View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by Open Research Exeter

Love in the Time of Capital

Love, Cinema, Capitalism:

What is love? Or, more specifically, what does it mean to love? These questions underwrite Alain Badiou's In Praise of Love, a book-length interview from 2012 on that familiar yet fugitive concept. In this atypically humanist volume, Badiou interleaves philosophical and aesthetic thought with autobiographical rumination so as to revivify the idea of love as a necessary condition for subjective vitality – or, as his ontological system would have it, as a formal procedure on an order of magnitude with science, art, and politics. Here is the book's conclusion, which approaches a summative definition:

> To love is to struggle, beyond solitude, with every thing in the world that can animate existence. This world where I see for myself the fount of happiness my being with someone else brings. "I love you" becomes: in this world there is the fount you are for my life. In the water from this fount, I see our bliss, yours first. (104)[1]

Through the well-worn optic of psychoanalysis, love appears either as deeply insular and narcissistic or as fantastical camouflage for sexual desire. In Badiou's philosophy, which includes but is not limited to psychosexual forces, it begins to look subtly though meaningfully different. The difference is found in the stated content as well as in the form of that content's articulation. Love remains egocentric, but it also manifests as a kind of self-sacrificial narcissism, in a force that urges the lover beyond their individual seclusion. This is the materiality of love, what elevates it beyond desire, the fact that it involves the sustained commitment to another being in its totality and however that being might disrupt any kind of self-interest. The shifting pronouns suggest as much, in their movement from "I" and "my" through "you" and then to an "our" which finally becomes "yours." And if, in the phenomenal emphasis on seeing, to experience love is to experience visual beauty, here again

form reflects content. The sense of rapture that attends this description exceeds conceptual ideation in such a way that the appreciation of love seems to require some heightened degree of aesthetic attainment, necessitating something like an artistic or even poetic sensibility. That attainment and its concomitant sensibility are present here in the overflow of liquid imagery – and above all, in the metaphor of the "fount," perhaps best known as the titular embodiment of Eros in Henry James' novel from 1901. Indeed, love is too overwhelming a force to be described by philosophy alone, or at least by the philosophical logic for which Badiou is best known, and so it surges into the space of art, flooding through a borrowed metaphor to find its ultimate destination in a poem by Mallarmé. "In the wave you become," the book supplements this definition with a quotation, as though condensing the whole of its argument into a single apostrophic fragment: "Your naked ecstasy." (104)

While Badiou insists that theatre is the ideal genre for representing love of this sort, and though he punctuates his argument with poetry, with this essay I want to insist categorically that within our modern context another medium presents itself as the most likely form to exemplify an aesthetics of love as it has been approached here: namely, cinema. There are, to begin, technical reasons for this, as some of the medium's most influential theorists seem to have known all along. "In my opinion," André Bazin once reflected, "the cinema more than any other art is particularly bound up with love. The novelist in his relations to his characters needs intelligence more than love; understanding is his form of loving." (72) In cinema, where subjective depth can only be assumed beyond visible surfaces or inferred from choreographic action, the screen itself encodes those interpersonal relations suggested in that metaphor of the fount. This aspect of the medium enjoys further resonance in the psychical structures of spectatorship. According to Laura Mulvey, "the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego," and it is precisely this disjunctive relationship, between the ego and its object, "which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience." (10) In other words, the medium's innate narcissism stands in contradiction to its scopophilia, and the two can only reconcile by way of the fact that we of

the audience gaze lovingly into the faces of others on the screen precisely when they are doing likewise at each other, as though together in a boundless multiplication of desire. And this, the nigh-on communal bliss of love as encoded by the apparatus and committed to aesthetic form, is what we see in some of the most mesmerizing episodes of love from classical cinema.

Jean Vigo's L'Atalante (1934) is not only illustrative of cinema's claim to primacy for the representation of love; it also creates an aesthetic wholly consonant with Badiou and Mallarme's aqueous imagery and it does so in coherence with the terms subsequently proposed by Bazin and Mulvey. The plot is simple. Jean, working-class captain of the eponymous canal barge, lives aboard with this new wife, Juliette, and with two lumpen crewmembers. The couple, played by Jean Dasté and Dita Parlo, travel from the south of France and to Paris, turning a delivery route into an ersatz honeymoon, but their happiness is torpedoed by Jean's controlling jealousy. After a night in Paris, the two are separated, with Juliette being left behind somewhere in the city's industrial outskirts. With unknown distance between them, estrangement provides the conditions of possibility for the film's most enchanting scene, wherein the twinned influences of surrealist art and socialist montage combine into the very exemplar of Vigo's celebrated "poetic realism." Early in the film, Juliette recalls to Jean that she once submerged her face in a bucket of water wherein she was granted a vision of her true love. "I saw you before I met you," she tells him, producing a revised and outward-looking version of the Narcissus myth. In his desperation, Jean attempts to recapture something of that magic, and dives overboard into the River Seine. We are shown a static medium-shot in which he tumbles about under water. Dimly lit and dressed in black, Jean appears as a shadowy apparition, a dark force that casts off a thousand shimmering bubbles. He swims toward the camera, face first, floats upward out of the shot, then reappears swimming in from the left. As he begins disappearing out of view and to the right, with only the left leg of his tattered trousers remaining in the frame, a vision of Juliette appears: a medium long-shot, showing the entirety of her figure superimposed into the water on top of his much closer medium-shot. Arms stretched heavenward, or toward the water's

surface, she wears her white wedding dress and veil, which together billow in the depths. Again, Jean swims toward the camera, as though from behind Juliette, and she vanishes just as he crosses through the space she momentarily inhabited. Then, finally, two shots are double-exposed into one. Jean, who has reeled into close-up but remains obscured by shadows, looks about in every direction, not quite frantically but clearly searching, before he exhales a final breath and swims upward. Projected onto this and occurring simultaneously is the animation of Juliette's face, undisturbed by the water and brightly lit from multiple points – rather than submerged, her veil and tresses are lightly windblown. As the music builds, she smiles in such a way that lifts and lights her entire face, changing the character of every feature in a gesture that moves the shot beyond elation and toward ecstasy. It is this cumulative effect, the collapse of insurmountable geographic distance into a single stereoscopic image, that exemplifies love as we have heard Badiou define it – to be sure, it is tempting to suggest that the philosopher is reading Mallarme's fragment through Vigo's film.

Much more could be said about the technical aspects of this sequence: that it was shot by Boris Kaufman, brother to Dziga Vertov, whose influence looms large; and that its double-exposure unites bodies not only within frames, but also between frames via a kind of montage, thereby encoding the "animate existence" of lovers precisely as animation. This technical reading, however, would pursue an allegory without being sensitive to the deeper beauty of these images, which no amount of close analysis or technical description will ever make fully legible. Nevertheless, we should pause and historicize this aesthetic – and, in particular, the way cinema uses the modernity of its own form to engage that of its historical setting. If, in so much early cinema, locomotion and train-tracks would provide some reflexive vision of cinema's own industrial apparatus, here the canal barge similarly grounds Vigo's love story, and what Gilles Deleuze would call its "liquid perception," in a definite time and place. "In L'Atalante," reflects Siegfried Kracauer in like terms, "we experience with all our senses how strongly the fogs of the river, the avenues of trees, and the isolated farms affect the mind, and how the sailor's relationship to the city is determined by the fact that he looks at the lodgings perched on the quay from sea level." (48) And this, for Kracauer,

is what makes Vigo unique. "Instead of simply revealing the role objects may play in conditioning the mind, he dwells upon situations in which their influence predominates, thus exploring camera possibilities to the full." (49) The barge is an unequivocally working-class setting, the space of labor, and that setting defines the lovers to such an extent that their reconciliation coincides with the termination of Jean's employment. Moreover, during the lovers' separation, Juliette is forced by pecuniary need to leave the Parisian arcades for the factories, and eventually finds employment in a music shop. Their love, in short, stands in opposition to the economic conditions from and despite which it emerged, and that is one reason why its consummate form is so emphatically hydraulic. Or, as Deleuze interprets it, "a clairvoyant function is developed in the water, in opposition to earthly vision: it is in the water that the loved one who has disappeared is revealed, as if perception enjoyed a scope and interaction, a truth which it did not have on land." (Cinema 1: 167) It is because of this tendency – the irreducible materialism of a potentially idealistic story, only achieving its narrative victory as a hard-won triumph over the market – that Stanley Cavell describes cinema in general and cinematic love in particular as "inherently anarchic." In his formulation, our "unappeasable appetite for stories of love is for stories in which love, to be found, must find its own community, apart from, but with luck still within, society at large; an enclave within it; stories in which society as a whole, and its laws, can no longer provide or deny love." (225) That a bravura moment of stylistic attainment – such as the lovers' underwater dance, wherein fluidity encodes a type of material freedom – posits some social relation beyond the depredations of the market with its endless drudgery is exemplary of this appetite.

To love, in the cinema of industrial capitalism, is to enter a space beyond emotional gesticulation and inhabit that of material commitment. This commitment is what we see both tested and affirmed in other films released elsewhere during the interwar years, perhaps most notably in F. W. Murnau's Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (1928) and in Charlie Chaplin's City Lights (1931), two films wherein love is realized only provisionally and through acts of self-sacrificial generosity. What these films tell us, by showing love as something seized

against the economic terrorism of predatory bankers and abusive factory owners, is that its value is irreducible to that of the market – that, in short, love cannot be realized in profit. For this reason, love presents itself from within cinema as thoroughly incompatible with capitalism, a unique social relation to which the profit nexus is everything. That love articulated in such a way during the interwar years has as much to do with the historical moment as it with shifting tastes in narrative production. This was a period in which, despite or even because of a global economic downturn, there was a collective sense that things could be different and that love could and should be irreducible to the extant structures of immiseration. Indeed, Alexandra Kollontai sensed in this moment an opportunity for redeeming even those uttermost bourgeois of institutions, the marriage and the family, precisely in the abolition of capitalism. "Marriage," she hoped, "will lose all the elements of material calculation which cripple family life" and, once extracted from that economic structuration, it might become something other than the means of capitalist reproduction: "a union of two persons who love and trust each other." If, however, cinematic love is utopian in this very material sense, as a force conjoined to revolutionary immanence in antipathy to the standing social order, its potential realization will only acquire meaning in relation to its antithesis: "it is," writes Fredric Jameson of what he calls the utopian enclave, "an aberrant by-product, and its possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum." (15) The problem is, from the standpoint of the present, capitalism's momentum long ago arrived at its absolute plenum in the global form of what has been called postmodernism. There are neither eddies nor backwaters; only a surging river whose tide flows inexorably one-way.

In our age – the age of a multinational capitalism experienced as one vast universal market – such a utopian enclave seems unimaginably inexistent even as a possibility. Commercial cinema reflects as much. "It seems significant," wrote Theodor Adorno in 1951, "that in today's society with its artificially integrated fascist masses, reference to love is almost completely excluded." (137) In cinema, the great narrative medium of the masses, love

is either reified into a cliché of romantic chastity (think, for instance, of any film co-staring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan) or debased into something like mere carnality (in the art-cinematic money-shots of, say, Vincent Gallo, Gaspar Noé, and Michael Winterbottom). Or, in the case of Fifty Shades of Grey (2015) – a film whose market cynicism finds evidence in the fact that it was released on Valentine's Day – we encounter both of these devolved forms of love operating in perfect unison to produce a film that is simultaneously moralizing and debauched, thereby necessitating the new sub-generic descriptor of "mommy porn." If – as in the films of Vigo, Murnau, and Chaplin – love once sought to exceed capitalism's unreconstructed social relations, in subsequent films similar plotlines are modified to valorize upward mobility and the false reconciliation between otherwise antipathetic classes. Such is the exemplary case with one of the most successful and altogether paradigmatic romantic comedies of all time, Pretty Woman (1990), in which a corporate raider played by Richard Gere grooms a prostitute, played by Julia Roberts, so she can pass as his girlfriend for the benefit of his degenerate business associates. And yet, the manifest falsity of these films' commercial idealism only illustrates a simple truth: nothing that can be purchased or sold can ever hope to acquire the sustained passion, the everyday ecstasy, or the simple bliss of love so affirmed by Badiou's illustrious definition, suggested in Mallarme's image, or screened so improbably in those old films.

"Eros," wrote Deleuze on the changing face of cinema in the post-war period, "is objectively sick: what has love become that a man or a woman should emerge from it so disabled, pitiful and suffering, and act and react as badly at the beginning as at the end, in a corrupt society?" (Cinema 2: 6) The idea of a sick Eros makes sense within the context of any number of films and filmmakers, finding positive affirmation in the body-count love stories of Terrence Malik, the tragic melodramas of Ang Lee, and the beleaguered queer romance of Todd Haynes, Abdellatif Kechiche, Gus Van Sant, and Wong Kar-wai; enjoying twee recitation in the work of Michel Gondry and Sofia Coppola; and reaching something like its nadir in the moribund figure of Woody Allen. Nevertheless, a potential exception to the rule of love $\neq$ capitalism is within the sub-generic amalgam of disaster romance, wherein the

otherwise sentimental is counterpoised to the blunt force of catastrophe, as in the cinema of Alain Resnais, so as to renew love's vitality by threatening the annihilation of its subjects. That is what we see, most powerfully, in the opening minutes of Hiroshima mon amour (1959), when the embrace of two lovers shows their limbs coated in the metallic dust particles of what appears to be radioactive fallout, or what Davina Quinlivan describes as "macabre confetti." Nonetheless, this strategy of aligning love and catastrophe, allowing the former to draw renewed energy from the latter, has too been thoroughly commercialized, arriving at its apotheosis in another film about economically improbably romance flourishing whilst at sail – in a film that was, until topped by the director's subsequent effort, both the most expensive and the highest grossing production of all time. Indeed, we can conclude this provisional sampling of cinematic love stories by contrasting that exemplarily realized scene, from Vigo's L'Atalante, with the manifestly adversative ending of James Cameron's Titanic (1997).

Titanic dramatizes an affair between Jack Dawson and Rose DeWitt Bukater, a vagabond artist and a youthful personification of the old regime. While the narrative energy and character design – built around the casting of Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet – advocate for Jack and Rose's romance as an immaterial bridge across a truly abyssal class divide, the film's ending (itself an echo of Fritz Lang's Metropolis, 1927) puts lie to all of this as no more than the most baseless of liberal idealisms. After colliding with the iceberg, and when surrounded by a sea of cadavers, Jack and Rose survive on a makeshift raft with the appearance of a grand piano's lid. Whereas, in L'Atalante, Jean dives overboard hoping to access a vision of his lover against all odds and on little more than a superstitious hunch, in Titanic the very opposite takes place. Rose is atop the raft, and Jack hangs from its side, with only his arms and head above water, and there he rapidly freezes to death. As the wind section of Celine Dion's chart-conquering ballad begins to swell, Rose tells Jack's corpse that she "will never let go, I promise," precisely whilst snapping off his frozen grip, letting his body sink into the blackened depths. In startling contrast to the vitality of Juliette's smile, Jack is blue-white and already glazed with frost as he rapidly descends from view and never

to be seen again. Slavoj Žižek has exposed this moment to immanent critique, interpolating himself into a recreation of the scene. “What am I doing here,” asks the jittery philosopher from a small rowboat, “in the middle of the ocean, alone in a boat, surrounded by frozen corpses? I am in a scene from James Cameron’s Titanic, which is the supreme case of ideology in recent Hollywood.”[2] What makes this film superlatively ideological is the way it flirts with the idea of interclass love only to conjure that idea away as impossible – the way that, in Žižek’s analysis, the iceberg is internal to the love story and not the other way around. “The ship hits the iceberg,” he observes, “not immediately after sex but when the couple goes up to the open space and decide to stay together.” This is how economic ideology shades into aesthetics at a very practical level. As has been contested, from internet speculation through a dedicated sketch on Mythbusters, both Rose and Jack could have survived on that raft, which appears much larger than their two bodies. In other words, Jack’s death was the unnecessary sacrifice of a working-class subject, who dies not in some heroic gesture to save his lover but, rather, because it is impossible to imagine their shared happiness anywhere beyond this doomed vessel. When confronted about the banal horror of this ending, Cameron himself asserts the rule of necessary closure. “The script says Jack dies,” claims the director, “he has to die. Maybe we screwed up. The board should have been a tiny bit smaller. But the dude’s going down.” (quoted in James Hibberd) And so it is that, in an exemplary capitulation to the laws of capitalist realism and in a microcosmic reflection of scarcity economics, the market enforces its rule with unforgiving clarity, and love sinks into what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels once called the “icy waters of egotistical calculation.” That, it would seem, is the fate of cinematic love in the triumph of capitalism.

Interlude: Communists in Love

If the problem for cinematic love resides in the economy – in the apparent universality of capitalism, the global reign of the commodity, the polarization of classes, the rampant

egotism cultivated therein, and the accompanying reification of everything – then so too might a solution. This is how Badiou's thesis acquires its political edge. In his words,

> it will be easier to re-invent love than if surrounded by capitalist frenzy. Because we can be sure that nothing disinterested can be at ease amid such frenzy. And love, like any process in the search for truth, is essentially disinterested: its value resides in itself alone and goes beyond the immediate interests of the two individuals involved. The meaning of the word 'communism' doesn't immediately relate to love. Nonetheless, the word brings with it new possibilities for love. (173)

This suggestion makes good sense within certain genealogies of political thought, and has firm precedent in some of the more philosophical aspects of communist discourse. "Without factions in love," claimed Ernst Bloch, "with an equally concrete pole of hatred, there is no genuine love; without partiality of the revolutionary class standpoint there only remains backward idealism instead of forward practice." "Love," wrote Antonio Negri, "cements different beings together; it is an act that unites bodies and multiplies them, giving birth to them and collectively reproducing their Singular essence." (7) And yet, even if the word "communism" and a communist understanding of the collective together bring new possibilities for love from within the space of politics, or at least political philosophy, it remains much harder to make any such claim against the history of cinema. That is to say, although love might be experienced as something like a counterforce to capitalism, communist filmmakers have struggled to elevate this realization to aesthetic truth.

In the history of communist filmmaking, erotic love seems to exist only as an obscure sideline to the larger dramas of the collective – which tend to play out in the mass, multitude, or group – and most frequently as an ill-fated supplement to narratives of class struggle. This trend has its roots in socialist aesthetics, and specifically in the extirpation of conventional subjectivity from early Soviet filmmaking. Not a few thinkers and filmmakers have found in this antinomy a mirror of the capitalist subject's own struggles and despair. Walter Benjamin

is only the most influential to have recorded this dynamic, Soviet cinema's denial of what he refers to as "the themes and problems drawn from bourgeois life," which include romantic love of the sort that might have graced the Hollywood silver screen. "They won't stand for dramas about love," he reflects. "The dramatic and even tragic treatment of love is rigorously excluded from the whole of Russian life. Suicides that result from disappointed or unhappy love still occasionally occur, but Communist public opinion regards them as the crudest excesses." (15) While, in the immediately post-revolutionary films of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, there was no room for love or anything like it, those films only reflected an almost puritanical set of conceptions internal to revolutionary discourse at the time: in 1920, for instance, Lenin famously told Clara Zetkin that "the present widespread hypertrophy in sexual matters does not give joy and force to life, but takes it away." And so, extending left puritanism beyond the context of the socialist state, by the end of that decade the rigorous exclusion of love would be staged elsewhere as its own kind of satirical anti-drama. Directed by Louis Buñuel and co-written with Salvador Dalí, _The Golden Age_ (1930) is structured around a series of quasi-masturbatory sublimations, in which a bourgeois couple attempt to consummate their relationship but are repeatedly thwarted by the pillars of capitalist society – family, church, state – before that society descends horrifically into wholesale Sadean depravity. This film, to be sure, represents the communist take on love at its most critically suspicious but also its most reductive: love is either moral romance or base erotics, depending on the context, and one is always the grotesque counterpart to the other. Even if Buñuel's film might be exceptional in the sheer extent of its satire on bourgeois love (its only rival on this is Dušan Makavejev's deliriously bonkers _Sweet Movie_, from 1974), communist films that attempt reconciliation between love and collectivity ultimately succeed in the latter only at the expense of the former. From Soviet offshoots, like Dovzhenko's _Earth_ (1930) and Eisenstein's failed Mexican project, through the late modernism of Visconti's _La Terra Trema_ (1948) and Angelopoulos' _Travelling Players_ (1975), right down to Hollywood's own flirtations with revolutionary heroism, as in Steven Soderbergh's Che Guavara biopic from

2008: in all of these films, love presents itself as little more than a casualty of or a distraction from the revolution. It is treated with profound skepticism.

From the obverse angle, more conventional love stories set within the context of communism seem to hijack political radicalism and grind it down into the stuff of melodramatic pathos. That is what we see in the emotionally dilated outpourings of Sydney Pollack's The Way We Were (1973), Warren Beatty's Reds (1981) and Julie Taymor's Frida (2002), wherein collective action registers negatively as a threat to the desiring individual. These three films conform to, in words taken from Roger Ebert's review of the John Reed biopic, "a traditional Hollywood romantic epic, a love story written on the canvas of history, as they used to say in the ads." Perhaps most culpable of this reactionary tendency is David Lean's ultra-kitsch adaptation of Doctor Zhivago (1965), which not only presents love and revolution as two antipathetic forces, but in doing so reduces the revolution and its aftermath to a spectacular backdrop. Richard Roud is perfectly lucid in describing this aesthetic. "In the film," he claims, "the revolution is reduced to a series of rather annoying occurrences; getting firewood, finding a seat on a train, and a lot of nasty proles being tiresome." Capitalism fails love by reifying it into romance or pornography, and communist filmmakers struggle with love's representation because it is "drawn from bourgeois life," much like how bourgeois film presents revolution as a state-sized hazard to love – in cinema, it would seem, love always threatens to propel narrative back toward the nexus of capital, against which militant satire of the type mobilized by Buñuel might act as some final preserve. Perhaps, then, Badiou's clarification of his own suggestion, that communism offers new possibilities for love, is needed to make sense of why we are yet to see a productive interlacing of these two potentially synergetic things. "While we're about it," he muses, "we can also say that love is communist in that sense, if one accepts, as I do, that the real subject of a love is the becoming of the couple and not the mere satisfaction of the individuals that are its component parts. Yet another possible definition of love: minimal communism!" (90) This clarifying exclamation will need to be tested in cinema, a medium we have suggested was at some point apt to the task of love's representation, and there we will locate at least one exemplary film that knows

its place in the histories of both cinema and capitalism, and which brings us back to the philosophical conceptions and geographical terrain with which we began.

Bertoluci's Romance, Godard's Elegy

In the constellation of love and communism, the two only ever seem to eclipse one another's radiance, occluding whatever visions we might otherwise expect to witness orbiting over the terror firmer of our capitalist landmass. Communism and love thereby appear, at least on first glances and contra Badiou, as another irreducible antinomy. And yet, two communist filmmakers have expended heroic amounts of critical and aesthetic intelligence grappling with precisely that antinomy, seeking to ameliorate the apparent exclusivity of its terms with varying degrees of success. The first of these two filmmakers is the Italian director, Bernardo Bertolucci. As early as 1964, with <u>Before the Revolution</u>, Bertolucci was exploring the prospects of communists in love. This film – the style of which was influenced as much by Bertolucci's idol, Jean-Luc Godard, as by his mentor, Pier Paolo Pasolini – is focused on Fabrizio, a student unable to reconcile his bourgeois upbringing with the militancy of the Italian Communist Part and who engages in an incestuous affair with his aunt, Gina, before committing himself otherwise to a life of bourgeois domesticity. "Like many of Bertolucci's films," reflects Jonathan Rosenbaum, "this story struggles to reconcile Marx and Freud, played out in this case through Fabrizio's battle to reconcile his 'nostalgia for the present' with his Marxism, and his idealism with his class." In the end, Fabrizio chooses the ruling class. Nevertheless, the idea of incestuous desire as a locus for revolutionary love, a kind of minimal communism, also finds home in <u>The Dreamers</u>, from 2003, which tells the story of a ménage-a-trois, set in Paris during the riots of 1968. Matthew, played by Michael Pitt, is an American exchange student who meets Théo and Isabelle, twins played by Louis Garrel and Eva Green, during a protest against the firing of Henri Langlois from the Cinémathèque Française. The film explores the possibility of love as an act learned by Isabelle from the

French New Wave, whose greatest exponents learned it from classical Hollywood, or as an act learned by Matthew through a lifetime's immersion in bland Americana. While an enormous wealth of visual charm is to be found in how this film recreates scenes from its cinematic precursors, so much of that is justified narratively as an affectation born of financial security and social disconnection. That is to say, desire is confined to a domestic interior, insulated from the outside world by the twins' wealthy parents' apartment, and only in the background to this, beaming in through televisions and overheard from the street, is the coming insurrection. The film concludes when its three lovers are wrested from their isolation, that private enclave, by a brick hurled through the window. "The street came flying in the room," claims Isabelle. Confronted with real insurgency, Matthew withdraws and the siblings take up arms. Théo hurls a Molotov cocktail into a line of police and he and Isabelle hold hands before the paramilitary onslaught.

While this final gesture, with the incestuous lovers joining a failed revolution, might have the outward appearance of love as minimal communism, we must nevertheless disassociate our exploration from Bertolucci's project, which is more about romance than it is about love. This film stages both its Marxist and its Freudian drama within a cultural vacuum that has since collapsed back into the market. Its "nostalgia for the present" is manifest in an idealized recreation of May 1968, in aesthetic style no less than narrative content, as an event that is safely and ineffectually distant from the balance of political forces in 2003. Analogously, the narrative is economically as well as architecturally isolated from the political events of that moment. It obtains within the same kind of erotic interior that Bertolucci perfected three decades prior, with Last Tango in Paris (1972). So the director once reflected on the mise-en-scène of that earlier film: "it's a film that's built on the concept of the inside of the uterus. Not just the room. Marlon in fact makes a voyage back to the uterus – so that at the end he's a fetus. The colors in the film are uterine colors." (quoted in Jonathan Cott) The Dreamers holds to a similar paint-by-numbers color-coding – the apartment here is by turns fecal or menstrual – and in this way it articulates love as a flirtation with exogamous taboo. Moreover, it does all of this whilst using a visual form thoroughly

compatible with the market ideology from which its narrative seeks estrangement. If the formal nostalgia attaches itself to the French New Wave and in particular to the early films of Godard – one of The Dreamers' most joyous moments recreates the Louvre sprint from Bande à part (1964) – it almost goes without saying here that this is a mode of filmmaking Godard himself left behind, as emblematized by his public fallout with François Truffaut in 1973. "You say films are trains that pass in the night," Godard criticized Truffaut in particular and the New Wave aesthetic in general, "but who takes the train, in which class, and who is driving it with a management snitch at his side?" (Quoted in Jonathan Romney) It will, however, be in Godard's own late work – in a film also released in 2003, no less – that we find an almost perfect articulation of love as minimal communism.

From the very beginning, Godard's cinema has been preoccupied both with an exploration of political history and with the capacities of his chosen medium to simulate historical experience. That is what we first encounter in the New Wave films of the 1960s, set in a world mediated by Hollywood yet always ghosted by the French-Algerian War and by the influence of American imperialism. Since the Dziga Vertov Group, operational between 1967 and 1972, this preoccupation has evolved into a consciously Marxist approach to the events of the twentieth century as realized through a Brechtian commitment to re-envisioning the world along with the means of perception. This is what Jacques Rancière is suggesting when he argues that "Godard puts 'cinema' between two Marxisms – Marxism as the matter of representation, and Marxism as the principle of representation." Operating on either side of this duality, love has been an abiding commitment for Godard's cinema, registering as both a matter and a principle, as content and form. Though it is easy enough to cite narrative iterations of love as matter – the disquisitions from Alphaville (1965) and the sublimations of Hail Mary (1985) would only be the finest examples – more revealing of this commitment are Godard's descriptions of filmmaking as an act of love in and of itself. For Godard, love is what elevates cinema above comparable and competing media. "There is no film without love," he claims, "love of some kind. There can be novels without love, other works of art without love, but there can be no cinema without love." (132) Finally, before we approach the

film in question, there is good reason to connect Godard's view of love as a conditioning force with that of Badiou, with whom we began. Though it will be completely unsurprising that Badiou has mentioned Godard on multiple occasions, and that he dedicates some lengthy excursions to Godard's work in his essays on cinema, this relationship also exists at the heightened level of artistic collaboration. Badiou appeared in Godard's tripartite video production of 2010, Film Socialisme, in which the philosopher is shown – in another recollection of our various aqueous settings – lecturing on Husserl to an empty auditorium aboard a luxury cruise ship. And if, similarly to the oceanic vessels of Vigo and Cameron, this one served as an allegory for cinema's place within capitalist modernity, in 2012 that ship – the Costa Concordia – capsized off the coast of Tuscany, as though to confirm Godard's well-documented suspicions about various end-times, not least of which is the end of cinema itself as a technology anchored to an industrial capitalism rapidly being outmoded by its neoliberal, post-industrial, finance-driven successor.

It is on this, the irrevocable foreclosure of endings, that Badiou argues he and Godard are fundamentally different. Here we must confirm that Badiou's book on love borrows its title from the 2003 film that will bring this essay to its conclusion, In Praise of Love. When asked about this title, during the interview that makes up the book's content, Badiou replies with an account of Godard's cinema that will be worth quoting at some length:

> Godard has always inscribed in his films, from one moment of history to the next, what he considered to be the points of resistance and creation, and more generally everything that in his eyes deserved to enter the composition of an image. What is essential for him, I think, is to allocate love between a strong, puritan conception of sexuality and a really amorous tension located more often in women, so that all men face the challenge of joining them or accepting their authority on this point. […] I have admired close up his unique precision and his demanding stance. And it is love that is almost always at stake. Nevertheless, the melancholy that colours everything in Godard marks the difference between him and myself in terms of the connection

between love and resistance. I feel incurably distant from that subjective colouring, even when love is at stake. (99)

Godard's film is indeed melancholic in a studiously psychoanalytic sense, insofar as its narrative fragments seem governed by the premature mourning for an object before it is lost, which in this case results in an apparent inability to find love. While we could say as much for Godard's view of cinema on the whole, which he has been declaring dead since 1967, it should also be recognized that such endings have always been less a point of termination than a catalytic impetus to renewal. So much is implied by the film's original title in French and its slightly peculiar translation into English, from Eloge de l'amour to In Praise of Love. In the original, "Eloge" is less funereal and instead much closer to what Godard's frequent citation, Rainer Maria Rilke, had written almost a century ago at Duino Castle, near Trieste, as a kind of lyric verse: a form that, whilst mournful, nevertheless strives toward praise in an almost Christian sense:

Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen. Unser
Leben geht hin mit Verwandlung. Und immer geringer
schwindet das Außen. Wo einmal ein dauerndes Haus war,
schlägt sich erdachtes Gebild vor, quer, zu Erdenklichem
völlig gehörig, als ständ es noch ganz im Gehirne.

Nowhere, Love, will the World exist but within. Our lives
pass in transformation. All of the while the outer realm,
is lessening. Where a solid house once was,
some concocted structure shoots into view, as at ease
among concepts as if it still stood in the brain. (322-23)

That, then, is what we are set to encounter in Godard's elegy, his song of praise: a hard-won and seemingly impossible vision of an apparently extinct love, conjured forth and reanimated once more from within the dying medium of film.

The plot divides in two, to form something like an estranged couple whose individuals only make sense when taken together, with the film's latter third taking place temporally earlier than what precedes it thereby providing necessary context for that which we already know but only after the fact. The first and longer part of the film, shot on black and white in 35mm, follows a man named Edgar who is preparing an artistic "project," a concept without medium, about the four stages of love in the different phases of life: meeting, physical passion, separation, and reconciliation. While Edgar interviews and auditions participants for the project, he obsesses over a woman whom he met years ago, Berthe, who now works a menial job, cleaning passenger cars at a railroad depot, to support her son. Though Berthe wants no part in the project, she and Edgar spend a night wandering Paris. If there is romance, here, it is certainly muted, or at least transferred elsewhere. Weeks later, after the two have established a warm friendship, Edgar learns that Berthe has committed suicide. The film's final third takes place two years earlier and is shot in over-saturated color video. The visual transition is almost overpowering. Edgar arrives in Brittany to interview the biographer Jean Lacouture as research for a cantata he is writing for Simone Weil – a feminist who was, amongst other things, a philosopher of love, which she conceived of in terms that are remarkably coherent with those we have been using. "Supernatural love," she once affirmed material commitment, "has no contact with force, moreover it does not protect the soul against the coldness of force, the coldness of steel. Only an earthly attachment, if it has in it enough energy, can afford protection against the coldness of steel." (xxiv) There, in Brittany, Edgar also encounters an elderly couple who fought in the Resistance and who are now meeting with delegates from the American state department who aim to broker a film deal on behalf of "Spielberg Associates." The couple's granddaughter, Berthe, is attempting to renegotiate their exploitative contract. The film ends after Berthe drives Edgar to the train

station and he ventures back to Paris, to the film's first part, now carrying the rudiments of his project but with Berthe's unknown fate ahead.

If love, in this, is minimally communist, that is not only because it finds incarnation in the counter-fascist Resistance or because the film's dialogue so frequently tilts toward robust political discussion, but instead and primarily because the experience of love in both that wartime period and in the present is given voice through a specific philosophy, which is made to resonate with questions about cinema more broadly and with the film's unique forms. "The state is the very antithesis of the image of a loved one," Berthe tells Edgar, "whose sovereign reason negates that of love." Hollywood, Godard's film suggests through a series of inelegant though arresting gestures, is an extension of the state in general and of North American imperialism in particular. "Washington is the real captain of the ship, and Hollywood is only the steward," claim the representatives of both Spielberg Associates and the United States. "Trade follows films." And the film they hope to make of the Resistance is one that, like those we have seen here, will ultimately debase the lifelong love between two fighters into whatever cliché of romance. "A story starring Julia Roberts," Berthe cautions, before citing the very apex of film-as-trade, Cameron's Titanic. Godard's film, by contrast, reacts against this by consciously inverting the aesthetic principles of what we called disaster romance, and especially its fulfillment in the historical epics of Steven Spielberg. The primary contrast here is between Godard's film and Schindler's List (1993), the Holocaust drama which famously recedes from a color-realistic arcadia into the ghettoes and the camps, which are shot in decorative black and white, or what Godard dubs "Max Factor," after the cosmetics company. It is well-known that Godard claims to hold himself personally accountable for humankind's collective failure "to prevent Mr. Spielberg from reconstructing Auschwitz," and here we only need to add that In Praise of Love dramatizes precisely such a preventative gesture within its subject matter, in the figure of Berthe who negotiates on behalf of the Resistance fighters against Spielberg Associates, and that it also stages such prevention as aesthetic principle, by progressing from the oversaturated video footage of the near past into a future shot in black and white, the hallmark of a self-consciously cinematic art whose

presiding god, in this film, is not Spielberg but Robert Bresson (from whose reflections on cinematography Berthe reads aloud to the camera). "The real question in fact is to know if an American superproduction today has the right to dramatize all the great hopes that came out of the end of World War II," read the production notes in what might be construed as a statement of artistic intent.[3] But what does this critically anti-capitalist or minimally communist self-positioning have to tell us about love? Or, more specifically, if Godard's film interrogates an apparently loveless cinema as representative of a loveless mode of production, does it offer some alternative, affirmative, and ultimately communist vision? Our answer to these questions is to be found in the inter-illumination between the film's two parts and how they vitalize the relationship between Edgar and Berthe, in scenes that will bring this essay to its close.

Having spent the night together strolling through Paris, Edgar and Berthe find themselves by the Seine, which is focalized in two long shots that emphasize both urban beauty and industrial decay, naturally backlighting windblown leaves against the dilapidated exterior of a Renault factory on one riverbank and against two billowing smoke stacks on the other. In the second of these shots, which looks downstream from a bridge, a river barge sluices toward the camera, pushing a swell with its bow. An afterimage of Vigo's L'Atalante, perhaps. Edgar and Berthe are shown in silhouette close to the water, down below street level, where he stands and she sits before the river's shimmering, reflective surface. They discuss trade unions and death, the workers' struggle and her parents' suicide. Another shot has them positioned side-by-side only inches apart, as they look down onto the river from beneath a bridge. The conversation, now about his project and their first encounter, is made fragmentary by industrial noise, over which we cannot hear their words and, because they face away from the camera, we cannot see their lips move. "They sell talking images," he says of Hollywood, as though the film wants to divulge its own self-consciousness. "But images never talk." Another shot, but this time they are further still down the river and the camera is much closer, just behind Edgar, whose head takes up the frame's left quarter. Familiar music: a workers' song, from L'Atalante, which was indeed set on this very river and which now haunts our

contemporary love story as a revenant of what once was and what might never be. “When I think about something,” Edgar says in voice-over, “I’m really thinking of something else. You can only think about something, if you think of something else. For instance, you see a landscape new to you. But it’s new to you because you mentally compare it to another landscape, on which you know.” Renewal through estrangement? The meaning of and motivation for these words will not be revealed until later. Berthe enters the frame from the right, obscuring our view of the factory. She removes her coat and then her hat, her hair blows in the wind, a double for the leaves in previous shots, and she leans in close to Edgar. “Let feelings bring about events, not the contrary,” Berthe has elsewhere quoted Bresson, and that is what we are seeing here – an event from which we are denied the right to bear witness, as though explicit rendering is to reify. Rather than embrace, as we have been trained to expect, she whispers something into his ear and from so close that he would surely feel the heat of her breath on his neck. Several sentences, yet we hear nothing but the old song from an old film.

Whatever Berthe is saying here, in a scene choreographed so perfectly to deliver on the kind of romantic encounter we cannot but help will into being, is one with the mystery of Edgar’s unrealized project and with the film as a whole. What might otherwise have been an outward performance of love, a declaration made either verbal or physical, registers as love only in its conspicuous absence, as a critically anti-Spielbergian aporia, that ultimately draws together around the film’s multiple seams:

> We will never see Edgar’s project or know the form it may ultimately take, if any. We are in the middle of a voyage whose endpoint is uncertain and whose beginning is already forgotten. In the passage from filmic to videographic time, the (video) future is already in the past, the present strives to preserve an aesthetic memory of what film was, and we the viewers struggle to envision the work to come, which is always just beyond our reach. (91)

Nevertheless, this remarkable scene provides clues to the decipherment of that future vision, rendered for us in the film's final third, where it will articulate the idea that what might condition a passage from our "aesthetic memory of what film was" into some futural apparition of "the work to come" is nothing other than love itself, which will take shape before our very eyes as an inner seascape, or a sacred fount, belonging to the medium as much as to the lover. At the level of medium, we are granted multiple visions of an otherwise familiar ocean revitalized precisely by videographic mediation. Waves beat on rocks and are made more real by the digital video that – like our own perception – cannot quite keep up with the events in detail and so warps them into an impressionistic blowout. Tides awash in the early twilight recolor as red and black, taking on an almost biblical hue. A pair of seabirds swoop and dive across an orange billow of clouds. That such visions are to be associated with both lover and medium is all but confirmed when, in the final minutes, Berthe accepts a petition from two children, dressed in madrigal costume, to "dub The Matrix into Breton." The subsequent shot shows Edgar watching her from an interior doorframe and, while we are still thinking of that utmost spectacular of Hollywood movies, it delivers a spectacular effect of its own. The shot's right side, from which Berthe will emerge into the frame, double-exposes the rippling cerulean ocean onto a wall and staircase. As Berthe crosses the screen, to eventually pass through the door whose frame Edgar inhabits, an oceanic swell follows her from right to left, growing deeper and darker until the staircase is barely perceptible, to form a wave that finally crashes, enveloping her spectator. "In the wave you become," we read from Badiou's Mallarmé, and that is what we see here, in a digital-era update on the underwater dance from L'Atalante: the oceanic surge as that which holds lovers, however estranged, together and as one.

What remains of Godard's film after this truly astonishing moment is a drive to the train station, which combines a conversation between Edgar and Berthe with similarly intensified impressions of the world around, whereby mundane images of traffic, the speedometer, and a rain-spattered windshield distort and pixelate to become newly fascinating. "Do you know the saying of St. Augustine," she asks him, before naming the

condition for our chiasmic passage into cinema's unknown future. "The measure of love is to love without measure." He repeats, or delivers for the first time, the monologue he will either recite or recall on the riverbank in Paris, on what it means to see things anew, but this time he is superimposed over an oceanic sunset, a kind of hallucination that joins those intensified visions of the otherwise mundane to form an incoherent totality. This, to be sure, is the first stage of love, as Roland Barthes once described it, which will evolve into a second stage, and that second stage is what shall prevent the final realization of Edgar's project, and what might also keep Berthe's secret words from our eyes and ears:

> In the first case, my rejection of reality is pronounced through a <u>fantasy</u>: everything around me changes value in relation to a function, which is the Image-repertoire; the lover then cuts himself off from the world, he unrealizes it because he hallucinates from another aspect the peripeteias or the utopias of his love; he surrenders himself to the Image, in relation to which all "reality" disturbs him. In the second case, I also lose reality, but no imaginary substitution will compensate me for this loss: sitting in front of the Coluche poster, I am not "dreaming" (even of the other); I am not even in the Image-repertoire any longer. Everything is frozen, petrified, immutable, i.e., <u>un-substitutable</u>: the Image-repertoire is (temporarily) foreclosed. (90)

What we are seeing in Brittany, with the cresting wave and during the car ride, is the transformative force of love, as a means of fundamentally altering our way of being in and experiencing the world, here reclaiming an image of itself from the clichés of the culture industry and its cinematic regime; and what we have already seen in Paris, in Edgar's artistic and amorous obsessions that direct the narrative toward a moment of apparent irresolution, is the evolution of that initial break with reality into a new state of affectionate longing. All of which is, decisively, the result of cinema's bid for autonomy from the multilayered edifice of capital so as to grant us one seemingly anachronistic though altogether real vision of love as artistic event. An elegy that is also an affirmation: minimal communism.

Works Cited:

Adorno, Theodor. The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture. Ed. J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 1991.

Badiou, Alain and Nicolas Truong. In Praise of Love. Trans. Peter Bush. London: Exmouth Books, 2012.

Barthes, Roland. A Lover's Discourse: Fragments. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2002.

Bazin, André. What is Cinema? Vol 2. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Benjamin, Walter. Selected Writings. Vol. 2, part 2, 1931-1934. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Berlant, Lauren. Desire/Love. New York: Punctum, 2012.

Bloch, Ernst. "'Commentary on "Theses on Feuerbach'" (1971): https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/commentary-theses.htm

Cavell, Stanley. The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979.

Cott, Jonathan. "A Conversation with Bernardo Bertolucci." Rolling Stone, June 23 (1973): http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/features/a-conversation-with-bernardo-bertolucci-19730621

Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 1: The Movement-Image. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 2: The Movement-Image. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Gaeta. London: Continuum, 1989.

Ebert, Roger. "Review of Reds." January 1 (1981): http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/reds-1981

Godard, Jean-Luc. Jean-Luc Godard Interviews. Ed. David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998.

Hibberd, James. "James Cameron defends Titanic ending." Entertainment Weekly, January 30 (2017): http://ew.com/movies/2017/01/30/james-cameron-titanic-ending/

Jameson, Fredric Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. London: Verso, 2005.

Jöttkandt, Sigi. First Love: A Phenomenology of the One. Re.press: Melbourne, 2010.

Kracauer, Siegfried. Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture. Ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Kollontai, Alexandra. "Communism and the Family" (1920). https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/communism-family.htm

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party": https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Screen 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

Negri, Antonio. Subversive Spinoza. Ed. Timothy S. Murphy. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Quinlivan, Davina. Filming the Body in Crisis: Trauma, Healing and Hopefulness. London: Palgrave, 2015. Ebook.

Rancière, Jacques. Film Fables. Trans. Emiliano Battista. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Ebook.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. The Poetry of Rilke. Trans. Edward Snow. New York: North Point Press, 2009.

Rodowick, D. N. The Virtual Life of Film. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Romney, Jonathan. "The day the New Wave came crashing down." The Independent 30 January (2011): http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/the-day-the-new-wave-came-crashing-down-2198227.html

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Before the Revolution (1964)" June 12 (2000): https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2000/06/before-the-revolutiona/

Roud, Richard. "Review of Doctor Zhivago." The Guardian 19 April (1966): https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/apr/29/doctor-zhivago-david-lean-review-archive

Weil, Simone. Gravity and Grace. Trans Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London: Routledge, 1952.

Zetkin, Clara. "Lenin and the Women's Question" (1920): https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1920/lenin/zetkin1.htm

---

[1] While I don't spend much time disentangling love, and Badiou's version of love, from the concept of desire, in its psychoanalytic and other formulations, for the best books on these two phenomena see Lauren Berlant's Desire/Love and Sigi Jöttkandt's First Love: A Phenomenology of the One.

[2] This and the following quotation are from Slavoj Žižek in The Pervert's Guide to Ideology, directed by Sophie Fiennes and released in 2012.

[3] This synopsis has been republished by the film's distributor, Vega, at: http://vegafilm.com/en/title/eloge-de-lamour-2001/