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**The Eighteenth Brumaire of Patricio Guzmán:
lessons from *The Battle of Chile* (1975-9)**

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A few years ago, I attended a public screening and discussion of a program of four works of leftist U.S. community media. The works varied in length and commitment. They spanned about 50 years of media-making from across the country, with the earliest film from 1970—the incredible film, *Finally Got the News* (Bird, Gessner, Lichtman, Louis, Jr., Morrison, League of Revolutionary Black Workers) about the League of Revolutionary Black Workers which led a multiracial, militant labor organization in Detroit.

The screening, which was held at my university at the time, was well attended with a mix of university-affiliated spectators and an unaffiliated public. The post screening q&a with the program's organizers was polite and orderly. The standard process questions were posed (by me; I was the moderator): how did the project start? Who was involved? How did you find the material? How did you research it? The standard congratulations were issued. The program was unquestionably an achievement, though the programmer directed the attention away from their own labor and that of their collaborator, and instead emphasized the utility of the media; their context within particular labor struggles; and the importance of the ethnographic and archival labor of excavating networks of relations, biographies of producers, funding models, etc. This labor was contrasted to the dominant form of academic film scholarship, comparatively uncomplicated—namely, textual approaches—readings, analyses, armchair opining, etc. Her gentle critique resonated; and it may be an important corrective.

But, the room—the theater where the screening was held—told a parallel story. The crowd managed to be both enthusiastic and resigned. Despite almost obligatory protestations of relevance and timeliness, the room was strikingly placid. A great work of radical filmmaking—*Finally Got the News*—emerged as a relic; interesting only for asking historical questions about political organizing of the past or for sharing stories of the days when another world seemed possible. Far from seeming vital, the films seemed like finished business, even if they were objects of resigned admiration.

Although I had done my part to contribute to the staid, reserved atmosphere, I wondered whether this room—its feel, its vibe—provided the best justification for a textual approach. What if someone in the audience, rather than nostalgically praising *Finally Got the News*, had argued with it? What if someone had raised the question clearly posed by the film—of whether race-based organizing is good political strategy and under what circumstances?

In my imagination I had unfolded an alternative scenario: one in which there was an actual debate, in which people disagreed, in which some argued that the film—paradoxically—made the best case for Bernie Sanders' leadership while others argued that it clearly showed that people of color cannot organize with whites. Of course such a debate would have been a debate about how to *interpret* the film, about its meaning—and not about its place in a carefully and responsibly plotted historical mediascape.

After the event I began to wonder—at a more meta level—whether political works belonging to a distant historical moment can be enlivened in the present and under what circumstances? Is re-enlivening even a desired mode of engagement with historical works? Is it desirable for political ends (clearly part of the interest of the organizers of the program) and/or for scholarly ends? Are only *certain* works at *certain* times available for re-enlivening? Are some political works unavailable for re-enlivening because their time has actually passed and thus they are only available for scholastic and historical excavations? What method(s) are most conducive to re-enlivening?

What follows here is an experiment in re-enlivening an eclipsed work of socialist cinema. My approach is surely some variety of formalism, though not the usual kind of theoretical formalism associated with Marxist film theories, the sort associated with symptomatic or ideological critique. Rather, this will be an experiment in a film criticism—albeit a theoretically-interested film criticism. Film criticism—as I will practice it here (there are surely several varieties of it)—begins with an object (a particular film in this case) and tries, through a close and precise attention to its particularities, to reveal—not for an especially specialist or insider readership—how it works, how it is structured. In practicing this inductive approach, my hope is, first, to better understand a difficult film; second, to broach larger questions about film form certainly; but, perhaps more importantly for a Marxist practice, I hope this approach, this work of film criticism, inspires a *debate* about political organizing and strategy in general (the subject of the film, in my reading), one that would not have been likely without the *work* of interpretation.

Among the films about large-scale social change, there are few more significant than Patricio

Guzmán's three-part documentary, *La Batalla de Chile: La lucha de un pueblo sin armas/ The Battle of Chile: The Struggle of a People Without Arms*. This essay is about that film on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the coup that first brought General Pinochet to power. It is particularly fitting that it is appearing in *Jump Cut* considering the journal's long history of publishing on *The Battle of Chile*, beginning with Julianne Burton's first preview of the film in her 1975 dispatch from the Pesaro festival of International New Cinema. *Jump Cut* went on to publish the first serious political treatment of the film in English by Victor Wallis in the November 1979 issue, which also featured a contextualization of the film by the Angry Arts Collective. Zuzana Pick has written about the film in the pages of *Jump Cut*, and recently, in 2010, Victor Wallis returned to *The Battle of Chile* on the occasion of Icarus Films' release, on DVD, of a special 4-disc edition that includes all three parts of the film.[1] [[open endnotes in new window](#)]

Culled from approximately twenty hours of verité footage of mass street demonstrations and so-called man-on-the-street interviews,[2] and overlaid with a retrospective authoritative voice-of-god narration, *The Battle of Chile* chronicles—over its 262 minutes—the unfolding of the 1973 coup that overthrew the democratically-elected socialist President of Chile, Salvador Allende, and installed General Augusto Pinochet at the helm of a military government that would rule Chile for over 20 years. The film was put together—from exile in Cuba between 1975 and 1979—by Guzmán collaborating with some key intellectuals including the Chilean filmmaker associated with Chilean New Cinema, Pedro Chaskel; the Spanish economist, José Bartolomé; the Cuban filmmaker and theorist, Julio García Espinosa; the Chilean filmmaker, Federico Elton; Chilean political theorist Marta Harnecker; and the French filmmaker, Chris Marker.

The first part, “The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie” (1975), and the second part, “The Coup d’Etat” (1976), track the events from about March 1973 to the coup, which took place on September 11, 1973. Part I covers the period just before the parliamentary elections of March 4th and leading up to an aborted coup, called the “tanquetazo,” on June 29, 1973. The *tanquetazo* killed 22 people, including an Argentine cameraman, Leonard Hendrickson, whose footage, which captures his own death, both ends Part I and begins Part II. The attempted coup of June—which was authored by the fascist, CIA-backed “Fatherland and Freedom” movement—fails when most of the military refuses to go along. Part II takes the viewer from the failed attempt in June 1973 to the bombing of La Moneda palace in September and the death of Allende inside. Part III, “The Power of the People” (1979), takes up a thread introduced in Parts I and II and amplifies it, focusing on the attempts of ordinary people—workers, peasants, housewives, etc.—to organize themselves against the coordinated efforts of Allende’s enemies to reverse the course of the revolution.

Over the years, this long-recognized masterwork of political filmmaking has been eclipsed—in public and academic spheres—by Guzmán’s recent poetic-philosophical memory films such as *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), *The Pearl Button* (2015), *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2010).[3] The consensus seems to be that, whereas the later films stand as genuine works of art, “*La Batalla de Chile* is very much a film of its time,” as the scholar María Luisa Ortega recently put it.[4] Several ideas are at work in this assessment:

- first, that *The Battle of Chile* belongs to a tradition of dated leftist agitational filmmaking—which includes paradigmatically the 1968 Peronist film *La hora de los hornos* (Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino)—whose politics and polemical methods today appear crude and even naïve;
- second, that it employs what Bill Nichols has called a “historical rhetoric” that “examines the past and asks what really happened” as opposed to, say, a “deliberative rhetoric” that “proposes what to do”:[5] and
- third, that the purported objectivity of its cinema verité techniques have been superseded by explicitly subjective techniques like first-person narration, stylized re-enactments, and enigmatic narrative foci.

While it is surely true that *The Battle of Chile* tries to establish what really happened in one of the major episodes of twentieth-century socialism, the film is more than just an archival document or a memory film, an agitational spark or a landmark in the *history* of the development of documentary forms like cinema verité. It is the formal originality of *The Battle of Chile* that I want to explore here.

Despite the specificity of its subject matter (the 1973 coup), despite the partisanship of its crew (they were staunchly on the side of Allende), despite even the seeming straightforwardness of its cinematic tools (the voice-of-god narration and verité camerawork), the film is as much about a *method* of analyzing *contemporary* events as it is about a particular time, place, or politics.[6] Unlike other leftist films of the period, it does not make a case *for* socialism *against* capitalism and imperialism; it functions, rather, as a kind of training film, apt for *cultivating* strategic thinking about where political power resides and how to exercise it. In other words, *The Battle of Chile* is best understood as a primer on how to make change happen, a way of modeling how to act in times of social and political transformation.

It is aided in this modeling project by the unusual historical circumstances in which an avowed socialist like Allende, who was explicitly planning a “democratic road to socialism,” holds the Executive. It is fair to say that most filmic representations of mass street-based movements pit the “unwashed,” exploited masses—the *people*, characteristically pictured as crowds of demonstrators—against the repressive state (either unpictured or figured as a male tyrant). Sergei Eisenstein is famous for this, as is Gillo Pontecorvo. So, too, in different ways, are the films from the Workers Film and Photo League in the 1930s.

The archive of images of street protest largely belongs to the iconography of the left. That is, moving images of protesting crowds have generally functioned as the visual synecdoche for “the people”; and it is thought that “the people”—as a notion, as an expression of popular sovereignty—only makes

sense, in Judith Butler's formulation, in its "perpetual act of separating [itself] from state sovereignty." [7] In *The Battle of Chile*, by contrast, the state and *the people* (a phrase present in the film's subtitle—"la lucha de un pueblo [a people] sin armas") are on the same side, and they are, moreover, opposed by *other people*, who are also assembling in the street as protesting crowds.

This means that there are street crowds comprised of ordinary people on both sides of the political divide; and both groups are claiming the mantle of "the people." That it is the right—the Opposition, which is a substantial and a somewhat diverse coalition—occupying the more standard position of opposing state power creates a recurring sense of disorientation in the film as the familiar coordinates (e.g. left=the people/the protesters/the aggrieved/the righteous and right = the state)—and familiar largely thanks to media—are jumbled. Indeed, Guzmán's great challenge is to chronicle a confusing political landscape where a battle is waged between different social forces—parties, unions, boss's organizations, neighborhood associations, student groups, etc.—a battle that divides people politically but not, or at least not self-evidently, in social or class terms.

To meet this challenge, or so I will argue, Guzmán's film conjures a paradigm of the historical materialist method as applied to a prior revolution, with its own famous "June Days," Karl Marx's 1852 *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is about the failure of revolution and the rise of a single figure in charge of the state. Perhaps the most famous line in Marx's text is about historical repetition. Marx acknowledges the truth of the old adage that history repeats itself, but insists that the adage fails to register a crucially important dimension of this phenomenon: that in repeating itself history changes modes or genres. The first time as tragedy, he famously wrote; the second time as farce. On this basis, Marx develops a method that relates the phases of the 1848 revolution to the phases of the 1789 revolution (itself an event in which performers wore the garb of the Roman republic).

The Battle of Chile is another repetition of this cycle, but in its adaptation of Marx's method to the medium of cinema, the film raises basic formal questions specific to the problem of the *representation* of social change on film. Most notably: how does film, and this film in particular, visualize—or concretize or materialize—the abstract notion of a social force? This question has, of course, been broached in other films—including Sergei Eisenstein's fictionalized historical films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Strike* (1925), and *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (1928). But the problem of filming a social force takes on a peculiar shape in a cinema vérité documentary mode where the "raw material" is footage of actual events. It takes on a peculiar shape where the allegorization—achieved by Eisenstein partly through his deployment of *typage* in which he casts certain non-actors in particular roles based on the extent to which their physical attributes conform to widely-held, pre-existing stereotypes of the social identity they are representing (the anti-realist idea being that one's physical characteristics and one's social identity are not naturally correlated)—must therefore contend with the specificity of each and every person-on-the-street who is interviewed.[8]

Not least for this reason, Guzmán's person-on-the-street tends to be representative of a collective subject or subject position. That is, each particular person interviewed stands-in for a social force; and, in some sense, each interviewee's role is to ventriloquize the self-understanding of the group to which they belong. Yet at the same time, each person also resists representativeness; each is, in some basic sense, irreducible to a broader collective. The spontaneity of cinema vérité's method (which is unlike Eisenstein's practice of *typage*) and the ontology of the medium conspire to deliver singularity—*that person*; *that voice*; *that syntax*; *those words*; *that way of talking and walking and head-cocking*; *that unique life*, unlike any other. Each social actor is unavoidably singular, even if they function in the film as representatives. Of course that social actor's singularity, uniqueness, nonfungibility—which is medium-specific—must, to some extent, pull against or unsettle the smooth unanimity of the collective voice. The reliance on person-on-the-street interviews must ultimately constrain the allegorizing impulses of a social force film like *The Battle of Chile*.

My re-reading of *The Battle of Chile*, then, will come to focus on the tension that the person-on-the-street interview generates within the project of the representation of large-scale social change. This device that is so prominent in Guzmán's film, and which has no correlate in Marx's written pamphlet, is both central to the film's democratic and humanist ethos but is also a potential destabilizer for its more general and ambitious aspiration to narrate a story (without heroes) about the battle of social forces. *The Battle of Chile* ultimately turns this tension into its greatest achievement.

Now-time

Why connect *The Battle of Chile* with *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in the first place? Part of the answer, as I have already intimated, lies in the film's conspicuous work in staging questions of historical repetition and changing registers of performance. First published in *Die Revolution*, a German monthly magazine based in New York, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* begins in February 1848, when a bourgeois revolution unseated the then republican monarch, King Louis Phillipe, and concentrated power in a constituent assembly that drafted a new constitution. It ends in December 1851, when the freely elected president, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, dissolved the parliament and set himself up as emperor of France, in a marked repetition of the dissolution of the 1789 Revolution in the first Napoleon's coup. The account was written retrospectively, several months after the fact, though it narrates the recent events almost exclusively in the present tense.

The Eighteenth Brumaire is not primarily a work of history, so much as it uses a historical case study as an exposé of unseen levers of power. True, the work narrates how a particular history unfolded, taking into account the actions, often inadvertent, of various groups. These groups include not merely classes or quasi-classes—the peasantry, the proletariat, large landholders, the aristocracy of finance—but also political forces that were sometimes coextensive with particular classes and sometimes divided among them. Such is the case with the bourgeoisie, on the very cusp of the coup.

Parliamentary and literary representatives of this class were against Bonaparte, but its extra-parliamentary members were mostly with him. Marx writes of the

“most motley mixture of crying contradictions: constitutionalists who conspire openly against the constitution; revolutionaries who are confessedly constitutional; a national assembly which wants to be all-powerful and still remains parliamentary, etc.”[9]

In one of his frequent recourses to poetic language and literary history, he concludes,

“Men and events appear as Schlemiels in reverse, as shadows that have lost their bodies. The revolution has paralysed its own proponents and has endowed only its enemies with passion and violence. The counter-revolutionaries continually summon, exorcise, and banish the ‘red spectre’, and when it finally appears, it is not in the phrygian cap of anarchy but in the uniform of order, in [the soldier’s] red breeches.”[10]

The point of Marx’s description here is that things are not as they appear; classes and subclasses and various other constituencies are not behaving as one (even Marx) would expect or predict. Shadows that have lost their bodies are like effects without causes. The work of the *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, though, is not to give up on explanation and declare the actions of men irrational; rather, it is to investigate hidden, hard to discern causes.

Seen from a certain perspective, there are clear parallels—historical as well as methodological between Marx’s work and Guzmán’s. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* opens in 1848 with a revolution that creates the French Second Republic and ends with a coup d’etat three years later that installs Louis Napoléon Bonaparte as Emperor of France from 1852-1870. Similarly, in *The Battle of Chile* the story begins with the 1970 election of Salvador Allende, who promises a peaceful transition to socialism, and ends with a coup d’etat three years later that appoints General Augusto Pinochet first as President of the Military Junta of Chile and later as President of the Republic; he rules from 1973-1990.

Beyond such parallels, striking as they are, there are deeper, and more important *methodological* connections between Marx and Guzmán’s work. Like *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the film is made after the fact, from 1975-9; so, it, too, is a near-term retrospective, set off from the events by only a short time. As with *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the end—the coup—introduces the film and haunts every moment of it. The “players” are also social, and mainly, political forces: Allende’s Popular Unity coalition; the so-called Opposition, with its own coalition of center, center-right, right-wing, and extreme right parties; the military, whose class composition and class character are no straightforward matter, etc. Like *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, as well, the film has little political substance in a more familiar sense of doctrines and programs and polemics: it does not argue for socialism on the merits. Instead, it is about *how power works*—how to get it and how to lose it. Significantly, just as in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, *The Battle of Chile* does not represent power as residing wholly with the armed forces. Rather, in both works, power moves in multiple directions and has multiple lines of force.[11] We learn from each, in different ways, that power must have a base of support in the population—or, at least, those wielding the power must have neutralized (politically) large segments of the population that might have challenged that power.

Historians have long criticized Marx’s method of doing history, targeting it for its alleged determinism, for its reliance on what Engels in his 1885 introduction referred to as “the great law of motion of history”—that is,

“the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes.”[12]

If *The Eighteen Brumaire* has survived as a scholarly object of study into the present, it is largely because it won a new lease on life for its “literary qualities” and not for either its historical *method* or for its content. But in organizing and activist circles, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is seen as a model—a method—of how to *analyze the present* political conjuncture with an eye toward intervening in it. I think *The Battle of Chile* could be used similarly.

It is hard to see in these two texts about revolutionary failure any sense of hope or optimism; they are made with, and saturated by, knowledge of defeat and death. But the methods of both texts also offer up an alternate reading in the cracks of historical inevitability. What if, inspired by the example of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, we were to read *The Battle of Chile* not principally as a historiographic document, nor even as offering a method of making historical films, but rather in more prospective terms as an organizing primer, an aid in understanding, say, when and how to organize a general strike? This requires the peculiar strategy of moving backwards into moments of historical flux, when the lines of power were not solidified. “Give us guns! The Army is coming! We will defend you!” say Allende’s supporters throughout Parts I and II. What if Allende had done this? We wonder about the counterfactuals that emerge in watching *The Battle of Chile*. The exercise of popular power requires strategic thinking about the push and pull of social and political forces. It requires constant re-orientation to counter the disorientation(s) of living in the present, to counter the way that the underlying dynamics of politics may not appear to people so clearly.

This is not a problem unique to Guzmán’s time, or to Marx’s; it lives with us still. Many people who were not alive yet or too young at the time would like to believe that if they lived during the era of the Civil Rights Movement, they would have joined the movement; that they would have believed that change was possible and imminent; that, with some work, the balance of power could be shifted, that the time was ripe. But, of course, in most cases that is false. The difficulty of living in history is that,

in the present, one does not have the retrospective clarity characteristic of looking back on events long past.

This difficulty is marked in the recent political slogan, “Never Again is Now,” which emerged in organizing against Trump’s U.S. immigrant detention camps.[13] The phrase “never again” refers to the Holocaust; it affirms a commitment to act sooner rather than later in the face of a new fascist threat. To dub the detention camps concentration camps and to propose that now is the time when the fascist threat is upon us, I think, an attempt (some would say an overblown attempt) to counter the disorientation of being in the unfolding of history. If the balance of social forces were transparent, if appearances could be trusted, we would not need such a shorthand that attempts—in four words—to lift us out of the disorienting flow of the present and give us the “Now” anew. *The Battle of Chile* aims at this problem exactly, though it takes far more than four words to make its point.

Mechanics of historical change

The subject of the first two parts of *The Battle of Chile* is how the coup became possible. We often talk loosely—perhaps as a shorthand—about coups as if the coup plotters got together in some back room, decided they had had enough of the status quo, and then—from morning to night—take state power. Perhaps even the subtitle of this film—“the struggle of a people without arms”—gives this impression, as if it was *the people*—regular people—on one side and the armed forces on the other imposing its will (as if it was the military’s guns alone that was the source of its power). Might makes reality.

In *The Battle of Chile*, it is significant that the film begins with the end—with the military’s bombing of La Moneda Palace on September 11th 1973. The bombing comprises the film’s credit sequence, with the sounds of airplanes and explosions preceding the first image. The opening montage lasts about 50 seconds and shows the palace, in a series of six high-angle long shots, being hit by bombs and subsequently catching fire. The montage ends with a super-imposed title card, “Part I: The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie”; now the film proper will begin. This opening sets up a kind of suspense structure where we know the ultimate result: the coup. The question raised within the first few minutes is: how did the coup become possible in Chile, until then the oldest, most stable democracy in Latin America?

After the credit sequence, which is in a sense a flashforward, the film will move back in time—roughly six months—to the period of street demonstrations that took place in the build-up to the parliamentary elections of March 4, 1973. Then, it will proceed forward in time, chronologically. As it proceeds chronologically, the film will adopt a peculiar dialectical structural pattern that will alternate back and forth between segments depicting the street demonstrations of two opposed political coalitions: Popular Unity, which supports Allende; and the Opposition, which must receive more than 66% of the vote in order to realize its main objective—namely, the impeachment of Allende. The film represents each side with a combination of crowd shots and person-on-the-street interviews.[14] The Popular Unity coalition is made up primarily of smaller political blocks including the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Radical Party, Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU). The Opposition is comprised primarily of the Christian Democrats (led by the former President Eduardo Frei), the National Party (led by the former president, Jorge Alessandri, and Sergio Jarpa), the Radical Democracy Party, and the Radical Left Party. The first twenty minutes of the film alternate between these political forces, giving each approximately the same amount of screen time, about seven minutes each. While at this point the pattern is dialectical and thus treats the two opposing political forces as coherent entities, of course there are internal disagreements between the parties that comprise each coalition. Those political differences come to take on special importance in the case of Popular Unity, first, because the internal conflicts (between the ‘reformist’ wing and the ‘revolutionary’ wing) that intensify in 1972 put pressure on Allende’s state, and second, because the conflicts reflect an argument about strategy and tactics whose resolution overdetermines the course of events. [15] These conflicts will be taken up in more detail below.

Part of what is so striking in this opening is the film’s representational symmetry in the presentation of both sides: each has its crowds; each has its individuals, though they are not spokespeople or leaders, for the most part. Depicting politicized masses as marching crowds making demands on the state is a familiar cinematic trope, but these crowds are usually comprised of left political elements protesting *the state*, making demands of the state, registering their disapproval of the state. In *The Battle of Chile*, there are crowds and there are ordinary people on both sides of the political conflict. But although the screen time is roughly evenly divided between the sides in the first 20 minutes, the *emphasis* is not. The interviews with the supporters of the Opposition are of special significance here.

Guzmán asks individual Opposition demonstrators: “What is your position on the elections of this Sunday? What do you think about the future? Do you believe in the electoral road or in another road? The four people to which he puts the last question, do not hesitate: the electoral road always, they affirm confidently, despite their evident disgust with “those dirty communists,” as one demonstrator puts it.

This sets up the film’s basic problematic: How did it come to pass that the average (largely middle class) citizen supporters of the Opposition came to accept the coup? Despite the film’s seemingly partisan tilt, this is the real question that frames the first two parts of *The Battle of Chile*. The film—in these first two parts—will try to account for how this sector of the population abandoned its basic commitment to democratic norms as a consequence of the events on the ground.[16] Those events, it is suggested, shifted their consciousness and allowed them to justify—to themselves—the necessity of the coup. These first two parts are, in effect, the story of how the coup was legitimated; this is a story about politics, not about brute strength.

The Battle of Chile's framing political question is close to the one that frames *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: Marx writes,

“It is not enough to say as the French do, that their nation has been taken unawares. A nation like a woman is not forgiven the unguarded hour in which the first rake that tries can take her by force. The riddle will not be solved by mere phrases that merely state it in other terms. What needs to be explained is *how a nation of 36 million can be taken unawares* by three common con-men [Louis Bonaparte, the duc de Morny his half-brother, and the minister of Justice Rouher] and marched off unresisting into captivity.”[17]

The March parliamentary elections gave the Popular Unity coalition 43% of the vote, which denied the Opposition the 2/3 (66%) majority it needed to impeach Allende. The voice-over narration announces that with this electoral defeat the electoral phase comes to an end, and the strategy of the coup begins to take shape. That strategy has five planks, all numbered in text on screen: 1) Hoarding and the Black Market; 2) Parliamentary Boycott; 3) Student Disturbances; 4) The Offensive by Employer's Organizations; 5) Copper Strike. These episodes will frame the heart of Part I. Each strategy of the Opposition sows confusion and instability, and aims at winning another layer of the population to the Opposition's side. In this sense, the strategies are oriented toward impacting the “optics,” and thus mobilizing and de-mobilizing certain sectors of the population. For each strategy of the Opposition, the film reveals the gap between how things appear and the underlying forces at work.

For example, in the first strategy, “Hoarding and the Black Market,” business interests and small shopkeepers, angry with the government for implementing price controls and restrictions on exports, began hoarding goods in warehouses where the goods were allowed to rot and/or selling the goods on the black market. The intention was to empty store shelves of products, thus producing shortages. The optic of empty store shelves has long been employed to discredit mostly leftist governments.[18] The calculation in the Chilean case was that this would shift popular opinion as it would demonstrate that, practically, Allende's government could not meet the needs of the population. In response to the hoarding, supporters of the government—with the assistance of a government minister assigned to help with coordination—organized themselves into neighborhood-based local councils for provisions and prices (JAPS) comprised of workers, housewives, residents, etc. They took possession of hoarded goods when they could and organized the distribution of provisions (including those produced by nationally-owned food producers), selling them at cost.

In the case of the fourth strategy (“The Offensive by Employer's Organizations”), employer organization leaders escalate their rhetoric against the state and begin to organize stoppages and boycotts designed to hobble production in state-owned and state-run factories. The employer organizations justify their actions by citing government failure to resolve problems around pricing, tariffs, and spare parts shortages. In a particularly illustrative sequence, a leader in the National Confederation of Owners of Taxibuses and Autobuses addresses a huge convention crowd from a stage. His total conviction and his language—which coopts familiar terms and phrases of leftist political discourse and is captured by *The Battle of Chile* in close-ups—make his speech surprisingly compelling, and thus disorienting. Listen to him:

“We can't keep on patching and mending and wearing ourselves out,” he says. “The vehicles have gotten old and the bent back of many of the owners have grown old too! Generations of them! It's a matter of filling the pots, of surviving, of holding out, of being able to save this sector, because with that we are saving the jobs of millions of people who have faith and confidence in this working man, in this ill-treated transporter. He is the person who is actually building Chile! He is the true revolutionary! Who can deny that the moment has come for the entire transport sector —without distinction, fighting on one platform—to propose this national stoppage!”

In effect, he is arguing for the work stoppage of the transport sector on the same grounds that people typically argue for workers' strikes (i.e. it is a matter of putting food on the table and, anyway, the *transportistas* actually add value to the society). Rather than rejecting outright Allende's revolutionary, transformative project, the speaker happily claims the radical mantle, re-signifying the left's rhetoric and remaking small business owners into hard-working, beleaguered, under-appreciated victims of an inept and oppressive government.

Within each of these episodes, *The Battle of Chile* will build a cause-effect chain by oscillating back and forth between the destabilizing assaults of the Opposition and the responses and counter-attacks of Popular Unity. Judging from the structure of the film, the fifth and most significant of the strategies pursued by the Opposition is the strategy of the “Copper Strike.” I would like to focus on this episode because it constitutes a particularly stark example of how the film invites a certain kind of disorientation as a form of training in strategic thinking.

Copper strike

In the fifth strategy of the coup, “Copper Strike,” the copper miners at the nationalized El Teniente copper mine go on strike for economic reasons. The voice-over narration that begins the episode explains that the strike advances the interests and agenda of the Opposition (even if the striking workers are not actively seeking this outcome): “For the first time, the Opposition wins over a sector of the proletariat. In the El Teniente mine, a group of workers go on strike for economic reasons. Traditionally well paid, the copper miners are the aristocracy of Chile's workers. For the Opposition, the aim of the conflict is to paralyze the mine. 20% of Chile's earnings are produced here.” The camera surveys the energetic crowd of striking workers chanting a variation on the familiar slogans from Popular Unity demonstrations including “*El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido*. [The people,

united, will be never be defeated].” Reprising that cry, these strikers chant: “*Teniente, unido, jamás será vencido*. [Teniente mine, united, will never be defeated.” When the leader of a faction of the workers in support of the Popular Unity government proposes that all the strikers return to work, he is met with the chant: “Politics no! Politics no!” The implication is that the strikers are striking *as* workers, independent of the state; they are holding the state—regardless of its stated commitments to their interests—accountable for promises that have yet to materialize.

This sequence is deeply disorienting, and in a way that is characteristic of the structure of Part I. While the film’s voice-of-god narration proposes that the striking workers are privileged antagonists, hastening the demise of Allende, assisting in the coup—the crowd that we are seeing on the image track, in effect, declares itself to be *the people*. It wants to be heard. It wants what the socialist government promised. From a certain point of view, it might seem that the strikers are pressuring the state from the left, and refusing Popular Unity’s nationalist appeals for unity against first-world interventionism. Who can side against these legitimate strikers? They are bona fide workers, after all. And the force of their protest is palpable. The film has put the spectator in an awkward position. All the iconicity of this crowd—everything commonly associated with the strike, with the dignity of labor, with the legitimacy of withholding it, with the tyranny of the state, with the righteousness of organized worker masses—all of this must be reassessed in light of the narration. Word versus image. Instruction versus spectacle. Things are not as they seem. Or, to put it in the terms of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*,

“Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they appear to be revolutionising themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis, that is when they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, and uniforms in order to enact new scenes in world history, but in this time-honoured disguise and with this borrowed language.”[19]

Marx’s insight applies as much to strikers who reach for the favored chants of Popular Unity, as it does to Guzmán himself, who has no choice but to borrow from cinema’s repository of revolutionary imagery and try to re-signify its meaning.

But we can go deeper: how to characterize here the relationship between the introductory voice-over narration and the synchronous images? In some sense, the *verité* images *illustrate* the narration: The strikers are allowing themselves to be used by the Opposition. The images certainly do not contradict the voice-over narration; this is not a case of counterpoint. And yet, the rhetorical force of the images is undeniable. By *presenting* them—by showing us energized, disciplined, striking workers that are so similar to images from across the history of left political filmmaking—the film “infects” us a bit with this disorientation, and thus inoculates us. If the choice of material were more stark, melodramatic, Manichean, caricatured—i.e. if the crowd were less convincing, if the speaking organizers of the strike seemed more cynical or less earnest—the sequence could not invite disorientation because it would be clear to the viewer that the strikers are enemies and their movement astroturfed. But the disorientation of the sequence as it has been filmed and edited invites the exercise of strategic thinking.

The film forces one to think hard about the significance of the copper strike within a broader context. The strike has been delinked from the standard contexts in which it is encountered (i.e. the fight with a capitalist boss). The viewer cannot fall back on the familiar tropes. Actually, she can now see the strike as a tactic. By itself, the strike has no pre-determined political affiliation with leftist politics: it can be wielded by the political right just as well as by the political left. One must think strategically on a case-by-case basis. What is the meaning of a strike in the *unusual* case in which socialists control the executive branch? What sort of strategy is this strike? What kind of pressure does it exert? How and on whom? How can its effects be neutralized without losing the support of its participants or its sympathizers?

A few minutes later, in one of the most striking person-on-the-street interviews of the film, an interviewed striker himself displays an emblematic disorientation. The sequence begins with two street-level shots of a crowd of hyped-up strikers marching through the streets. From off-screen, an interviewer asks a first demonstrator, “why are you striking?” He responds matter of factly, “We’re demanding the 41% that the [state owned] company owes us.” “How many days have you been on strike?” the interviewer follows up. “It’s been 21 days now.” “What’s going to happen?” “It will have to be settled today or tomorrow,” he replies.

After this set-up, the film cuts to a different person-on-the-street interview. The off-screen interviewer resumes where he left off: “Is this a union movement or a political movement?” A well-dressed striker in his white collared shirt and suit jacket replies in a distinctly unrefined Spanish, “It’s never had anything to do with politics because there’s never been a politician or legislator or senator involved in this. Because the workers are defending our own rights. And I think we have to win because we elected our President so that he would defend the worker’s rights, not so that he’d come and criticize us when we ask for something. It isn’t just.” “Are you with the President?” the interviewer asks, trying to clarify matters. “Yes, I am with the President.” “But this strike is damaging the government,” the interviewer presses. “Of course it’s damaging, but I think that in all these 21 days of striking, they should at least have settled the strike.”

These interviews take place more than an hour into the 90-minute film. The first interview is factual. It is just what one would expect. He basically says: The government hasn’t paid us; we want our money. But the second interview takes up the thread of the stadium rally. Without the film’s guiding

voice-over narration and its structural conceit, I think I would hear this worker differently. But after 60 minutes, the film has primed me, trained me. The worker stammers. At one point, the camera tilts down to reveal the striker's clasped hands. He's nervous, perhaps he is unaccustomed to being filmed, to being interviewed, to being asked to deliver his own political analysis. This strike is not political, he affirms. At no point has a politician or a senator or a government representative been involved with this or directed anyone's actions, he says. He is a worker defending his rights. His choice to strike is a free choice. In fact, he supports Allende. He is his own man. Here he is speaking in his own voice, for himself. No one directs him.

But, of course, the film has tried to show that being directed is not always so plain as literally being told what to do or say. Moreover, directing events is not so straightforward as plotting secretly in some backroom. Despite his protestations, the worker is acting against his interests—the film suggests. At an earlier historical moment, one might have said that he exhibits false consciousness.[20] What the man is blind to—the film suggests—is his place, his role, in the battle of powerful underlying forces. The film has put the viewer in the position of seeing his blindness, even as one can also sympathize with him and perceive how he might find himself holding such a view. I can put this differently: the film shows that the man is missing a cognitive map, to use Fredric Jameson's coinage. What the times make difficult is to perceive, as Jameson writes,

“the contradiction between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience.”[21]

The interviews give us a kind of access to that phenomenological experience while the film as a whole—its structure, its narration—gives us the structure of things. Together, they prompt us to map the relation of the particular to the general, experience to structure.

Like the crowd from the earlier stadium sequence, and like the speaker at the National Confederation of Owners of Taxibuses and Autobuses conference, the worker is compelling. We do not dislike him; he seems genuine, not cynical. We understand why things might look this way to him; without the film's narration, they might look that way to us. If the person-on-the-street interviews, if the shots of crowds striking and protesting, if the scene of an auditorium of university students chanting in support of the strike “workers and students, forward together” (in an upside down reprise of the slogans of May 1968)—if these sequences are all disorienting by countering certain unacknowledged associations, and thus by exerting pressure on the viewer's loyalties, the voice-over narration can be depended on to steady us. But in the gulf that opens between the narration and the disorienting scene, we are prompted to reconcile appearances and (invisible) political dynamics. In that space, strategic thinking comes into play. The spectator inevitably strives to understand *how* the underlying forces could produce such beguiling optics—or, stated differently, how such beguiling optics could hide such a contrasting reality. Of course, if this reading is compelling, it raises fundamental questions about cinema verité as a convincing representational strategy and about the evidentiary status of the person-on-the-street testimony.

The person-on-the-street

The example I have been describing exhibits a tension at the core of the film's deployment of person-on-the-street interviews. On the one hand, the film gives a very prominent role to the words of anonymous workers, peasants, supporters of the Popular Unity government who are active in organizing themselves in their neighborhoods and in their workplaces. Indeed, if the film has some political content it is a commitment to direct democracy, to the basic intelligence and capacity of regular people—of *the people*—to run their own neighborhoods, to run the factories, to run the state, to run the world—cooperatively—maybe even without leaders. And, above all, to speak for themselves. The incredibly high-level and evident political sophistication of the self-expression of the women and men on the street and in the recorded organizing meetings, especially in Part II, has been—I think—rarely paralleled in the history of nonfiction cinema.

On the other hand, in this case of the striking worker, self-expression is a problem—not because the striker is bad or cynical. But, because he is disoriented, because he is shortsighted; he is not thinking analytically about contemporary events. In this case—and this is just one example of many from Part I—the narration has undermined the credibility and reliability of the worker's self-expression.

The person-on-the-street interview has no parallel in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. That a social force would be imagined as a marching crowd in film is not so surprising perhaps. But that a film largely about the battle of social and political forces should rely so insistently on the close-up testimony of anonymous individuals is surprising. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is premised on the insight that things are not as they appear, that there is a divorce between the explicit discourse of groups and the courses of action they pursue. The speeches of group representatives are of little utility in predicting the latter. As Marx writes,

“Just as in private life, one distinguishes between what a man thinks and says, and what he really is and does, so one must all the more in historical conflicts make the distinction between the fine words and aspirations of the parties from their real organization and their real interests, their image from their reality.”[22]

But the standard ideology of the person-on-the-street interview confers authority on the person-on-the-street. To question that authority is to violate the form's democratic ethos. In our contemporary context, in which the people's self-expression is unassailable, this reading of *The Battle of Chile* must chafe.

The strength of the first part of *The Battle of Chile* rests with the tension surrounding the person-on-

the-street interview. The person-on-the-street is *both* visionary and myopic. While he is always to be believed, his *analysis* is not always right. But even when he is mistaken as in the case of the striking worker of Part I, the impact and singularity of his figure, of his voice, of its tone and timbre, of his gesture—all the unique contributions of film to his characterization—is such that he is not to be dismissed so easily. We want to see if we can account for *why* things look this way to him and *why* they are not actually that way. The film's open, curious, and compassionate approach to its social actors eschews the moralism that often attaches to epic historical battles like this one. In the place of moralism, the film invites a different kind of political thinking, one which can account for the divergence between appearance and reality. Across several examples, this move constitutes a kind of training.

The power of the people

But the film's cultivation of strategic thinking is not limited to orienting us in the conflicts between the left and the right, where the person-on-the-street errs. I will give a different kind of example, where the tension is not between the narration and the social actors but rather where it emerges from within the film's depicted world. In Part II, there is a remarkable 9.5-minute, 13-shot sequence that presents an official meeting between a delegate from the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile/ Chilean Trades Union Congress (CUT), which was a trade union federation coordinating with Allende's government, and workers belonging to the Recoleta industrial belt or *cordon*. Founded in 1953, the CUT was the largest worker federation in Chile and its purpose was to bring unity to the previously dispersed worker's movement. The CUT was a multi-tendency organization; its governing board in 1970 had representatives from across the leftist party spectrum, with the strongest representation coming from the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. *Cordones*, on the other hand, were organizations of workers from *all* the factories in a given municipality; they had begun to form across the country in 1972. They were horizontally-organized and very democratic entities: leaders or delegates were elected from factory shop floors and could be changed easily; meetings of delegates from the factories were open, meaning that anyone could speak (though only delegates could vote).[23] Recoleta, which was comparatively small, brought together 30,000 workers from 51 different unions.

The almost 10-minute sequence unfolds a debate among the Recoleta *cordon* members and the delegate from the CUT—"Chico" Mosquera. The background is this: In response to the unfolding attempted coup of June 29th 1973, the CUT—imagining it to be the decisive moment for mass mobilization—had issued a call for workers to occupy their factories. The *cordones* heeded the call, and several hundred factories in Santiago alone were taken over. But after the crisis had passed and the coup had been put down, Allende again sought a conciliation with the Christian Democrats (as protection against another coup). He wanted to see the return some of the factories. The CUT soon found itself under pressure from the government; it was caught between the President and the *cordones*, which were determined to push forward.[24] While the debate is ostensibly about how to handle the spontaneous and extra-legal worker take-overs of once-privately owned factories and whether or not to nationalize them or return them, more existentially, the conflict between Mosquera and the Recoleta *cordon* workers is a conflict over key questions of socialist strategy:

- the challenges of trying to achieve socialism in one country;
- the constraints imposed by the legal road to socialism;
- the difficulties of coordinating actions across parallel worker organizations (the unions, the CUT, the *cordones*) and party leadership, etc. (i.e. the question of democratic organizational and inter-organizational structures);
- the independence and autonomy of the worker's movement—that is, independence from even a friendly state like Allende's (i.e. the instability of dual power).

The back and forth goes through not one but four rounds. **Round One.** First the CUT delegate—implicitly trying to convince the workers to take direction from the CUT leadership—argues that not all the factories that have been taken over by workers should ultimately be nationalized (i.e. receive recognition and direction from the state). There is the matter that some of those factories are unprofitable and so would represent dead weight for the state. The floor resists: fine, but once we've taken-over these factories, we need some kind of decision from the CUT about what to do with them.

Round Two. Mosquera then gets to the real issue: Some of those occupied factories are owned or partially owned by foreign capital, the Swiss in particular. Chile's external debt is discussed and renegotiated in Switzerland. In taking over Swiss factories, the government invites retaliation from the Swiss government in the form of crippling economic sanctions and/or boycott that limit Chile's access to credit as well as to manufactured goods from abroad. A worker calls out: look, we're not talking about international relations here; we're talking about nationalizing all the factories that interest us—without making any compromises. That's the role of the CUT (presumably, not to compromise).[25] Another adds, advising a different form of explanation: all this talk of international relations is not going to sit well with the workers. If you don't provide more local reasons (for halting occupations), using more plain language—the workers will disobey the CUT leadership.

Round Three. Mosquera: okay, yes, we can provide more local reasons. The worker's government only controls a part of the apparatus of the state. The reactionaries want nothing more than a confrontation between the occupying workers and the forces of order—be they the police or the military. So, if the workers disobey the CUT leadership, if they take justice into their own hands, and confront, physically, the police or the military—then the right will accuse Allende's government of being undisciplined, without a central authority (as the workers would be acting independently). Allende will be impeached, which is what they want. In the most stinging rebuttal, a man from the floor responds: the movie is very clear to us. You told us to organize ourselves across all sectors—in

our neighborhoods, in our trade unions, in our industrial belts. We did that. And you keep saying that it isn't the right time, that we have defer to the legislature, to the judiciary, that such-and-such can't be done because this belongs to Queen Isabel and that belongs to Switzerland. This is all bureaucracy, and it's dividing us! It shows that neither the President nor the CUT nor the Popular Unity politicians have faith in us, in popular power, in our capacity to win. The room erupts in clapping.

But the sequence doesn't end there as it could have. If it had, it would have clearly signaled the film's sympathy with this feel-good battle cry from the most charismatic speaker so far. Mosquera gets the last word, delivered as a gesture of reconciliation:

"Here power isn't achieved only through good organization. There [must] be good organization. But we also need to have some weight to counter-balance the real power of the reactionaries."

Mosquera will acknowledge the mistakes of the leadership and he will acknowledge that the objections of the room are not ill-intentioned. But he will also try to make the case for centralization: that worker actions should not proceed in parallel to the worker's organizations, but should take their lead from those organizations and from the government.

This is clear example of internal debate on the left. It might even look like an enactment of the conflict between so-called reformists (represented by Mosquera) and so-called revolutionaries (represented by the *cordon* workers). But, in its focus on process, the sequence emphasizes the meaningfulness of intense comradely disagreement. There are no moralistic denunciations (though clearly there is a foregrounding of the threat of those). No one's position is reactionary or backward. This reads as democratic deliberation.

But perhaps the even more significant accomplishment of the sequence is that it does not merely *allude* to the fact that there is internal conflict and disagreement on the left; a single round of the debate could have produced a *debate-effect* with the viewer noting: "ah, yes, there was internal debate." Rather, the duration of the sequence, the number of rounds in the argument/counter-argument cycle, the intelligibility of the articulated *positions*—all these aspects of the sequence are the product of deliberate filmmaker choice.

Together, they have a very powerful, pedagogical effect. The point of the sequence is not to side with the charismatic voice from the floor against the nervous and hesitant leadership. In other words, the film is not so much advancing an argument *here*. The point is to be touched by an awareness of the *difficulty* of the *strategic* questions. It is an invitation to *think*—to enter into the complications of the particular circumstances and try on different positions in the debate. More specifically, it forces one to think about the tortuousness of the so-called legal road to socialism. It forces one to consider why socialism in one country faces such obstacles within the context of an inter-connected, globalized world economy. It forces one to contend with both democratic and hierarchical structures within and across worker organizations. It forces one to face the implications of the actual power of repressive state apparatuses like the military and the police.

I think what is most potent about this sequence is that the words matter; they betray a very high-level of discourse, a sophisticated grasp of the political landscape. The scene reveals a seemingly broad base of *active* participation in political deliberation. And because of the specificity of the representation—its insistence on the details of the debate (as I am doing now) and the physical variety of the debaters—it thwarts the temptation to allegorize: the participants aren't functioning as stand-ins or types. They aren't mere mouthpieces of the "reformist" line that sought a consolidation of Allende's gains or the "revolutionary" line that wanted to push through to a more radical transformation of the society. As a consequence of their embodied speech, I am induced into really engaging with the *terms* of the debate; my wish for clear answers—as if I were judging from some all-seeing perch, above the fray—thwarted. Maybe the film's narration will ultimately side with the charismatic worker articulating a version of the "revolutionary" line (the bureaucracy slowed the process too much; it should have abandoned the legal path sooner), but the better course of action was far from obvious. The sequence fills me with that perception of disorientation that must have characterized the historical moment.

"The Power of the People"

While this scene from Part II may represent the height of a meaningful practice of popular power through democratic debate and deliberation, it is Part III that is actually expressly devoted to the practices of popular power. Part III, "The Power of the People," has received the least scholarly attention. Indeed, it often even goes unshown when Parts I and II play. Like the other two parts, it is constructed from footage of mass actions and person-on-the-street interviews. In contrast to the two other parts, this part is the most romantic: the analytic drive of Parts I and II has largely fallen away; and the meaning of events has become fixed. This part will, to my mind, foreshadow the shift in Guzmán's work to a more poetic, haptic register.

The ostensible topic of Part III, "popular power," focuses the spectator's attention squarely on the agency of the person-on-the-street, on all the ways that ordinary people (workers, peasants, students, intellectuals) tried to advance the transition to socialism by organizing—democratically and in microcosm—the new society within the structures of what continued to be a bourgeois, capitalist state.[26] The Opposition orchestrated a transportation stoppage; the workers organized other ways to get to work. The Opposition effected the bosses' abandonment of factories and the work stoppages of a professional class of workers on whom production depended (engineers, etc.); the factory workers took over the management of production and conspired with class-traitor professionals. The Opposition coordinated with the United States to halt the importation of spare parts; the workers

fabricated their own. The Opposition promoted hoarding among small shopkeepers and exchange on the black market that in turn led to food shortages; neighborhood cooperatives took over food distribution, setting up distribution networks that connected food producers directly to neighborhood-run stores. The Opposition used the courts to stall the state's expropriation of unproductive land; peasant cooperatives occupied the land and produced food for the neighborhood cooperatives, etc..

At the level of film form, this third part contains a breathtaking sequence—what Barbara Klinger might call “an arresting image”—that materializes in a single sound-image the fraught relation between individual and social force.[27] For the first time, the film will incorporate an extra-diegetic musical motif by J.A. Quintano that recurs across Part III, and that will end the entire film. The motif is first introduced in the credit sequence of Part III, but fades by the first shot. Its true, robust introduction occurs almost exactly halfway through the 78-minute film, and it is attached here to an image that also has no precedent across the three parts of *The Battle of Chile*. The one-minute, thirty-second tracking shot follows closely a hand-pulled rickshaw moving down a Santiago street.[28] It is encumbered with several feet of what look like building material, and a person atop that. The sun is low enough in the sky that the rickshaw casts a deep shadow between itself and the camera. The camera films the sunlight head-on, producing a lens flare effect. The shot is uncanny, as it reveals the young man who is (ostensibly) pulling the rickshaw to be almost gliding along the road. His touch is so light that at moments his feet seem not to touch the ground at all, but to be perpetually suspended above it in a leap. Is he propelling the rickshaw or is the rickshaw propelling him?

The non-synchronous melody that accompanies the shot is a downbeat version of “Venceremos,” the 1970 *Nueva Cancion* hymn of the Popular Unity Party by Claudio Iturra and Sergio Ortega (and associated with the communist singer-songwriter, Victor Jara, who was tortured and killed during the dictatorship of Pinochet). This rendition is played on the traditional Andean wind instrument, the quena. The fragile, slowed down melody played on a voice instrument contrasts sharply with the upbeat, triumphant, folk-march music and lyrics of the original song, which were intended to be sung *en masse* as a kind of anthem:

“From the deep crucible of the homeland/ The people’s voices rise up./The new day comes over the horizon. All Chile breaks out in song... Peasants, soldiers, miners,/And the women of our country, as well,/Students, workers, white-collar and blue./We’ll do our duty. We’ll sow the land with glory./ Socialism will be our future./All together, we will be history’s completion./ We shall prevail, we shall prevail/A thousand chains we’ll have to break,/We shall prevail, we shall prevail/We know how to overcome misery.”

This short sequence is haunting, in a way that is uncharacteristic of *The Battle of Chile*. Despite its singularity—, as an image, it figures the reciprocal relation of *the people* to history and to historical change. The thin man pulling the rickshaw stands-in allegorically for *the people*, while the rickshaw figures the movement and dynamism of history, a movement which is neither without the direction given it by people nor entirely *determined* by their intentional efforts. The rickshaw is surely moved by the man and his laboring, but the rickshaw also appears to be moving the man along; history is directed by agents, but it also directs them, or as Marx writes in the opening lines of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited.”[29]

The shot represents the relation as no other image of locomotion could; it functions, I would argue, as an unmistakable iconographic visualization of “popular power.”

The tune adds a plaintive, nostalgic note. “Venceremos” was a rallying cry. While it was written in a moment when it seemed possible that socialism would be Chile’s future, that Allende would prevail, and so its legacy will always be tied to the stunning defeat of 1973. Whether this defeat represents the loss of a battle or the loss of a war remains to be seen, the film ultimately suggests. Still, the melodrama of the shot is almost too much. In 1979 when the film was seen around the world (except Chile), it was already too late; what might have been wasn’t: we know it and every viewer knows it. But the man pulling the rickshaw surely didn’t know it, nor did Jorge Müller Silva, the cameraman who filmed this moment and who would be disappeared and probably tortured and killed by Pinochet’s forces shortly after the coup. How must that moment have seemed to them? Did it seem that their world was on the verge of a change, and that they were the agents of that change?

This uncanny shot of the man pulling that icon of a pre-industrial, colonial past—the rickshaw—stands out because it is a romanticized sound-image of worker agency—full of love, but also of the pity and resignation that comes with superior knowledge. This shot—in all its beauty and complexity—is a crystallization of the ideology that transforms the person-on-the-street into an unimpeachable witness to history. But while this ideology may indeed guide most deployments of the person-on-the-street interview, *The Battle of Chile* has largely avoided this brand of worker romanticization until this point, the point at which the analysis of the balance of social forces gives way to an eruption of mourning.

Allies versus comrades

In the last third of Part III, the romanticization of the worker takes on a distinct resonance. For the first time in a film comprised of many shots of crowds and several person-on-street-interviews with unnamed, anonymous social actors, a character begins to emerge. He is Ernesto Malbrán, and his voice-over will end the entire film. Malbrán was a college friend of Guzmán’s. At the time of the

filming, Malbrán had left his university studies in theater to take up a post as director of public relations for the nationalized industrial sector. In one sequence, Malbrán is explaining what the workers are doing in an Atacama saltpeter factory to maintain production after the bosses abandon their positions; he is arguing for more centralized oversight of the production of spare parts. In effect, he is arguing for the expediency of a division of labor—or, put differently, for a conductor to lead the orchestra.[30] Cirled by workers, he explains over three shots,

“If, at this moment, there’s an imperialist blockade and we don’t receive raw material or spare parts, what do we have to do in industry? We have to plan production, and provide organization and good administration for the repair shops and for the foundries. Without repair shops, you can’t have industrial development in this country. At this moment, the repair shops are the heart, which can keep the rest of the industry’s machinery alive and functioning. Because, the comrades here make spare parts. [shot 2] These comrades invent the spare parts that we need. They make the pieces that they need! *The worker thinks concretely; he doesn’t understand university abstractions. The worker is fed up with listening to words.* [shot 3] The demands which our comrade made are very serious. What is he demanding? Objectives, goals in the repair shop. What is he demanding? A rational administration of the repair shop, with production plans. We can’t carry on with little workshops in each section because that means a lack of administration, on the one hand, and a dispersion of resources, on the other hand. And this qualified workforce will get tired and leave. They will get disillusioned. There is no comrade here who supports fascism. They are all workers, and they have a tremendous worker consciousness.”[31]

Malbrán is doing a lot of talking in this sequence, and as he says these words, the handheld camera surveys—sometimes in medium shots, sometimes in extreme close-ups—the small group of workers collected around him listening. When Malbrán says of the workers that they think concretely, that they don’t understand [*no entienden*] university abstractions, that “the worker is *cabreado de palabras* [fed-up with words],” his words sting, particularly because the shot, as it shifts focus to the workers surrounding Malbrán, forces one to imagine them heard by the workers that he describes. One wonders whether the workers feel badly about this description. One wonders whether the filmmakers have self-consciously included this bit, whether the camera operator deliberately surveyed the effect of Malbrán’s words on the small crowd. And if so, why.

One is strongly inclined to dislike Malbrán at this moment and many viewers do; his well-intentioned condescension is difficult to forgive. For the first time, someone has spoken *for* the workers. They are seen and not heard, and that changes the dynamic drastically. For the first time, they are like a chorus. And while it may seem that there is a tension here between romanticizing the person-on-the-street’s testimony by treating it as uniformly unimpeachable as Part III largely does and speaking for *the people*—, in fact, I would claim that, paradoxically, these are two sides of the same coin. Both modes essentialize *the people*: in the first case by projecting supernatural wisdom and total mastery onto human beings; and in the second case by treating the workers as a symbol, an undifferentiated mass-block of mute doers. In practice, this is a stance almost universally reserved for perceived inferiors.

Malbrán’s words will end the film. In the last minutes of the film, Malbrán has taken over the task of interviewing the workers of the saltpeter factory—in effect taking Guzmán’s place. One worker makes the case that supporters of Allende must be armed, that the dream of a democratic road to socialism must be given up and that Allende must marshal the power of the state to forcibly impose the revolution. “Now is our chance to do it. We have to do it now or never. Because the enemy knows what’s in store for him.” The film’s recurrent plaintive musical tune picks up. As the image slowly zooms out from the saltpeter mine it reveals a flat and empty Atacama landscape, an image that foreshadows Guzmán’s 2010 film, *Nostalgia de la luz*. Meanwhile the worker’s voice, clearly neither synchronous nor simultaneous with the image anymore, finishes the thought, “He [the enemy] knows that he’ll never get back what he’s lost... and he’s like the devil.” And then Malbrán seemingly responds, in voice-over: “Let’s walk, comrade. We’ll see each other around, comrade. Goodbye.” “We’ll be seeing each other,” the worker says, reworking Malbrán’s syntax. “May we come out ahead. It’s now or never,” he adds. The zoom comes to a stop and the moving image is replaced by a freeze frame of barren flatness, and now Malbrán’s same words from earlier replay: “Let’s walk, comrade. We’ll see each other around, comrade.”[32]

What strikes me in this ending is the repetition of the word “compañero.” This usually is translated as “comrade,” and Malbrán uses it—perhaps even ostentatiously—throughout the last half of the film. These last lines have me imagining the two figures—Malbrán and the worker—walking toward the horizon in this bare, otherworldly landscape; it is an image that evokes the no place/good place of utopia. They walk in the same direction. This is another allegorical sound image, but it is one that figures the fraught relationship between *the people* and the intellectual/artist, for surely Malbrán here is a stand-in for Guzmán but also for a social sector whose loyalties are often divided. That familiar gulf between workers/peasants and middle-class intellectuals has long produced difficult relations, and romantic representations. Are Malbrán and the worker together like friends—despite all their differences? We want to imagine so. Yet the phrasing of the last line of the film suggests something else: “We’ll see each other around, comrade.” It’s not friendship, exactly. Or we might say it’s a specific kind of political friendship—not allyship, but comradeship.

“The term comrade,” writes the political theorist Jodi Dean in her recent manifesto, titled “Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging,” “indexes a political relation, a set of expectations for action toward a common goal.” She goes on,

“Comradeship binds action, and in this binding, this solidarity, it collectivizes and

directs action in light of a shared vision for the future.”[33]

The term’s anachronistic ring—its association with failed political experiments and seemingly barren forms of political organization like the party—is precisely why Dean likes it. “Comrade is a carrier of utopian longing”—it estranges the present and injects a hopeful note—an ego ideal—in the thought about the future. Comradeship is not like allyship. In contrast to comrades, Dean writes, “allies are privileged people who want to do something about oppression. They may not consider themselves survivors or victims, but they want to help.” “To be an ally is to work to cultivate in oneself habits of proper listening, to decenter oneself, to step aside and become aware of the lives and experiences of others.”[43] Unlike in comradeship, in allyship it is not action that matters, but identity. Allyship treats struggles as possessions, acquisitions, to which some have no right. “Where the ally is hierarchical, specific, and acquiescent, the comrade is egalitarian, generic, and utopian.”[35] Ultimately, Dean makes the case that allyship is a symptom of the displacement of politics onto “the individualist self-help techniques and social media moralism of communicative capitalism.”

“Communicative capitalism enjoins uniqueness. *We are commanded to be ourselves, express ourselves, do it ourselves. Conforming, copying, and letting another speak for us are widely thought to be somehow bad, indicative of weakness, ignorance, or unfreedom.* The impossibility of an individual politics, the fact that political change is always and only collective is displaced into an inchoate conviction that we are determined by systems and forces completely outside our capacity to affect them.”[36]

What I wish to pull out of the conclusion of *The Battle of Chile* is a tension between the condescending Malbrán, whose kind of transgression is today probably the favorite target of so called call out culture on the left, and the solidarious Malbrán, the class traitor Malbrán, who has left his university studies to put his skills and his energy at the service of Allende’s experiment in forging a democratic road to socialism. Guzmán will incorporate the offending sequence discussed above into his 1997 film *Chile, Memoria Obstinada*, perhaps poking fun at his old friend. Malbrán—with his all his words, his fancy education, his middle-class pedigree, his white skin—what kind of friend could he be, after all. Always speaking *for* other people. Within the framework of allyship, Malbrán would require re-education, perhaps he’s even irrecoverable. But what if he is something else? What if he is—genuinely—a comrade? There is no question that Malbrán’s condescension is unpalatable, but it follows—paradoxically—from too much allyship, too much worker romanticization, too much Manichean melodrama. It follows from the familiar gulf that separates workers from intellectuals, that has led to intellectuals treating the worker like some special creature from a different universe.

Still, *The Battle of Chile*, even in its oscillation between an analytic mode and this more romantic register, ultimately affirms the ethos of the comrade—an ethos in which self-expression, the person-on-the-street testimony, is treated as subject to debate and contestation, just like everything else that humans are involved in. This is the last lesson I would wish to take from *The Battle of Chile*, apt for our *now*.

As I said at the outset, this has been an experiment in re-enlivening. But even if this piece of film criticism has succeeded in re-enlivening the object, one might rightfully ask—and I frequently ask myself this question—“So what? What does re-enlivening accomplish anyway?” This question takes me to the heart of what a meaningful Marxist film and media studies might look like—and *do*. Does Marxist film and media studies merely take up topics of relevance to the Marxist tradition (such as any old moving image representation of revolution or social change, labor or class)? Does it concentrate on privileged objects like Eisenstein’s films or like *The Battle of Chile*—that is, objects with established Marxist formal and political commitments? Is it better thought of in methodological terms as restricted to certain approaches? Can it be expected to intervene in the world of struggle outside the academy? Or is it enough for it to contribute to keeping alive (for an audience of few) a tradition of theoretical and historical analysis and prompt debate and disagreement? I expect this special section will help sort through these questions.

Notes

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1. See Julianne Burton, “The old and the new: Latin American cinema at the (last) Pesaro Festival,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* no. 9 (1975); see Zuzana Pick, “Chilean cinema: ten years of exile (1973-83),” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* no. 32 (April 1987); see Victor Wallis, “*Battle of Chile: Struggle of a People without Arms*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* no. 21 (November 1979); see Victor Wallis, “*Battle of Chile: Struggle of a People without Arms*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* no. 52 (summer 2010). [[return to text](#)]

2. While the phrase “man-on-the-street” interview is the familiar way to refer to an interview with an “ordinary” anonymous person, in the rest of this essay I will use the gender-neutral formulation “person-on-the-street” instead.

3. Even the contemporary literature on *The Battle of Chile* (in both Spanish and English) is surprisingly sparse for such an important film. The most in-depth treatments of the film that I know of are Lopez’s excellent, “*The Battle of Chile: Documentary, Political Process, and Representation*” in

The Social Documentary in Latin America, edited by Julianne Burton (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990) and Jorge Ruffinelli's chapter in *El cine de Patricio Guzmán: en busca de las imágenes verdaderas* (Chile: Uqbar editors, 2008).

4. Maria Luisa Ortega, "La Batalla de Chile/ The Battle of Chile," in *The cinema of Latin America* edited by Alberto Elena and Marina Díaz López (London: Wallflower Press, 2003): 158.

5. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017): 77.

6. Ana Lopez emphasizes the analytic character of the film, but her emphasis is a bit different from mine. See Lopez, "The Battle of Chile: Documentary, Political Process, and Representation."

7. See Judith Butler's useful discussion of popular sovereignty in "'We the People'—Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly" from her book, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015). Although Butler here is by no means focused on visual representation, visual representation is taken up briefly when Butler makes the straightforward point that "no picture of the crowd can represent the people" (165). And yet, in media representations, pictures of crowds do routinely stand-in for the notion of "the people." We might add that the terms of this synecdochic substitution across the history of moving image media bear investigation, not least because the current sense of what resistance to the state looks like is surely a consequence of a media effect. Butler helpfully notes that,

"Access to any public square presupposes access to some media that relays the events outside of that space and time; the public square is now partially established as a media effect, but also as part of the enunciatory apparatus by which a group of people claims to be the people.... This implies the need to radically rethink the public square as always already dispersed through the media representation without which it loses its representative claim" (167).

8. Typage is a kind of practice that reveals a commitment to allegory: actors are chosen for the extent to which—based on their appearance—they represent social types (i.e. *the industrial capitalist, the factory worker, the peasant, the military commander*, etc.). The films that employ typage, then, are easily read as conflicts between groups (represented diegetically by "typical"-looking individuals. The selection, based on appearance, may represent a case where the selected actor is chosen to play a role that does not correspond to a biographical fact about the actor (i.e. so an industrialist might be played by a non-actor who earns their living working in a factory). See Abe Geil's "Dynamic Typicality" in *Sergei M. Eisenstein: Notes for a General History of Cinema*, eds. N. Kleiman and A. Somaini (Amsterdam University Press, 2016) for an excellent account of typage.

9. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London ; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 39.

10. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 40.

11. In this respect, the account troubles the classic view of the state as containing a monopoly on the legitimate right to use force; see Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Edited by Talcott Parsons. (New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 1964); Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991).

12. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 116.

13. The temporality of this slogan is striking. See Walter Benjamin's notion of now-time in "On the Concept of History."

14. The representation of the crowd on film has a long filmography as well as an abundant literature that makes important distinctions between the ornamental, fascist crowds of Leni Riefenstahl and Fritz Lang; the unruly mob theorized by Gustave Le Bon and evident in, for example, D.W. Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm* (1921); and the loosely organized but not anarchic crowds of leftist films. See Siegfried Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament" and *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton UP, 1960); Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (UMinnesota Press, 1987); *Crowds* (eds. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews, Stanford UP, 2006); Stefan Jonsson's *Crowds and Democracy: The Idea and Image of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism* (Columbia UP, 2013).

15. For more on the political conflicts within Popular Unity, see Ian Roxborough, Philip O'Brien, and Jackie Roddick, *Chile: The State and Revolution* (1977) and Marian Schlotterbeck's *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile* (2018).

16. While this sector overlaps with what might be considered "the middle class," it is not identical. Professional organizations and associations (groupings whose members often identify as middle class) cooperated with the Allende government in 1971. Still, some historians point to Popular Unity's loss of support among the middle layers by 1973 as crucial for the success of the coup. That is surely part of Guzmán's story here. For more on the historian's assessment, see Casals, Marcelo. "The Insurrection of the Middle Class: Social Mobilization and Counterrevolution during the Popular Unity Government, Chile, 1970-1973," in *Journal of Social History* vol.54, issue 3 (Spring 2021).

17. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 24. Emphasis mine. It must be noted that

Marx here seems to analogize the situation of France taken “unawares” by Bonaparte to a woman taken “unawares” by a rapist. The point seems to be that both France and the raped woman were not adequately on guard and that, once caught, did not resist. Moreover, Marx appears to be critical of the unguardedness and quiescence of both France and the raped woman. Although he seems to be characterizing a received wisdom (i.e. “a nation, like a woman, is not forgiven...”) using the passive voice, he is not invoking this received wisdom in order to contest it, but rather as a kind of support for what he will say next. The use of the analogy is unfortunate, and for my purposes both confusing and distracting. And although the idea I wish to convey is best conveyed by the first and fourth sentences of the passage, I have included this problematic second sentence so as not to unwittingly “cleanse” Marx’s text.

18. Empty store shelves are a cliché in the media treatments of Cuba after the Revolution, for example.

19. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 19.

20. Although “false consciousness” is often considered an off-limits term, there have been some recent attempts to rehabilitate it including by Steven Lukes, who begins a clear-throated defense with these lines, “I want to defend the answer to a question. The answer is ‘false consciousness.’” Lukes writes,

“I conclude that people can sometimes, even often, be mistaken about their interests and the mistakes they make can be conceptual and cognitive... In particular, they can exhibit what has been given the name false consciousness. As our examples show, they can have systematically distorted beliefs about the social order and their own place in it that work systematically against their interests...and, in general, be unable to see what links ‘public issues’ and policies with ‘private troubles.’ To state these conclusions need not invoke any epistemic privilege, while nonetheless assuming that, in these matters, there is truth to be attained” (28).

See Steven Lukes, “In Defense of ‘False Consciousness,’” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 2011, Article 3. Moreover, even Terry Eagleton, in his balanced survey of various theories of ideology from 1991 flatly refuses to throw out the notion of false consciousness. He gives a multi-faceted account of false consciousness and the arguments for and against it as a useful notion. Here is a taste of the latter:

“Any ruling ideology which failed altogether to mesh with its subjects’ lived experience would be extremely vulnerable, and its exponents would be well advised to trade it in for another. But none of this contradicts the fact that ideologies quite often contain important propositions which are absolutely false: that Jews are inferior beings, that women are less rational than men, that fornicators will be condemned to perpetual torment. If these views are not instances of false consciousness, then it is difficult to know what is; and those who dismiss the whole notion of false consciousness must be careful not to appear cavalier about the offensiveness of these opinions” (13).

And later:

“For those who hold that thesis [of false consciousness] do not need to deny that certain kinds of illusion can express real needs and desires. All they may be claiming is that it is false to believe that murderers should be executed, or that Archangel Gabriel is preparing to put in an appearance next Tuesday, and that these falsehoods are significantly bound up with the reproduction of a dominant political power. There need be no implication that people do not regard themselves as having good grounds for holding these beliefs; the point may simply be that what they believe is manifestly not the case, and that this is a matter of relevance to political power” (14).

See Terry Eagleton’s *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso Press, 1991).

21. See Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988): 349.

22. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 43.

23. Ruffinelli cites Alain Touriane’s grand claim that whatever the ultimate outcome, “Chile will have supplied the revolutionary movement a unique form: the industrial cordones.” See Ruffinelli, p. 113.

24. For this context, see see Ian Roxborough, Philip O’Brien, and Jackie Roddick, *Chile: The State and Revolution* (1977).

25. Here we can hear a clear echo of the “revolutionaries” slogan: “Advance without Compromise.”

26. See Schlotterbeck, Marian. *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende’s Chile*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018.

27. For more on the “arresting image,” see Klinger, “The Art Film, Affect and the Female Viewer,” in *Screen* 47:1 (Spring 2006). Ruffinelli takes note of this sequence in a single line, calling it “a magical interlude or powerful instance of visual punctuation”; it is one of the most striking of Part III for him as well. In a footnote, he cites the editor Chaskel describing to him how iconic the scene depicted is and how the team came to include this unusual sequence. See Ruffinelli, o. 114.

28. Victor Wallis discuss this shot in his 2010 review of Icarus' 4-disc DVD release of *The Battle of Chile*. Wallis writes, "The grit, the love, and the pathos of the people's struggle are fused in this shot." See Wallis.

29. Marx, Karl, Mark Cowling, and James Martin. *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (post)modern Interpretations*. London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, 19.

30. See Karl Marx. *Capital*, Vol. III, chapter XXIII. New York, NY: International Publishers, 1967: 383.

"[A]ll labour in which many individuals co-operate necessarily requires a commanding will to co-ordinate and unify the process, and functions which apply not to partial operations but to the total activity of the workshop, much as that of an orchestra conductor. This is a productive job, which must be performed in every combined mode of production."

31. Ruffinelli also cites this bit as an example of the "conflicts over language between vertical theory and the horizontality of need." That is, the theoretical language of the leadership and the common language of the "ordinary" worker. (Another example of this conflict occurs in the CUT meeting I discuss above.) For Ruffinelli, Malbrán's formulation is not problematic or cringeworthy. On the contrary, "the film needed some broad final analysis, something eloquent, that could integrate in a single figure all its fragmentary elements. That is Malbrán's function..." (116). Ruffinelli's description here might be thought of a perfect set-up for a critique of the old left, though Ruffinelli is not interested in mounting such a critique; neither am I, though for other reasons.

32. I have made this point in a short online review of Guzmán's *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2019) published in the June 2021 installment of *Docalogue*: <https://docalogue.com/the-cordillera-of-dreams/>

33. Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (New York: Verso, 2019): 2.

34. Dean, 16, 19.

35. Dean, 22.

36. Dean, 22 (emphasis mine).

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