

THE FILM FESTIVAL AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE

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THE FILM FESTIVAL AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE: PRO OR CANNES?

In recent years in the film critical imaginary the film festival has replaced film noir as the overweening (and perhaps last) remaining “site of resistance” to the capitalist machine in the area of film production. The idea of the festival itself has sparked a vast literature and a new legitimate area of study within media studies. The individual studies themselves make a useful contribution to understanding the phenomenon but behind them lays the unspoken assumption that the festival is a last outpost where art may have at least a chance of triumphing over commerce in an area where the hunting down of all resistance to the commodity form is ruthless.

The film festival of course is part of a larger entertainment-travel-leisure industry conglomerate, as much about sparking interest in a region or a country in economic development as a whole and in the development of its media industry, as about finding and bringing to public attention filmmakers with an aesthetic and social sense of the medium. The cynical way of phrasing this is to say that it is about regional and national economic profit (or survival) through using the emblems of social and aesthetic practice as a means to that ends. Thus last year, 2010, at Cannes, Vietnam, which is trying to grow its film and media industry and present itself as a cheap place for film production, announced the first Vietnam International Film Festival in October, and, Boulder Colorado, in calling for entries for February 2011, boasts that that year will be number 7 for the festival (a sign of growth) and lists its 2010 prizewinners including three films in various genres with prominent big-city U.S. releases in 2010 (*Ajami*—International Feature; *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg*—Documentary; *The Secret of Kells*—Animation), to prove that the festival has serious critical cache as a predictor of films that will be successful throughout the year which insures its profitability or, as the festival publicity phrases it, guarantees it as “One of the coolest film festivals in the world.”¹

Of course the model for festival enterprise and festival art is Cannes, the biggest in terms of sheer volume of films, 96 features alone in competition

¹ The quote listed on the festival’s website, <http://www.biff1.com>, is from *Moviemaker Magazine* which is of course part of the press contribution to the moneymaking complex.

this year as well as a market of over 1000 feature films, the most “glamorous” or “fun” with its three-a-day celebrity casts and directors ascending the steps of the Grand Palais, and the place from where films at all commercial and art levels will circulate internationally for the coming year (the New York Film Festival for example is often warmed over Cannes with a few new American entries, and the deals for most of the only 1% of foreign films that actually receive an American release in the coming year—a statistic revealed last year in a report by *Cahiers du Cinema*—will have been brokered at Cannes). Cannes is also the most thoroughgoing mixture of film art and film commerce and thus is a privileged site at which to query the contemporary relationship between the two.

2010 was my first trip to this most influential of all film festivals and observing the overall panorama for me perhaps destroys the idea of the film festival, or at least of this film festival, as “site of resistance.” The film industry is no longer any more even like the fashion industry where you have a top line released at the vaunted Paris, New York, and Milan weeks of fashion then lower lines which follow the haute couture, though of course haute couture itself takes its shapes, often unacknowledged, from the street. While Cannes still looks like it’s about the “art” films in the main competition which will circulate in the coming year and spur filmmakers to experiment with the form in ways they had not yet dared, looks are, in this case, deceiving. Cannes is much more about the way the art form, in the main and assorted other competitions, is being every day penetrated by commercial culture, and it is far more likely that rather than being influenced by “street culture” the art film, the “haute couture” in the upper regions of the Palais at Cannes, is simply being moved to the margins or wholly imbibing the commercial formulas that circulate in the depths of the Palais at the market screenings. Everywhere in film culture, the money imperative is here subtly, there transparently, remaking and reworking aesthetic practice in production, distribution and exhibition, often in the globalized world, Americanizing these practices or simply colonizing them in the name of Hollywood whose tentacles seem to reach into every aspect of the industry. In such a world is “resistance” possible or even a correct way to theorize the possibility of a social art where the needs it speaks to will be human needs rather than the “needs” of the stockholders investing in the enterprise?

This article will first detail how the Cannes film festival itself and the media production world around it are being commodified and in some cases colonized and then it will pose various potential alternatives to that process. There exist two primary ways of conceptualizing this “something else,” of conceiving struggle within the media industry, and I would suggest that rather

than favoring one over the other, each has its value. One is contained in the concept of “resistance,” that the path of struggle is to resist the processes of commodification and this path usually leads to some suggestion that there is an outside, an other than capitalist production, and to validating that other. Sometimes that other is the third world detailing through the social problem feature of the conditions of uneven production that foster exploitation with a sense of how more ancient ways are being destroyed by this process, that is, to turn the alter-globalist phrase, the sense of how “another world is possible” and may still teach us something (*Tiger Factory’s* description of the Indonesian baby trade, *The Man Who Cried’s* abject howl at the transformation of African communal life through war and privatization). A second mode of resistance is the revalidation of the distinction between the art and commercial film (this year’s prizewinner *Uncle Boonmee* leisurely describing the fantasies of a dying man and Bertrand Tavernier’s indulgently non-modern romance *The Princess de Montpensier*). A third mode is the persistence of the overtly “political” film which in its own way critiques the market imperative to never get beyond the continual forced and false “jouissance” of “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” seen at the festival this year in Ken Loach’s detailing of how the profit motive, as well as the colonial project, is destroying the consciousness of working class soldiers in Iraq in *Route Irish*. An opposite path is critique from within, with its accompanying dialectical suggestion that any change has to be immanent, that is, must grow out of the conditions of production of its moment; that, rather than “resist,” one utilizes the devices the contemporary media provides, and the point is to show how they can be reconfigured toward human ends.³ Here we have: The excellent documentary *Inside Job*, screened out of competition, which uses the testimony of the bankers themselves to explain how and why they precipitated the global financial crisis; Berlusconi poseur Sabina Guzzanti’s appropriation of the great one’s own media manipulating techniques to expose the way the Italian head of state exploited 2009’s earthquake in the town of Aquila for political ends in recalling both the horror film and Visconti’s *La Terra Trema* in her aptly titled documentary *Draquila-Italy Trembles*; and, perhaps most spectacularly, the Lion of Cannes,

² Given the state of Africa today, this Reagan-era hymn, which employs African rhythms, is almost the equivalent of Adorno’s quoting of the Third Reich joke that “everyone must be happy, else they are for the concentration camps.”

³ For a superb reading of Hegel’s rendering of the dialectic as fostering change see Kojève’s *Introduction a la lecture de Hegel*. For contemporary readings on the force of the dialectic in social transformation see Negri’s *Time for Revolution* and for a thoroughgoing examination of the form in cultural and aesthetic production see Jameson’s summa apologia *Valences of the Dialectic*. Finally, for a tracing of the development of the dialectic through the history of philosophy see Mouriaux’s *La Dialectique: D’Heraclite a Marx*.

Jean-Luc Godard, who in 1968 with his New Wave compatriot Truffaut brought the festival to a halt in support of the student strike, and who in 2010 in *Film Socialisme* continued the project of, as Jacques Rancière suggests, re-radicalizing the process of combining images not only to shock but also to show how the media can be made to open up connections between an ever multiplying plurality of images and the social meaning behind, in front, and within them in a world in which “the hyper-realistic materiality of the sign devours all distinctions between texts” (78).

TO BE OR NOT TO BE (COMMODIFIED), THAT IS A QUESTION,
BUT A BETTER QUESTION IS, ‘IS THERE ANY WAY TO AVOID IT?’

The financing of the Cannes film festival itself illustrates the interpenetration of art and money that so dominates the festival. The festival for 2010 had a 20 million euro budget of which a little under half was state funding from the national (Centre National de la Cinematograph—3.1 million of the also 20 million budget in 2009), regional (180,000), state (Conseil General—155,000) and city level (Ville de Cannes—5.3 million).⁴ The remaining half is from two sources: the first is from, in the festival’s term, “parrainage,” the paternal godfather or sponsor, of which the most omnipresent in this festival was the computer company Hewlett Packard which paid for many of the technical installations while hawking its own personal computer, the Envy, “un bijou de technologie,” and the second is the entrance fee paid by distributors to see the nearly more than 5000 films, including documentaries and shorts, circulating in the Palais. Cannes is to be commended for continuing to have such a high level of public financing but it must be borne in mind that all three levels make their demands, that is that the economic base is constantly prescribing the limits of the art house competition superstructure. Thus, the public funding must produce its own return to justify the public outlay, with 2009’s festival supposedly generating 250 million euros, and must be conscious of having that outlay being part of a national, regional and city money making machine. Likewise, the rationalized branding of the corporate sponsor HP must justify its “parrainage” to its shareholders and thus had festival employees in front of the huge HP banner asking in a survey “What computer companies have you

⁴ These are all 2009 figures from *Tele 2 Semaines (France)*, Saturday 9 May, 2009. In general festival financing figures are hard to come by, with the festival preferring not to focus on this question. The 2010 figures are from official Cannes Festival Publicity, “Festival de Cannes Palmares de chiffres,” Wednesday, May 12, 2010.

heard of?," making sure everyone got the message about purchasing its "jewel of technology." Finally, the largely staid genre fare of the films in the Palais basement and above not only finance the competitions, but also, by prescribing the market that the competition films must enter as well, increasingly dictate how far and in what way the art fare in the Palais will differ from the commercial films if they are to survive outside of the fragile structure of the festival circuit.

Countering this commercial imperative though is the extraordinary concentration at Cannes on tradition and pedagogy, not standard capitalist values. There is a real sense at all levels that work by directors will be brought along and that once you are under the Cannes umbrella your work will be continually recognized. This might be called cronyism or simply, as Marx puts it, "reproduction," but because of the various levels of the competitions, work is carefully nourished and tradition counters the "what have you done for me lately" ethos that is especially prominent in the film industry. So you have, at the beginning level, the mostly student competition of the Cinefondation, of which this year's winner, who I met at the festival, was a Master's student from Finland, Juho Kuosmanen, who had had a shorter film in the festival two years earlier and was urged to reapply with his 60-minute Master's feature *The Painting Sellers* which won the competition (though he still had to return to school to finish his theory thesis), followed by Court Mètrages or short films which in the industry are stepping stones to eventual feature funding. The feature length competition at the lowest level is the Week of the Critic for new directors, then, Quinzaine des Réalisateurs (Fortnight of Directors) for those usually with one film under their belt or who have a gifted first film, Un Certain Regard for those veteran directors at Cannes who do not make the main competition or for those just on the verge of making it, and, finally, the Cannes Competition of 18 films, most often of recognized directors. Yes, there are also the splashy outside-the-competition screenings, but even here for every *Robin Hood*—this year's big budget boffo box office bit of baloney—there is also a *Draquila*, as well as a Cannes Classic section with film restorations (this year's most prominent Grand Classic was René Clément's 1946 *La Bataille Du Rail*, a French *Open City*, made just after the war, celebrating in near documentary fashion the partisan resistance in blocking German supplies via rail⁵) and,

⁵ There is a counter World War II narrative about the rails describing how the French national railroad system, then as now called SNCF, methodically transported 76,000 Jews, 20,000 Gypsies and 38,000 political resisters to concentration camps in the 2009 documentary *Les Convois de la Honte* (*Convoys of Shame*).

back to pedagogy again, each year a director's Master Class, this year featuring the Italian '60s iconoclast Marco Bellocchio, whose deconstruction of Italian masculinity in the personal corruption of Mussolini, *Vincere*, was well received at Cannes in 2009.

The festival is itself part of the larger financial system and as such it "mirrors the workings of global capitalist economies" (Mazdon 15). Thus Cannes 2010 was the first post-Copenhagen festival—that is, after the major failure in November 2009 of the world's nations to continue the Kyoto Accords, thus tossing in the towel on climate control—and the tumultuous winds that rocked the Croisette nearly cancelling the parties and receptions on the Riviera were a harbinger of Cannes in the era of Global Warming. Elsewhere, the loss of filmmaking sovereignty, detailed below, was itself mirrored on a much grander scale, as the proposition was floated during the festival by the banker-friendly European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso that because of Europe's financial crisis, national budgets may now have to be submitted for austerity review to a supranational finance committee, operating like an IMF say with Latin America in the 1980s, disciplining by enforcing social cutbacks. Also on display was the new meanness of capitalist production faced with declining profits, evidenced by a bid to increase the price of Cannes video images by attempting to lock out Reuters and other news services, with those companies responding by boycotting the press conference announcing the Cannes official selections, an echo of our own increasingly nasty access wars in which Fox, for example, threatened to shut down access to the Superbowl if Time Warner did not pay Fox more for each Fox channel it includes in its cable system.

Like other capitalist industries, the media industry at the time of the crisis was experiencing the contradiction of overproduction, with, for example, hedge fund money having poured into independent films in the U.S. as a sexy industry to invest in and with demand dropping and money tightening *Variety* reported that this year "there was an end to the glut" and "a noticeable lack of titles for sale" (Wednesday, May 12, 1). And, just like other industries, the financial shakedown has resulted in a dawning dominance by China and the other BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India) countries, with China's box office growing 44% in 2009, now the second leading box office eclipsing Japan for that position as China has now accomplished with its economy as a whole. As Beijing producer Wang Zhonglei put it in a statement that may speak volumes about the flow of global economic power, "Five years ago we hoped (the Hollywood studios) could bring us support and investment. Now we're helping them" (Landreth 10).

Cannes as a film festival has a partly political and progressive origin. It was founded in 1939 as a rival to the then fascist Venice Film Festival which in 1937 had failed to recognize Renoir's anti-war *La Grande Illusion* with a top prize. Unfortunately inaugurated September 1, 1939, the day the war began, the festival was quickly cancelled until 1946 and finally became established as a perennial event in 1951 (Mazdon). The opening night screening in 1939 of Hollywood's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* indicated that for Hollywood the festival would be a way of continuing its global domination, using the platform of the festival to highlight its incorporation of the world (and in the case of Hugo's classic of the 15th century, world history) under an American umbrella—exactly parallel to this year's splashy Euro opening on the Croisette of *Robin Hood*. That domination has accelerated in the era of globalization where, in the media industry, almost more than any other, globalization often does mean Americanization and where there is far less resistance at Cannes to this interpenetration of American capital and American styles, modes of production, and ways of simplifying content than to the more overt fascist encroachment in the early days of the festival. One can see the problem of Hollywood dominance for example in the Mexican cinema, a “thriving cinema” at the moment with its own pantheon of contemporary directors working at all levels of the industry, from the art film, Carlos Reygadas (*Japan*), to the more crowd pleasing, Alejandro Gonzalez Inárritu (*Babel*), to serious directors working in and around the commercial industry Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth/The Devil's Backbone*). The industry produces 70 films per year yet its box office Top Ten for 2009 was the worst kind of Hollywood fluff (*Ice Age 2, Avatar, Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince, Transformers 2/2012, Fast and Furious, Twilight, Angels and Demons, Monsters vs. Aliens, Bedtime Stories*) (*Hollywood Reporter, Special Report, Mexico*, May 15, 2010, 43-45).

Contemporary Hollywood hegemony in the film industry is being secured through its mastery and command of the 3D process which it is pressuring more and more theaters to install. *Avatar* has established the immense profitability of the process which by its format puts pressure on smaller more intimate films and national film industries to adopt and which the American business press pushes relentlessly. (Cannes itself is rushing to install the technology and fully furnishing the Palais for 3D screenings will be part of an overall huge outlay to renovate the Palais next year.) Latin America, *Variety* squeals, which thus far has only 600 theaters equipped, is “racing to build more 3D screens in the region” (May 10, A24). In Europe France is the “world's digital frontrunner” (behind the U.S. of course and yet the “world's digital forerunner” is refusing to adopt the American trade-

mark term for the effect, “3D”, often instead referring to it by the generic “relief”) and although according to the trade press “Italy touts itself as being in the forefront of Europe’s 3D revolution,” the Italian Health Minister is worried about reusable 3D glasses as a transmitter of bacteria. Finally, although “big, multiplex operators are celebrating, many smaller exhibs have yet to partake of the juicy 3D pie” (A20), with the article not noting that the reluctance of the “smaller exhibs” may have something to do with the fact that the majority of the profits of that “3D pie” go back to the Hollywood studios. And, while Hollywood pushes a relentless modernization, a post-Cannes report by the Centre National de Cinema shows that with the speeding up of digitalization, projectionists will be losing their jobs at a much faster rate than predicted before the “3D explosion”, with the theaters in France expecting full automation in three years, as opposed to what seemed at first a more leisurely six to eight years, by which time 1000 employees could lose their jobs (Fabre, 21).

Everywhere Hollywood and the Hollywood purely-for-profit ethos is penetrating European production, commercializing and juvenilizing it. (The French call this “dumbing down” process “cretinisation”.) In Europe the central pillars of film financing, following the French model, are government subsidies and television profits garnered from the broadcast of Hollywood features, ala Canal Plus. This year Spain announced that it is revising its laws on government subsidy, favoring films with a bigger budget and a “larger market need” while also decreasing the amount of revenue, from 5 to 3%, required to be reinvested by Spanish broadcasters in the Spanish film industry (*Variety* “Spotlight on Spanish Cinema, May 15, 2010, A1.) Poland, the site of the famous Polish Film Institute, which has produced and sustained, among many others, Roman Polanski, Andrej Wajda and Agnieszka Holland, has announced a new grant funding priority affecting the school as well urging more “family and historical films” and converting grants to loans so that “profit maximization becomes the priority”, prompting the reaction from an industry source who did not dare to be named that, “There is a danger that Polish language films will become more infantile as a result” (*Variety*, “Spotlight Polish Cinema”, May 17, 2010, A2.)

Hollywood often sees Europe as a place where, as the European publicity puts it, “the same production values can be achieved for less,” but this reduction of what were once mighty national industries to outsourced locations for crafts work on Hollywood product, blatantly colonial in its orientation, has also the colonial effect of stifling indigenous production. Germany, for example, has remade its Babelsberg Studio, which plays on its history as the site of the German silent giant UFA and originator of the great

Expressionist and Weimar Cinema, into a cheaper version of Hollywood for the production of Hollywood product, boasting that it was the place where *Speed Racer* and *Inglorious Bastards* were produced. (*Bastards'* director Tarantino became so enamored of the site and vice versa that there is now a Tarantino Strasse in the studio, next to the Lang and Murnau Strasses.) *Screen International* boasted that the German government's "rich regional and federal funding schemes" were "efficient, transparent, and unbureaucratic," in other words, that the government was practically giving away its \$67.3 million in grants, to encourage foreign production (May 2010, 63). And the effect on the indigenous industry as it becomes more a way station for commercial production? The Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov, at Cannes with *Exodus: Burnt by the Sun 2*, a film whose narrative follows the Soviet General from the first *Burnt by the Sun*, a Cannes prizewinner, this time detailing his plight in the Red Army during the Second World War, complained at the festival that the reduction of the once mighty Russian film industry to a subordinate producer of short term market product had a deleterious effect: "People have lost the habit of working on long projects. They've become used to making music videos and commercials...So it was very difficult to form a crew" (*Hollywood Reporter*, May 15, 6.) (The final indignity forced on the director was that his more leisurely art house length for the film of three hours was ordered by its European distributor, Wild Bunch, to be cut by half an hour for a Europe whose attention span is now being shortened by Hollywood commercial product.)⁶

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, EXHIBITION: SEE NO EVIL, HEAR NO EVIL, SPEAK NO EVIL

Richard Porton's excellent anthology on the film festival sees the always underlying purpose of the festival as product distribution and Cannes,

⁶ A huge controversy at Cannes this year involved this interpenetration, in the idea that a television mini-series, *Carlos*, based on the 1960s assassin/revolutionary, directed by a French "auteur" Olivier Assayas, would play on the Croisette, a place delegated to high art films. Even more controversial was the distribution scheme, with the film appearing in its first installment on television, Canal Plus, a few hours after debuting at the festival, in both arenas in a five-and-a-half-hour version, then later in the summer appearing in French theaters in a three-hour version. The problem though was not so much that the work was made for television but that it was not very good television, rather than say on the caliber of *The Wire* in the American context, much more on the level of a highly charged "explosive" mini-series that is mostly bombast and that used to star Richard Chamberlain. (Yes, it's a European *Thornbirds* with trashy politics instead of trashy morals.) As to the film version, which *Le Monde* called "electrifying" (July 7, 2010, 22), *Liberation* noted that the three-hour version was not a scintillating new experience, but a way of trying to lure an audience into the theaters to see it since it had not only screened on television but had also already been released on DVD as well in the five-and-a-half-hour version.

rather than being no exception, is the most potent festival vehicle for fostering film diffusion. "Typically 10 days in Cannes denotes raising a few hundred million dollars. You can accomplish in a week what typically takes six or nine months in terms of deal construction" is the way one producer, Graham Taylor Head of WME Indie Division, explained it to *Variety* (May 10-16, 10). In which case much of the activity of the festival, the competition, the prizes, and the overt politics, is about raising consciousness of the film to the point where it will get a distributor or secure distributors for territories that it has not yet conquered.

The festival, as noted has a past political history and France itself is always highly politically charged so as usual this year there were many political controversies circulating around the films. French and Italian right wing political formations did all they could to raise the bidding price of Rachid Bouchareb's *Hors La Loi (Outside the Law)*, about the Algerian war of independence, and the aforementioned *Draquila*, on Berlusconi's political grandstanding. Bouchareb's film puts for the first time on the screen, right up front in the film's second sequence, the French massacre of Algerians at Sétif on May 8, 1945, VE day, where the Algerians marched to achieve their own liberation as they had aided the French in achieving theirs from the Nazis. The UMP (the party of Sarkozy) representative from the Cannes region, Alpes-Maritimes, declared, sight unseen, that the film distorted history and the day of its presentation, the entire area (Cannes, Nice, Antibes), one of the landing spots of the self-exiled French Algerians, the pied-noirs, was a marching site for first the right and then later some Algerians chanting "FLN," the name of the independence party. The last word was probably had by the director, Bouchareb, who when asked at the press conference why he showed the massacre replied essentially, "What am I supposed to do, make a pro-colonial film?" On the Italian side, the Minister of Culture, Sandro Bondi, boycotted the festival because he said *Draquila*, which includes a lengthy segment on Berlusconi's ties to organized crime, a significant topic at the moment in Italian politics, should not have aired at Cannes because it promotes a negative image of the Italian leader. (Interestingly, in its urging of media censorship, the Berlusconi right almost never refutes the charges leveled against it. It simply takes the tack that to expose these connections is "indecent".)

Another controversy centered around jailed cineastes Jafar Panahi and Roman Polanski, one imprisoned by the Iranian government for supposedly planning a film about the current cultural revolution that ignited after the contested elections, the other under house arrest in Switzerland as the US

tries to extradite him for an action that the victim had forgiven him for, and both the subject of petitions urging their freedom. *Le Monde* editorialist Franck Nouchi pointed out that progress had been made in the world because at the moment only two repressive regimes, Iran and the United States, were still in the habit of jailing filmmakers (May 14, 2010, 22). The last word though on politics as aid to distribution was Russell Crowe's well timed comment that "If *Robin Hood* were alive today, he would concern himself with media monopoly" (*Liberation*, May 13, 25) which, given that this Robin is the least rebellious and most conformist Hood in history—the excuse is that the film is a prequel, that is before *Robin* became a brigand—might be turned back on its issuer to mean that *Robin Hood's* "concern" this summer was not with dismantling but with promoting the media monopoly of the global conglomerates. (More provocative was Kate Blanchett's (Maid Marion's) comment (*Hollywood Reporter*, May 13, 55) that "I always wanted to be Robin. I really wasn't interested in the maiden in distress.")

The film festival, and particularly Cannes, is also a vehicle for promoting related industries. The Cannes red carpet is important for the fashion industry where it functions somewhat akin to product placement in films themselves. "You have 10 days to rock the red carpet with the most expensive jewelry and outrageous couture gowns" according to ex-Gautier model, now Cannes fashion producer, Alex Huynh. "The free publicity is worth more than any window display in the best department store and allows labels to reach the customers even faster now via the Internet" is the way a *Woman's Wear Daily* correspondent explained the "synergy" (*Hollywood Reporter*, May 13, 52). At the blatantly commercial level, there are characters like Oscar Generale, profiled in *Independent Film Quarterly*, the self proclaimed King of Product Placement: "When I close a deal with a celebrity to be a brand ambassador it brings huge satisfaction and excitement: like with Bruce Willis for Cesare Paciotti, Sharon Stone for Salvini jewels,...Paris Hilton for Damiani, Asia Argento for Miss Sixty... (18-19)." Generale is now bringing that same "excitement" (or superficial reduction of all content to selling) to film production, working on a star vehicle with Kevin Spacey on the Jack Abramov scandal called *Casio Jack*. On the very highest level of the festival, there was, this year, the Tim Burton led jury. Burton himself, in his 3D *Alice in Wonderland*, being the first Hollywood entrepreneur to boast top design houses using his film as a runway for new designs, and at the festival searching frantically to award films that leaned away from social conflict, which after all can be a detriment to marketing, such at the Grand Priz winner, *Uncle Boonmie*, a meditative reflection on death, or, in Burton talk, a film which embraced the magical, and Mathew Amalric, best director for *Tournee*

about a troupe of over the hill and over the top burlesque artistes (a film most critics at the festival panned) while completely ignoring problematically nostalgic but incredibly well acted working class fare like Mike Leigh's *Another Year*.

In terms of resistance at the level of distribution, there were two main routes that surfaced. One is distribution's Other, Piracy. The 3D process itself is designed as a way of combating the taping and selling of commercial product and, lest the industry think this is a problem confined to China, in Spain, very hard hit by the financial crisis, with unemployment over 20%, the taping and selling of commercial product caused a sales drop in theater tickets and DVDs in 2009 of 34%. (Perhaps, "If Robin Hood were alive today," his merry band would be selling pirated copies of Russell Crowe's *Robin Hood* as a way of raising money to oppose media conglomeration.) Godard pointed to the contradiction inherent in this privatization of creative work when he responded to a question on the distribution scheme of his entry at Cannes, *Film Socialisme*, by saying that "There's no such thing as intellectual property, there's only intellectual responsibility," a response that completely perplexed *Variety* (May 5, 8). Godard also disrupted the Cannes measured distribution scheme with his film by first creating a four minute synopsis which played on *YouTube* prior to the film's screening and then making the film available as a Video on Demand the same day as its screening. The veteran director also refused to come to the festival, with his refusal a public relations gambit that generated perhaps as much publicity as if he had come. He sent in his stead French philosopher Alain Badiou, who lectures an empty hall on a cruise ship in the film, and who walked the red carpeted steps of the Palais being greeted with the same fanfare as Russell Crowe, with his new book, *The Communist Hypothesis*, not being an exploitative but a legitimate questioning of not exactly how we can rob from the rich and give to the poor, but how we can halt the institutional robbery of the poor by the rich in the wake of the belt tightening after the economic crisis through a spirited rethinking and new application of the principles of Marxism.

THE FILM'S THE THING WHEREIN WE'LL CATCH, THE CONSCIENCE OF THE CEO

Cannes is of course a perfect place for understanding how this supersaturation of the consciousness of the market is affecting the films themselves, or the "product." Let's take for example Argentine veteran director Pablo

Trapero's *Carancho*, featured in *Un Certain Regard*, about an on-the-skids lawyer, Sosa (Ricardo Darin), an ambulance chaser who meets a young inexperienced EMT doctor, Lujan (Martina Guzman), two people trapped amid Buenos Aires' daily carnage who are trying to do their best. (Sosa's lawsuits against the insurance companies are explained as the victims' only chance of redress in an inhuman system.) Trapero is a brilliant director; *Crane World* his first film, about the dignity of a migrant construction worker, was the best Ken Loach film Ken Loach never made and *El Bonaerense* is a systematic laying bare of the corruption and brutality at the heart of the Buenos Aires police force, one of the most violent in the world. He is also a product of the New Argentine Cinema, whose force at least in part comes from directors responding to the economic crisis of the early part of the decade and of one of the world's great film schools and of a thriving live theater, both of which breed filmmakers. Yet here is Trapero remaking his film to have it play for the wider global audience in a way that is dictated by the market rules established by Hollywood. What Argentina offers, boasts director Daniel Burman in a *Variety* special on the Argentine Cinema, is the ability to mesh "market appeal with auteurist sensibility," to compete with Hollywood using "maximum script potential and...good image quality and sound" (director Diego Rafecas whose latest film is a drug drama *Paco*). The idea is for Argentina to enter the world of the global blockbuster; as producer Mariano Llinas describes it "...every year there is a film that is original, something that must be talked about and that once again changes the parameters of making of films" (May 15, A7). Unfortunately *Carancho*, which adopts aspects of the blockbuster formula, is not that film. It uses Argentina's new global star, the lead in the Academy Award winner *The Secret in Their Eyes* Ricardo Darin, and it mixes him in a film that begins as a socially conscious essay on the poor and Argentina's health care system but then switches, presumably because the global blockbuster formula demands it, to a routinized gangster film in the last quarter as Sosa's debts and creditors get the best of him culminating in a final scene that is supposed to be "edge of your seat" shocking but just feels out of touch with the small, quiet film that began talking about the victims of this system with such patient insistence. A similar distortion happens with the already discussed Algerian film *Outside the Law*. The film purports to be a kind of *Battle of Algiers* on the French home front, about the bringing of the war by the FLN to France. However, the look, iconography, and character relations often instead take their cue from the far more mundane *American Gangster* and reduce the social meaning of the film to a series of bombastic Hollywood gun battles, a clear adapting of the film to market demands imposed from without.

Elsewhere, in the Quinzaine de Realisateurs, Mexico's *Somos lo que hay* (*We Are What We Are*), a first time film by Jorge Michel Grau, clearly is indebted to Sweden's wonderful mix of social realism and horror, the Vampire adolescent film that in a new way gets at the malaise and daily depression of the lives in Sweden of ordinary people, *Let the Right One In*. However, when the genre travels, much is lost in translation, and *Somos* quickly sheds its attempt to lay bare the life of a poor family in Mexico City and becomes merely a second rate cannibal, zombie, vampire film. So the omnipresent Hollywood generic formula reworked so effectively into the social problem film in the Swedish context, in the Mexican, obliterates the social conditions that generate the family's cannibalism, and instead of the film laying bare the problem of Mexico City's poor, ends up as just an unintended plea for vegetarianism. More unsettling, because more dialectical, was the Quinzaine entry which won the Camera D'Or prize for best first film, *Ano Bisiesto* (Leap Year). The film is about a lonely indigenous woman in Mexico City who strings together a series of sexual encounters, each one becoming more violent and degrading, as a substitute for a communal life that in the modern city is being eradicated. The film features the acting and the body of first timer Monica Del Carmen, from the rebellious region of Oaxaca, whose indigenous frame appears full force on the screen as if for the first time, reminding one of last century's first depiction of the indigenous body in painting on the part of the muralists, Riviera, Siqueiros and Orozco. "When I arrived in Mexico...I looked at the television and I saw the game shows presented by the grand blondes with the German physiques, which was nothing like the people I saw in the street," said director Michael Rowe who is from Australia (*Le Monde*, June 16, 20). The problem is the crossing of the sadomasochistic element of the young woman's existence, clearly a market gambit, as a way of discussing her alienation. The disturbing question the film raises though is not, How far will she go?, as the film's publicity would have it, but rather, Is this drawing of the indigenous body and spirit into the more diseased forms of late capitalism a way of critiquing that form or part of the process of the colonizing of that population by introducing those forms into it?

There were though a number of films at the festival that were resistant, in the sense of opposing the dominant order by summoning up forms of struggle outside the contemporary media complex, outside the spectacle, and these also tended to oppose that order with older aesthetic forms. The first of these could be classified as the art/social problem film, using the long history of the cinema, from expressionism to neo-realism, to raise questions about the contemporary global order. The best of these, awarded the Jury

Prize, essentially third prize, in the main competition, was the African film from Chad *Un Homme Qui Cri* (badly translated as *A Screaming Man* instead of as *The Man Who Cried*). It is important to make the point that Mahamat-Saleh Haoun's film is about twin plagues that are devastating Africa and attacking its collective will, war *and* privatization. The film is about a 60-year-old former swimming medalist, Adam, nicknamed Champion, who loses his job as a lifeguard at a resort that is being bought from the state by a conglomerate which is quickly rationalizing the labor force by firing the father and replacing him with his young assistant who happens to be his son. The father then enlists the son in the omnipresent war to keep his own job. The film in its detailing of the old man's degradation at losing his place as Champion lovingly recalls Murnau's *The Last Laugh* and Emil Jannings' proud head bellman at a grand hotel and his agony at being made obsolete. The tragedy of the war takes over the second half of the film and it becomes a bit more predictable but it ends with a quote from Aimé Césaire restating Adam's sad lesson that with these twin evils raging, you cannot be a spectator in life. You must actively oppose them. Also admirable in this vein were *Illegal*, from Belgium, a finely detailed examination of the crime not of illegal immigration but of a degrading incarceration and deportation system which confines a woman from Eastern Europe trying to make a better life for herself and *Miranda Invisible*, a fascinating psychological study of the effects of Argentine fascism in the time of the dictatorship in the same vein as *The Secret in Their Eyes*, by Diego Lerman (*Suddenly*), about the sexuality of a young female school teacher distorted and contorted under the last days of a hyper-masculinized military rule under the dictatorship.

A second moment of resistance came from the art film, films that attempted either through their pace, subject matter, or way of treating that subject matter to carve out a time or space other than that dictated by the market. The Grand Priz Winner *Uncle Boonmie Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, is Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul's slow and magical inhabitation of the parting reveries of both a dying man haunted by the Southeast Asian War, "I've killed many communists," and his equally aging sister haunted by her own sexual predilections and fetishes, the most startling of which appears to her in the guise of a phallic fish. This kind of reverie which questions one's actions in maintaining the power structure, as opposed to bland nostalgia, is not something capitalism dotes on. Recognized though as equally outside the mainstream market was French veteran director Bertrand Tavernier's *The Princess of Montpensier*, a lovingly recreated amorous history set in the time of the Protestant/Catholic wars, played this time as tragedy as opposed to Tavernier's satirical previous "cape et epee" (swashbuckler)

La Fille de d'Artagnan (1994).⁷ *Variety* recognized the film's outsider status, including its indulgent length at 2 hours, 19 minutes, hailing it for its non-commercial 'bravery': "...there's no sense here that the pic is straining to be relevant to the present...There's no subtextual allusion really to contempo France or civil wars anywhere in the world today, just the feeling that this is an interesting story in its own right, fascinating precisely because it's so at odds with modern sensibilities" (May 17, 30). What in more activist times one might reproach for its asceticism, here, in a moment when the past must be drained of all meaning in order to be immediately grasped in terms of its commodifiable link to the present, the film's hermeticism is a sign of its market refusal, of its taking the time to situate itself. The last word though on art house resistance to commodification may have been Terence Malick's no show. He simply did not finish *Tree of Life* on time and did not rush to accommodate the market.

Finally, there was the specifically political film, treating a contemporary political question, which does now begin to feel like an older form. Yet, there is still life in the form, not in the only American entry in the competition Doug Liman's *Fair Game*, a well-acted, by Sean Penn and Naomi Watts, piece of fluff about the Valerie Plame affair, her being exposed by the White House as a CIA agent, where ultimately nothing more seemed to be at stake than the perturbation of a bourgeois household, but in Ken Loach's *Route Irish*, despised by critics as an incompetent thriller, about the privatization of the military in Iraq. Loach continues a theme he explored startlingly in *It's a Free World*, the corruption of British working class solidarity by the values of the neo-liberal market, here transferred to contract soldiers attempting to make their fortune by starting their own company in Iraq. The film exposes the horrors and the inefficiency of torture and ultimately refuses to exonerate its working class mercenary lead character in the way that Liman's Jason Bourne is an ultimately noble US intelligence agent in the Bourne trilogy. This fidelity to the logic of the subject matter rather than making it conform to the requirements of the Hollywood genre is partly responsible for why Loach makes a "thriller that doesn't work." It's not Loach's direction that doesn't work. It's the formal conventions of the thriller itself which cannot allow for the irredeemable guilt of its mercenary protagonist and which must by its prefab rules ultimately romanticize that character.

⁷ For an interesting take on the difference see the interview with the film's duel expert, "Entretien avec Alain Figlarz: Les combats de La Princesse de Montpensier," by Hubert Niogre, part of an excellent dossier on the "cape et d'eepe" film in *Positif*, July-August, 2010.

DIALECTICALLY YOURS

It was in fact a series of documentaries that seemed to best carry on the idea of immanent critique either in their content, *Inside Job*, or their form, *Gaslands/Draquila*. The financial crisis was the subject of a number of films. The documentary rendering of the fall of Lehman Brothers and the rise of Goldman and Morgan, all pseudonyms in the film, was by far the best aspect of the otherwise clunky Oliver Stone sequel *Wall Street – Money Never Sleeps*. The revelation of the festival though and the best single document I have seen, heard, or read as a detailed explanation of the financial crisis is Charles Ferguson's extraordinary *Inside Job*, which painstakingly, immanently, uses the testimony of industry insiders to construct a devastating tableau of all the parties that contributed to the grand illusion keeping the financial markets afloat, most spectacularly including the business press and the supposedly neutral academic institutions. Ferguson's interview with the dean of the Columbia Business School, Glenn Hubbard, is one of those gorgeous moments in journalism when a political actor who has never been adequately questioned is exposed, resulting, in this case, in that actor throwing up his hands and demanding that the questioning be stopped. Also wonderful were the aforementioned *Draquila*, with Berlusconi's political posturing traced not only through standard documentary interviews of the townspeople of Acquila but mixed with the director Guzzati's own transgender Berlusconi impersonation where she postures much like "the great one," and Josh Fox's *Gaslands*, about how omnipresent drilling for natural gas is slowly but inevitably destroying drinking water in the United States, told as a personal odyssey by Fox, a Pennsylvania riverside landowner who wants to know what will become of his water supply as a result of the very intrusive process of drilling, called "fracking," both of which cross elements of standard documentary with the more personalized essay form of Michael Moore.

Finally there is Godard, whose *Film Socialisme*, even the title returning a word banned in the U.S. to auteurist prominence, was the most startling illustration of how the might of the image making media can be turned against itself. The film, which Godard maintained was done by a collective, recalling the heady years of the Dziga Vertov group, is about many things; the leisure industry and its place in commodification, the post-World War II history of Europe, Africa's lost place in globalization. The aforementioned Badiou appears along with Patti Smith in the first segment of the film which takes place on a cruise ship, highlighting Europe's position with the U.S. at the top of the leisure industry food chain. Badiou lectures to an empty hall

about the politics of geometry versus algebra, with no one on the actual cruise ship taking time away from gambling and shopping to hear him. The cruise ship segment of this three part essay is a wonderful condemnation of the leisure activities of a class whose hedonism is simply another boring way of passing time and making money for someone else. It employs the device of the tourist's home video both to highlight its narcissistic place in the leisure industry and to point to how the democratic spirit of the medium can be renewed. The second section is less focused and far less successful. It harkens back to the collective days of *Le Gai Savoir* and the second half of *Weekend* with a group of women, children and a llama at a gas station. The llama steals the show and seems to be much more coherent in his/her critique of oil and natural gas than the other members of the collective, posing as he/she does next to a gas tank which is acting to make him/her extinct. Best other immediate gem in this section is one of the young women, accessorized to the max, with no discernible affect except a marketed beauty, reading Balzac's *Lost Illusions*. The third part returns to Europe in a critique embracing the history of the cinematic medium, where Eisenstein's *Potemkin* first stands as a Utopian moment of cinematic and social salvation and then, as an icon of the Russian Revolution, is used as a contrast to Europe after World War II where the U.S. liberation from fascism is seen not as a liberation at all but as the beginning of a new domination that leads to the current fiscal malaise. The film ends with a stenciled NO COMMENT, designed to provoke the audience into thinking for themselves about the contemporary situation; thinking with, but also beyond, the barrage of images hurled at them each day. The formal experimentation here also embraces the extradiegetic (outside-the-text) convention of sub-titles. Godard's three-word "translations" from the French are a reduced conceptual rendering of the dialogue instead of a literal translation. The tripartite condensation recalls the three parts of the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic (broadly, thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis) as well as suggesting that speech is constantly reduced in this society to advertiseable bits, i.e., sound bites. Beyond a provocation, Godard's thinking of, about, and in images suggests new ways that Hollywood's "dictatorship of technology" can be refashioned in the service of its own liberation.

Which raises the opening question again, the question that the film festival and Cannes in particular poses so presciently, about the ability to halt, modify, or alter from within or without, the commodification process. In the case of Godard himself, is his cinema an indication of a path through and beyond the corporate dominance of the image, or is he, as Adorno said in the Hollywood of the 1940s about Orson Welles, simply the exception that

proves the rule, the one who is lionized as the truly free individual whose “freedom” is the mark and the sign of a global confinement, a freedom that is allowed to fully exercise itself only because all those around it are in chains, too blind, and afraid to take off their 3D glasses?

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