

JUST SOME OF THE WAYS TO SHOOT A STRIKE

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JUST SOME OF THE WAYS TO SHOOT A STRIKE: MILITANT FILMMAKING IN FRANCE FROM ARC TO THE GROUPE MEDVEDKINE

Il y a des mots qu'on souhaiterait ne plus lire...peuple, pauvres, révolution, usine, ouvriers, prolétaires. (There are some words that we no longer wish to read...the people, the poor, revolution, factory, workers, proletariat.)

— Jacques Rancière, 2003

In the Anglophone consciousness the idea of a political French cinema from the '60s and '70s is attributed almost solely to Jean-Luc Godard or a few films that took politics as their subject i.e. narratives of political intrigue. And yet the period between 1967 and 1980 saw no dearth of political production, in fact there was an explosion of militant cinema that has unfortunately been left almost entirely untouched, not only in English language film studies, but until recently in French film studies as well. This largely overlooked period of immense contemporary cinematic relevance needs to be mined today, not only to fill in this unaccounted for lacuna in the history of French cinema, but to redress perhaps the most risible irony of all, that *cinéma militant* itself sought to “reassert forgotten or repressed history.”¹

In 2004 *CinémAction* published its 110th issue entitled “Le Cinéma Militant Reprend le Travail” (Militant Filmmaking Gets Back to Work). Guy Hennebelle contributed an introductory essay to the issue, published shortly after his death, whose title posed the question *Si ce n'est plus l'heure des brasiers, c'est peut-être celle de la reprise* (If It Is No Longer the Hour of the Furnaces, Perhaps It Is That of the Reprise). *CinémAction* was Hennebelle's creation and this issue was the fourth number of the journal to deal explicitly with militant filmmaking. The inaugural issue, published in 1978 as a special edition of the film revue *Écran* was itself on militant cinema, and already offered a kind of balance sheet and interrogation à la “where are we now/what is to be done?” So in 2004, while on the one hand reminding its reading public of the rich history of militant filmmaking in France, *CinémAction* was equally reminding its readers of how contentious such a project was: Hennebelle's suggestion that it was no longer the “hour

¹ Michael, Ryan, “Militant Documentary: Mai 68 Par Lui-Même,” *Ciné-tracts* 2. nos. 3-4 (Summer, Fall 1979:1-20).

of the furnaces”—meaning of course that the time of Gettino and Solanas’ Third Cinema had reached its limits—but perhaps the time of the “reprise”—an explicit reference to Hervé Le Roux’s 1996 documentary of the same name—meant that nearly forty years after the events of May ’68, militant cinema had still not found its resolution and in fact continued its history of being an aporetic project that was contested from its most nascent utterance. Le Roux’s *Reprise* (192 min., 1996) was a search through the militantism of the ‘68 generation taking as its conceit the image of a young female factory worker who had been caught on film for ten minutes refusing, in the most explicit terms, to return to work after the strikes of May 1968. The 10-minute film, *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder (The Return to Work at the Wonder Factory)*, was shot under the direction of IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques) students Jacques Willemont and Pierre Bonneau, as a documentary about the students and workers of the OCI (L’Organisation communiste internationale).² The fact that Willemont was working on this film within the framework of an IDHEC project was by no means an isolated or happenstance event. IDHEC, occupied during the strikes, had made common cause with Les États généraux du cinéma as well as a number of militant filmmakers and collectives. One of the most significant of these collectives was the Atelier des recherches cinématographiques (ARC), which was comprised of a number of figures, such as Jacques Kébadian and Jean-Denis Bonan who had been working in the margins of the film industry and who would go on to be well-known militant filmmakers, if not filmmakers tout court.

The filmmakers who would constitute ARC began to work collectively at IDHEC in 1963, when they were inspired to film a French miners strike. The rushes of this project were bought by the French trade union CGT (Confédération générale du travail) and may be found today in the CinéArchives at the PCF. This film, *La grande grève des mineurs* (25 min., 1963), although cited as being partially a collaborative project, is ultimately attributed to Louis Daquin. The film documented the strike that ran from March 1–April 3, 1963. Its structure is dictated by the chronological unfolding of the strike, and ends with a recitation of everything the miners accomplished and gained from the strike.

In 1967 the same students filmed a demonstration for the sécurité sociale that was finished with assistance from IDHEC. Jacques Kébadian and Michel Andrieu of the nascent collective began frequenting a group convened

² OCI was a Trotskyite group that split with the PCI (Parti communiste internationaliste) under the influence of Pierre Lambert (Pierre Bousset).

around Jean-Denis Bonan and Mireille Abromovici; Jean-Denis was an experimental filmmaker and his companion Mireille an editor.³ Bonan and Abromovici had been spending time at the La Borde clinic and were themselves close to Félix Guattari and CERFI (Centre d'Études de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelles).⁴ With this grouping, the idea emerged of a more formal collective. ARC was formalized during the final trimester of '67, and in the first trimester of '68 its members went to Berlin with members of the Trotskyite organizations LCR (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire) and the JCR (Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire).⁵ In West Berlin, the newly formed collective filmed the German student movement activist Rudi Dutschke and other members of the SDS which resulted in *Berlin 68* (41 min., 1968), the first formal creation of ARC.

During the events of May '68, ARC's approach to filming in many ways mirrored the events themselves: they employed a wildcat method. Just as almost every sector went on strike, from football leagues to textile factories, ARC quite simply tried to shoot everything. While the collective created films such *Nantes Sud Aviation* (30 min., 1968) or *Le Droit à la parole* (52 min., 1968),⁶ much footage from these shoots was sold to television and received cinematic exposure primarily from its unauthorized usage by Gudie Lawaetz in his *Mai 68* (190 min., 1974) and its authorized usage by Jean-Luc Godard in his *Un Film Comme les Autres* (120 min., 1968).⁷

³ Together these two, along with Richard Copans and other students from IDHEC would go on to found the militant film collective CinéLutte in 1973.

⁴ CERFI was established in 1965 by Félix Guattari and was a subgroup of the existing FGERI (Fédération des groupes d'études et de recherches institutionnelles) at the experimental La Borde clinic. The group's project was largely described in their publication *Recherches* which took as its guiding principal that the problems communist organizations were experiencing during that period were related to changes in global capitalism. The group was trans-disciplinary, publishing texts on, among others, psychoanalysis, ethnology, mathematics and political economy. CERFI continued to exist until 1987.

⁵ Many of those involved in this project would go on to be part of the Situationist-inspired Mouvement du 22 Mars.

⁶ *Nantes Sud Aviation* was made under the direction of Michel Andrieu and Pierre William Glenn and chronicles Nantes Sud Aviation's participation in the May strikes. *Le Droit à la parole* was a project undertaken by Andrieu and Jacques Kébadian which looked at the way in which the May strikes opened up spaces for participatory dialogue, focusing largely on the unity being forged between students and workers.

⁷ During an interview in January 2010 Michel Andrieu recounted the experience with Godard. "Near the end of May, we were in the old IDHEC, in an old studio. Godard, said 'Look, go to the lab, and grab me one minute every ten minutes. Don't choose, don't look, just do it totally randomly.' I was the one who was in charge of getting the footage, and I did try to stop at the end of the shots/sequences but in general I did what he asked. And it was a shock, both esthetically and ethically. It was for *Un Film comme les autres*, and everything that isn't shot by him is ours, everything that isn't in the interview. I understood something then that I hadn't understood before: it was the eruption of modern art in cinema, the aleatory, something that I had never imagined. I didn't realize we could not choose the images. I thought it was extraordinary to think that way." Interview with the author, January 11, 2010.

In 1997 Gilles Dauvé (a.k.a. Jean Barrot) opened his essay, “Out of the Future,” which would serve as the introduction to a revised edition of his and François Martin’s *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*, by saying: “One of the best films about class conflict is a 10-minute sharp and biting shot, taken on June 10, 1968 outside the gates of the Wonder factory—a battery-maker—on the outskirts of Paris.”⁸ Jacques Rivette referred to the film as the most interesting cinematic document to emerge from the events. Again, *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* was never intended to be a stand-alone film, rather it was part of a longer student production made within the framework of “reportages” at IDHEC. All that remains of that project, however, is the sequence originally titled quite simply *Wonder, mai 1968*, which showed the conditions under which a strike was ending and workers were being ushered back into the factory not only by the factory management but more dramatically by union leaders from the CGT. The sequence takes form as it focuses on a young woman who refuses to return to work, and a young male student who intervenes on behalf of the woman and her refusal.



⁸ Gilles Dauvé, *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (London: Antagonism Press, 1997), 1.

Le Roux said in an interview that he didn't consider *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* a piece of "cinéma militant."⁹ Regarding a militant film that belongs as much to "Cinema" proper as it does to militant politics, this sentiment may best be summarized by the often repeated cliché, "cinéma militant, cinéma chiant" (Militant cinema, boring cinema). There is something decidedly suspicious about such an approach, a persistent desire to separate politics and aesthetics that sees in every meeting of the two a tiresome tract, the implication being that if a film moves beyond the didactic, then politics must be absent. All of which casts some slight shadow of suspicion on the celebration of *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*. While the film certainly offers a quasi-empirical vantage on an aspect of the events, it is a film out of context, the documentary that was left undone. If on the one hand the film denounces the flaccid yet bullying policies of the CGT, it equally shows an unchanged isolation of the single worker's challenge before the collective. Equally, the young male student is dismissed by the workers when he admits that he doesn't work at Wonder. But if we remember the initial impetus of this project, in its unfinished entirety, the goal was to demonstrate unity between students and workers, and with *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, what we are ultimately left with is a man and a woman on the cusp of their prelapsarian drift into the post-68 miasma.

The issue is then not whether the film is a worthy document, certainly it is. *La Reprise* is an invigorating documentary to watch in the sense that it really depicts a woman screaming in the face of capitalism. It is in fact precisely this element that connects the film to the best *cinéma militant* made during and after the events: the priority given to women's voices, marginalized voices (in this case those who were in disagreement with the dominant position of returning to work), and an ability to connect the affective with the political. But ultimately the film is a document of failure that supports an ever-growing discourse around the failure of the events of May '68. What is absent, and what the film requires to retake its position as a politically militant film, is the historical context, or in more filmic terms what we could call the reverse-shot. Without the whole of the context of the film we have a shot without its then contemporary reverse-shot. One possibility in looking for a project that accomplishes this both historical and cinematic task is to turn to a militant project that solidified in March 1967 with the filming of the strike at La Rhodiaceta, referred to as Rhodia, in Besançon by Chris Marker and Mario Marret.

⁹ *Pour un cinéma éthique: Hervé Le Roux pour la reprise de son film Reprise*, <http://www.critikat.com/Herve-Le-Roux.html>

Produced by Chris Marker's SLON¹⁰ and eventually screened in March 1968 on ORTF's (Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française) show *Caméra III* (a show that was canceled after May 68), *À bientôt j'espère* (44 min., 1967-68) was the cinematic salvo that would initiate the creation of the Groupe Medvedkine Besançon. Groupe Medvedkine would initiate their project with a film entitled *Classe de lutte* (40 min., 1968), a film which sought to redress a number of perceived problems with Marker and Marret's *À bientôt j'espère*.

À bientôt j'espère came as the result of a request sent to Chris Marker by Centre culturel populaire de palente les Orchamps (CCPPO) director René Berchoud, which famously read, "If you're not in China or somewhere else, come to Rhodia; important things are happening here." The CCPPO was (and is; the center operates today under the diligent supervision of Roger Journot) a cultural center that had as its purpose the cultural initiation and cultivation of the local working class, and it had had a substantial history of involvement with marginal and militant artists.¹¹ The strike at the textile factory, La Rhodia, had already captured the imagination of the Parisian intelligentsia due to its particularly global demands. The workers were not interested solely in wage increases and hour reductions, they were demanding, quite simply, a better life, which in their mind was synonymous with the end of capitalism.¹² Marker responded to Berchoud's request, showing up with filmmaker Mario Marret, and the two began shooting.

À bientôt j'espère opens on a snowy Besançon as a number of men pick through piles of Christmas trees and a voice over announces that it is a few days before Christmas (therefore nine months after the March strike), just outside the factory doors of La Rhodiacéta. Georges Maurivard (Yoyo), a young militant strike leader, calls out to those who will listen to take a moment to hear about the tribulations of workers in Lyon. In these very

¹⁰ One year before the May events Chris Marker established the production and distribution company Société pour le lancement des oeuvres nouvelles, or SLON (also the Russian word for "elephant"). SLON was created in order to distribute the collective film project *Loin du Vietnam* (1967), which brought together a number of the luminaries of '60s filmmaking—including Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, Alain Resnais, Agnes Varda, William Klein, Claude Lelouch and Marker himself in support of the North Vietnamese during the American military involvement in Vietnam. SLON was set up in Belgium because of their permissive censorship laws (and because of France's particularly strict laws).

¹¹ See Micheline Berchoud, *La véridique et fableuse histoire d'un étrange groupuscule: le CCPPO*, Les Cahiers des Amis de la Maison du Peuple de Besançon, Cahier 5 (2003).

¹² With reference to these demands see Chris Marker's "Les Révoltés de la Rhodia," published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*. 123 (March 1967), in which he writes: ...(!)it is amazing to see to what extent the workers link immediate economic demands to a fundamental questioning of the working class conditions and capitalist society...It is not a question for these workers of negotiate, like the Americans, for their own healthy integration into society, but to contest this society and all the gifts of "compensation" it has to offer.

brief first moments, it is already too apparent how the chosen representational strategy of the strike will elicit an eventual negative response from the workers when shown the film. While Yoyo's speech is about solidarity as he militates for striking workers in Lyon, the image of Yoyo and the group of hapless workers listening to him unfortunately gestures towards an undoing of that solidarity. The appearance of those gathered around him is almost that of extras quickly brought together for the film so that Yoyo will have an audience.

À bientôt j'espère employs a primarily direct approach to documentary, largely composed of interviews, with a few concessions such as voice-over and the occasional montage of still images. Among the interviews in this film there is one that typified the aporia the film confronted, an interview that in hindsight made explicit the work that the Groupe Medvedkine would have to take on: the interview with two workers, Suzanne and Claude Zedet.

The interview takes place in the Zedet home, with Suzanne and Claude sitting together at the kitchen table smoking. Claude Zedet describes his work schedule and as he speaks, there is a close-up of his wife Suzanne, who timidly avoids the camera through a downcast look, as Claude describes how they barely see each other and remarks that when he comes home at eight, he wants to eat but Suzanne is ready to go to sleep. The interview continues this way: Claude speaks, Suzanne listens and is looked at. At one point Suzanne speaks, saying that working just to bring home money is useless and that she hates working for someone else, but Claude more or less interrupts her.

The segment is ultimately a study in minutiae of the film's problematic, which will be addressed and remodeled in the subsequent Groupe Medvedkine films. The content of Claude's speech is not itself the critical stumbling block: he clearly describes working-class life and makes sure that the viewer understands the toll it takes on his wife. He is conscious of the immense responsibility that falls on a mother, particularly a working-class mother. His wife is present; his wife speaks once, which gives the appearance of her voice being on the same plane as his own, suggesting that there is an equivalence of speech. But there is an impasse that points to an imbalance: it is a film, and the image of Suzanne makes clear that she has desires, that she wants to speak and so her speech is like Yoyo's call to action in the opening, where the image betrays the logic of the speech. The fragment of speech that we do get from Suzanne momentarily aligns her mournful stare with the power of the image when we hear her recount that she is working in a void, and that she doesn't like working for someone else. The problem

pointed to by Suzanne's sound and image is not *what* Claude says, but rather the fact that he speaks at all. His speech is an authorial, authoritative one, which by no means seeks to invalidate or undermine what Suzanne says, but on the contrary seeks to legitimize it, which forces the question: what power structures are in place at the level of speech and representation that require legitimation?

It is in this last question that one of the primary problems of *À bientôt j'espère* is revealed: Marker and his crew of sympathetic filmmakers create an immediate history and seek out marginalized voices to recount it, that is, they tell a story that is imperative to tell, but in the presence of the workers, it is still the filmmakers who tell it. *À bientôt j'espère* maintains the legitimizing voice of the author. Even if the majority of the film is dedicated to discussion by and with the workers of the factory, and even if in those discussions the author's voice takes second place through the *cinéma-direct* technique of the non-amplified, off-camera interviewer's voice, it ultimately only creates an illusion of the primacy of the workers' speech, and there is always a lapse back to the voice-over of the authors. Further, within the diegesis, the film replicates this very structure, i.e. within the structure of the marginalized history, the presentation of the history comes from the legitimized speech of those who normally speak, in this case, the men.

Much like *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, *À bientôt j'espère* is a document about failure, in particular the failure of the strikes. While these failures are on the one hand empirical facts about the strikes, the presentation remains deeply locked in a discourse that appears to seek out their failure and to exacerbate it by focusing on the way in which this failure is reproduced in daily life. The only moment that seems to inspire hope is the final interview with Yoyo, where a number of the workers are gathered around a table discussing why the December strike was unsuccessful. Yoyo turns to the camera as if turning towards the factory bosses and says, "À bientôt j'espère," Hopefully we'll see you soon. Her hope is historical, because from the historical vantage point, we know that *Classe de lutte* will follow, that is to say, this effectively is a reverse-shot.

Between *À bientôt j'espère* and the constitution of Groupe Medvedkine there is an illuminating document entitled *La Charnière* (The hinge, pivot, or turning point), which is an audio recording of the workers from La Rhodia responding to a screening of *À bientôt j'espère*. There is something decidedly telling about this document as merely a recording of voices. The importance of speech is brought to the fore and suggests that all speech must be put on

the same plane. The audio recording is only diegetic sound: no voice takes primacy over another, and no image can intervene to persuade the audience to lend more credibility to a particular speech. For a moment in the dark an entirely horizontal democracy is set in motion.

The criticism from the workers is aggressive as, one of them yells out, “The director is inept.” Another worker explains, “Our solutions, and we do have solutions, weren’t discussed at all,” or, “Chris is a romantic, he looked at the workers and the unions with romanticism.” The workers felt betrayed by the portrayal, and luckily their criticism didn’t fall on deaf ears. Marker responded to workers suggesting that as long as he was the one filming he could only be a sympathetic observer; the workers needed to be the ones creating the films. And so he gathered a group of filmmakers and technicians to teach the workers at Besançon, over the course of six months, on weekends and evenings, how to use film equipment. The workers would film themselves, the workers would represent themselves, and after Marker recounted the story of Alexander Medvedkin and his ciné-train, the first Groupe Medvedkine and the film, *Classe de lutte*, were born.¹³

Right from the opening, *Classe de lutte* sets itself against the deflationary opening of *À bientôt*. Sylvio Rodriguez’s ode to Che Guevara *La Era está Pariendo un Corazón* accompanies a soft-focus, black-and-white close-up of Suzanne Zedet, taken from Marker’s film, followed by a full shot of Suzanne crossing a room strewn with political banners, eventually arriving at a flatbed editing table where another woman watches a demonstration on the monitor. Then there is a Godardian intervention: a close-up of factory worker Georges Binetruy filming, matched with the sound of a bullet being fired and ricocheting. As the drama of Rodriguez’s song builds, the camera moves away from the women at the editing machine and pans up to a wall covered in the kind of graffiti that only French militants are capable of producing. A spray-painted paragraph written in cursive reads, *Cinema isn’t magic, it is a means and a science, a means born from a science and put in the service of a will: the will of the workers to free themselves*. Binetruy, the image of the working-class hero, crosses the frame, leaflets are printed, and one wonders if the pleasures of revolutionary activity have ever been filmed with such spirited and ludic clarity.

¹³ Alexander Medvedkin was a Soviet filmmaker who, with the support of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, was given three out-of-service train cars which he outfitted with editing facilities, a processing lab, and a screening room and the little space that was left over was dedicated to sleeping and eating quarters. For 280 days this ciné-train traveled into the Ukraine and Caucasus regions where the technicians produced films on the life of factory workers, miners, farmers, and peasants.

After the opening sequence of *Classe de Lutte*, we return to the Zedet home, where Claude works at a desk, Suzanne types, and their child draws. An off-screen voice asks Suzanne, "What are you doing?" She responds "I'm working for the cause." Her response already marks an explosive change. The home life looks industrious and spirited; both work, the three of them work. But the first to speak is Suzanne. Her timidity is by and large gone, the weight of listening to another person describe her is no longer a factor. She speaks for herself, and she speaks clearly.

The first image in *Classe de lutte* after the credits is a sequence not shown in *À bientôt j'espère* but from the same shoot: the interview with Claude and Suzanne, now talking about the amount of time they are able to give to the cause. Suzanne says she would like to militate more, but doesn't have the time. Claude concurs, she doesn't have the time. While it remains true that Suzanne's demeanor exudes timidity, she speaks, and these images, and this speech in the hands of Marker and the others, were left out. Here we see the importance of her speech, the importance of her speaking about the significance of revolutionary action in her own life. This sequence cuts to May 1968. Suzanne, in a black rubber trench coat and tightly cropped hair, is at a demonstration among workers. She yells, "We're not scared!" The film then cuts to Suzanne standing on a platform above the crowd addressing the people: "We can't accept this division. Until now we have decided to go on strike *together*, we have explained our demands *together*, we have spoken to management *together*, and we must continue our struggle *together*! If there's going to be vote, it has to be done *together*!"

This is not the Suzanne Zedet portrayed in *À bientôt j'espère*. This is a Suzanne empowered in a totally empirical way, and it is with this representation of personal and political change in the figure of Suzanne that the film shows how class interests and the coming explosion of group specific political struggles did not necessarily have to separate and that in fact they were, it appears, interdependent. These are the major strengths of the Medvedkine Groupe project: the indispensability of speaking for oneself, and the imperative of self-representation. The film represents the workers as they wish to be represented, because it is of course they who are doing the representing. Suzanne speaks for herself, by herself, but as she insists *together*, which is to say she speaks as a worker for the workers. This is not the mere inversion of a structural homology where woman has replaced man as the authoritative or imperious voice. What the film offers is an image in the service of radical egalitarianism. The great conceit that has to be made, when seeing these films in sequence, is that there is a radical transformation

of the individual directly corresponding to a radical transformation of social conditions. This transformation is exemplified primarily in *Classe de lutte's* narrative of a working-class wife and mother becoming conscious of the impoverished conditions of her daily life. The Suzanne of *À bientôt j'espère* is passive and grey, timid and self-doubting; the militant Suzanne of *Classe de lutte* is radiant, self-assured, and committed. She has become what appears to be a fully actualized militant.

Though Suzanne is the primary subject of the film, it is worth considering a few of the impressive formal qualities of *Classe de lutte*. To begin, Marker's imprint is more than apparent. It can be assumed that his influence was great, despite the protestations hurled at him in *La charnière*. There is voice-over, interview footage, many of the same elements that filled *À bientôt j'espère*. But where there was gravity in Marker's effort, even with his evident love for the people he films, there is now levity. The themes discussed are still the perennial themes of the world proletariat, but it is they who speak, who recount and who form. There is music, playful intertitles, a lengthy hand-held tracking shot along a brick wall (oddly reminiscent of the textured films of Jean-Daniel Pollet or *The House Is Black* by the late Iranian woman poet Forough Farrokhzad), inserts that have the mark of Godard, and a constant appearance of slogans. The use of stills, primarily industrial looking etchings, to accompany the recounting of Besançon's history, the series of shots of water, townsfolk, the various textiles produced, and the figures that correspond to production totals are all exciting demonstrations of a particular strain of materialist filmmaking. The director of *La Jetée*, moved by the imperatives of *cinéma-direct* to shoot with as much objectivity as possible in order not to obscure the subject with his own ideological residues, is formally trumped by the working-class of a town in Eastern France.

Before *Classe de Lutte* ends, we return to Suzanne for a final interview. She is in a dress, a little more formal than we are used to seeing her. Suzanne describes the trouble that she is having with her job as a result of her militancy. A series of letters from the company are shown in close-up, read aloud, and describe how Suzanne's pay is being cut. Still, she smiles. Vivaldi plays in the background (the same piece from Godard's *La Chinoise*). Suzanne explains that she no longer works in a void as a result of her militant work, even if she has taken a substantial pay cut. There are images of her with other women from the factory, images of her in a library, a brief interview with her as she drives. Suzanne speaks about Picasso; she compares him to Prévert, she says that she came to culture through the class struggle and that the first book she read that she loved was *The Mother* by

Gorky. This is the last we hear from Suzanne. Colette Magny's *La pieuvre*, a song about La Rhodiaceta, accompanies images of Suzanne during May '68. The final lyrics of the song are from Suzanne's address to the workers at the beginning of the film: "Until now we have decided to go on strike *together*, we have explained our demands *together*, we have spoken to management *together*, and we must continue our struggle *together*!"

And then a black screen with the words *à suivre* (to be continued).

What continues are the films from this group, the *Nouvelle Société* series and the formation of a second Groupe Medvedkine a little further north in Sochaux with the workers from the Peugeot factory notable for its militant history and violent clashes during the May '68 strikes.¹⁴ As these collectives dispersed, others were constituted: Cinélutte emerging in 1973 came out of the ARC tradition, Cinéthique made its own avant-garde montage creations that shared as much with the Situationist films as with the *Mechants Handicapés*,¹⁵ and then the video collectives took off. Meanwhile, French leftist political formations over the latter portion of the 1970s moved from Larzac to Lip and ultimately to Mitterand. While on the surface this trajectory appears to be a kind of leftist triumph, it is equally worth noting that each of these experiences points to a breakdown in class-based politics and toward a Foucauldian micropolitical approach. The struggle on the Plateau Larzac against a military base pushing local peasants off the land and the self-managed watch factory, Lip, were both projects that garnered widespread attention from left-wing activists in the '70s. In fact, the Lip factory in Besançon became something of a Lourdes for the left, that is many made the pilgrimage. But these projects also served as a symptom of an increasingly fractured revolutionary project. For instance Lip was not a party-based struggle and its political affiliations were manifold; there was no Lip party line. Again, these struggles along with the various and numerous cultural struggles appearing (gender, race, special needs community, gay rights, etc.) were for some leftist critics signs of a weakening universal class-based revolutionary program. And while the 1981 election of Mitterand at first seemed like a victory for the left (at the very least it put an end to conservative rule

¹⁴ For an original account of life at Peugeot Sochaux, Marcel Durand and Michel Pialoux, *Grain De Sable Sous Le Capot: Résistance & Contre-Culture Ouvrière: Les Chaînes De Montage De Peugeot*, 2nd, rev. & augm. ed. (1972-2003; Marseille: Agone, 2006).

¹⁵ *Mechants Handicapés* was the journal for the militant organization Comité de lutte des handicapés which formed in 1972 to organize for the special needs community. A number films were made in conjunction with this group including Sabine Mamou's 1976 super-8 *Ames charitables s'abstenir* and Cinéthique's 1975 *Bon pied, bon oeil et toute sa tête*.

that had lasted over two decades), Mitterrand's project soon revealed its fissures, for example, in a general inability to think about state-building outside of capitalist confines and more concretely by making common cause with Reagan and his nuclear arms strategy. With these general political shifts militant film production endured its own mutations, as for example its shift to the so-called *cinéma d'intervention*¹⁶.

With the development of video technologies, many collectives began using this relatively new tool to create inexpensive productions, while at the same time, those who had spent the '70s organizing and managing the distribution of militant films turned to distribution as their primary mode of operation. Perhaps the most glaring, if somewhat problematic, example of this would be Marin Karmitz, who moved from being the director of one of the most well-known militant productions, *Coup pour coup* (90 min., 1971), to producer, distributor and the owner of the enormous movie theater chain MK2.

While perhaps not all that one had hoped, it is worth remarking that *Reprise* was produced by Les Films d'Ici¹⁷, the founder of which was none other than militant cineaste, founding member of Cinélutte and former member of Révolution!¹⁸ Richard Copans. It would take almost thirty years for *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* to be given its deserved reverse-shot. In the closing words of Hennebelle's posthumously published article, "Suddenly Hervé Le Roux's *Reprise* announced that the work of mourning was finally over—Mitterrandism being in its last throes—and ...we could go back and think about that damned militant cinema and find some merit in it after all."¹⁹

¹⁶ Over the course of the 1970s and early into the '80s critics and filmmakers concerned with the future of what was predominantly referred to as *cinéma militant*, tried to reformulate the tenets and the aesthetic methods of that cinema. One of the principal moves was to look for new ways to designate such a cinema and *cinéma d'intervention*, *cinéma de contestation* or *cinémas de rupture* were just three of the possible terms under which this engaged filmmaking could be placed. In many ways, however, the films themselves continued to work in the same ways. In February 1980 in *Écran* N. 347 Abraham Ségal, apropos of his film *La vie, t'en as qu'une* (*You've Only Got One Life*), designated three areas of focus for the new political cinema: a focus on who is speaking, on the place from which they speak and an emphasis on the creation of an impure cinema. There is not much in these three positions to distance the new *cinéma d'intervention* from what had been called *cinéma militant*.

¹⁷ Les Films d'Ici represented on one hand a possibility for the creation of political works that found a larger audience, because the production company also distributed and produced somewhat popular auteurist films, thus opening up distribution possibilities for its smaller political projects. On the other hand the films produced by this company began to generate an increasingly personal documentary form that had perhaps politics as its theme but ultimately eschewed the issues of social and class relations that were of such importance to Cinélutte.

¹⁸ A hybrid militant organization that sought to merge Maoism and Trotskyism.

¹⁹ Guy Gauthier and Thomas Heller, *Le Cinéma Militant Reprend Le Travail. Condé-sur-Noireau* (Paris: Corlet Télérama, 2004), 18.

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