simply recreate a period as meticulously as possible, but to delineate in a given historical situation the main currents of social conflict and to teach the audience to see these. *Les Camisards* accordingly was animated by "a didactic ambition, in the sense that Brecht understood it."[20]

The second influence was from a more conventionally historical source. Allio's preparation for the film led him to read deeply on the Camisards and on the history of the Cevennes region, including the accounts of actual Camisards recently collected by Philippe Joutard in the book *Journaux Camisards*, which proved crucial to how he conceived of the characters in the film (fig 3.2). The most consequential text he encountered, aside from the archival documents published in *Journaux*

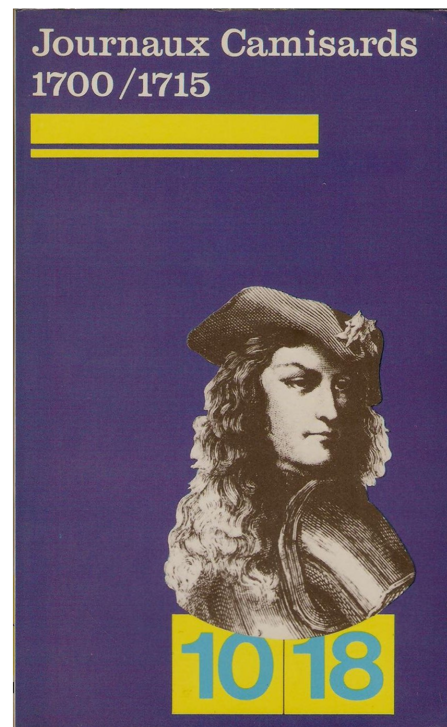

Figure 3.2: *Journaux Camisards*, ed. Philippe Joutard, 1965

[19] "Histoire, peuple, écran. Un entretien avec René Allio," conducted by Jean-Paul Burdy, Didier Nourrisson, Régis Cogranne, *Espaces Temps* 5, (1977): 8.
[20] Ibid.

Camisards, was Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Les paysans de Languedoc*, published in 1966 from his doctoral thesis. Le Roy Ladurie was a student of Fernand Braudel, generally considered the towering figure of the *Annales* school. The publication of the book marked something of a turning point within the trajectory of the *Annales*. While Braudel revolutionized historiography by emphasizing an understanding of the power of economic and geographic forces that play out over the vast temporal scale of the *longue durée*, above all in his monumental work on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philipp II*, this focus tended to render human action and events nearly inconsequential. While still working within the framework of the *Annales*, Le Roy Ladurie "was one of the first to see the limitations of the Braudelian paradigm, and to work out how it should be modified."[21] *Les paysans de Languedoc* examines the south of France from the 15th to 18th centuries, tracking cycles of demographic expansion and contraction and their economic and agricultural effects, yet unlike Braudel he leavened his account of these large-scale cycles with a discussion of "cultural developments such as the rise of Protestantism and literacy, and […] the reactions of the ordinary people of his region to the economic trends they experienced in their everyday lives," focusing especially on the existence of periodic peasant revolts.[22] The book thus set the stage for what is known as the third generation of the *Annales*, which emerged in the 1970s and was marked by a widespread move away from the sort of immobile history practiced by Braudel, with its focus on relatively impersonal forces, and towards a variety of approaches that sought to understand history through a more cultural or anthropological lens. For Allio, the value of Le Roy Ladurie's book was in its ability to

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[21] Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The* Annales *School, 1929-2014* (New York: Polity, 2015), 72.
[22] Ibid, 71.

vividly render the underlying forces that connect a particular instance of popular revolt or resistance to a much longer history of struggle:

> He puts the Camisard revolt back into the context and the flow of the whole socio-economic history of the region's peasants from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Above all it shows that it is a link, a strong link surely, in the whole chain of revolt, rebellions, and strikes against paying tithes, which, from one century to another, from one region to another, Catholic or Protestant, speaks of the demands of poor peasants, day laborers, artisans, and workers for a better life, for their dignity, against the nobles and especially the bourgeoisie, bending under their exploitation, crushed by labor, debts, taxes, in total physical and moral insecurity.[23]

A number of the various historical goals of Allio's film are dissected by Jacques Aumont in a 1972 article in *Cahiers du cinéma*. This rather critical essay on *Les Camisards* subjects it to a semiological analysis, according to which the various elements of historical reconstitution employed in the film – he focuses especially on costume – are understood as bearing to varying degrees an "archaeological function" and a "semantic function."[24] The terms of Aumont's analysis are borrowed from Roland Barthes's essay "The Disease of Costume," which diagnoses, among other maladies, the common tendency of costumes in French theater to suffer from "the hypertrophy of the historical function, what we shall call an archeological verism."[25] If this excessive investment in accurately and scrupulously reproducing historical minutiae constitutes a sickness, it is by failing to achieve the measure of theatrical health that, for Barthes, is exemplified by Brecht. Barthes is perfectly explicit as to the criterion of his judgment: "every dramatic work can and must reduce itself to what Brecht calls its social *gestus*, the external, material expression of the social conflicts to which it bears witness."[26] This commitment

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[23] René Allio, *Les Carnets I: 1958-1975*, ed. Gérard-Denis Farcy (Lavérune: Éditions l'Entretemps, 2016), 151-152.
[24] Aumont, "Comment on écrit l'histoire,"65.
[25] Roland Barthes, "The Disease of Costume," *Critical Essays*, tr. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1975), 42.
[26] Ibid, 41.

to a Brechtian ideal of staging a clear social analysis thus also entails a particular conception of the task of historical understanding, distinguishing "an intelligent history which rediscovers the profound tensions, the specific conflicts of the past" from "a superficial history which mechanically reconstructs certain anecdotic details."[27] Resisting the lure of accumulating and displaying "true" historical details for their own sake, a successful costume should possess "a powerful semantic value," communicating to the audience "ideas, information, or sentiments."[28] In short, "*the costume must be an argument*."[29]

For Aumont, *Les Camisards* does not fall into the trap of inflating the archaeological function of its historical elements at the expense of their semantic function – Allio is, after all, too much of a "good Brechtian" to allow that to happen.[30] So while the costumes for the film were created after an extensive period of research to locate potential historical models – looking, for instance, at French paintings and prints from the 17th and 18th centuries – the guiding principal was not to create a scrupulous facsimile of true period dress, but rather to reference plausible historical models while underlining the fundamental opposition between the opposing camps of the Camisards and the royal forces. While the former wore outfits pieced together out of disparate elements and broken in, so that they gave a sense of having been lived in, the latter were costumed in designs fabricated from theatrical models and still retaining the stiffness of new clothes. As Allio made clear, this stark divide between two different modes of costuming was meant to suggest something about the essence of these

[27] Ibid, 42.
[28] Ibid, 46.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Aumont, "Comment on écrit l'histoire," 65.

opposed groups and their ways of inhabiting the world, something that impinged on their very bodies:

> Thus there is a visual difference introduced: on one side a costume that's been worn, which adheres to the character – to their personality as to their skin, to the point that it forms part of their being: that is the popular costume. And then there is the costume of the nobles, which is worn like a sign, like a parade, like a theatricalization of the whole person. These costumes are not "worn." What I mean is, they are not worn out, aged. They haven't truly taken the form of the body – it's the body which takes the form of the costume.[31]

Accordingly, the dichotomy that is inscribed at the level of costuming, juxtaposing the ostentatious inflexibility of those exercising authority with the unaffected authenticity of those resisting it, is reflected in the bodily comportment and performance style of the actors. The "rigid gestural code of the 'king's subjects,' civil or military" stands in sharp contrast to "the insurgents' 'freedom' of gait, even affecting their conception of discipline."[32] For Aumont the semantic function of these historical elements is, if anything, excessively clear, bordering on redundancy: "the signs all function in the same direction, they all say the same thing: namely, above all, the antagonism between two camps, cemented by two ideologies, one repressive, the other libertarian."[33] If Barthes warned against the wanton accumulation and display of historical detail at the expense of failing to produce an argument that communicates an understanding of history, Aumont's analysis of *Les Camisards* indicts it for a different sort of failure of historical representation: motivated by the desire to produce historical parallels with the present, Allio ends up constructing an excessively schematic and abstract picture of social and historical conflict.

[31] René Allio. "Les Costumes." *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma* 122 (February 1972): 9.
[32] Aumont, "Comment on écrit l'histoire," 66.
[33] Ibid.

Aumont's criticism hits at the crux of the anachronism that was, for Allio, key to the movie's political efficacy. While Allio clearly wanted to highlight – or even to embellish – the resonances between the Camisard revolt and the student and worker uprisings of 1968, in order to cast the latter events into the perspective of a much longer historical struggle, Aumont instead sees a collapsing of historical difference and a flattening of the specific contours of each struggle that thereby renders impossible a historical and political analysis of either situation. Allio's comments in interviews seemed to provide further evidence of a recklessly employed historical analogy, as the events of the film were likened to the situations in Vietnam, Algeria, and Ireland. Far from providing a critical analysis of popular struggle, capable of serving a pedagogical function, the film is condemned as partaking of "the very discourse of the dominant ideology, which has every interest in lumping together all struggles for liberation without looking too closely to specify their terms."[34] In tracing the outlines of Aumont's critique, my point is not to simply endorse his conclusions, but rather to stage some of the inherent difficulties of historical representation, especially (but not only) when it is operating in service of a political goal. How to calibrate the play of difference and similarity, distance and proximity, that is always at work in any attempt to make the historical past present? In his notebooks a few years later, Allio would define the task of history thus: "To restore life to beings, acts, forms, in order to understand them, in order to hear again what they were saying, in order to hear what they still say today, and in doing so, to understand ourselves."[35] He then proceeds to metaphorically figure our relation to history through the scenario of an unexpected encounter with our own reflection in a mirror, when for an instant we do not know who we are seeing, and our

[34] Ibid, 68.
[35] Allio, *Les Carnets*, 344.

own image "surprises us with all its strangeness, all its novelty."[36] This first instant of absolute alterity is followed by an interval of indeterminacy, "the moment when this other is still perceived as strange and at the same time we understand that we are looking at ourselves. To make History should be to make that moment last as long as possible. The whole length of a narrative."[37]

In his conception of *Les Camisards*, Allio clearly was concerned to make sure that contemporary audiences would recognize something of themselves and their struggles in the revolt of the Huguenots, a goal that he attempted to attain by strategically introducing elements of anachronism. It was especially in the performers who played the Camisards that this anachronism was concentrated. Aumont called attention to what he described as their "very '*rive gauche*' acting," and noted that as the film goes on "the progressive raggedness of the Camisard's costumes makes them look increasingly like hippies. At the end you're no longer really sure that you aren't in a Garrel film."[38] Jean-Pierre Peter, a historian who would be part of the team of researchers working with Foucault on *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, likewise would later complain that "What struck me negatively in *Les Camisards* was the fact that, besides their grotesque hysterical fits, and even at rest, the actors had the faces of people from the film world of 1968. I mean, a way of holding their face that is totally modern, that is yours and mine. The Huguenot "prophets" of the Cévennes, inspired peasants, were not what the film showed us."[39]

Allio would himself come to be dissatisfied with the way in which he'd used actors in the film – or, more particularly, *who* had acted in the film. In a 1977 roundtable

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, 66, 65.
[39] Jean-Pierre Peter, qtd. in Priska Morrisey, *Historiens et cinéastes: Rencontre des deux écritures* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 169.

on “History in Cinema” featuring Allio in conversation with several historians, including Le Roy Ladurie, someone raised the fact that in *Les Camisards* the actors spoke in modern French. Allio admitted that he considered this a valid criticism of the film, and used the question of language to connect temporal disparities (the anachronism of using modern French in a film set in the early 18th century) to spatial ones, emphasizing the importance of the regional aspect of the film, set in the southern Cévennes mountain range where French would not have been the language of daily life: “If I remade *Les Camisards* I wouldn’t call into question the narrative structure, but I would add the Occitan language […] I would do what I came to do for *Pierre Rivière*: I’d go look for Cévenols to play the Cévenols. Six years ago I would have only considered this to be a risk; and I certainly wasn’t politically mature enough to do it either.”[40]

It’s striking that Allio understands a casting decision – the question of whether or not to cast regional actors to portray the Camisard insurgents – to be a political matter, and even a significant gauge of his own political development. To understand why this is the case, we need to look more closely at *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, which marks something of a dividing line in Allio’s career, and is one of the more singular examples of the French history film in the 1970s. The film was radical in many ways, including the decision to almost exclusively employ dialogue and voiceover that was taken verbatim from the historical documents that Foucault had published, but for Allio the most consequential aspect of the movie, the determining element, was its casting of non-actors from the countryside where they were shooting in all of the principal roles. *À propos de Pierre Rivière*, a documentary shot on the set of the film by Pascal Kané, yet

[40] “L’Histoire au cinéma: Conversation avec René Allio, Marc Ferro, Philippe Joutard, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie," *Positif* 189 (January 1977): 7.

another *Cahiers du cinéma* writer looking to move into filmmaking, opens with Allio discussing this very fact:

> We began with an initial choice, which was a postulate, a fundamental choice, that we would film with non-professionals, with non-actors, who would play the peasants. When talking about the project we brought up the decision to film with non-actors, to have farmers playing farmers and peasants playing peasants, and what that meant. I believe that people were very responsive to that.

The remainder of this chapter will be engaged in trying to work out more precisely "what that meant." What sort of political aspirations, conceptions of history, and beliefs about the body (and in particular, the "peasant" body) are bound up in this choice about film acting?

If the decision to cast current day Normand peasants to play their 19th century forbears was the premise, the "initial choice" around which the film grew, this was true in a theoretical rather than a strictly chronological sense. As Allio's notebooks attest, he was initially considering casting his own son, Paul Allio, in the role of Pierre Rivière.[41] As late as February of 1975 he notes the possibility of filling the role of Pierre's father with Philippe Noiret, an actor who had worked with Agnès Varda, Georges Franju, William Klein, Bertrand Tavernier, and even George Cukor and Alfred Hitchcock. However, once the decision was made to work with non-actors hailing from the locations where they would shoot the film, it was decisive. Only a month and a half after he'd recorded his interest in casting Noiret in one of the central roles, Allio writes that "the idea that actors can play the whole 'peasant' side of *Moi, Pierre Rivière* has become completely alien to me. When I reread those notes, it seems to me that I'm reading someone else, speaking of a different film."[42]

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[41] Allio, *Les Carnets: I*, 312.
[42] Ibid, 339

What accounts for this sudden and profound rethinking of the film? If we want to locate something like an inciting incident, we might look to the trip that Allio took to Normandy at the beginning of March to see the locations where the events of Rivière's story had taken place. While there, he stayed with Jean-Loup Rivière, the editor of the theatrical journal *L'Autre Scène* and a producer for the radio program *Atelier de création radiophonique*, who had shot a video based on the Pierre Rivière case in preparation for a potential radio broadcast. Rivière introduced Allio to a woman from the village of Plessis who had played Pierre Rivière's mother in the video – a meeting which clearly left a strong impression on him: "A remarkable character – the Normand accent is almost the Québécois accent – unthinkable to not have that in the film. We must take advantage of both the truth-strangeness-difference of the language, and the non-acting of the non-actor. To do what Bresson does, but just not with the bourgeois."[43] As powerful as this experience was, it would be wrong to view the decision to employ non-actors as merely the fortuitous result of a single timely encounter. Instead, this decision, so central to how Allio would ultimately conceive of the film, was if anything overdetermined. It took shape in relation to a number of aesthetic and political aspirations that were emerging at this particular point in his development as a filmmaker, as well as to a wider set of contemporary debates about the production of historical knowledge and the ends to which this knowledge was put.

If Aumont's analysis of *Les Camisards* distinguished between an archaeological function and a semantic function at work in the elements of the film's historical reconstitution, we might similarly begin an examination of *Moi, Pierre Rivière* by delineating the functions served by Allio's use of non-professional actors to portray the

[43] Ibid, 335.

inhabitants of Normandy in the 1830s. Significantly, the dichotomy of archaeological/semantic does not seem wholly adequate to account for what is going on here, and this incongruence is the sign of a development in Allio's conception of the political task of his art. Recall that Aumont's conception of the semantic function of historical elements, borrowing from Barthes' analysis of theatrical costume, stems from a Brechtian ideal in which the unifying goal of a work of art is to clearly express an analysis of social conflict, to proffer an argument. If Allio's own early work in theater and film was carried out largely under the sign of Brecht, *Moi, Pierre Rivière* marked something of a turning point in this relation. Reflecting in his notebooks several weeks after the film had finished shooting, Allio notes that it has marked a "definitive exit […] from the Brechtian world."[44] Expanding on this claim in an interview, Allio says that the film, and "the way in which it is made" – this referring in particular to the work with non-professional actors – "constitutes a reassessment of the whole work of Brechtism, not of Brecht, but of Brechtism. And there are problems of the representation of history and of the way in which politics and ideology are inscribed in that work."[45] What is at question here is the idea of the Brechtian artist as a figure who presumes to possess a distanced and objective vantage point from which they can address the social conflicts that they have analyzed, and thus end up in a position of superiority vis-à-vis the people engaged in those conflicts, in possession of a lesson to teach them. The problem, for Allio, is that "Brechtism in some ways constitutes a certain discourse on social life and an implementation of certain forms, the taking possession of the function of spokesperson by the intellectual and the artist, starting from a point of view that they

[44] Ibid, 356.
[45] "La parole Populaire," in *Tombeau pour Pierre Rivière*, ed. Philippe Roy and Alain Brossat (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), 129. Originally appeared in *Jeune cinema* 99 (Dec1976-Jan 1977).

adopt in total solidarity and for the good of the figure that they represent, ultimately, by speaking for them."[46] This critique of "Brechtism" is in line with a broader disillusionment, fairly pervasive by the mid-'70s, with a doctrinaire view of Marxism's objectivity, which the *nouveau philosophe* André Glucksmann derisively lampooned as the "universal-science-for-guiding-the-people."[47] In place of this position of epistemological superiority, and the Brechtian aesthetic that is founded on it, Allio was seeking to find a form to *donner la parole* to his subjects, to give them a voice, not in the sense of speaking for them but rather of allowing them the opportunity to speak, of giving them the floor. Allio's use of non-professional actors, then, serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it is an act of archaeological excavation, revealing traces of the past buried in the bodies of the present. On the other, it is an act of political praxis, activating the people as agents of their own history by allowing them to speak for themselves.

Reviewing the publication of Foucault's *Moi, Pierre Rivière* in *Le Monde*, Le Roy Ladurie expressed his admiration for the collection of historical documents that Foucault's team had assembled, and especially for Rivière's memoire, "at times evoking Rétif de La Bretonne's bucolic novels and the Faulkner of *As I Lay Dying*."[48] He is less generous, however, to the series of analytical essays by Foucault and his partners that compose the second part of the book. Foucault, and most of the others contributing articles to the volume, scrupulously avoided trying to interpret Rivière's crime, choosing rather to analyze the ways in which his actions and words were seized upon

[46] Allio, "La parole Populaire," 131.
[47] Qtd. in Allio, *Les Carnets: I*, 356. Allio records Glucksmann's words, taken from *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes*, in the same journal entry where he records his "definitive exit […] from the Brechtian world."
[48] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Bocage au sang: Pierre Rivière, un parricide du XIXe siècle," *Le Monde*, October 18, 1973, 19.

by (but ultimately escaped) the various juridical and psychological discourses that wished to make sense of them. For Le Roy Ladurie, however, this amounted to an abdication of historiographical duty, and he laments the authors' refusal of a "historical psychoanalysis" that would "decipher the motivations and neuroses" that lay behind the murder.[49] While the worth of this kind of interpretation of Rivière's crime is debatable, it leads directly to Le Roy Ladurie's more salient critique that "the great absence in this work, except at the level of the raw document itself, is social history."[50] (In the foreword to the book, Foucault himself admitted that the concluding essays were far from exhaustive, and had "neglected many major aspects" of the assembled texts, including "the marvelous document of peasant ethnology provided by the first part of Rivière's narrative."[51]) Behind Le Roy Ladurie's insistence on the importance of social history is a critique of the way in which abstractions like "the peasant" serve to obscure the particularities of historical experience, and thus impede the very possibility of historical comprehension. "Pierre Rivière isn't a "French" peasant in general," Le Roy Ladurie argues, but one whose world was shaped by the particularities of the Normand landscape and local political struggles like the counter-revolutionary peasant uprisings at the end of the 18th century.[52] "Thus it's necessary to insert him into a local and regional anthropology rather than a national one. In the end, paradoxically, this book, illuminated by a great text, suffers from an insufficient dose of provincialism. In the brilliant team that Michel Foucault brought together, all that was missing was a Normand. A Normand ethnographer."[53]

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[49] Ibid, 25.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Michel Foucault, *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, tr. Frank Jellinek (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), xiii.
[52] "Bocage au sang," 25.
[53] Ibid.

Le Roy Ladurie's suggestion that what was necessary was not just a Normand, but a Normand *ethnographer*, tells us something about the intellectual perspective of the third generation of *Annales* historians that was mentioned briefly above in regard to the status of his first book, *Les paysans de Languedoc*. In reaction to the constraints of the scholarship of the second generation (the generation of Braudel), with its focus on historical forces acting on an almost abstract scale, a number of French historians in the 1970s moved towards something like historical anthropology, looking to understand the way in which the past was lived in a more intimate fashion. Allio's desire to use the bodies of his Normand actors to access traces of the gestures and ways of speaking of 1835 has an unmistakable resonance with this contemporaneous tendency in historiography. What would it mean, then, to consider gesture as an object of historical knowledge?

In an encyclopedic collection devoted to key terms of the New History published in the 1978, the entry on "Gesture" opens with a blunt assessment: "The study of gestures is not typical among historians. Those among us who are interested in it are rare, their interest is generally recent, and it stems from the influence of other social sciences, which in this domain have significantly outpaced history. […] the history of gestures remains to be made and […] its methods remain to be defined."[54] Yet as the very inclusion of the term in the encyclopedia indicates, if gesture was still a somewhat marginal object of historical inquiry, it was one of the many realms that seemed newly

[54] Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Gestes," in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier, and Jacques Revel (Paris: Retz – C.E.P.L., 1978), 194. While Schmitt argues that there is not yet a properly historical methodology for studying gesture, he does refer to work that has pointed in this direction, including some older work in the German tradition and, more recently, work by Jacques Le Goff and by Schmitt himself. Schmitt would go on to publish the magisterial volume *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident medieval* in 1990.

available as a legitimate area of research in this period. And, as we will see, the appeal of a history of gesture went far beyond mere novelty. But the challenges facing any attempt to produce an historical account of gesture were substantial. Unlike the sociologists and anthropologists who had been able to more productively (and directly) grapple with gesture, historians were forced to approach gesture through the intermediary of the traces found in documents, be they written or visual. These traces, such as the evidence given by the visual arts, "cannot be considered as the immediate 'reflection' of 'real' gestures," since the arts have their own representational rules and conventions, and thus act as "another level of communication, a 'metalanguage,' in relation to the gestural code."[55] The case was even more difficult with written evidence, since "texts name gestures, but rarely describe them."[56]

While the gestures of the past were an elusive object – and perhaps even because of this – the idea of gesture acted as a powerful lure to the imagination of certain historians. It seemed to hold out the promise of a history that could access the sensual particulars of the way in which the past was lived, by anchoring the abstraction of the *longue durée* – a temporality that was seen as not human but as quasi-geological – in the embodied experience of individual subjects. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* provides a case in point. Published in 1975, Le Roy Ladurie's book was an unexpected popular success, selling a quarter of a million copies in France and being translated into numerous languages. Working from an archive of transcripts of interrogations conducted during the Inquisition by Jacques Fournier (later to become Pope Benedict XII), Le Roy Ladurie noticed that a substantial number of those interrogated came from a single village, Montaillou. The testimony of these

[55] Schmitt, "Gestes," 194.
[56] Ibid.

villagers became the basis for an attempt to reconstruct a quasi-anthropological account of their way of life and beliefs, in order to compose "not a history of a particular village, but a portrait of the village, told in the words of the inhabitants themselves, and a portrait of a larger society, which the villagers represent."[57] While the first part of the book explores the physical environment, both natural and constructed, of the village and its environs, the second, and much longer, part of the book, bears the suggestive title "Archaeology of Montaillou: From Gesture to Myth." In the introduction to this section, Le Roy Ladurie describes the historiographic method he will use as a way of working down into "a lower geological strata" in order to "examine, as far as possible, the precise [pointilleux] world of gestures from which everyday life is woven."[58] He then goes on to address the idea of gesture more directly, though by way of offering something of an apology:

> Do not expect comprehensiveness from me, in a domain where neither information nor a set of problems [l'approche problématique] is in focus. My inventory of gestural activity at Montaillou, in the wider frame of the culture of the Ariège, will be brief and incomplete. I will limit myself to evoking, to the extent that documentation allows me, several gestures: some natural or apparently natural. Others more obviously cultural and prefabricated by the group. Among these gestures, some have reached our era intact and continue to be practiced: their permanence testifies to the *longue durée* of behaviors. Others have disappeared or been modified.[59]

A couple of things are especially worthy of note here. The first is the evident gap between the admittedly meagre documentary knowledge and theoretical armature that Le Roy Ladurie possesses with which to address gesture, and the pride of place he gives it in the historical anthropology he is undertaking. This discrepancy is significant. It

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[57] Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The* Annales *School, 1929-2014* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 95.

[58] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975), 199. Though there is an English translation of the book, it is severely abridged, and does not include most of the material quoted here.

[59] Ibid,

points, I think, to the way in which gesture functions as something of a phantasmatic historical object, an irrecoverable key to the way in which the past was inhabited, and thus a mark of what history – or at least, a certain type of history – endeavors to know, while aware that it can never fully know it. The second point, perhaps slightly at odds with the first, is the idea of the survival of gestures and the connection of gesture to the *longue durée*. Schmitt's essay on gesture stresses this as well, claiming that "the history of gestures leads to the analysis of a society's deepest mental frames, and also to their slow transformation: it is necessarily inscribed in the very *longue durée*."[60] Keeping in mind the play between these two positions – the past as something that must forever remain elusive to us, and the past as something whose remnants persist, borne in the very ways in which we move our bodies – we will now turn to Allio's film and the work of his non-actors.

Embodying the Past

The figure of Pierre Rivière himself only enters into the film slowly and obliquely. The first shot of the film after the credits unroll over a shot of the Norman landscape presents us not with the commission of Rivière's crime but with its aftermath. The camera dollies past the lifeless bodies of mother, sister, and brother spread out in front of the still smoking hearth of their cottage, linked by a dark pool of blood. The silence is broken by a cry of horror offscreen, and after a cut we see a succession of villagers run up to the open door and gaze upon the scene inside before turning and running away screaming. It is not until nearly ten minutes later that we are granted our first sight of Pierre in the flesh. But this appearance is fleeting and distant, offering us only a brief glimpse from behind as he runs awkwardly from the camera (fig. 3.3). He

[60] Schmitt, "Gestes," 195.

appears next reflected in a shallow pool, his figure inverted and his face obscured by the undulations of the water's surface (fig. 3.4). The following scene, portraying an encounter with a gendarme that will lead to his apprehension, is staged with Rivière again in the far distance, his back to the camera. Even during his initial interrogation, Rivière remains less than clearly visible to us. While the camera now enters into greater proximity with him, he is shot from the side, his head bowed in such a way that we cannot see his eyes, calling to mind a description of him given earlier in the film by the King's Prosecutor: "he constantly keeps his head down, and his furtive glances seem to shun meeting the gaze of others, as if for fear of betraying his secret thoughts" (fig. 3.5).

Figure 3.3: ***Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère*** **(René Allio, 1976)**

Figure 3.4: ***Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère*** **(René Allio, 1976)**

Figure 3.5: ***Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère*** **(René Allio, 1976)**

The deliberation and reticence with which Allio's camera has granted us access to Pierre Rivière – or, rather, withheld our access to him – is broken by an abrupt cinematic gesture. As he sits down in his cell to compose his confession, he raises his

head from the page and confronts the camera directly as be begins to speak the first lines of his text: "I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother, and wishing to make known the motives which led me to this deed, have written down the whole of the life which my father and my mother led together since their marriage" (fig. 3.6). This sudden eruption of direct address possesses a palpable dramatic weight, but it also needs to be understood as a very deliberate effort on Allio's part to inscribe the nature of Foucault's book into the relationship between the camera and the actor's body. Foucault's book, which is made up of a collage of different texts that were produced around the murder (newspaper reports, witness testimony, medical reports, etc.) stages an encounter between the discourses that attempt to capture and explain Rivière, and Rivière's own text, the memoir of his parents life together and his own crime that he composed while in jail. Foucault was always at odds to emphasize the primacy of Rivière's own text within the book, maintaining that more than anything else, "it was simply the beauty of Rivière's memoir" that motivated his team to devote themselves to studying the case, and that "the utter astonishment it produced in us was the starting point."[61] What sustained this attention, and what made the publication of these documents legible as part of Foucault's intellectual project, was the way in which "Rivière's own words about his actions so overpower, or at least so thoroughly escape," any discourse that would presume to make sense of them, from that of the medical and legal authorities that weighed in during Rivière's trial and sentencing, to the intellectuals and psychiatric professionals of present-day Paris.[62] The singularity of

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[61] Foucault, *I, Pierre Rivière*, x.

[62] Michel Foucault, "Crime and Discourse," in *Foucault at the Movies*, tr. and ed. Clare O'Farrell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 154. In the same interview, Foucault gleefully discusses the book as a taunt to a number of his contemporaries: "So publishing this book was a way for me of saying to all those shrinks in general – psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists – of saying to them: look, you've existed for

Rivière's self-described "crudely styled" text, and the cunning by which it evaded the grasp of institutional and discursive power wishing to make pronouncements on its meaning, thus made it integral to Allio's project of creating a space for *la parole populaire* to express itself.[63] The striking look into the camera as he begins to recite the opening lines of his memoir marks a shift in register – from Rivière as the subject of others' descriptions of himself and his crime, to author of his own discourse and the central narrating agency within the film – and dramatizes the binding of a historical document written in 1835 to the embodied presence of Claude Hébert, the young Normand farmer portraying Rivière, seen here unobstructed for the first time.

Figure 3.6: *Moi, Pierre Rivière* (René Allio, 1976)

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150 years, and here's a case contemporary with your birth. What do you have to say: Are you any better equipped to talk about it than your nineteenth-century colleagues? […] my secret wish was to hear criminologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists discuss the Rivière case in their usual insipid way. But they were literally reduced to silence: not one of them has spoken up and said, 'This is actually what Rivière was about, I can now tell you what no one could tell you in the nineteenth century' (except one idiot, a psychoanalyst, who claimed that Rivière was the epitome of Lacanian paranoia). But with this one exception, nobody else has said a word. And it's to this extent that I think psychiatrists today have continued to share in the embarrassment of nineteenth-century psychiatrists and have shown that they have nothing more to say." 153-154.

[63] *I, Pierre Rivière*, 55.

Allio's cinematic framing of Rivière emphasizes the idea that we are being granted an unmediated access to his voice, and even to his interiority. But this staging of *la parole populaire*, *la parole paysanne* creates a rather stark tension distinguishing our access to Rivière as a singular individual from our access to the people who make up his social environment. The centrality of Rivière's memoir within the film's narrative structure, and Allio's scrupulous fidelity to the letter of this text, exerts a profound influence on the shape of the performances of the rural actors.[64] From the point where Rivière's narration begins, his voice-over takes on a dominant role, so that the images often seem to function as illustrations of the text that he voices, rather than asserting an existence independent of his words. We can see this immediately, as Rivière opens his narrative with an account of the genesis of his mother and father's ill-fated marriage, entered into in the hopes that his father would thereby avoid being conscripted into fighting in the Napoleonic wars. As Rivière recounts his father's family history, the camera pans through a cemetery until it settles upon the family arranged as if posing for a group portrait, immobile and gazing out into the camera (fig. 3.7). After a moment the eldest brother, wearing a military uniform, steps forward, breaking the stillness. As Rivière's voiceover informs us that the eldest brother was called to serve in the military, he turns and bends down to kiss his mother, while the other family members stay planted in place – the younger brothers turn their heads slightly towards him, but the father does not even do this, and continues to look forward at the camera. He then bids adieu to his father and brothers in a series of small, reserved gestures – the father places his hands on his shoulders saying "Be brave, my son," while the younger brothers

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[64] According to Allio, there was "not a single word, a single gesture, a single scene represented which was not reported either by Rivière or by the witnesses." "...la parole Populaire," 130.

move forward slightly to shake his hand – before his mother gives him a crucifix that he tucks into his uniform as he exits the shot to join a group of soldiers in the distance. A sort of shot/reverse-shot pattern follows. In long shot we see him run onto a road to catch up with a group of marching French soldiers, turning back to wave a final goodbye as he leaves. The film cuts back to the family waving to him. The film then returns to the previous framing, as the older brother catches up to the regiment of soldiers and begins marching with them. When we cut back again to the family in the cemetery, however, the spatio-temporal unity that seemed to link the previous shots has been thrown out of sync. Though the editing conventions of the sequence have implied a temporal continuity, Pierre Rivière's father is now standing at the right side of the frame, where the oldest brother had originally been positioned (fig. 3.8). For a brief instant this transposition registers as a continuity error, but the voiceover soon renders it legible: "My father was on the conscription list of 1813." His physical displacement, into the spot formerly occupied by his older brother, signals that he is now next in line to be churned through the machinery of imperial war. Occupying the same position, he now moves through the same set of gestures – bending to kiss his mother, standing in front of his father who touches his shoulders and offers the same exhortation to be brave, and grasping the youngest brother's hand – before exiting the shot, only this time not to fight but to seek marriage in order to avoid the war.

Figure 3.7: ***Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère*** **(René Allio, 1976)**

Figure 3.8: ***Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma sœur et mon frère*** **(René Allio, 1976)**

What we see here is quite evidently not an attempt to create any sort of verisimilitude, to convey the sensation that we are witnessing a real moment from the past brought back to life. From the posed, frontal composition of the figures before the

camera, to the small, discrete gestures passed between the family, to the repeated ceremony of parting, the sequence projects an awkward and intimate monumentality. Instead of simply making the past present, it offers a densely woven condensation of time, compounding not only two distinct events in the life of the family – one brother leaving for war, another, slightly later, seeking a wife to avoid the war – but also the time in which these events have become passed down as family lore, to be narrated more than twenty years later by Pierre Rivière in his memoir, as the earliest seeds of what will come to be his crime. More than this, too. If the strangeness of the sequence can in part be accounted for as an attempt to find a cinematic correlative to the narrative form of Rivière's chronicle, to visually and dramatically render the way in which a span of years might be recounted in a few mere sentences, it also demands that we acknowledge the human bodies that act as the support of this historical image, creating a relay between the 19th century and the 1970s. These bodies both exceed and fall short of what we might expect. It's hard to escape, for instance, the uncanny feeling produced when we notice after a moment that the older brother, just being conscripted into the army, appears to be in fact a relatively old man, perhaps in his mid-50s. If their weathered physiognomies, their slight awkwardness when moving in front of the camera, communicate a certain air of "peasant" authenticity that perhaps could not be achieved with professional actors, this does not contribute to an illusion that we are witness to the rural past so much as call our attention to the labor of their performance and the operation of temporal displacement in which they are engaged. They seem to be not so much reincarnating figures from the past, as *standing in their place*, a form of embodiment that here opens the question of anachronism – not through a simple discordance of historical detail (a piece of modern clothing in a film set in the 19th century, for instance) but rather through the space between character and actor that

invites us to register historical gaps and fissures as well as traces of the past surviving across the chasm of time.

While this sequence is not entirely representative of all of the performances in the film, it does capture something about the way in which over and over the simple fact of the sheer bodily presence of his performers is called on to do the work of establishing a link with the past. This fact, this belief in the archaeological side of the film, comes into tension with Allio's avowed political aspirations for the film, wrapped up in the idea that the film was letting the peasants speak in their own voice, and turning them into agents of their own history. This uneasy tension may account in part for how strongly Allio insisted, again and again, that his actors were active contributors to the work of the film. To take one example of many:

> The utilization of non-professionals in the film isn't Bressonian. What is being called on in the peasants is imagination, the capacity to invent, the capacity for creation that they have within them, as each individual does. Because of the fact that they aren't yet completely eaten up by urban civilization and industrialized, this is still more capable of functioning in them. The peasants understood very well that we were coming to look for something that only they were able to give us: to speak and to show peasant life. The film is completely theirs, it belongs to them as much as to me. We worked with them as you work with artists. They learned the written text, we rehearsed, like with professionals. They carried out what artists have given themselves a monopoly on carrying out. They truly appropriated for themselves the work of cinema and, from this point of view it was a tremendous experience humanly speaking, and in terms of my work, an extraordinary lesson.[65]

What accounts for the change between Allio's initial determination, when he first decided to use non-professional actors, "to do what Bresson does, but just not with the bourgeois," and this insistence, only a year or so later, that his use of non-actors was emphatically not comparable to Bresson? Part of this shift was due, no doubt, to what

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[65] "La parole Populaire," in *Tombeau pour Pierre Rivière*, ed. Philippe Roy and Alain Brossat (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), 136.

Allio learned through working with his cast of non-professionals, but I believe that it also likely owes something to the publication of Bresson's *Notes sur le cinématographe* in 1975. Bresson's collection of lapidary observations and working notes, dating mostly from the fifties, but including material as recent as 1974, devoted a substantial amount of space to his thoughts on his singular approach to working with his performers, or, as he preferred to call them, models. For Bresson, the model stood in stark contrast to the idea of the actor, which derived from theater and was antithetical to the resources of cinematography (his term for film as an art of sound and movement shorn of any link to theatrical models). His first note on "Human Models" in the book addresses this polarity between model and actor as a matter of how their performances are generated: "Movement from the exterior to the interior. (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)"[66]

The actual results of Bresson's method, as manifested in his films, were perhaps less decisive for Allio than the rhetoric with which he framed the contribution of his models and their relationship to the filmmaker. Bresson's conception of the model as someone whose movements are ruled by an automatism that has been rigorously installed through the work of the filmmaker obviously sits uneasily against the political aspirations with which Allio was investing his own work with non-professional actors. If Allio sought to portray his work with the people of rural Normandy as an act of giving them the chance to speak in their own voice, to demonstrate their own capacity for invention and creativity in defiance of an urban intellectual or artistic elite that would speak for or about them, then it's not hard to imagine that Bresson's description of his molding of the actor raised uncomfortable feelings in Allio about the degree to

[66] Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, tr. Jonathan Griffin (København: Green Integer, 1997), 14.

which his own interaction with his performers might not be purely a matter of allowing them to represent themselves. In an interview given in late 1976, Allio addresses the question of his work with his actors in a way that seems intended to emphasize his difference from the Bressonian position: "In other films that employ non-professionals, they are manipulated from the exterior. In asking my impromptu actors to approach their characters from within, I didn't have any difficulties. They knew characters like that, they socialized with them, consequently their gestures and words became natural and not contrived."[67]

In claiming that he asked his actors to approach their characters from the inside out, there seems to be something of a conflation between the idea of an interiorized (or psychological) conception of acting and the conviction that "in each of us there is an element of creative imagination," and a resulting fear that admitting to directing his actors "from the exterior" – starting from their movement and gestures rather than from their interiority – would amount to manipulating them or denying their own inherent creative capacities.[68] Allio's insistence that his direction is not oriented towards his actors outward actions doesn't entirely square with the evidence. It would be difficult to imagine that the sequence of Rivière's father's family in the cemetery, for example, was directed mainly through instructing the actors on their motivations and feelings, rather than working through a particular set of movements and gestures. Likewise, in a scene of Allio working with his actors captured in Pascal Kané's documentary *À propos de Pierre Rivière*, we see him giving directions to the actor portraying Pierre Rivière's father by acting out his part for him, roughly miming particular gestures that he wants him to make. But even if this were not the case, even if Allio were rigorously committed to not

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[67] Qtd. in *L'Humanité Dimanche*, October 20, 1976
[68] Ibid.

directing the outer actions of his actors, wouldn't this be possible precisely because, in choosing his actors from the Normand countryside, he was selecting people whose capacities for moving through the world had already been shaped through the deposits of history, the survival of gestures and postures and ways of speaking over the *longue durée*? Concerned to make sure that his collaborators from the Normand countryside not be understood as mere pawns in his own creation (and that he not be taken to be an opportunistic Svengali profiting off of his actors' rural exoticism), he perhaps misses the extent to which all of us have been shaped "from the exterior," our actions always possible precisely from within the horizons of that shaping. If Allio here shies away from acknowledging this, Foucault, in a response to the film, offers us a beautiful fantasy of the body as the imperceptible accumulation of history's deposits, and cinema as the vehicle for our relation to this obscure matter of which we're composed:

> There is still a common element that is found in this strong dramatic meaning of the everyday, and its permanent presence beneath the never-ending flight of all these micro events that don't merit a mention and more or less disappear from memory. But this all actually registers at a certain level. Ultimately, every insignificant event that took place in the heart of the countryside is still in some way inscribed in the bodies of twentieth-century urban inhabitants. There is a tiny element of the peasantry, an obscure drama from the fields and the forest, the barn, that is still inscribed somewhere, has marked our bodies in a certain way, and still marks them in an infinitesimal way. […] Film allows you to have a relation to history, to establish a mode of historical presence, a sense of history that is very different from what you can achieve through writing.[…] It's not at the level of what we know but at the level of our bodies, the way we act, the way we do things, think, and dream, and abruptly those mysterious little pebbles inside us become unstuck.[69]

[69] Foucault, "The Return of Pierre Rivière," in *Foucault at the Movies*, 161-162, 167.

CONCLUSION

"Professional, in the Old-Fashioned Sense of the Term":
The Situation of the French Actor ca. 1981

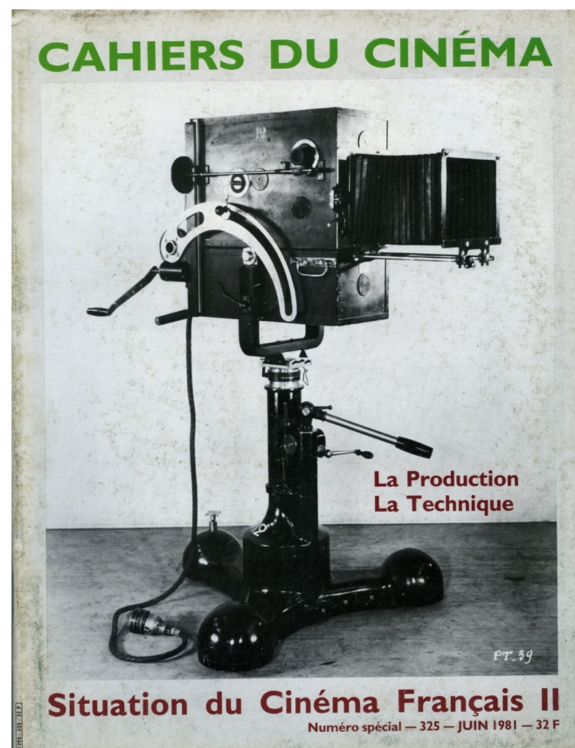

Figure 4.1: ***Cahiers du cinéma*** **May and June 1981 – "Situation du Cinéma Français"**

In the introduction to this dissertation I pointed to the publication of two issues of *Cahiers du cinéma* on the "Situation of French Cinema," published in May and June of 1981, as one marker of the end of the period I've been studying (fig. 4.1). Featuring reflections from the editorial team and interviews with key figures, as well as survey responses from a wide range of directors, technicians, and producers, these issues simultaneously attempted to take stock of the past decade and to provide some kind of orientation to understand where French cinema was going. Included in the May issue is a section on actors, featuring extended interviews with Isabelle Huppert and Gérard

Depardieu, two actors who had risen to prominence in the seventies and who were chosen because they were "exemplary, in that they learned to strike a balance between the films where they establish their image, consolidate it, and refine it for the public and those where they put it into play in relation to the desires of an *auteur*."[223] In the interviews themselves and in the editorial reflection that prefaces them, *Cahiers* is clearly interested in developing an understanding of the ways in which the place of the actor within French cinema has changed since the inception of the New Wave.[224] Accordingly the section opens with a rough sketch of the past twenty years:

> It's well known that actors are the body of cinema. If it moves, it's to make them move. The New Wave started by creating new actors: the old ones didn't suit them. Twenty years later, some of them have become very famous (Belmondo), while others have in turn became *auteurs* (Blain, Brialy). Many remained between the two. For things aren't simple: modern cinema questioned and threw into crisis the notion of the actor. Bresson, Tati, Resnais, Rouch, for example, needed other bodies, other reflexes: in this way they asserted their cinema. The public noticed this and shunned their films. After 68 the gap seemed to widen even more. Godard tries to use the name and the image of Montand and Fonda in *Tout va bien*, but fundamentally he doesn't love them. The public notices and shuns the film. Today again the situation is shaky. Actors less often attempt the impossible, they want to last, to have a career, a good image: professionalism. But they also want to act in great films, the ones that will remain, films by *auteurs*. Even at the risk of having a rough time of it. Thus it was necessary that there were once more filmmakers who loved actors and who told them so (Truffaut), and that those who no longer love them reconcile with them (Godard).[225]

In the interview with Isabelle Huppert, *Cahiers* returns to the idea of professionalism, using it to designate the distinction between Huppert and the previous generation of actors who came of age with the New Wave:

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[223] *Cahiers du cinéma* 323/324 (May 1981): 97.

[224] The interview with Huppert was conducted by Serge Daney and Serge Toubiana, while Depardieu was interviewed by Daney and Danièle Dubroux. The prefatory remarks are not attributed, but presumably they were written by some combination of Daney, Toubiana, and Dubroux.

[225] *Cahiers du cinéma* 323/324 (May 1981): 97.

> You realize that the actors or actresses who were very linked to the New Wave, that is, who participated in rather crazy cinematic experiments/experiences – I'm thinking of certain films of Rivette or Godard – never crossed the point I'm talking about, that's to say a moment where they establish themselves as a professional by saying 'I know how to do this or that and I want to learn to do that to have a more complete range.' They went through a human experience and, in general, for those actresses or actors – I'm thinking of Bulle Ogier, Juliet Berto, Lafont, Léaud – very gifted people, their way out is to try to *make* films. Perhaps you are the first actress coming a bit later who is going to become professional, in the sense of [Danielle] Darrieux, in the old-fashioned sense of the term[226]

In identifying the '60s and '70s with a turn away from "professional" acting – at least in the case of the films that they understood to matter – the editors at *Cahiers* make explicit something that has largely remained implicit in this dissertation. For while my focus has been on acting in French cinema, I have devoted relatively little attention to the types of people who we usually refer to as actors. Whether it be the artists and models who stand before the camera in the Zanzibar films or the Normand peasants reenacting the 19th century for René Allio, the majority of the performers I dwell on are not actors in the sense of having undergone any specialized training or even embraced acting as a vocation.[227] Even in the case of *Out 1*, which draws on the talents of many established actors, it is a matter of either working with people tied to the theatrical avant-garde or with precisely those actors – Ogier, Berto, Lafont, Léaud – that the interviewers single out as having declined to "establish themselves as […] professional[s]."[228]

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[226] Ibid, 100.
[227] Though sometimes the encounter of a non-actor with cinema was enough to spur them in this direction. Claude Hébert, the lead in *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, moved to Paris after the completion of the film in order to pursue a career in acting, although he eventually abandoned acting and became a priest.
[228] Though it should be noted that Michael Lonsdale was able to maintain a career that spanned experimental and classical theater, as well as cinema ranging from the most modernist (Duras, Buñuel, Marcel Hanoun, Robbe-Grillet, Resnais) to the most popular (*Moonraker*, *The Day of the Jackal*).

Yet if these remarks from *Cahiers* can be proffered as a vindication of my focus in the preceding chapters, they might also be read, more critically, as indicating a blind spot. Or, to put it more constructively, as pointing in the direction of future research. While the timeline that *Cahiers* offers here is exceedingly sketchy, they provide an account of acting in post-'68 French cinema as marked by two tendencies. On the one hand, the questioning and putting into crisis of the notion of the actor is intensified even further than it was in the '60s. On the other hand, however – and presumably this second tendency begins later than the first, even if it overlaps with it – there is a contrary movement by which a more conventional approach to cinematic acting reasserts itself, under the guise of "professionalism." The altered status of the actor in turn puts pressure on the work of directors, forcing them to "reconcile" with actors. While this account could surely be criticized for being overly schematic, it offers suggestive hints that might serve to orient a more comprehensive history still to come of cinematic acting in France during this period. I don't mean merely that this history would need to be more attentive to the contributions of conventionally trained actors – though this is of course true. More substantively, it prompts us to think about the way in which a certain idea of the "professional actor" (or any other kind of actor, such as the non-professional actor as understood in Italian neorealist cinema, or the star actor of classical Hollywood cinema, for example) is a historically variable formation that exists at the intersection of particular economic forces, modes of film production, aesthetic regimes, relationships with the other arts and mass media, etc. Accordingly, the line of questioning pursued by *Cahiers* uses the theme of the return of the "professional actor" at some unspecified point during the 1970s to think about the changing relations between actors, directors, and audiences – changes that manifest in paracinematic practices like publicity but also within the films themselves.

So what exactly is at stake in the claim that Huppert (and Depardieu) might represent a return to professionalism? Partly, of course, it is a matter of economics, of the commerce of French cinema. Both actors, according to *Cahiers*, are engaged in establishing an image in which the public is invested, and banking on this investment in order to sustain a career over the long term and to enhance their own capital within the French film industry, thus gaining a certain level of autonomy to decide what sort of films they will be in and what films will be considered financially viable. This is implicitly contrasted with the idiosyncratic use of actors by modernist directors in the '60s and '70s, leading to films that were avoided by audiences. Of course the writers of *Cahiers* are not claiming that there were no new actors who were popular with the public in the '60s and early '70s. Rather what makes Huppert and Depardieu exemplary of a new situation in French cinema is their willingness to bank on their broader popularity while working with *auteurs* making singular and demanding films. As a result of this, there is a change in the relationship between actor and director. According to the *Cahiers* interviewers "the '60s isn't a decade of actors, rather it belongs to *auteurs*, who all had very complicated relationships to theater, to the fact of acting, of displaying oneself – they were people influenced by Bresson. I believe that we're emerging from a long period of distrust, almost of rivalry, between actors and *auteurs*."[229] Huppert's answers in the interview, which show her to be a quite articulate theorist of acting herself – in response to one of her statements, the editors say "What you just said is very *Cahiers*. It's a very theoretical thesis" – do not necessarily confirm the elimination of any rivalry between actor and director. They do, however, indicate the assertion of the actor as a creative force that is not simply subordinated to the vision of the auteur.

[229] *Cahiers du cinéma* 323/324 (May 1981): 103.

In several places in the interview Huppert speaks of exhibiting *un regard* – a gaze or a look – vis-à-vis the films that she acts in. It is clear that she is talking about something more than simply the physical act of looking as recorded by the camera, something closer to a point of view, a position of judgment, that is inscribed within the film. For instance:

> the roles [actresses] are given are no longer the same as before, they depend less on the vision of the director, a share of feminism enters into it. Perhaps that isn't the word. I sometimes feel a competition in that aspect. Precisely because there is the gaze of the actress on the film, thus the gaze of the actress on the man directing it. […] At the end of the fifth or sixth week of shooting, I feel that this gaze sometimes bothers them. And they experience the need to suddenly add things to the film, their words, what they themselves think of the film, in a schematic and demonstrative way, to reassure themselves.[230]

If this does not quite sound like the reconciliation between actor and *auteur* that the interviewers spoke of, it does at least provide some hints towards an understanding of how we might analyze films in a way that would attempt to take into account the push and pull between actor and director as a dynamic force in the film's creation.

Whatever the shortcomings of *Cahiers*'s initial attempts to outline a history of acting in French cinema since the New Wave around the concept of professionalism, there is something admirable in their desire to articulate the overriding tendencies that had changed the situation of actors over the past twenty years, and to make these changes an integral part of the story of modern French cinema. While this dissertation has focused closely on a small number of films and performances, hoping to grasp in their particularities principles that would illuminate our understanding of the period more generally, the example of *Cahiers* here serves as a reminder of the elucidating power of a distant view. While their account cannot simply be adopted without

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[230] Ibid, 109.

qualification or revision, it offers a starting point for thinking about the greater sweep of the changing situation of cinematic acting over the course of my period. Refined and elaborated, this sort of meta-narrative could provide the scaffolding that would clarify the integral place of the various scenes of this dissertation within a larger historical structure, rather than leaving them as somewhat free-floating episodes. The history of acting after the New Wave remains to be written.

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