GHOST WORKERS: CONTEMPORARY FRENCH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING IN THE GLOBAL AGE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In recent years, French documentary filmmakers have recorded the impact globalization has had on their society; the corpus presented here gives evidence of a shared effort to question the political and ideological affiliations of a practice largely committed to leftist ideals throughout most of the twentieth century. This dissertation examines the convergence of anti- or alterglobalization sentiments and the documentary turn to ethics in the last twenty years in an effort to reinvent social and political documentary filmmaking as an ethical praxis committed to the reconciliation of individual emancipation and collective responsibility.

The demise of workers’ movements and trade unions in the last decades has led filmmakers to explore other modes of subversion of neo-liberal global capitalism, the principal target of contemporary social documentary. These filmmakers have striven to undermine the historical and philosophical legitimacy of the equation of “work” and waged employment. The unemployed, the gleaner, the consumer, and the farmer have been foregrounded as new models of subjective emancipation for the proponents of an altermondialisation. Filmmakers themselves have invested their own bodies in the denunciation of the global expansion of neo-liberalism. This study draws from Michel Foucault’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s conceptions of ethics and subjectivity in order to account for Luc Moullet’s, Vincent Glenn’s, Agnès Varda’s, Raymond Depardon’s and Jonathan Nossiter’s “embodied knowledge” (as defined by Bill Nichols).

First, the dissertation argues that globalization has encouraged filmmakers to expand the doctrinal politics of early militant cinemas into a broader ethical project which consists of probing into the philosophical, social and environmental foundations of a sustainable world democracy. Second, by defining its “politics of location” – another term used by Nichols –
through historically polyvalent concepts, such as artisanal savoir-faire, terroir and work, this corpus reinvigorates long-standing national debates and casts new light on old cultural assumptions, especially France’s endless historical opposition between urban modernity and rural conservatism. Finally, contemporary filmmakers shift French cinema’s auteurist claims from elitist inclinations towards a post-national reflection on documentary practice’s unique ability to promote an ethical consciousness and engagement with the world at large.
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Introduction

Globalization, Work and the Ethical Turn of Documentary

Ce que l’on nomme “mondialisation,” cela peut-il donner naissance à un monde, ou à son contraire?

- Jean-Luc Nancy.¹

In the preface to Sophie Meunier and Philip H. Gordon’s 2002 book *The French Challenge: Adapting to Globalization*, Michael Armacost, former president of the Brookings Institution, states that “nowhere has globalization received greater attention than in France, where political and business leaders, intellectuals, and the public at large have been debating the potential merits and dangers of a world in which people, capital, goods, and ideas travel across borders as never before.”² While Armacost does not explicitly mention cinema among the contributors to the debate, globalization has certainly provided filmmakers, particularly documentarians with a fruitful source of topics. In France, the fascination with globalization has coincided with an unprecedented boom in the production of documentary filmmaking, made both for television and theatrical releases. More visibly than in fiction cinema, filmmakers’ engagement with global capitalism, and most importantly its impact on the everyday life of French citizens, has led them to question the capacity of documentary to formulate a critical interrogation of what the globalization of the economy means for our subjective experience of and in the world.

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou la mondialisation* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2002), 9. “What we call ‘globalization,’ does it produce a world, or its opposite?” (This is my translation)
This project will assess how, in the current context of globalization, French social documentary filmmaking questions the political and ideological affiliations which culminated in the militant cinema of the 1960s and engages creatively with broader aesthetic, economic, political and philosophical responses that the changing scale of our experiences and identities has elicited. In each chapter, close film analyses carefully draw on the sociocultural contexts in which the films were produced and engage with contemporary critical theories about globalization and work. Indeed, many of the documentaries included in the corpus explicitly connect filmmakers’ aesthetic experimentations and political interrogations to recent critical interpretations that French intellectuals have given of globalization, for example through the inclusion of interviews with those same intellectuals.

One of the main claims of this study will be that French documentary critiques of global capitalism have also undertaken a stylistic and ideological reformulation of the very practice of political filmmaking. Wendy Brown states that the “we” of recent social movements differs from the collective statement made by the Left during the twentieth century. She adds: “we also have to recognize that the ‘we,’ the ‘I,’ who […] is still committed, if there is still some continuity in the cares that it has for humanity […] is in some way governing itself, as opposed to being run by a power larger than itself, the ‘we’ that loves again will be a different ‘we’ than the one we are.” Brown’s call for new ideals echoes in fact the priorities set by filmmakers in the face of globalization. The dogmatic politics of twentieth-century class struggles and Marxist dialectics

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3 By militant cinema, I am referring here to films inspired by Marxist dialectal materialism made about, for, and sometimes by industrial workers to denounce the exploitative nature of bourgeois capitalism and alienating working conditions and to promote the proletarian revolution advocated for by Marxists, Maoists and leftist trade unions. Well-known filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker and René Vautier were among the most iconic figures associated with the practice, but militant cinema also allowed a large number of collectives, including the Medvekin groups, Dynadia, Cinélutte and several others, to revolutionize documentary filmmaking in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

no longer inform filmmakers’ aesthetic decisions; similarly, if alterglobalization movements’ aspirations for a fair and equal world recall the Communist utopias of the past, these positions have lost previous bureaucratic and populist structures and rhetoric. The doctrinal rigidity of past revolutions has therefore been abandoned and replaced with what I prefer to call here a praxis of ethical consciousness. From a revolutionary weapon in the 1960s in the midst of decolonization wars, Communist insurrections and workers’ strikes, the camera has become a tool of didactic inquiry and a compass which enables filmmakers and spectators to question the positions they have been assigned in the global scheme of late capitalism. The chapters of the following study will therefore illustrate how documentary filmmakers expand the notion of political engagement from a narrow ideological, partisan understanding of the term to one that encompasses a broader ethical reflection on the meaning of world democracy and its sustainability. To that end, notions of work, subjectivity and ethics will provide points of intellectual convergence for the five chapters that compose the dissertation.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first in-depth study to focus on the ideological evolution of representations of “workers” and the expansion of the notion of “work” in French documentary films in the context of globalization. Although the production of documentary films has boomed since the mid-1990s, French film scholars continue to privilege fiction cinema over contemporary documentary. Two recent contributions nevertheless are worth mentioning here. Sarah Cooper’s Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary (2009) and Alison Murray Levine’s Framing the Nation: Documentary Film in Interwar France (2010) represent two opposite approaches in the field of documentary studies. Cooper focuses exclusively on highly canonical filmmakers, including Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Agnès Varda, whereas Levine restricts her corpus to “ordinary” colonialist and regionalist “educational documentaries” from
interwar France.\textsuperscript{5} In contrast to these clearly divisive corpuses, the present dissertation voluntarily cuts across the line that typically separates canonical from “ordinary” films to highlight filmmakers’ continuous efforts to reflect on the social role their practice has or can have today across the spectrum.

The corpus as a whole brings together so-called art films, productions made for and through the support of television public and cable channels as well as documentaries directed by filmmakers who have openly embraced anti-globalization activism; similar juxtapositions are replicated within several chapters. Thus, Agnès Varda’s unanimously celebrated film, \textit{Les glaneurs et la glaneuse / The Gleaners and I} (2000) extends and reinforces Pierre Carles’s controversial rehabilitation of the unemployed in \textit{Attention, danger, travail} (2003) and \textit{Volem rien foutre al païs} (2007); Jonathan Nossiter’s meditation on the historical dimension of \textit{terroir} in \textit{Mondovino} (2004) both echoes and internationalizes George Rouquier’s and Raymond Depardon’s contributions to French rural cinema in the last thirty years (\textit{Biquefarre} (Rouquier, 1983); \textit{Profils Paysans: L’Approche} (Depardon, 2001), \textit{Profils Paysans: Le quotidien} (Depardon, 2004), and \textit{La vie moderne} (Depardon, 2009)). The originality of this corpus, which is voluntarily diverse, strengthens more than it weakens the contribution of this academic study. Contrasting filmmakers who are unquestionably revered as \textit{auteurs} with documentarians who oftentimes willfully operate on the margins of what constitutes “French cinema” for scholars reveals that \textit{auteurism} continues to drive the political and social engagement of French documentary filmmakers while demystifying its elitist restrictions.

Throughout the twentieth century, French leftist cinema largely supported the social rights of industrial workers, labor movements and anticolonial campaigns. One of the

\textsuperscript{5} Sarah Cooper, \textit{Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary} (London: Ingenta, 2009); Alison Murray Levine, \textit{Framing the Nation: Documentary Film in Interwar France} (London: Continuum, 2010), 2.
motivations of this study is to argue that work continues to play a prominent role in the social critique of globalization and more recently neoliberalism. By documenting the damages caused by the primacy of economic and financial interests over social and environmental concerns, filmmakers have also given unprecedented public visibility in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to a long-lasting, yet largely overlooked, debate about the ideologically-laden evolution of the meaning of work, production and labor. While the militancy of May 1968 provides my analysis with a necessary and productive reference, most of the dissertation is dedicated to the exploration in recent films of new critical models and the emergence of new modes of subjective emancipation from the economic determination imposed upon individuals by globalization.

One of my central postulates is that the corpus essentially breaks away from the twentieth-century affirmation that capitalism can only be subverted through the political emancipation of the working class. The nineteen-sixties’ emphasis on exploitation, which promoted self-management and the physical and economic expropriation of bourgeois capitalism as the goals of workers’ class-based struggles, has become less central to recent indictments of the alienating essence of the latest form of capitalism: neoliberalism. More recently, the factory, symbol of capital’s domination and class antagonisms, has been replaced with a more inclusive structure: the company, the elemental unit of corporate capitalism. What turns this corporate structure into the new microcosmic inferno of the globalizing neo-liberal economy is its modus operandi: management. At this point, I should specify that the various terms used so far to refer to global capitalism (neoliberalism, corporate capitalism, financial capitalism, late capitalism) will be used interchangeably to accentuate respectively ideological, structural, (im)material or historical features.
Taylorism and Fordism, the targets of militant cinema in the 1930s and 1960s, sought to organize labor in order to maximize productivity inside the factory, the unit of material production. The global economy relies increasingly on the provision of services and “economicizes” more and more activities. As a result, existing boundaries between the everyday life of individuals and basic social interactions in the social sphere and their function in the world of economics performed in the factory have collapsed. As a result, management not only exploits subjects, it “manufactures subjects” as Michel Foucault lucidly anticipated as early as the 1970s.6 Foucault’s fundamental distinction between the pre-existence of an ideal legal subject and subjectivity as the result of an interplay of contradictory and mobile social, political, cultural, religious and natural forces helps us point to a crucial ideological and philosophical difference between the militant cinema of the 1960s and contemporary critiques of global capitalism. The Marxist interpretive framework that inspired documentary filmmakers to mediate the revolutionary politics of workers’ movements at the time asserted the ideal completeness of the Proletariat as political Subject. The Proletariat was presented as being essentially subjectified by the bourgeois structures of industrial capitalism that reduced workers to de-humanized automata. Today, filmmakers demonstrate how neo-liberal methods of management permeate all sorts of social structures and relations to produce subjective types that will help reproduce the system, particularly the manager and the insatiable consumer.

This is why escaping societal management unites the various film projects introduced throughout this dissertation and why work, which has essentially become synonymous with waged labor, is now a highly contested category. As several critics, including Robert Castel,

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6 Michel Foucault, “Society Must be Defended,” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 59: “…instead of asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or what powers of theirs they have surrendered, allowing themselves to be subjectified, one would need to inquire how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects.”
André Gorz and more recently Richard Sennett, have pointed out, the centrality of waged labor marks a radical and recent reversal of anthropological categories. Castel not only points to the sudden imposition of waged employment as a socioeconomic norm but also to how the ideological valorization of this type of activity from the late nineteenth century onwards purposefully served the interests of capitalism.

We forget that wage-labor, which today occupies the vast majority of those who work, and to which most of our protections against social risk are inextricably tied, has long been among the most uncertain, as well as undignified and miserable, of conditions. One was a wage earner whenever he was nothing else, and had nothing to exchange other than the force of his arms. Someone fell into the position of wage earner when his conditions had deteriorated: the ruined artisan, the tenant whose land would no longer sustain him, the journeyman who could never become a master, and so on. To be or to fall to the level of wage laborer was to be put into a condition of dependency, to be condemned to live “from day to day,” to find one’s self subject to the empire of necessity.

The historical dichotomy that Robert Castel establishes here between today’s wage laborer and the artisan, the farmer, and the journeyman has recently been echoed in recent French documentary critiques of global capitalism. Indeed, what motivates Agnès Varda (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse/The Gleaners and I, 2000), Pierre Carles (Attention, danger, travail, 2003, and Volem rien foutre al païs, 2007), George Rouquier (Biquefarre, 1983), Raymond Depardon

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(Profs Paysans: L’approche, 2001, Le quotidien, 2004, and La vie moderne, 2009) and to a lesser extent, Luc Moullet (Genèse d’un repas/Origins of a Meal, 1978) and Vincent Glenn (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., 2004), to elevate activities otherwise dismissed as unproductive is the independence and freedom that they see determining the subjective autonomy of gleaners, voluntarily unemployed individuals as well as that of consumers and citizens who scrutinize their needs and the decisions that are made for them by supranational institutions.

Thus, while the militant cinema of the 1960s was exclusively centered on the experience and the political emancipation of (industrial) workers, this dissertation will introduce four other figures which have become more prominent in contemporary French social documentary filmmaking: the unemployed, the gleaner, the consumer, and the farmer. What the project reveals is that through globalization, documentary filmmakers have called into question both the alienating nature of neoliberalism and the modernist limitations of the Marxist-based emphasis on class struggles. Documentary has undertaken a double critique of capitalism and socialism by challenging the institutional legitimacy of work as defined and normalized since the late eighteenth century. Moreover, filmmakers have also shown that behind the ideological contention that the two systems of thought have had over the worker, both reduced human beings to abstractions, either as trade value for capitalism or as a political Subject for socialism. Therefore, it might be more exact to say that the chapters will explore how filmmakers position “being unemployed,” “gleaning,” “consuming” and “farming, or cultivating the land,” as processes that combine individual emancipation and the ethical consciousness and production of a common world. However, Dominique Méda argues that the theoretical principles guiding contemporary critiques of “work,” while contrasting the alienating nature of modern conceptions
of work with some atemporal anthropological ideal of work as humankind’s self-realization and
creative freedom, are in fact the product of nineteenth-century ideologies as well.9

More recently, the affirmation of a double emancipatory process from neoliberal
structures and from the globalized cult of productivism has stemmed from the convergence in the
mid-1970s of leftist critiques of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism and of the increasing
political influence of environmentalism and ecology. In France, in particular, while workers’
unionism suffered from the failed revolution of May 1968, farmers’ movements underwent
radical transformations throughout the 1970s. The rapid industrialization of French agriculture
coupled with localized tensions opposing governments and small-scale farmers over land use
drew new political lines within the profession. While in the first half of the twentieth century,
rural France was a symbol of political and social conservatism in need of modernization, the last
forty years have seen a fundamental reversal. Large crop producers largely adhered to the
industrialization of farming techniques and benefited from the policies, quotas and subsidies
voted by the European Commission from the early 1980s onwards; in contrast, small-scale
farmers saw in agribusiness and European laws the systematic erosion of traditional practices,
product quality and accountability. With the creation of Confédération Paysanne in 1987, under

travail a trouvé son unité au XVIIIème siècle, en tant qu’abstrait, marchand et détachable, et en tant que moyen
permettant de créer de la richesse. C’est l’économie politique qui a donnée au terme de travail son unité conceptuelle.
Marx ne serait pas en désaccord avec cette thèse. Mais je soutiens également que, ce faisant, il n’existe pas d’avant
ou d’au-delà, d’âge d’or en quelque sorte, où le travail aurait été pleinement conforme à son essence: à la fois
facteur de production, fondement du lien social, vecteur d’expression et de réalisation de soi. […] En soi, nous
disent sociologues, psychologues, juristes, philosophes du travail, […] le travail est l’activité la plus humaine,
l’essence de l’homme, la manière la plus haute pour l’homme de s’opposer à la nature, de s’exprimer et de
transformer le monde. […] cette idée est le produit de la pensée du XIXème siècle.” (Translation is mine: “The term
‘work’ found its unity in the 18th century, insofar as it became abstract, commodified and detachable, and insofar as
it enabled the creation of wealth. It is political economy that provided work with some conceptual integrity. Marx
would not disagree with this thesis. But I maintain also that, as a result, there is no before or beyond, no golden age
in a way, when work would have fully matched its essence: all at once a factor of production, the basis of
socialization, a vector of self-expression and self-realization. […] In itself, as sociologists, psychologists, jurists,
and philosophers specializing in the notion of work, work is the most humane activity, the essence of man, the
highest manner in which humankind can oppose Nature, express herself and transform the world.”)
the leadership of José Bové, small-scale farming became synonymous with progressive politics and the warrant of environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and social autonomy. Workers’ and farmers’ movements took two opposite trajectories in the last quarter of the twentieth century; to a large extent, the evolution of both categories reflects the ideological and philosophical transitions that reshaped leftist activism during the time. As regional urban centers witnessed de-industrialization, rural traditions inspired new progressive values, many of which shaped the political and social agendas of alterglobalization movements in the early years of the new millennium.

At the end of the passage cited above, Robert Castel remarks upon the unchained thirst of global capitalism for endless accumulation of capital, goods, land, and energy resources. This, in his mind, has raised another issue as regards subjective emancipation and autonomy, namely what he calls “necessity” or what is now commonly referred to as needs. As Zygmunt Bauman very simply puts it, “the secret of all successful ‘socialization’ is making the individuals wish to do what the system needs them to do for it to reproduce itself.”

For neoliberal capitalism, successful socialization means adhering to the idea that individual self-realization and happiness lie in the constant redefinition of one’s own needs. Bauman thus differentiates between consumerism and dissatisfied consumerism as being the true logic of neoliberal society: “In [the society of consumers], those who go solely by what they believe they need, and are activated only by the urge to satisfy those needs, are flawed consumers and so also social outcasts.” By making necessity the fundamental principle of the normalization of a certain organization of labor and of social subjectivization, neoliberalism essentially justified the individual dependency described above by Castel as the means/compromise by which “democratic individualism” can

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11 Ibid., 148.
be achieved. ¹² As the dissertation will most clearly show from chapter three onwards, part of what filmmakers, as well as anti-globalization social movements such as *altermondialisme*, have done in the last ten years is to cast these very “flawed consumers” and “social outcasts” as the subjective models for the twenty-first century. If the emancipated subjects of the industrial era were workers who took control of the production process, being a free subject in the early twenty-first century would thus mean having the capacity to distinguish between needs and desires, to escape the economic, social and cultural determination of private service providers and redirect one’s time away from waged laboring tasks to self-assigned, self-serving or community-building activities.

In reaction against neoliberalism’s totalizing determination of the world through management, anti-globalization social movements have largely formulated their critiques as a proposal for an alternative world. As global capitalism promotes productivism and endless cycles of economic growth and continues to measure success and happiness according to material and financial accumulation, a growing number of economists, sociologists, activists, and filmmakers have proposed a counter-narrative that would instead consider “degrowth” and “degLOBALization” as more sustainable modes of development and production.¹³ This reversal of economic necessity is not new; in fact, similar arguments had already been advanced in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, but it is in the nineteen-seventies that such arguments gained ground, particularly among leftist groups. However, while in the nineteen-seventies such ideas were essentially downplayed and marginalized as political utopias, sustainability has become a defining element of early twenty-first century world citizenship and subjectivity.


Early responses to anti-globalization reactions were refined in the late 1990s and reframed as a rejection of neoliberalism, or the economic rationalization of the world. This is clearly expressed in the *altermondialist* slogan, “The World is Not for Sale,” which rallied hundreds of thousands of people in Seattle in 1999. The movement has thus far failed, almost as spectacularly as it came about, to bring the entire system down and overhaul capitalism, using the tactics of the past, particularly street protests. Failure here simply means that in spite of *altermondialist* activism, national governments continue to entrust the private sector with services that used to be overseen by public officials, the WTO and other international organizations have not been dismantled and most reforms promoted by *altermondialist* associations have yet to become reality. In spite of its inability to foment a broad-ranging revolution against the hegemony of global capitalism, many of the ideas *altermondialisme* put forth have nonetheless permeated public debates and, I argue, have encouraged filmmakers to pursue new idea(l)s and renew their practice beyond the immediate anti-globalization activism.

Oppositions of local diversity to global homogenization have thus also been reframed since the success of these transnational gatherings between 1999 and 2001; some positive effects of “globalization” were revealed in the process, the most significant being the emergence of a transnational “movement of movements.” In order to differentiate the positive from the negative, new denominations emerged, emphasizing the affirmation of an alternative experience of the inevitable interconnectedness of people, cultures, histories and social becoming.

If “nowhere has globalization received greater attention than in France,” it is also in that country that the polarity between globalization as an economic phenomenon and the production of a more humane world was posed most explicitly in semantic and philosophical terms. French philosophers Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Edgar Morin and Etienne Tassin, among others,
all contrasted the neo-liberal determination of “globalization” with what they prefer to support, namely “mondialisation.” As they denounce the general acceptance of the English term and the common usage of the Anglicism, the French term was meant to refer to the experience and preservation of the world as the common habitat of humankind. If the necessity to come up with a French word to describe a more humane alternative to the changing scale of human civilization might be seen as another example of Franco-French exceptionalism, the French concept nonetheless points to a fundamentally different representation of the relationship individuals have with their environment and among themselves.

The insistence of these philosophers on distinguishing between the two terms and their respective referential scope can be replaced within an ongoing debate that started in France during the nineteen-eighties between the New Philosophers and the “philosophers à l’antique,” as Jacques Rancière calls them. Rancière explains that the quarrel revolved primarily around the meaning of democracy: “in transforming the alienated consumer of the day before into a narcissus who uninhibitedly plays with the objects and the symbols of the market universe, […] ‘the joyous postmodern sociologists’ established ‘that democracy was nothing but the reign of the narcissistic consumer varying his or her electoral choices and his or her intimate pleasures alike’.” For the philosophers who found in Ancient thought a more pertinent model, “politics” should be seen as “an art of living together and a search for the common good,” and that required “a clear distinction between the domain of common affairs and the egotistical and petty reign of

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17 Ibid., 22-23.
private life and domestic interests.” While the debate about globalization versus mondialisation changed the terms stated here between politics and domestic interests by seeing the latter under threat and in need of preservation, mondialisation absorbed the concerns expressed about democracy and politics mentioned above by reaffirming a sense of history and memory as the foundations of a cosmo-polity. This effort to define mondialisation marked Jacques Derrida’s late intellectual and political engagements in particular, as the following quote illustrates:

If I maintain the distinction between these concepts of [monde and mondialisation] and the concepts of globalization…, it is because the concept of the world gestures towards a history, it has a memory that distinguishes it from that of the globe, of the Universe, of Earth…For the world begins by designating, and tends to remain, in an Abrahamic tradition (Judeo-Christian-Islamic but predominantly Christian), a particular space-time, a certain oriented history of human brotherhood, of what in a Pauline language …one calls citizens of the world.

Notwithstanding the religious tone that Derrida attributes to this idea of the world as something distinct from more scientific representations, particularly the image of a globe, the universalist and humanist ideals put forth by anti-globalization discourses turn out to reaffirm a Eurocentric image of the world and world citizenry.

Sophie Meunier and Philip Gordon situate then President Chirac’s call for “managed globalization” – mondialisation maîtrisée – in perfect accordance with the “‘universal’ message” that the French Revolutions of 1789 carried, meaning “the foundation of democracy and human rights.” Yet, in their view, mondialisation maîtrisée would tend to reaffirm the role of national governments as key safeguards against the domination of economic principles in the governance

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18 Jacques Rancière, Hatred of Democracy, 23.
of the world. In the context of documentary responses to globalization, this last aspect appears to be arguable insofar as filmmakers either ignore the political intervention of national governments or most often question their resignation to the authority of the WTO or the European Union in the matter of economic (de)regulations. This is particularly evident in films that align more closely with altermondialist ideas, like Vincent Glenn’s *Pas assez de volume* (2004), or mistrust institutional discourse, like Pierre Carles’s *Volem rien foutre al païs* (2007). If *mondialisation maîtrisée* might turn out to be more of a compromise than what Sophie Meunier and Philip Gordon suggest, this dissertation presupposes that the films in its corpus oppose the pursuit of a new world ethos to the management of individual employees and consuming machines by global capitalism.

The semantic polarity between globalization and *mondialisation* has been central to the engagement of several French philosophers since the turn of the century; but what this project seeks to demonstrate is that a similar contrast has also nourished the practice of documentary filmmakers. This last rapprochement between contemporary French thought and documentary filmmaking can be discussed in relation to the “turn to ethics” that several critics have commented upon since the last 1990s. In the last section of this introduction, I will explain how the ethical praxis engaged by French documentary filmmakers both prolongs previously developed philosophical and filmic positions as regards ethics and requires new conceptual frameworks in order to grasp more effectively the conflation in recent critiques of globalization of two “strands in ethical thought”: the “humanistic model of ‘virtue ethics’,” or “ethics of the

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21 This ethical turn also served as a critical premise for Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton’s recent edited volume, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed encounters* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.
self,” which was developed in Ancient Greek philosophy, and the more recent emphasis placed on the critical interrogation and negotiation of alterity, or “ethics of the other.”

Ethics has also been a central concern of documentary studies from the beginnings of the practice; yet, in the same way that globalization led filmmakers to revise century-long political ideals, the materialization of a new scale of experience has equally generated new theoretical interrogations concerning the role of documentary practice. As a mode of filmmaking defined by its “truth” and “authenticity” values as regards the world and subjects filmed, the question of ethics in the context of documentary filmmaking has largely consisted in determining which mediations and distortions done to “reality” in the name of artistic license are rightful or not. Ethical responsibility towards the subjects filmed has also driven most scholarly discussions of ethnographic cinema, which constitutes a significant subgenre of documentary cinema. These two observations demonstrate therefore that, when it comes to documentary theory, the focus of critics has more consistently privileged the ethics of the other.

As a matter of fact, Sarah Cooper’s recent critical analysis of the ethics of post-war French documentary cinema – which was mentioned earlier in this introduction – deploys a Levinasian conception of otherness to show how Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Chris Marker and Raymond Depardon exceeded the movements of recognition and self-reflexivity characteristic of 1920s and 1930s documentaries. More specifically, she explains that early ethnographic practices encouraged spectators to see themselves and question their experiences as they discovered faraway lands and cultures. In contrast, Cooper argues, from the nineteen-fifties onwards, documentarians sought to facilitate the spectators’ encounter with otherness and use

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22 Libby Saxton and Lisa Downing (eds.), Film and Ethics, 2-7.
documentary to defamiliarize their “pre-known reality.” She goes on and declares that: “what is lacking in current debates is an exploration of how documentary may resist the reflective mechanism that would refer one back to oneself or one’s world.” My conclusions will differ from Cooper’s as I still see filmmakers using their presence in the film as a means by which they can facilitate some self-reflective assessment about individual subjection to the neoliberal system and reveal subversive practices of emancipation. Moreover, I will also show that this self-reflexive movement is in fact reinvested in the ethical construction of another world and another role for oneself. Thus, unlike recent scholarly accents on the ethical engagement of documentary with the other, this study will demonstrate that the corpus of French documentaries about globalization calls for a critical reassessment of ethical praxis as a process that situates the self and the other as intricately connected. While Levinas has recently provided an influential framework for the discussion of ethics in documentary, I will borrow here from Michel Foucault’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s theorizations of the term.

Both Michel Foucault and Jean-Luc Nancy reconcile the self and the other by locating the former within the larger community composed of similar others – whether it is the notion of the polis that Foucault borrows from Greek philosophy or the world at large in Nancy’s case. What both philosophers emphasize is the inseparability of the process of becoming-subject and caring for others. For Foucault, “ethos also implies a relationship with others, insofar as the care of the

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25 Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema?*, 9. Cooper uses the phrase, “pre-known reality,” to refer to the spectators’ knowledge and personal experience of the world before cinema solicits a moment of self-reflection: “Selfless Cinema? hints at (while also questioning) the altruistic sense of the title in relation to a cinema that claims a primary interest in others as it reflects on the presence or the absence of the viewing self. […] My interest is in attending to what spectators see, in excess of a comparison to a pre-known reality, that seemingly, broadens the relevance of a film, but actually performs a reverse gesture of reducing what film can show us.”

26 Ibid., 9.

27 In addition to Sarah Cooper’s analysis of post-war French documentary cinema, it is important to mention Michael Renov’s book, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) which reasserted the role of subjectivity in documentary practice.
self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships” – in other words caring for oneself “aims for the well-being of others.” In *The Creation of the World, Or Globalization* (2007), Jean-Luc Nancy goes further and establishes a parallel between the production of subjectivity and that of the world as an ethos. Nancy therefore contrasts two models, the objectified globe imagined as a self-sufficient totality, and the world, described as “an ethos, an habitus, and a place of dwelling,” assimilating subjectivity with a process of endless self-regeneration and resignification. The “becoming-world” of human societies mirrors the “becoming-subject” of individuals. However, Nancy distinguishes between two kinds of subjects: the “subject-of-the-world,” who necessarily objectifies the world and “the sense of being-(with)in-the-world,” which can only be achieved through the endless pursuit of justice and integration. Inspired by these two definitions of ethics and ethical subjectivity, I will thus use the term ethical in this dissertation – whether it describes the praxis of documentary filmmaking or the consciousness that filmmakers seek to promote through their films – as the constitution and reproduction of the world and humankind as an ethos, a common habitat and a common sense of belonging.

Nancy’s dichotomy most explicitly resonates with two aspects of the corpus: first, the implicit objectification of the globe by neoliberalism, which subjects human and environmental resources to the satisfaction of endless accumulation; and second, the dualism introduced here between the world, as a project of justice and equity, and the “un-world” as its opposite. The first aspect clearly appears in the Third Worldist dilemma that Luc Moullet faces in *Genèse d’un repas / Origins of a Meal* (1978), and in the environmentalist bias of *altermondialist* films such

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30 Ibid., 44.
31 Ibid., 117.
as *Pas assez de volume* (Vincent Glenn, 2004) and the defense of small agriculture and *terroir* in *Mondovino* (Jonathan Nossiter, 2004). The second dimension of neoliberalism as a vile system is clearly present in the films analyzed in chapter two. In this chapter, which gives a large place to the influence of Christophe Dejours’s analysis of the increasingly pathological nature of work on recent films, neoliberalism is equated with a totalitarian system that enforces a double alienation on individuals. The latter are not only denied the possibility of gaining recognition for their work and thus feeling empowered in their social utility, but they are also ethnically alienated insofar as their fearful, but nonetheless tacit, compliance with a system that is corrosive puts them at odds with their own sense of self.

If the unemployed, the gleaner, the flawed consumer and the peasant-farmer incarnate ways in which individuals can care for themselves and subvert the ethical alienation perpetrated by neoliberalism, filmmakers also participate in the reinsertion of the self “within-the-world” that Nancy accentuates. By reclaiming a bodily presence, or at the very least an authorial voice, in their films, filmmakers strive to transform documentary into a space through which spectators are led into questioning their own place in the world. This reclamation of documentary as a necessarily subjective mode signals a shift from earlier political cinema where filmmakers would remove themselves from the profilmic scene to foreground the political affirmation of the subjects filmed or the testimonial release of personal traumas.\(^3\) And it certainly differs from the workers’ films of May 1968, when filmmakers would hand the camera over to the workers and renounce their technical and authorial expertise. Often, filmmakers prefer to identify with their spectators, more than the subjects they films: Luc Moullet (*Origins of a Meal*, 1978), Vincent

\(^3\) The absence of filmmakers from the world being filmed was seen as a guarantee of authenticity and untampered recording of some reality in the *cinéma-vérité* of the 1960s, by opposition to the narrative reconstructions that characterized Flaherty’s films in the early decades of the twentieth century, Dziga Vertov’s intellectual montage in the 1920s, or 1940s American propagandistic newsreels.
Glenn (*Pas assez de volume*, 2004), Jonathan Nossiter (*Mondovino*, 2004) and Pierre Carles endorse the position of an engaged, curious and critical spectator. Others, like Agnès Varda, Raymond Depardon and to a lesser extent Marcel Trillat, seem to look both ways and define their artistic and political project through the social struggles, identities or activities their subjects perpetuate and engage in. Agnès Varda’s film, *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse / The Gleners and I* (2000), certainly appears to be the most obviously multidirectional since the filmmaker willfully and self-reflexively endorses her role as an artist, as a social observer, and as a gleaner. So all the films discussed in the dissertation give evidence of some degree of self-reflexivity about the practice of filmmaking and the role endorsed by the filmmakers themselves. If the subjective dimension of documentary had been reaffirmed in the field of documentary studies in the last two decades, it is Bill Nichols’s concept of “embodied knowledge” that encapsulates most effectively the double movement through which contemporary French documentary filmmaking and filmmakers reconcile the emancipation of individual subjects from their pre-determined roles as consumers and laborers and the collective production of the world as a new sustainable ethos and humankind as an inclusive community.33

Unlike past authorial claims of truth-telling – which underlied early ethnographic and propagandistic uses of documentary – this “embodied knowledge” does not authenticate as much as it questions and explores its own “incompleteness and uncertainty.”34 In times when globalization is presented as the inevitable trajectory of our national histories, French filmmakers illustrate perfectly the epistemological break that, according to Bill Nichols, documentary filmmaking best performs. In the following quote, Nichols reconnects the political dimension of documentary with the persona that always haunts the narrative intentions of the practice:

34 Ibid., 1.
The politics of location points to the importance of testimonial literature and first-person filmmaking. Testimonials are first-person, oral more than literary, personal more than theoretical. Such work explores the personal as political at the level of textual self-representation as well as at the level of lived experience. It contrasts with the traditional essay where the authorial “I” speaks to and on behalf of a presumed collectivity. The “I” of testimonials embodies social affinities but is also acutely aware of social difference, marginality, and its own place among the so-called Others of hegemonic discourse.\(^{35}\)

Nichols’s distinction between the “testimonial” and the essay is crucial to understand the changing nature of French documentary filmmakers’ political engagement as regards the impact of global capitalism on economic and labor structures. The militant cinema of the 1960s saw in the essay a model through which auteurs such as Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda and the large majority of cinéastes engagés could represent the voice of the working class first, and soon, more generally, all groups oppressed by the dominant social and economic system. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, film and video-essays thus became key tools in the political and social affirmation of women, recently decolonized people and immigrants, as well as homosexuals. However, as Nichols points out, the binary political categories and affiliations that had driven class struggles since the late 19\(^{th}\) century, continued to shape liberation movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s and the identity politics of 1980s multiculturalist visions have since been increasingly challenged by the lived experiences of the globalizing world. Rather than imposing a pre-determined framework of interpretation, filmmakers now seek to “mak[e] meaning in the company of others” and do so on the screen.\(^{36}\) While their predecessors foregrounded the political incarnation of the working class as a political subject, filmmakers


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 16.
have reclaimed in recent years their authorial presence to perform the experiences of “displacement and dislocation, of social and cultural estrangement, of retrieval, survival and self-preservation” that characterize our global age.\textsuperscript{37}

What makes this composite corpus uniquely fruitful is its capacity to affirm the cultural and philosophical cohesion of contemporary French social documentary against the global expansion of neo-liberalism all the while calling into question the historical identification of \textit{auteurism} with French art cinema, an arbitrary aesthetic category. In other words, studying Pierre Carles’s audiovisual \textit{montages} alongside Jonathan Nossiter’s conversational wanderings through \textit{terroirs}, Agnès Varda’s recent portrayal of contemporary French society, Luc Moullet’s early critique of global markets and Raymond Depardon’s reconciliation with his rural origins simultaneously asserts the ideological cohesion of French filmmakers and intellectuals in relation to globalization and suggests that broader connections need to be drawn between French filmmakers and the elaboration of a transnational “politics of location” by documentary practitioners worldwide.\textsuperscript{38}

In the course of the five chapters that compose this dissertation, my aim is to trace French documentary filmmakers’ ongoing refinement of a political engagement that has characterized this mode of filmmaking from its beginnings. Most specifically, the decision to study filmmakers thus far absent from academic studies on an equal footing with well-known canonical filmmakers intends to underline ways in which \textit{auteurism} has been embraced by marginal filmmakers as a means through which they can elaborate innovative social and political critiques and invest documentary with a new ethical function. In the specific context of France, the ability of filmmakers to infuse long-lasting ideological dissensions with alienating systems, in this case

\textsuperscript{37} Bill Nichols, \textit{Blurred Boundaries}, 7.  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 6.
global capitalism, with broad-ranging environmental, social and philosophical perspectives has proven extremely successful at disentangling old national cultural notions and rejuvenating stale and gridlocked debates.

Chapter one examines how documentary films produced since the mid-1990s have documented the increasingly precarious status of industrial workers. As a result, the serial factory closures that have taken place across France for the last fifteen years or so conjure the specters of past political struggles fought by the working class throughout most of the twentieth century until the late 1960s. More specifically, I argue that Reprise (Hervé Le Roux, 1996), Rêve d’usine (Luc Decaster, 2003) and Les prolos (Marcel Trillat, 2002) depict the increasingly difficult and spectral survival of working-class struggles, political identity and skills. As production and machines are relocated abroad where multinational companies are able to find cheaper labor, many films have focused on the social, economic and political dispossession of an entire class. The reason why I chose to look more closely at the three films mentioned above is that not only are they representative of a broader sub-corpus of films that have documented the material and symbolic dispossession of workers of their jobs, but they are also representatives pride in savoir-faire. Hervé Le Roux and Luc Decaster film the spatial dissolution of the working class in the emptying shops of soon-to-be-displaced manufacturing centers and the disappearing traces of working-class culture in suburban strongholds. Marcel Trillat draws the contours of what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt call the “precariat” of late capitalism. If I choose to open the discussion with this chapter, it is not because I consider that contemporary French documentary filmmaking has resigned itself to the triumphant success of capitalism worldwide - quite the contrary in fact. This first chapter sets into motion my analysis of the dialogue that
contemporary filmmaking has had with the past in order to redefine future priorities while establishing work as the primary site of contestation and resistance in our globalizing world.

Chapter two prolongs the initial discussion about industrial workers to the extent that it presents social and subjective precarization as the condition of any employed individual. The generalization of neo-liberal management in the service sectors from the nineteen-eighties onwards proves to be the most radical organization of labor in the twentieth century. Taking after psychoanalyst Christophe Dejours’s definition of neoliberalism as a totalitarian system, Jean-Michel Carré’s *J’ai (très) mal au travail* (2007) and Jean-Robert Viallet’s *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) expose contemporary structural mechanisms of alienation: the media, technologies, and the company. In these two films and the more clinical *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau, 2005), filmmakers play across the historically ambivalent function of documentary as regards institutional authority. Here, they divert typical traditional documentary devices, such as the voice-over and the clinical gaze, away from their objectifying purpose. Instead, filmmakers use both conventions along with more innovative editing practices to tease out the spectators’ own position in the system and to reflect on documentary’s capacity to engage with the ethical alienation that is presumably integral to neoliberalism.

From chapter three on, I investigate the subversive potential of activities that bring into question both the reduction of work to the waged productivity of individuals’ time and “skills” and the exclusive nature of the socialist political project. The main contention today’s social filmmakers have with this project concerns its emphasis on industrial work; in contrast, their films introduce, and most importantly confer a social value, to other types of “work.” In the third chapter, I focus on Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello’s “radical scavenging”
of archival footage to reverse common assumptions about employment and unemployment. If *Attention, Danger, Travail* (2003) and *Volem rien foutre al païs* (2007) revive 1970s utopian ideas, such as neo-ruralism and anarchism, I argue that the critical value of these films is to successfully grant authority to the unemployed people interviewed throughout the first film. These films thus propose to see unemployment as a form of time reappropriation that enables individuals to regain control over their freedom, happiness, and needs and sets new criteria of social utility. In the second part of the chapter, Agnès Varda’s impersonation of the gleaner as reclamation of artisanal production questions more directly the role of documentary filmmaking in the global cycle of disposability and recuperation. Unlike the unemployed, the gleaner does not dismiss the social value of work, but exploits her interstitial precariousness to define her social existence through the (re)collection of waste.

Chapter four can be seen as being paradoxically removed from the main question of labor and work: it is the most obviously connected to the thematic of globalization, and yet, it describes the gradual evacuation of work and workers as key political tropes in recent social movements, particularly *altermondialisme*. In this chapter, I argue that although international workers’ movements largely contributed to the rhetoric advocated for by the “movement of movements,” the worker no longer embodies the transnational resistance against the commodification of the world and the corporatization of international governance that crystallized during the 1990s. Instead, building on Hilary Wainwright’s equation of consumerism with a particularly astute form of involuntary labor implemented in the late stage of capitalism, I demonstrate that films as early as Luc Moullet’s *Origins of a Meal* (1978) – which I read as a proto-*altermondist* experiment – and more recently films like *Pas assez de volume* (2004) by Vincent Glenn have emphasized the ethical role of consumers in the new structures of
exploitation whereby cheap labor in the Global South, China, and Eastern Europe manufacture and grow retail products and food crops consumed everyday by Western populations. This chapter emphasizes therefore the shift that led from the 1960s tricontinental alliance of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism to a new transnational emancipatory project. While Luc Moullet basically demonstrates that globalization enacts an economic form of neo-colonialism, Vincent Glenn explores, through artistic and aesthetic detours, the capacity of documentary filmmaking to deploy a form of didactic militancy against the corporatization of knowledge and for the preservation of the commonwealth of human civilization.

The fifth and final chapter considers a small corpus of art films about rural culture: George Rouquier’s *Biquefarre* (1983), Raymond Depardon’s trilogy, *Profils paysans: L’approche* (2001), *Le quotidien* (2004) and *La vie moderne* and Jonathan Nossiter’s saga about the wine industry, *Mondovino* (2004). These films follow George Duby’s assertion that peasants are profoundly anti-capitalist. They are nonetheless producers, and it is as representatives of a different work ethos that I consider them essential to the debate engaged by documentary filmmakers about the alienating nature of wage labor and their search of alternative models of subjective production. Including recent films about rural life in this study both extends and offers a counterpoint to several of the threads traversing the dissertation. It would be impossible to discuss French reactions to globalization without addressing the notion of *terroir*, which encapsulates all the social, geographical and ideological contradictions of France’s long-lasting debate about national identity. Yet, what interests me in these three different film projects is their ability to go beyond the allegorical function of rural characters and settings in French cinema, either as the expression of nostalgia or nationalistic propaganda. Instead, these three films construct a parallel between documentary’s *mise en abyme* of rurality as a subjective struggle
against such cinematic picturesque projections and the anxieties that globalization has caused as regards to environmental resources, the disconnection of individuals from their natural environment and the role of locality as a site of resistance against globalization. Furthermore, while recent documentary films have insisted more on the demise of the working-class as a political agent and explored alternative subjective praxes, all of which affirm principles of environmental and social sustainability, farmers have recently ceased to be strictly identified with archaic traditions and conservative nationalism. The international popularity and prominence of farmers’ movements within anti-globalization movements has promoted a more progressive image of local, organic farming preyed upon by Goliath-like agribusiness.
Chapter One

Farewell to the Working-Class: Staging the Spectrality of Today's Struggles

Bien sûr, depuis qu'il y a des luttes et que le cinéma existe, il y a des films militants.

− Jean-Louis Comolli.39

Since the late nineteen-nineties, critics, including Martin O'Shaughnessy, Susan Hayward and Phil Powrie, have remarked on the “return of political cinema” in France.40 Filmmakers have engaged with the social, ethnic and economic compartmentalization of French national space, between banlieues and urban centers, de-industrialized regions and financial hubs, and more typically rural and urban areas.41 Yet, if critics have focused extensively on the renaissance of social realism in French fiction cinema, less has been said on the abundant documentary production that has focused on the “working class,” or to be more precise, its rapid dissolution since the mid-nineties. Globalization has accelerated the gradual process of de-industrialization that has had a dramatic impact on the French regions where mining, steel and textile industries were the primary sources of employment and economic growth. Massive lay-offs and industrial re-locations have devastated entire communities and become, as a result, the object of numerous

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39 Jean-Louis Comolli, “Décembre en août, Lussas 1996,” La parole ouvrière, Images Documentaires, 37/38, (2000), 85. “Of course, for as long as there has been struggles and cinema has existed, there have been militant films.” (The English translation is mine)
41 Several filmmakers and films recur as examples in critical analyses, particularly Bertrand Tavernier, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Bruno Dumont, Jean-François Richet, Robert Guédiguian, and more recently Laurent Cantet. It should be noted that in addition to this group of male filmmakers, critics have also looked more specifically at women's perspectives on contemporary social realities (through the works of Virginie Despentes, Agnès Jaoui or Laetitia Masson) as well as a growing corpus of films made by filmmakers from immigrant origins (Mehdi Charef, Rachid Bouchareb, or Yamina Benguigui).
documentary films. The selective corpus discussed in this chapter – Hervé Le Roux (Reprise, 1996), Marcel Trillat (Les Prolos, 2002), and Luc Decaster (Rêve d'usine, 2003) – will show how, as films “return” to the factories and industrial suburbs, two major sites of struggles that defined militant cinema in the late sixties and early seventies, filmmakers highlight the spectralization of workers as a collective political force while questioning the continued validity of past cinematic representations and definitions of the working class and, thereby, the political nature of contemporary social cinema.42

The “return of the political” in French documentary filmmaking points therefore less to a re-politicization of the act of filming than the manifestation of what Jacques Derrida and Wendy Brown identify as either “left melancholia” or the spectral indetermination of recent social and political struggles.43 These films stress therefore how globalization and de-industrialization have destabilized collective representations of the past and, to some extent, the very possibility of political and social affiliations that workers' movements took years to build and consolidate. Rather than seeing an aesthetic and political rupture in the immediate aftermath of May 1968’s wide-ranging liberation movements, the present chapter intends to highlight how contemporary filmmakers revisit past cinematic interventions and place images of the past at the very core of their project, either directly (through archival footage) or indirectly (by creating within present portrayals and documents spectral reminiscences of past social struggles and the historical body of the working class). Through the “return” of scenes and events that defined militant cinema's disruptive force – particularly factory occupations and the eruption of a workers' voice – these films can only attest to the impossibility of resuming the militant practices that culminated in the

42 Additional examples of social documentaries about the growing number of factory closures, industrial and management restructurizations as well as the dislocation of the working class as a cohesive social and political body can be found in the extended filmography included at the end of this dissertation.
events of May 1968. The working class, leader of the socialist revolution throughout most of the twentieth century, has therefore been de-classified by capitalism, reduced to contractual, de-skilled individual laborers, and is being stripped of its main political leverage: work.

Before looking at each of the three films mentioned above, I will start with a survey of the political and cinematic transformations that took place between May 1968, the heyday of militant cinema, and the emergence of new forms of contestation against globalization in the nineteen-nineties. I will focus more particularly on the growing irrelevance of strikes in the private sector as management would simply de-territorialize production and close worksites. As a result, as Rêve d'usine (Luc Decaster, 2003) illustrates, workers have found themselves locked in absurd struggles in which the silence and absence of management reduces them to spectral actors of past struggles. Since May 1968 continues to haunt modern-day conflicts and filmmakers, Reprise (Hervé Le Roux, 1996) traces the spatial dissolution of the working class while Les prolos (Marcel Trillat, 2002) insists on the political and social de-classification of industrial workers and the emergence of a broader “precariat,” which extends to the growing service sector.44 This in return shows the limits of the strategies deployed in the late sixties by unions and other leftist workers’ movements that sought to reverse power relations and assert their autonomy and independence by taking control of production.

**From Strikes to Closures: Displacing and De-classing the Working Class.**

Throughout the twentieth century, one event consistently symbolized working-class expression and political disruption in real life and on the screen: the strike. It shaped workers' movements and unions' strategies against governmental policies and, more importantly, it

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44 The term “precariat” was recently coined by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their latest book, Commonwealth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press University, 2009), 290.
crystallized collective unity. Strikes have often combined workers' requests for better working conditions and increased social rights with a collective reassertion of democracy against oligarchic and oligopolistic interests. The now mythologized general strikes of 1936 and 1968 have inspired more recent movements that have reshaped France's politics and social structures since the nineteen-eighties.

Similarly, these were key moments for French cinema. The second period is often described as the peak of a tradition of political filmmaking in France that was first initiated in 1936, but the periods differ in many ways. Although inspired by Communist internationalism, the cinema of the Popular Front resolutely emphasized the affirmation of an aesthetic and cinematic tradition supporting national social and political issues, breaking away from the internationally oriented commercial production that had dominated the twenties and the early thirties. The cinema of May 1968 was the opposite as it crystallized several international political discourses, particularly Marxism and Maoism, and aesthetic influences, including Soviet montage, Brechtian socialist realism and Latin American Third Cinema, in an attempt to reach out beyond national concerns. Although artificially reduced to a Parisian phenomenon, militant cinema was international in scope and radically transnational despite the marked visibility of key French auteurs. The political and artistic effervescence manifest during both periods reproduced the specificities of their contemporary social conflicts. During the last decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, filmmakers have focused on the local impact of international restructurations of economic and industrial patterns, now commonly referred to as globalization. Simultaneously, the anonymous and collective rejection of auteurist filmmaking that characterized May 1968 has gradually been abandoned as filmmakers have
reclaimed their presence as a mark of social and subjective engagement with the “forgotten of contemporary France.”

Once workers returned to work after the strikes that paralyzed France in 1967-68, most of the collectives responsible for workers' films ceased to exist. Some, however, survived under different forms and became extremely active in the redevelopment of documentary filmmaking throughout the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties. Les Films d'Ici, founded by Richard Copans after the dismantlement of Cinélutte, and Les Films du Grain de Sable, a production company co-founded by filmmaker Jean-Michel Carré, have been extremely influential, for instance, in the production of socially committed documentary films up to the present day. However, in spite of such efforts to maintain a strong tradition of political documentary filmmaking, the disillusionment of the failed revolution of May 1968 soon made it to the screen, and the late seventies witnessed both continuity and critical reflection on the political certainties of the late sixties. This reflexivity was perceptible, among other examples, in *Humain, Trop Humain* (Louis Malle, 1972), *Le Dos au Mur* (Jean-Pierre Thorn, 1978), *Grands Soirs et Petits Matins* (William Klein, 1978) and *Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge* (Chris Marker, 1977). In addition, throughout the seventies and eighties, documentary filmmaking underwent a re-professionalization, leaving behind the political authenticity of militant amateurism. It was not until the nineteen-nineties, thanks to the growing availability of small portable video and digital equipment, that amateur filmmaking would make a comeback and become a key tool of the participatory democracy advocated for by anti-globalization social movements. In the meantime, the new generation of documentary auteurs, many of whom were film students during May 1968, elaborated on the direct cinema and cinéma vérité of the sixties to shape the aesthetic

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contours of what is now commonly referred to as *cinéma du vécu.* After the collective affirmation of the working class as a political and historical subject, documentary cinema started exploring more personal subjective domains, including filmmakers' own subjectivities.

Moreover, while militant cinema initially presented the workers' movement as the expression of a unified, homogeneous class, in the aftermath of May 1968, specific voices, particularly those of women and immigrant workers, started telling a somewhat different picture. In the early seventies, these newly differentiated agendas raised fundamental questions about the persistence of homogenizing interpretive frameworks focusing on class struggles and offered a more nuanced look at the impact of new economic models on labor and individual relations to work. May 1968 celebrated the seizure of power by students and the working class against colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. The seventies saw the emergence of new types of antagonisms that gradually diffused the traditional Marxist dichotomies that opposed the proletariat and management. Working-class historical struggles were now filtered through the lenses of feminism (Carole Roussopoulos and the collective Video Out, *Monique (Lip 1)*, 1973; *Les prostituées de Lyon parlent*, 1975), immigration (*Etranges Etrangers*, Marcel Trillat, 1970; *La grève des ouvriers de Margoline*, Cinélutte, 1974; *Jusqu'au bout*, Cinélutte, 1975) and environmentalism (*Gardarem Lou Larzac*, Dominique Bloch and Philippe Haudiquet, 1974; *Condamnés à Réussir*, François Jacquemain, 1976). In addition to the diversification of experiences related, old enemies, paternalistic business owners, have been replaced by a new

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47 In July 2007, the online magazine *Critikart* had a two-part article on French militant cinema in the nineteen-seventies and both parts can be found at: http://www.critikat.com/Le-cinema-militant-francais-des.html.
rising elite: neo-liberal entrepreneurs. The geographical regionalism of bourgeois liberalism suddenly became almost harmless compared to the financial lords of global capitalism.

In 1978, *La Voix de son maître* (Nicolas Philibert and Gérard Mordillat) marked a shift in cinematic representations of management; as a matter of fact, recent films have perpetuated the growing distinctions established between the social benevolence of old-school paternalism and the indifference of international shareholders and financial capitalists for their workers. The new magnates of international capitalism successfully mastered and fully took advantage of their image, relying on the growing power of mass media. While old class struggles were fairly contained within the vertical structure of economic domination inside the factory, the new masters interviewed by Philibert and Mordillat knowingly and successfully asserted their power through increasingly interconnected economic, social and media structures. *La Voix de son maître* captured the crystallization of a consensual discourse that both dissolved the impact of May 1968 and pulled the rug out from under the workers' feet. As economic liberalism gained ground and widespread support throughout the eighties, industrial workers soon became the first victims of globalization.

In November and December 1995, France was once again at a standstill for over three weeks when railroad workers and, shortly thereafter, employees of the public sector went on a one-month strike to contest the reforms proposed by Prime Minister Alain Juppé that targeted the health care and pension systems. The political success of 1995 was nonetheless a transitional point both in the nature of social conflicts and in the way documentary filmmaking engaged with

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48 Historical and social qualifications are particularly stressed by the workers interviewed in *Calor, une usine en perspective* (Martine Arnaud-Goddet, 2005), *Appartenances* (Bernard Ganne and Jean-Paul Pénart, 1996), and *Silence dans la Vallée* (Marcel Trillat, 2007). Often, older workers recall, with a certain nostalgia, the availability of their old bosses, the latter's knowledge for the various steps of the manufacturing process in comparison to the distance, if ever met, and total ignorance for anything that exceeds profits and investments. Filmmakers are somewhat less naive, since as Trillat's repeated establishing shots of the family bourgeois mansion suggest, old paternalistic owners may have lost their business but they still live a fairly comfortable life, and were not rewarded by long-term unemployment. Distinctions are nevertheless drawn between both styles of management.
workers as political actors. Soon, the strikes contested more than the government's attack on these two key pillars of French welfare socialism; in 1995, several social movements converged to denounce growing social divides, policies supporting the privatization of public services and increasing social insecurity. While the movement was seen as an attempt to revive long-lasting French corporatist claims, it was also the symptom of profound uncertainties in France about the privatization of basic social rights and the capitalization of what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have recently called “the common.”

By “the common” we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world [...] We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth.49

The strikes of 1995 marked therefore the convergence of traditional forms of social protest long associated with the working class and newer social movements that would oppose the proliferation of financial and corporate models of capitalism not only in the industrial sectors but also through society at large. Anti-capitalism was no longer a conflict opposing the working class to capitalist owners on and through sites of production, particularly the factory. As the resistance to global capitalism gradually grew through large-scale anti-globalization protests, traditional forms of working-class struggles lost their past significance. Therefore, as Negri and Hardt argue in their recent analysis, Commonwealth, the focalization of political antagonisms on the common since the mid-nineties further isolates industrial workers. More recently, strikes have ceased to be disruptive and have instead been replaced by another event, the closure of the factory, decided this time by management. Where strikes once marked the exertion of workers'

49 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Commonwealth, viii. The notion of “the common” plays a major role in the ideological rejection of neo-liberalism by altermondialisme, as I will show in chapter four, especially in Vincent Glenn’s film Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C. (2004).
power, they are now reactive survival strategies that strengthen more than they weaken the existing order. Unlike *les Lip* in 1974, whose decision to hijack the machines and continue working while on strike enabled them to perform their economic autonomy; more recently, *les Moulinex, les Fabris, les Molex* and other groups trapped in endless judicial battles against the multinational groups that employ(ed) them embody individual and collective desperation.\(^{50}\) If in 1974 the collective onomastic appropriation of their brandname symbolized *Les Lip*’s political and economic empowerment as the owners of the *savoir-faire* promoted by the brand, in recent years, similar collective identifications have largely accentuated the tragic of commonly reported news stories. What was once an exceptional, although short-lived, achievement - *Les Lip* – has now become just another occurrence in the globalization of industrial production. Contrary to the strikes and factory occupations recorded during the late sixties, what filmmakers are now recording is no longer synonymous with political rupture and social liberation. In fact, the word “strike” is itself inappropriate and has largely been abandoned – except for railroad workers and employers of public services, including nurses, teachers and more recently university researchers. The gradual absorption of most paternalist industrial companies into vast multinational corporations administered by shareholders has crushed the traditional power of unions and workers, who can no longer use strikes as political and social leverage.

Cinematically, these strikes, and particularly, the movement led by railroad workers, marked a new step: video quickly became a prime support for amateur and professional recordings of the movements. Some critics saw in this the resurgence of experiments conducted

\(^{50}\) During the events of May 1968 and again on the occasion of locally based strikes in the early seventies, the employees of a given factory would be referred to by means of the brandname of the products manufactured: thus, *Les Lip* worked for the watchmaker Lip. Their decision to keep working while being on strike aimed to distinguish between their pride in the *savoir-faire* they had and the working conditions and wage exploitation they denounced. More recently, the employees victims of massive lay-offs have found in such identification of the group with the brandname the means by which they could make their struggles more visible in the media: *Les Moulinex, les Fabris* and *les Molex* have been among the most symbolic and longest struggles opposing workers to their management in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
with and by workers as part of the Sochaux and Besançon Medvekin groups created in 1967. The goal of such collective initiatives was to film an insider's view of the strikes in order to reappropriate a narrative that had been told for them, or in their name, up until then. At a time when social conflicts were commonly reduced to compilations for brief newscasts and short segments snatched by television crews for prime time reportages, the videos that were filmed in 1995 were less about getting workers’ voices heard, as in 1968, than about asserting the reality of the strike and the real experience of a social struggle. Therefore, in 1995, the use of video by strikers was less about opposing an amateur aesthetics to professional auteurism and more about reclaiming the truth of an experience in reaction to the sensationalism of television spectacle. However, as railroad workers opposed “the images of a festive and convivial life to the sad pictures/charts of liberal political economy,” and stood as the last corporatist rampart against the capitalization of social life, they drew attention away from a fading working class, who was then prey to a new type of social conflict: long judicial battles against absentee financial investors, shareholders and ghostly management teams. Several filmmakers have documented the material, social and political dispossession that such closures cause for workers – Marcel Trillat (300 jours de colère, 1999), Marie-Pierre Brêtas, Raphaël Girardot, Laurent Salters (Ex-Moulinex: mon travail c’est capital, 2000) as well as Luc Decaster (Rêve d’Usine, 2003) to mention a few examples of what has become a sub-genre of documentary films about globalization. For now, I would like to examine in detail Rêve d’Usine insofar as Luc Decaster captures the vanishing moment of a struggle, a historical subject and the destruction of the workers’ dream by a reality that escapes them now.

Rêve d'Usine (Luc Decaster, 1999): The Absurd Struggle of Spectral Workers.

The Dream Factory

Luc Decaster spent months filming a group of workers in a mattress factory in Mer, a small western town in France. After hearing from Epèda, their initial employer, that the site would soon close, the workers held on to their factory for months. Left without orders to complete and unable to get any explanations from representatives of management, whose absence accentuates the ghostly nature of these workers' struggles, they kept clocking in until the very possibility of a struggle became clear. Machines were finally dismantled and physically removed. In her recent analysis of Rêve d'usine, Samia Moucharik sees presence as being a key feature and modus operandi in the recent struggles - luttes - that have now replaced strikes in the vocabulary of unions and workers.52 For Moucharik, presence reclaims a time and space of resistance that is implicitly denied to them by the impossibility of a conflict due to the absence and silence of management teams. However, she reasserts thereby the essential role of the factory as far as cinematic representations of workers' experiences are concerned: “cinema cannot capture [them] outside of the factory somehow, it needs to film inside the factory that is either a workplace or the site of a struggle.”53

The problem is that, as demonstrated by Rêve d'usine, but also 300 jours de colère (Marcel Trillat, 1999), Metaleurop: Germinal 2003 (Jean-Michel Vennemani, 2003) or Les Sucriers de Coleville (Ariane Doublet, 2001), factories hardly function as workplaces or sites of struggle when workers are either artificially prolonging their production, about to be laid off or

53 Ibid., 733. “L'usine apparaît comme une des conditions nécessaires à la saisie de formes de pensée des ouvriers [...] le cinéma aurait besoin de filmer dans l'usine comme lieu de travail ou comme lieu de lutte.”
unable to find interlocutors to express grievances. I would therefore argue that, it is not that cinema “cannot capture” workers' experience outside the factory but rather that, by continuing to focus on the factory, filmmakers emphasize the surreal nature of the workers’ present experience. In recent documentary productions, the vanishing of industrial workers as an economic and political presence both in real life and in cinematic memory becomes central. Moreover, filming these people in their daily self-reassertion as workers highlights the absurd nature of what has become a non-conflictual conflict with absent decision-makers.

While scenes opposing employees and managers were common in militant cinema, allowing diverging views and discourses to be expressed aloud on the street or inside the factory, these scenes have largely disappeared from more recent films, leaving filmmakers in the role of surrogate interlocutors, stand-ins for absent management. In the second half of Rêve d’usine, one scene evokes the conflicts of May 1968, and particularly a similar sequence from the film Citroën-Nanterre (1968). A representative of what had thus far been absent management shows up. On that day, the employees had organized what looks like a fairly typical strike: they picket outside the building, banners hung on the walls and fences of the factory identify the nature of their complaints, local police are also present as required for similar events. What makes this scene significant lies precisely in the workers’ effort to stage their struggle in compliance with what social struggles have traditionally been. In Citroën-Nanterre, the director of the factory walks into the space that has been reclaimed by workers and their union representatives and is immediately confronted. Leftist students and workers' delegates draw attention to the abuse of immigrant workers' situation, and most of the scene consists of arguments and disagreements between on the one hand, the director and the “factory cops,” supervisors and administrators, and on the other, union representatives and students. In Rêve d'usine, the problem is less ideological
and concerns the employees’ general incomprehension about the decision to close the site and reduce the current employees to mere pawns in a vast economic chess game, with no consideration whatsoever for their personal situations.

The class struggles of 1968 have therefore been replaced with a more basic assertion: “we are workers, we just want to work.” The intertitles and the political langue de bois of 1968 seem no longer to have relevance as the main question concerns whether or not the workers will continue to be employed. Militant cinema never before questioned the status of workers as workers, it questioned the structures of domination and exploitation that alienated workers in the workplace; today, workers strike and occupy their factory to protect their status as workers in these same structures. The struggle that opposed the working classes to dominant classes, including business owners, has now become one that differentiates between those who do have a job and those who are unemployed. In the sequence discussed here, Mr. Guérin, director of the factory, not only stands as a representative of the company that decided to lay off all of these men and women, but he also stands as someone whose job is not threatened. “Do you have unemployed children, Mr. Guérin?” asks one of the employees.

*Rêve d’usine* is about more than the resilient presence of workers; it follows and stages their “lutte-présence” – to use Moucharik’s expression – to seize the vanishing moment that characterizes each of these local groups and industrial workers at large. I choose not to use the term “working class” here to emphasize that the films produced since the mid-nineties do not simply highlight the end of ideological representations that used to prevail but also, and most importantly, the disappearance of a whole “page in the history of work” as one employee sadly remarks in the film. The factory is therefore both the last reclaimed refuge for these people fighting to preserve their social utility and a trap insofar as their sudden reappropriation of the
place renders manifest their essential lack of control over the situation and the discrepancy between their reappropriation of the factory and the impossible repoliticization of the place in the present. In other words, their fight can only be seen as political through past representations; but at the same time, past representations have been neutralized by neo-liberal practices. If production has been de-territorialized, so has management: the on-site directors of the past, whose roots often were in the local community, have stepped down in favor of transnational financial investors and faceless logos. In the case filmed by Luc Decaster, the question remains to the end to know who really employed and paid these employees: Epéda, Epéfa, or another franchise? The sustained silence of managers and immateriality of higher executive entities renders the very notion of social conflict absurd.

The material and semantic dislocation of the factory accentuates the impossibility for these employees to resignify the workplace as a site of political production, as workers would repeatedly strive to perform in the militant films of the late sixties. Critics have often shown how in 1936, and again in 1968, workers appropriated their factories physically and symbolically, turning sites of economic production into a political space. By bringing social and private activities such as cooking, games and sleeping inside a space reserved for industrial production, occupations broke the boundaries supporting the existing social order and politicized the traditional divide between private and public spheres. However, as strikers soon realized in 1968, strengthening the social function of the factory as a key site of production for working-class culture and politics reinforced more than it would disrupt the economic compartmentalization of life. Not only were the workers on strike condemning themselves to assert further the centrality of the factory as a center of social as well as economic production, but in the specific case of May 1968, they removed themselves from any physical alliances with students and farmers who
had taken the revolt to the street.\textsuperscript{54} As such, 1968 highlighted the limitations of twentieth-century socialist utopias and the desire to break free from class-based subjectivities defined by one’s role in the production process. While much of the socialist project carried out by the unions, particularly the CGT, reaffirmed the collective identity of the working class as one that is both social and political, 1968 marked the emergence of a new discourse formulated by the workers themselves that would be distinct from traditional partisan and union lines and from representations held by industrial employers. Thanks to economic growth and steady industrial production since the early fifties, workers were finally able to consume and enjoy leisure activities. As a result, working-class culture and socialization was also defined by a desire to enjoy a social life and time that would not be regulated by industrial production.

*Rêve d’usine* illustrates perfectly how recent closures and re-locations of industrial sites abroad have suddenly reversed the process engaged in 1968, by which workers started to dissociate subjective production from the workplace. What Audrey Mariette calls “the closure-event” – *l’événement-fermeture* – is at complete odds with the actions that defined militantism in May 1968.\textsuperscript{55} Workers still appropriate their factories, but by doing so, they reinforce the economic order and go against the rupture that is now orchestrated by invisible management teams. This rupture is no longer political but remains social, except that instead of disrupting social boundaries and roles, *l’événement-fermeture* threatens the social place of workers as individuals. If the social status of workers is more than ever at stake, their actions no longer enact the ideological leadership of party affiliations, trade unionism and the utopian pursuit of the proletarian revolution. This is what I mean when I suggest the de-politicization of factory

\textsuperscript{54} Several militant films insisted on the ambivalent effects of factory occupations in 1968, particularly *Nantes-Sud Aviation* (Pierre-William Glenn and Michel Andrieu, ARC, 1968), *Cléon* (Alain Laguarda, 1968), or *Citroën-Nanterre* (Guy Devart and Edouard Hayem, 1968).

occupations since the late 1990s. This event triggers a re-signification of the factory as a home, a site of professional and collective identification; it is therefore not seen as a symbol of exploitation and alienation as it was during the strikes that stopped production in 1967-68.

Workers therefore redefine their struggle – *la lutte* – ideologically and affectively. If the *événement-fermeture* tends to encourage the return of older affiliations in order to save the factory-home, in *Rêve d'usine* (Luc Decaster, 2003), the factory becomes an empty shell, just like the workers have been stripped from their political and social essence. By the end, the factory turns out to be a dream, a vision that a group of people shared, designed and held onto for several months.

Luc Decaster’s camera followed the struggle of these employees from the announcement of imminent closure to the final vote that ended the occupation seven months later and confirmed their collective agreement with the financial compensations proposed by the managers. The short sequence described below witnesses the dismantlement of the machines and the visual disintegration of this short-term dream. The voice-over of one of the employees stresses the tragedy of their situation: “It was our home. [...] But you're just a number, you're nothing in fact. No respect, you're nothing. So, you start looking at yourself differently.” [...] As he pauses and remains silent for a brief instant, the image starts dissolving to white, to nothing. He resumes:

I can tell you that it's not easy, you know. I had no clue it would feel that way. So, people need to hang on. Technically, I am back to where I was 25 years ago. It's crazy. I'm telling you, I'm completely mad. So, I mark the days off the calendar. I am 50 years old, so, I swallow it all. After all, I tell myself that I am somewhat lucky, I have a job, even though...I was a professional technician and now I am considered a non-skilled worker. But I keep fighting in my mind, I tell myself: “Come on, hang on!”
By the time he is done, the image is now completely white and begins fading out to black as the music starts. The fact that he mentions the social regression experienced in the new job suggests the voice-over comments were added later on through editing. At first, the camera follows the small loaders and trucks that empty the workshops and leave the site one after another. It finally stops outside at a short distance and remains immobile until the end. On the left-hand side, a small delivery truck reminds the viewer of the now ironic slogan of the brand - “Je veux mon Epéda” [I want my Epéda.] Then, Luc Decaster lets the cinematic image do its magic: the shot described above, held for a short while, gradually dissolves into a white frame, creating some halo effects as if the cinematic apparition was suddenly disappearing.

Figures 1.1. and 1.2. The cinematic disappearance of a dream. (Rêve d'usine, Luc Decaster, 2003 © 24 images Production/Corto Pacific – Zootrope Films; Courtesy of 24 Images)

This last sequence reflects back on the opening of the film and particularly Decaster's choice to alternate voice-over and silent portraits, to allow the camera to follow the “characters” of the film before it loses them in the emptiness of the space. Rêve d'usine emphasizes therefore

the essential dispossession that is exerted on these people. By losing their work – shown at the beginning of the film by a series of shots of hands and arms performing precise but routine tasks and gestures – the workers lose the financial and social stability that employment guarantees in the present and the future. In addition, they are stripped of the more essential symbolic values that work holds: first, they are denied a specific savoir-faire and pride; second, they can no longer mediate the social ascension of their children.

Contrary to earlier films like Les Lip ou le goût du collectif (Dominique Dubosc, 1973), Rêve d'usine does not aim at short-circuiting official media channels and participating in the popularization of the protests outside of the factory. What was still possible in the mid-seventies is now already lost and Luc Decaster presents these men and women as being already defeated. The films of the sixties and the early seventies supported and relayed the workers' struggles; today, they can only draw attention to the fact that social cinema acts as a substitute interlocutor and mirror so that these people, the ghosts of globalization, or more specifically neo-liberal capitalism, can see themselves.

The factory has been taken away from them, and more generally from all workers, twice: first, because it belongs to the economic order of the past, and second, because when they are fighting for it, the site has already been discarded by economic and financial decision-makers. Yet, at the same time, this space guarantees them some social identity. Neither symptomatic of a re-politicization of the worker as a historical and social figure nor subordinated to the new discourses denouncing globalization, Rêve d'usine, like other documentaries that have portrayed closures and de-industrialized regions, focuses instead on the in-betweenness that defines industrial workers. Specters of the past, ghosts of the present, they are both present and absent, struggling and surrendering to the system.
Workers incorporated, Inc.

As I have already mentioned, Rêve d’Usine introduces its place and characters through close-ups of hands performing well-known gestures. Slowly, voices and hands become bodies; yet, as soon as they become whole, these bodies stand in front of us, silent, some looking straight at the camera, others, slightly looking away. Working has now become a mode of survival, a way to prove they still exist and continue to have a social function, even though orders are being phased out and transferred towards other plants.

Figures 1.3 and 1.4. From working hands to ghostly bodies. (Rêve d’usine, Luc Decaster, 2003 © 24 images Production/Corto Pacific – Zootrope Films; Courtesy of 24 Images)

After having filmed a few of these medium close shots, the camera slowly pans horizontally towards the empty space of workshops where piles of materials and unused machines stand still – only a few hooks are still vacillating, suspended in the air. The space shows the trace of both past activity and present stillness; immediately after making this short foray into the emptied-yet-not-empty space of the factory, the camera meets the stern looks of a larger group, standing as silent as before.
Positioned at a low angle, the camera reveals the collective presence that will embody the struggle throughout the film. In less than three minutes, Decaster leads the viewer through the in-betweenness where this “dream” seems poised: individual voices and collective presence, past references of the struggle – union representation, strikes, confrontations – and present isolation, appropriation of a space already abandoned. Indeed, “it is not [theirs] anymore,” but this “it” itself appears to refer to the struggle – la lutte – at large. These bodies, filmed like ghosts walking through already discarded spaces, both recall and foreshadow other specters who will return to decaying buildings and worn communities in other places and at other times – 300 jours de colère (Marcel Trillat, 1999), Ex-Moulinex: Mon Travail, c'est Capital (Marie-Pierre Brêtas, Raphaël Girardot, Laurent Salters, 2000) and Silence dans la vallée (Marcel Trillat, 2007).

In the midst of the critical and political vacuum that followed the failure of May 1968 in France, and the collapse of Communism as an international ideology in 1989, Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx saw in the ghost the emblematic figure of the social, temporal and spatial shifts of the late twentieth century. Laborers, (im)migrants, the poor, and victims of human rights abuse are all ghosts in the new world order that Derrida defines:
[...] The specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter.57 When workers resurfaced in French documentary cinema during the second half of the nineteen-nineties, the historical and political aura of the working class had already evaporated throughout the seventies and eighties. Yet, failures on the left to find a new lease on life as economic liberalism established itself as the unchallenged economic and social doctrine never put the myths of the past to rest. Therefore, the workers of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, such as those portrayed in the film, are trapped between two periods, two bodies and two realities. Unlike fiction cinema, documentary materializes, through its essential indexicality, the evanescent “incorporation” that Derrida describes.58 Here, Luc Decaster renders manifest Bill Nichols’s definition of the documentary image’s unique indexicality: his film simultaneously records the visual evidence of the employees of Epéda in Mer and captures the workers’ fragile place in the present world.

Work as a Figure of Speech

What made work cinematic for a few decades was essentially the ability of the medium to

58 Here Luc Decaster renders manifest Bill Nichols’s definition of the documentary image’s unique indexicality: “[...] cinematic sounds and images, like photographic images, enjoy an indexical relationship to what they record. They capture precisely certain aspects of what stood before the camera, which is sometimes called the pro-filic event. This quality is what makes the documentary image appear as a vital source of evidence about the world. Though true, it is immediately crucial to clarify this point. A document and an indexical sound recording or an indexical photo are documents; they provide evidence. But a documentary is more than evidence: it is also a particular way of seeing the world, making proposals about it, or offering perspectives on it. It is, in this sense, a way of interpreting the world. It will use evidence to do so.” Bill Nichols, Introduction to Documentary (2nd edition) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 34-35.
aestheticize the working body as part of a glorification of industrial modernism. Militant cinema, on the contrary, reacted against such objectivation of the human body and gave a larger place to speech. More recently, filmmakers have re-emphasized the physicality of work by re-signifying gestures from the workers' point of view. As skills are increasingly transferred over to robotized manufacturing processes and workers become interchangeable chain links whose role often consists in assisting the machine and keeping an eye on control boards, filming and listening to them as they describe their work takes on a historical and memorializing function. For René Baratta, the opacity of work for viewers makes speech inevitable and necessary; images invite spoken utterances while speech reinforces and makes images more available. Historically, cinematic representations of workers have indeed privileged one or the other. During the forties and fifties, films glorified physical force through images of working bodies, usually male. The only comments available at the time came from voice-over narrations. During the sixties, images of work were subjected to the overflowing speech of workers; work became a narrative, delivered by individual and group testimonies. Voice-over was then replaced by workers' first-person narratives layered over images or through interviews. Bruno Muel's famous sequence in *Avec le sang des autres* (1974), which superimposes the voice of an industrial worker describing the emotional impact of the physical pain felt in his hands onto images of workers taking their early morning shift, has become a symbol of the narrative shift that became more tangible in the early 1970s. Over time, the physical elements of work disappeared, replaced by machines or

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59 René Baratta, “Filmer le travail: de quel travail s'agit-il?,” in Annie Borzeix, *Filmer le travail*, Champs Visuels, 6 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 94-102, 102. “Est-ce à dire que dans un film sur le travail la parole est plus importante que l'image? Non, mais elle est en quelque sorte consubstantielle à l'image. L'image est là pour susciter la parole et la parole à son tour vient éclairer cette image d'un sens nouveau, pour faire émerger les motivations et la subjectivité de celui qui agit.” (“Does it mean that in a film, speech is more important than the image? No, but it is somehow consubstantial to the image. The image is there to trigger speech and speech in turn brings a new meaning to the image, to extract the motivations and the subjectivity of the agent.” This translation is mine.)

60 This sequence has appeared in several other contemporary films, including Pierre Carles’s *Attention, Danger, Travail* (2003) discussed in chapter three.
supplanted by passive forms of employment, services rendered to customers and immaterial transactions. More recently, speech and more specifically memories of work have come to constitute the last access individuals have to work, because they are unemployed or because their skills are no longer needed in the current processes of production.

Devalued by the economic system, it is through savoir-faire and skills that workers salvage the very last traces of their social utility. Instead of simply pointing to the alienating nature of industrial work, these gestures take on a second function for the workers themselves, they become a counter-narrative by which the workers oppose the use value of their work to the deflating exchange value of labor on the global market. These gestures, which have become natural and somewhat automatic through repetition, no longer represent a mode of production that de-humanizes workers into automata; they channel the affective investment workers put in the quality of the product and through which they have perfected their skills over time and identified with a specific métier.

Workers do not only reclaim their individual savoir-faire; the montage in the opening sequence of Rêve d'usine stresses how each of these individual skills fits into a collective process. Quality is therefore less the result of a succession of individual tasks than the integration of complementary savoir-faire. Voice-overs, using past and present tense, mix the present of the struggle and the past characterized by work and self-fulfilling pride: “we had heard the message, make better products than competition,” “we are the only one in the world to make this,” “I like doing good work, we have to be meticulous,” “we are an extremely competitive company and we make good products...” Unlike militant films, the collectivity does not form in reaction to working conditions as part of a large process of political affirmation; here, the collectivity is defined through its shared identification with, and pride in, the work itself, which once again
marks a return to conceptions that were predominant in pre-capitalist socialist struggles. However, if Dominique Méda sees 1848 as a pivotal struggle in the redefinition of (industrial) work as a vector of self-expression, the employees on strike in Rêve d’usine seem to compress pre-and post-1848 conceptions of work. While they emphasize the social value of their work and see it as their self-affirmation, their struggle is nonetheless about preserving their only means of survival.

Unlike earlier films, Luc Decaster does not film the repetitive gestures performed by the workers to denounce working conditions and the industrial automatization of human robots. In 1972, Louis Malle, for instance, combined the aesthetics of militant cinema with the technical focus of industrial films in Humain, Trop Humain. His quasi-silent close-ups of hands, feet and bodies busily performing precise tasks along the chain of production already marked a sharp contrast with the militant films of the late 1960s that documented strikes and emphasized breaks in the production process. However, in spite of the changing perspective, Malle’s camera echoed and rendered concrete the anti-capitalism of his time as the filmmaker emphasized the repetitive nature of the gestures and the isolation of workers, men and women, imposed on them by the noise, the pace and the spatial layout of the various units of production. In Rêve d’usine, Luc Decaster approaches the workplace in what could seem a less condemning manner; he draws attention to the fact that for workers, relocations are essentially dispossessions of their skills. This may seem like it presents industrial work as a source of subjectification, but I would prefer to see in this less ideological portrayal a stronger indictment of global capitalism, as it gradually


“Les journées de 1848 marquent en quelque sorte solennellement le moment où la conception du travail comme moyen de la réalisation de soi prend le pas sur la conception du travail comme simple moyen de subsistance. Quelles sont en effet les revendications de Proudhon, de Louis Blanc ou des ouvriers ? Elles sont au nombre de trois: la création étant issue du travail, c’est le travail qui doit être récompensé, et non le capital; le travail étant collectif, c’est ce collectif en tant que tel qui doit recevoir rémunération; l’exercice du travail étant devenu la condition de maintien en vie des travailleurs, la production doit être organisée de manière à répondre aux besoins sociaux en évitant le gaspillage, d’une part, et de manière à ce que chacun puisse obtenir un revenu, d’autre part.”
achieves what Jacques Derrida describes as the “anthropomorphic projection” of the
 commodified “thing.”  

The autonomy lent to commodities corresponds to an anthropomorphic projection.
The latter inspires the commodities, it breathes the spirit into them, a human spirit, the
spirit of a speech, and the spirit of a will. [...] With this movement of a fiction of a
speech, but of speech that sells itself by saying, “Me, the commodity, I am speaking,”
Marx wants to give a lesson to economists who believe (but is he not doing the same
thing?) that it suffices for a commodity to say “Me, I am speaking” for it to be true and
for it to have a soul, a profound soul, and one which is proper to it.

While such subjective performing speech characterized militant cinema in the late sixties, the
status of speech has become much more complex since. Political interventions denouncing
exploitation, alienation and filth in the workplace have been replaced with memories and
descriptions of simple gestures, a sense of pride in owning skills which enable workers to play a
role in the international prestige of a particular brand or a certain industry. Many employees
cannot even enjoy this sense of pride and self-achievement as their function has been reduced to
checking computer screens and panel boards. For those who have been laid off and deprived of
their status as workers, replicating gestures they used to do in the middle of emptied shops is
seen as a way to reclaim ownership of their skills. As robotization and mechanization complicate
further the act of filming work, filmmakers linger on and therefore emphasize the affective
connection workers have with their activity. The camera thus mediates the workers’ point of
view more than it constructs a political judgment that would originate in the filmmaker himself.
Filming or listening to people talking about their work is also often a matter of memorializing
disappearing practices. In this context, the stasis of work modifies once again the aesthetic and

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political values of oral comments.

From a political weapon in 1968, speech has become a mode of survival; more importantly, the location of speech has been redirected. In 1968, film recorded workers' speech but these eruptions were not contingent on the presence of filmmakers, who happened to be participating witnesses. Today, in the absence of interlocutors, film becomes an essential receptacle, even though it can only act as a surrogate presence. As workers find themselves tilting more and more at windmills, unable to hold invisible management teams accountable for any decisions, filmmakers, and spectators, take on the role of substitute interlocutors. Documentary filmmaking is now less a medium that records the affirmation of political subjects than one that can listen and enable individuals to preserve their subjectivity.63 In the early sequences of Rêve d'usine, one of the employees addresses Decaster, who is behind the camera. She explains that they are all angry and tired of always hearing the same answers and feel trapped and unable to express themselves as they would really wish to. “If I could express myself freely, then, I don't know, I may want to break the machine, just so they can't use it anymore ... I don't know if you understand what I mean, we want to let it out but if we do, we may lose people's sympathy, in town, and so on, I don't know how to explain it to you.” (17'34-18'21) While Decaster's presence enables her to get some kind of release from the trap she describes, her concerns about whether or not the filmmaker can understand their situation stress the growing isolation that workers fighting lay-offs feel. However, if he accentuates the “surreal” beauty of their struggle, as another employee describes it, Decaster emphasizes the emptiness of the factory, their home, and the stifling invisible barrier that separates their experience from the outside.

63 This will also be the case in more recent pathological representations of work, which will be addressed in chapter two, particularly Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés (2005).
Rêve d’usine captures the spectral incorporation of industrial workers and the oneiric quality of site-based struggles at a time when economic structures have not only been re-territorialized across continents but have also permeated social structures. Many other films have documented the incorporation of industrial remains within new geographies. *Sur les cendres du vieux monde* (Laurent Hasse, 1999) and *Silence dans la vallée* (Marcel Trillat, 2007), for instance, examine the social and economic precarization of old industrial bastions while new financial fortresses grow and pull the strings of the global economy. In 1996, Hervé Le Roux was among the first to sketch out, with his camera, a topographical shift from the class-based social structure and power struggles of industrial capitalism to the gradual emergence of a more diffuse precarious labor. As *Reprise* shatters the events now remembered as May 1968 into a plurivocal mesh of narratives, stories and memories, Le Roux’s camera looks for the spatial traces of this superimposition of geographies in the urban fabric.


Preceding the large majority of films that have depicted factory closures, the impact of globalization on French labor and the generalization of precarious employment since the late nineties, *Reprise* revisits the social struggles of May 1968 and the role of cinema in the (re)-presentation of the events then and now. This film is transitional in its multidirectional movements: it returns to 1968 while filming Saint-Ouen in 1995; the various subjects interviewed both recall June 10, 1968, and other personal and historical events that shaped their political engagement before and after that particular day.64 In *Reprise*, the Wonder factory, which

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64 On June 10, 1968, the strike that had opposed the female workers of the Wonder factory in Saint-Ouen, their trade union representatives and members of the local Communist Party to the direction of the factory finally came to an
at the time was a leading manufacturer of batteries, becomes a sort of mythic land – “Wonder, Wonderland” as Hervé Le Roux ironizes himself in the opening voice-over comments. This Wonderland, which comes from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and recalls Chris Marker's puns and borrowings from the English writer's fantasies, can only exist in and through the memories of the men and women who worked there in the past.⁶⁵ Even the short militant film that constitutes the discursive, historical and intertextual matrix of *Reprise, La reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* (Jacques Willemont and Pierre Bonneau, 1968), was filmed outside, on the streets, as workers, mostly women, were being encouraged to return to their workshops. In spite of, or maybe because of, its intangibility, Wonder becomes a vast emptied space that does not symbolize either one particular social conflict or the militantism of May 1968; in Hervé Le Roux's search for Jocelyne – the woman refusing to go back to work on June 10, 1968 – Wonder condenses both local and national industrial evolutions. After leaving Pierre Guyot, a local elected official who was among the few men talking with the woman in the 1968 film, Hervé Le Roux's voice-over confides to us that “[they] came with their tape to meet a character from 1968, but [Guyot's] story, the only story he really wanted to tell, had taken place ten years earlier.”⁶⁶ Pierre Guyot's commitment was deeply rooted in his experience during the Algerian War and his complex relationship with his father, leader of the Communist Party Raymond Guyot. Others, including Marie-Thérèse, a union representative, and Mademoiselle Marguerite, a forewoman at end. Workers were strongly encouraged both by their representatives and the management team of Wonder to resume work. For some, the compromise negotiated by union representatives was far from satisfying. Two young students from the IDHEC, Paris’s film school, who were present almost by chance, were thus able to record a ten-minute confrontation between one of the workers, who virulently refused to return to work, and local elected officials and union representatives.

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⁶⁵ Chris Marker's 1977 historical panorama, *Le Fond de l'air est rouge*, is known in its English version as *A Grin Without a Cat* – which refers to Carroll's Cheshire Cat. More recently, in 2004, Marker brought back his famous cat in *Chats Perchés/The Case of the Grinning Cat* for his documentary following two simultaneous urban trajectories: that of a mysterious artist leaving replicas of the cat throughout the Parisian landscape and that of the presidential campaign of 2002 and various social protests that turned the city of Paris into a living political stage.

Wonder since before 1968 until the closure soon before *Reprise* was shot in 1995, recount or allude to the restructuration of management from the eighties onwards, after the family business was sold to Bernard Tapie first and later integrated within the multinational group Alstom.

Other times, other conflicts, transversal connections such as these tie *Reprise* to other films, including Jean-Pierre Thorn's *Le dos au mur* (1978) about the strike that shook Alstom Saint-Ouen for over a month or *Chaix Vivra* (1975), a film by Jean-Louis Lorenzi and Michel Carré about the strike that mobilized print and press unions for several years in the Chaix print shops in Saint-Ouen. With *Reprise*, Hervé Le Roux has updated the testimonial genre that characterized and dominated documentary, haunted by the Holocaust and the Second World War, in the second half of the twentieth century. His detective investigation of the past and the process of memorialization is not so much about overcoming inexpressible and unrepresentable traumas as in *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1983) or *The Sorrow and The Pity* (Marcel Ophüls, 1969). Instead, Le Roux and others after him start from images, posters, films or words that are now emblematic of an epoch but have somehow lost their initial referentiality in the process of memorialization. Reproduced, reinterpreted, lost or fossilized by time and change, certain images, words or labels describing the workers' movements have led several filmmakers on political, sociological or personal quests.67

67 In 2004, Christophe Cordier reiterated Hervé Leroux's experiment in his film, *Frères de Classe*. 1972, Saint-Brieuc, the strike voted by the workers of the Joint Français has radicalized, which has led management to call the CRS, the French riot police. A photograph opposing a union leader and worker to a police officer was taken and became a symbol of the social violence at stake in the workers' movements that had first exploded in 1968. In the first minutes of the film, Christophe Cordier remembers the day his father brought the poster-photo home and hung it on his son's bedroom door. Fascinated by the image, Cordier, thirty years older and a filmmaker, returned to St-Brieuc, determined to find the two men face to face on the picture that became a symbol of social struggles. While he was only able to meet with the sons of the police officer, he met the enraged worker, Guy, still working and still actively involved in local strikes and social struggles. As the film unveils the personal stories behind the icons, the black and white picture that pitted the workers against the brutality of the government police fades and invites a more nuanced re-reading of the historical moment. Guy and Burgnault, the riot police officer, had been best friends since they were children. The rage clearly visible on Guy's face in 1972 was mixed with the pain he felt when finding himself on the other side of the invisible institutional boundary that separated him from his friend.
Through the Looking Urban Panorama

Several critics have pointed out the multiplicity of meanings at stake in the word *Reprise*. Recycling past images of workers resuming work after a long strike, this film was also Hervé Le Roux's symbolic way to offer the evasive revolted woman filmed in 1968 a second take, giving her and himself a chance to tell us more about who she was, why she was so angry that day and what happened after those few minutes immortalized by cinema. For Laurent Marie, *Reprise* is also a re-motivation or re-signification of political and personal utterances, a remake of May 1968 no longer seen through the Marxist and Maoist *langue de bois* that dominated at the time but reinvigorated through the testimonies of the many seamstresses of collective memory.68 Kristin Ross emphasizes, more than the moment of political eruption for the working class usually associated with such strikes, the deliquescence that follows, the violent *reprise* that is this time performed by political authorities, forces of order or the economic absorption of workers' revolt. She locates in the film's relentless insistence on every detail of the footage recorded in 1968 “a kind of historical condemnation whereby '68 itself becomes spectral, partaking of the peculiar spectrality and ungraspability of the recent past in the minds of those whose past it is.”69 She continues and explains that *Reprise* does more than establish the continuities originally intended by Hervé Le Roux between individual memories and the present-day industrial and urban landscape. For Ross, Le Roux's most successful “reprise” lies in showing “the repairing or reweaving of a fabric, filling in the holes to make the tissue whole again.”70

This tissue directs viewers' attention to a space within the film that has remained

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70 Ibid., 142-143.
overlooked thus far in critical accounts: the panoramic, traveling shots inserted at irregular intervals between interviews or, less often, during voice-over testimonies. Mostly present in the first half of the film, these views of Saint-Ouen both support the recollections provided by the two filmmakers who shot *La Reprise du Travail aux usines Wonder*, past and present CGT/union representatives and elected officials who reminisce on internal relations between employees and management at various times in Wonder's history. In other words, these views connect oral accounts to the physical and demographic transformations that are still visible today and can be deciphered in the depth of Saint-Ouen's panorama.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt contrast three “geographies of rebellion” that occurred at various stages of capitalism: first, the *commercial city*, a site of exchange between agricultural production and pre-capitalist cities; second, the *industrial city* that revolved around the factory as primary site of production but remained separated from its productive core by walls; and finally, more recently, the *biopolitical city* or *metropolis* that integrates spaces of economic production and living spaces.\(^7^1\) *Reprise*, as Ross points out above, does not so much juxtapose temporalities, as two of Negri and Hardt’s “geographies of rebellion.” 1968 Saint-Ouen, then an industrial city, gradually evolved into 1995 Saint-Ouen, a *banlieue* integrated within the metropolis, Paris. The industrial bastion has therefore been relegated to a reservoir of precarious laborers, where the specters of yesterday’s working class coexist with the ghostly presence of today’s immigrants in the periphery of French society. Both “geographies of rebellion” thus merge in *Reprise*, as recollections and views of the industrial-*banlieue* layer up.

Located on the northern outskirts of Paris, Saint-Ouen forms a triangle with two other former industrial bastions whose names have often been associated with various representations of the past and present Parisian urbanscape, Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers. Since the mid-

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\(^7^1\) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, 251.
nineteenth century, Saint-Ouen's economic, political and social history has been tied to the industrial, chemical and manufacturing waves of expansion. Hervé Le Roux alludes to the industrial variety of the town in brief commentaries that fill in any gaps viewers may have on the social history of the town. Coal, steel, auto, and later electrical and electronics industries were a source of employment and economic expansion at various times between 1830 and the late nineteen-eighties. In addition, the old printing shops of Chaix (1880-1980) become a useful platform from where Le Roux captures a panoramic, semi bird's-eye-view, guiding our eyes from Sacré Coeur basilica perched on Montmartre, leftward to the old Wonder workshops, on the other side of the beltway that separates Paris from its suburbs. I say semi-bird’s-eye-view because the shot is quite low and does not fully conform to the aerial point of view typical of bird’s-eye-views. However, since the camera is located on top of a roof, the perspective is still above the cityscape.

In one circular horizontal panning shot, Hervé Le Roux captures the architectural, historical and industrial transformations that resulted from the industrial boom precipitated by the construction of a harbor and docks in 1830. The few cranes barely visible in the background point to the nearby presence of the Seine river and the original strategic importance of the city. Between the majestic basilica that towers over Paris and the metal roofs of Wonder, this shot also provides glimpses of the demographic and socio-economic composition of Saint-Ouen: a few Hausmannian-style apartment buildings and boulevards disappear, engulfed in the more chaotic assemblage of public housing high-rises and the working-class residential neighborhoods surrounding what used to be the Wonder factory. These shots, apparently disconnected and random in the narrative unraveling of the mystery woman, weave invisible threads that slowly design a historical and geographical map of Saint-Ouen.

Throughout the film, the camera roams through the streets of Saint-Ouen and some landmarks of the local working-class culture: a bistro, La Choppe des Puces, right across from the factory, the walls and doors of Wonder – it is unclear whether Le Roux was refused the right to film inside the old buildings or simply did not intend to – the labor exchange, also known as the CGT headquarters, the docks or industrial zone, the Chaix print shops (another large employer in Saint-Ouen with a history as conflictual but much less memorable, or memorialized, than Wonder's), various homes of former workers and supervisors, as well as peripheral locations in relation to Saint-Ouen. Le Roux goes to Normandy, where a few satellite factories were built, and to the island of Oléron, where Poulou, the leftist high-school student seen and heard in *La reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, now lives. This geographical escape allows Le Roux and Poulou to briefly mention the remobilization of the Maoists after the failures of May 1968, at the side of the farmers who continued their struggles well after the defeat of industrial workers. This
“interlude” — a word used by Le Roux himself —, which happens approximately halfway through the film, takes us away from Saint-Ouen and Wonder but on his way, radio newscasts stretch further into the present the social conflicts of the past. Employees of a striking Quimperlé factory denounce the poor working conditions that evoke Emile Zola’s *Germinal* a few years before the turn of a new millennium.72

So the factory and factory life are never seen in *Reprise*. Instead, they are always mediated by literary, personal or political references; therefore, the only somewhat unmediated access that viewers have to Saint-Ouen lies in those shots of empty buildings with curtains flying in the wind, barely functioning industrial zones and railway tracks, graffiti-covered walls and storefronts, all immersed in the depths of a brand-dominated skyline.


The women of May 1968 have been replaced by immigrant workers, as the silhouettes of African men, women and children walking through the streets or playing in public parks tend to suggest. *Reprise* was a film about the “characters” that made 1968, it was not intended as a film about present-day Saint-Ouen; yet, in these inserted views, Le Roux's film does initiate a present

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72 Emile Zola’s famous novel on the working conditions of miners in nineteenth-century France was published in 1885, and was most recently adapted for cinema in 1993 by French filmmaker Claude Berri.
narrative. Through quick, unanticipated “encounters,” the camera underlines the new contours of Saint-Ouen as the old industrial city slowly merges with the biopolitical metropolis: “as the space of economic production and the space of the city tend to overlap” the metropolis becomes “a place of unpredictable encounters” with alterity. Reprise does not force any representation though, instead it layers up fleeting encounters of the present on persisting, yet disappearing, discourses and political identifications of the past.

Reprise traces the gradual absorption, and effacement, of industrial sites within the spreading metropolises. It recreates, as it reveals the successive layers of the urbanization of Saint-Ouen, the historical and spatial mobility of labor. As industrial cities were gradually converted into suburban peripheries, the working class was replaced with a diversifying pool of precarious labor. The former shared skills, the latter are defined by social and economic exclusion. In Les prolos (2002), Marcel Trillat maps out the general dislocation of the working class as a result of management experiments and the gradual absorption by capitalism of past workers' claims for flexibility, individual autonomy and polyvalence. While films documenting closures, such as Rêve d'usine or more recently Marcel Trillat's Silence dans la vallée (2007), witness the de-industrialization of French regions as a result of re-locations abroad, focusing on the material disaggregation of factories, Trillat's journey across France assesses the structural transformations that have made the idea and the political project of the working class impossible. His encounters highlight the social and political disappearance of a class by looking at ways in which its skills, its discourse and its culture have been appropriated by capitalism.

73 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Commonwealth, 251-252.
*Les Prolos* (Marcel Trillat, 2002) – From the Working Class to the Precariat.

In six stops in different factories and workplaces across France, Marcel Trillat presents a cross-section of today's “working class,” or rather what is left of it. Unlike the two other films discussed in this chapter, Trillat films essentially inside operational sites while workers go around their daily tasks and shifts. His “prolos” are therefore not as ghostly as Luc Decaster's, but they hardly constitute a class per se. He purposely films modern-day metalworkers, a group who in the nineteen-thirties provided the Popular Front with strong union leadership and political will, the textile industry of the North which was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century, rural regions where many of today's retiring workers abandoned agriculture looking for better opportunities in local industries during the nineteen-forties and early fifties, and finally the shipyards of the Atlantic in Saint-Nazaire, where Trillat filmed the enduring “fighting spirit” of a whole community in the late sixties. As he revisits some of the major places of French workers' history, Trillat shows how, in spite of semantic adjustments and some modifications in the organization of production, the alienating nature of the working conditions has hardly changed. Trillat’s camera and questions suggest that unlike many of the workers interviewed, the filmmaker is not convinced that today’s “operators” are more autonomous than yesterday’s “workers” as they now belong to “elementary units of production” and no longer stand along the production line. Marcel Trillat's early militanthism resurfaces as his questions focus on three axes that used to be central to workers' cinema: first, structures of struggles, particularly the role of unions, second, wages, and finally, alienation. What is different

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74 In 1938, Jacques Lemare directed a 38-minute long film about metalworkers' unions, *Les Métallos*; later on, other filmmakers celebrated their work, including Jean-Daniel Pollet, *Pour mémoire (la forge)* (1979). In 1968, Marcel Trillat spent some time in Saint-Nazaire filming one of the hardest strikes that affected the town and the families of the workers on strike for over two months.
though is that today’s workers have seemingly given up on the political consciousness that animated the struggles of the past and no longer share the pride that their predecessors had in belonging to a social and cultural community, the working class. I will therefore examine more closely how camera movements and Trillat’s recurrent questions counter-balance, more than they reinforce, the workers’ testimonies in most instances.

In lieu of increased autonomy and more flexibility, Trillat highlights the isolation of workers, and his conversations with workers suggest that discussing wages, a central stake of class struggles, has now become taboo. As a result, *Les prolos* raises questions about the role of unions now and in the future, as they are now facing fundamental social, political and economic divides between, on the one hand, traditional workers (employed full-time and guaranteed long-term benefits and the stability of a career working for the same employer all along), and on the other, a growing number of interim and contractual labor. However, in recent years, this “precarization” has increasingly affected the regular workforce, since all are now threatened by unemployment. The political “being of the class” that Marx promoted as the incarnation of revolutionary avant-garde and that André Gorz denounced as what blinds and imprisons further individual workers has been replaced by precarious labor.

For Marcel Trillat, *Les prolos* and *Femmes précaires* (2005) were made in an effort to respond to “the ritual vision” that associates poverty with violence. Instead, the journalist-filmmaker documents the social normalization, if not standardization, of poverty among a larger population of precarious labor, that cuts across gender, age and ethnicities. This has been a continuous thread throughout Marcel Trillat's career in militant cinema, with radio experiments and later on television. As early as the seventies, Marcel Trillat, despite his communist

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affiliations, was always more interested in the margins of the working class: immigrants in *Étranges étrangers* (1970), women in *La nouvelle école des femmes* (Jacques Krier and Marcel Trillat, 1972) and youths in *L’Exil* (Michel Parmart and Marcel Trillat, 1974). Although marginalized socially and politically by the Party and some leftist organizations, these groups proved nonetheless essential to the reproduction of the system, as the last decades of the twentieth-century showed. Very early, Marcel Trillat filmed less the struggle of a cohesive working class than the instrumentalization of labor by economic and, to some extent, political interests.

As a new century and a new millennium start, investigating the changing nature of the working class is therefore as much a social as it is a personal necessity for Trillat.

I had to take this trip. We had been hearing that the working class was about to disappear, I was about to believe this was true. A whole universe that had fascinated me when I was young, during my first reportages and that would have faded like an engulfed continent. Yet, based on the last census, there are still approximately six million active workers, more than 25% of waged employees. And until proven wrong, there is no better way to manufacture boats, high-speed trains, vegetable mills, computers, panel trucks, socks, yogurt...No better way either to build those empires, those fortunes that tower over the misery of the world, more than ever. I dedicate my travelogue to the forgotten of contemporary France.76

Here, the filmmaker’s emphasis on the ambivalent and fragile place of workers in late capitalism

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76 Marcel Trillat's voice-over introduces the project, establishing clearly his intentions and position. “Ce voyage, je devais le faire. A force de l'entendre dire, on allait finir par le croire: la classe ouvrière serait en voie de disparition. Tout un univers qui m'avait tellement fasciné dans ma jeunesse. Lors de mes premiers reportages et qui serait évanoui comme un continent englouti. Pourtant, d'après le dernier recensement, il reste environ six millions d'ouvriers enactivité, plus de 25% des salariés. Et jusqu'à preuve du contraire, on n'a pas trouvé mieux pour fabriquer des bateaux, des TGV, des moulinettes, des ordinateurs, des camionnettes, des chaussettes, des yaourts...Pas mieux non plus pour édifier ces empires, ces grandes fortunes qui surplombent plus que jamais la misère du monde. Ce carnet de voyage en six étapes est dédié aux oubliés de la France contemporaine.”
echoes Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's description of the paradoxical nature of late twentieth
century and early twenty-first century proletariat, or what they call the “precariat.” For the two
critics, “by making labor increasingly precarious for an ever larger portion of the workforce, [...] capital is casting labor out, expelling it.”77 In their view, while this reinforces the commodified
nature of labor, it also opens the way for regained subjective political and social autonomy.
Chapter three and four will pursue this argument further: I will see in particular how the
unemployed and anti-globalization social movements question the implicit links maintained
between employment, citizenship and democracy. Here, however, I would like to stress how Les
prolos focuses on the discursive and structural gaps that distinguish late nineteen-sixties
workers’ struggles from today’s “precariat.” Marcel Trillat’s personal trajectory, in the film and
over time, creates an implicit, understated dialogue between this present survey and the past.

The “New Worker” and New Labor

In spite of some testimonies that underline a greater variety in the tasks performed and a
general satisfaction with their professional situation, Marcel Trillat's film insists on the isolation
of today's “operators”, which is now preferred to the term “worker,” in the “line” of production.
While this last term marks a change in the French terminology, since it was previously known as
the “chain,” the linguistic representation of the production process remains the same in English.
Continuity is in fact more or less what Trillat suggests by means of camera angles and
movements that highlight the partitioning of the space in small islets of production and the
persistence of rows as dominant structures for the assembly of large pieces. In the film, modern
methods of management seem to reinforce, almost paradoxically since they seek greater
integration and polyvalence, the isolation of labor. After interviewing several individuals in the

77 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Commonwealth, 290, 293.
first vignette, recorded at Renault trucks, a long tracking shot (14'09) slowly rolls along the various work stations lined up in the warehouse.


At times, the camera reveals a single human body engulfed by rows of machines and piles of materials. Human presence appears to be almost contained behind the fences that separate some of the units and overwhelmed by the massive place now given to a variety of robots and mechanized processes. The only moment when workers seem to escape the solitude of their work is paradoxically the traditional production line itself (24'10): teams of operators bustle about putting together enormous truck engines. Similar shots showing solitary men and women attending to various machines or simply doing their work recur throughout the film, which ends with a long tracking shot of an underpaid janitor riding his scooter through the cities of Paris from one apartment building to another. From Renault trucks, which used to host the proud metalworkers of French industrialism, to the stairways of Parisian apartment buildings, what makes the unity of today’s growing “precariat” has to do with the low wages received more than the political cohesiveness and culture of yesterday’s working class.

Throughout the film, Marcel Trillat traces the emerging discrepancies between what he
observes and what people are willing to say. In spite of the more “humane” and clean image of factories, his questions and the camera reveal the emergence, or the return, of new subcategories or groups. Thus, comments made by management such as “human hands are more profitable than robots in certain instances,” or “the future productivity of companies will come from human labor [not robotization]” take on a double meaning as Trillat draws attention to the stagnation of wages, particularly as fewer and fewer employees are able to work their entire career with the same company and therefore see their savoir-faire increasingly de-valued over time.

In his analysis of waged labor in the late eighties, *Métamorphoses du travail: critique de la raison économique* (1988)/*Critique of Economic Reason* (1989), André Gorz warned about the promotion of a “new type of workers” from the seventies onwards.78 In his view, a new humanistic ideology, embodied by the proliferation of “human resources” personnel, was implemented to mask the divisions created among workers as a result of new types of employment – interim, subcontracting, part-time, etc – and widespread social insecurity and precarity. However, while such a humanistic revalorization of workers could be seen as positive, Gorz sees the “reprofessionalization” of workers through a renewed emphasis on their qualification, self-development and general well-being in the workplace as an attempt to separate an emerging “working elite” from the working class and the growing mass of precarious labor and the unemployable.79

The image of the new workers, proud of their crafts, masters of their work, capable of keeping pace with technological developments, does not therefore derive from a belated concession to the humanism of labour on the part of the employers, but corresponds to a necessity produced by changes in technology. [...] All it needed to do so

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was to adopt the values of the utopia of work as its own: control (that is, technical reappropriation) by the workers over the means of production; the full development within work of the abilities of the individual; and recognition of the importance of skills and the professional ethic.80

Marcel Trillat does draw attention on several occasions to the success of such managerial efforts to reconsider some workers, since many express their general satisfaction. In fact, their testimonies echo some of the words used by Gorz to describe the humanistic conception of full-time workers. One employee explains to the filmmaker that working in units of production makes him feel more autonomous as he is in charge of several operations, developing new lines with engineers and has a more varied experience of the company and his own function in the process. Another one describes his workplace as a small “paradise.” However, if workers are involved in the decision process in several of the companies filmed in *Les prolos*, Marcel Trillat counterbalances this somewhat idealistic vision of modernization and humanism with less compelling examples.

For those confined to interim positions as overqualified, aging or young, inexperienced workers, work fails to be as rewarding socially and financially. Almost all of the young employees interviewed at the beginning of the film agree on the fact that “they will not spend their whole life working [for Renault trucks].” They refuse to follow the footsteps of their parents, who they now see as broken by the physical demands of factory work; they all insist on the boring nature of the work, and the simple fact that being a worker no longer guarantees the material comfort that previous generations enjoyed. The factory no longer represents an end, the dream in which previous generations invested; it is now only tolerable as a temporary means by which younger generations may start dreaming about other social projects.

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80 André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 68.
In fact, as sociologist Serge Paugam states, while professional integration, understood as the twofold material and symbolic recognition of work and the social protection that ensues from being employed, used to cement working-class culture, systematic efforts to break class identification have caused a general disinterest in work. Elaborating on Maurice Halbwachs’s conception of the working class, Serge Paugam compares the situations of workers in the sixties with what can be observed in the late nineties. Forty years ago, industrial workers were able to close social and economic gaps since their salaries would give them access to certain commodities and they shared a sense of pride in the skilled trade they owned. By the late nineties, the stagnation of salaries, the growing number of precarious types of employment and the disintegration of working-class solidarity and identity pulled industrial workers further away once again from the rest of society. While disinterest in work used to be compensated by social security and stability, workers are now unable to find satisfaction in their work and are no longer guaranteed employment in the short or long term.81 This confirms the growing divide that André Gorz predicted between a minority of workers who are relatively privileged and the larger majority of de-skilled, precarious labor, or, worse, migrant workers illegally recruited outside of all forms of social protection and in denial of work regulations.

As wages remain a central taboo, they nonetheless guarantee some unconditional attachment to work as a central value, and constitute as such the primary instrument of control for capitalist interests. Following Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, it even seems that wage has now replaced class-consciousness as mode of identification for the “precariat.” They argue that wage conditions will be one of the three axes of rebellion they see emerging today against global

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capitalism, along with work itself and the capitalization of social life. If Marcel Trillat continuously draws attention to the workers’ low wages, *Les prolos* seems to be more invested in the present consciousness of the situation than future possibilities of organization, as Negri and Hardt pursue. Instead, the film highlights, implicitly, how structural divisions within the working-class and the marginalization of labor in the production process have slowly altered the traditional role of unions. Trillat accentuates therefore how the final piece of workers’ history has been removed: after boundaries between industrial sites and social reproduction fell (*Reprise*) and workers lost their political leverage and became obsolete links in the process (*Rêve d’usine*), unions are faced with an impossible choice between protecting the social rights of a small elite of re-professionalized workers and those of the growing population of precarious labor and the unemployed (*Les prolos*).

**Conclusion: The De-Classed Labor of Contemporary Documentary.**

In 1980, André Gorz issued a simple “farewell to the proletariat,” breaking away from traditional Marxist-based class struggles rhetoric. His atypical vision for the reinvention of society foreshadowed the emergence during the following decade of new social movements led no longer by the working class but by individuals stripped of any possibility of social and professional identifications. Gorz was among the first to conceptualize new interpretive frameworks to account for the growing political dimension of unemployment, social exclusion and precarity, which have since become prominent themes for sociologists of work, particularly

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Robert Castel and Dominique Méda.84

While Gorz initially denounced the recuperation of the Marxist process of proletarianization by capitalism, the English title given to the translation of his book, *Farewell to the Working Class*, went further and buried the historical possibility of workers' collective incarnation. This provocative statement came at a time when class-consciousness was seriously challenged by the liberal cult of individualism and consumerism as a mode of self-affirmation and existence. However, by defending autonomy as essential to the production of society and individual subjectivities, Gorz proposed a third way that would, or could, correct Marxist historical negation of a subject that would exceed class identification. Working-class power lied, according to Marx, in the collective reappropriation of work and its products by workers. Gorz explains that global capitalism seeks to dissociate producers from products by re-territorializing the production process across space.85 Workers are therefore disconnected temporally and spatially from the product of their work. One of the first to conceive of globalization as large-scale biopolitics, a term that Michel Foucault introduced in 1979, André Gorz questioned the political instrumentalization of industrialism at the expense of workers themselves.

While some critics have seen the de-classification of the working class as being essentially a de-politicization, Gorz suggests that only when such identification is maintained do workers lose their political agency. His rehabilitation of individuals as political subjects offers therefore a more productive way to understand how documentary filmmakers have themselves redefined political engagement and political subjects in the age of globalization. The semantic

85 This is precisely what Luc Moulet made clear in his 1978 film essay, *Origins of a Meal.*
shift that replaced the “no longer fashionable” exploitation with exclusion signals, according to Jean-Pierre Garnier, that those who are excluded “do not fight to overhaul the social system, but to be reintegrated in it.” Garnier's persistent association of political filmmaking with class-based narratives permeates several critical accounts of contemporary French cinema. Jean-Louis Comolli, for whom militant cinema exposed the ideological contradictions of the medium, deplores, for instance, the lassitude shown by “workers themselves, tired of going around in circles tied to the same chain.” It “exhaust[s],” in his view, representations and possibilities and leads spectators away from workers' cause. His description of “the paradox faced by documentary cinema” as “playing against its own team, the side of belief” reduces documentary to militant revolutionary aesthetics. However, if the effacement of workers as historical agents of social and political change inevitably raises questions about the nature of political cinema, André Gorz's de-classification appears therefore as a necessary step to detangle workers from the double-bind in which globalization has trapped them, and contemporary documentary from the spectral determination of militant cinema.

*Rêve d’usine, Reprise* and *Les prolos* clearly position the struggles and experience of today’s workers in relation to past class-based and site-based conflicts to highlight better the instrumentalization by capitalistic interests of past claims and conflicts. As workers are caught between outdated political claims and references and their subjugating need for work as primary mode of social identification and economic survival, filmmakers can no longer find in militant cinema an aesthetics and politics that would free them. Instead of chasing representations that were true for yesterday's *cinéma engagé*/militant cinema, it seems more relevant to study what

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86 Jean-Pierre Garnier, “Le social sans la politique,” *L’Homme et la Société*, 142, (octobre-décembre 2001), 65-89, 82. “A la différence de l'exploitation, dont la dénonciation est passée de mode, disait-on, l'exclusion a ceci de commode qu'elle ne met en scène que des vaincus. [...] Lesquels ne se battent pas pour renverser le système social, mais pour y (r)entrer.”

focusing on the vanishing of the working class means for documentary cinema and politics today. While the documentary films considered here also show workers fighting within, rather than against, the economic system that exploits them, they do not oppose class-based politics to individual experiences and struggles with social issues. Filmmakers explore and articulate the emergence or, in the case of industrial workers, question the possibility of new political subjectivities that would express neither a collective class-consciousness nor individual interests. The dissolution of the factory symbolically as a site of production and political affirmation and literally as a material building initiates a long process by which documentary filmmakers address the necessary redefinition of politics as work fails to free subjects and no longer produces citizens. This first chapter thus has shown the obsolescence of the working class as a social, political and cinematic category. With the rise of neo-liberalism and global financial capitalism from the nineteen-eighties onwards, the concept of production itself underwent significant redefinitions. Management not only continued to promote higher productivity in the manufacturing sector but it was also applied with great enthusiasm to the booming service sector. If working-class culture had had emancipating effects for the workers throughout the twentieth century, the rise of corporate culture was to have a radical impact not just in the workplace but also on social relations at large. Chapter two will therefore study the emergence in the late nineteen-nineties of new interpretive frameworks that marked a radical shift away from Marxist political economy in order to respond to the pathological nature of neo-liberal management.
Chapter Two

“Total Quality”: Management, or the Pathological Institutionalization of Alienation

Having explored the spectral disempowerment of the growing precariat, the late twentieth century’s substitute for the proletariat, in the first chapter, I will now turn to emerging sociological and ideological paradigms in contemporary French documentary representations of work, which are clearly highlighted in three recent films: *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (Sophie Bruneau and Bruno Roudil, 2005), *J’ai (très) mal au travail* (Jean-Michel Carré, 2007), and *La mise à mort du travail* (Jean-Robert Viallet, 2009). Inspired by the publication in 1998 of Christophe Dejours’s *Souffrance en France: la banalisation de l’injustice sociale*, these three films address the crisis of work in different aesthetic and narrative ways. In these films, filmmakers bring their cameras to a new type of workspace, which imposes new constraints on the filming of work and its impact on individual subjects.

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*Figure 2.1. La Défense, Paris. (La mise à mort du travail, Jean-Robert Viallet, 2009 © Yami 2 Productions – France Télévisions Distribution; Courtesy of Jean-Robert Viallet)*

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Behind the reflective glass windows and façades of corporate headquarters as well as in the open felted cubicles of call centers, filmmakers overcome the hostility of this a-filmic white-collar world driven by the cult of management. Indeed, at first glance, the encounters taking place in front the camera and the immaterial nature of the tasks performed by men and women on computer screens or via phone conversations seem quite banal and ungraspable visually. Critics and filmmakers have seen in this neo-liberal soft controlling of performances and behaviors, in and outside the workplace, the latest stage of the sustained impulse of capitalism to organize and control labor and tasks for improved productivity and maximum profits throughout the twentieth century. “Management” has now expanded on what Taylorism, Fordism, and more recently Toyotism, experimented with in the factory: modifying social behaviors so that individuals serve the interests of global capitalism both at work and in their private lives, by subordinating the subjective and political integrity of individuals to their social and economic identities as workers and consumers.89 As they depict the internal organization of service-providing companies, a sector that boomed from the late nineteen-seventies onwards and now represents the largest share of national and global economies, these three films engage with what Nigel Thrift describes as the “**performative** politics of incarnation” that transformed management from a theoretical model of labor organization to a seductive lifestyle for those who would partake in it.90 Thrift thus substitutes his predecessors’ discussions of the industrial working class with the newly embodied “management body” – defined by a dedication to endless productivity, 

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89 Toyotism takes its name from the Japanese car brandname Toyota which developed in the 1960s a new model of labor organization. Promoting the polyvalence of the worker, Toyotism went against the compartmentalization designed by Taylor in the early years of the 20th century. Still motivated by the constant improvement of productivity, Toyotism sees flexibility as a better response to evolutive demand than the standardization and deresponsabilization of workers advocated for by Taylorism. Production is therefore constantly adjusted to demand to avoid waste and surplus and to maintain high production standards; in 1972, a Japanese journalist shared the daily life of Toyota’s employees for several months and concluded that this system generated impossible cadences, promoted the total interchangeability of workers who would then be denied the ability to develop professional pride in refined skills and essentially normalized a highly and endlessly competitive working environment.

a passionate investment in the success of capital, continuous adaptability and an unconditional commitment to the new methods of organization.  

Like Thrift, the filmmakers reveal the technological and media structures that invisibly regiment the body of the management economy, but they most importantly look at the impact this regimentation has on individual bodies. Yet, if responses to the subjective and ethical alienation caused by management are now medical more than political, what is pathologized is not the individual body but the “management body” – the de-humanized and de-humanizing incarnation of the organizational model known as management by an entire professional, but also socio-economic and cultural, corporate community. What is at stake in these three films is therefore the deconstruction of the “management body” in order to enable the individual subject, to become autonomous again.

Christophe Dejours, Jean-Michel Carré and Jean-Robert Viallet – and to a lesser extent Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil – condemn the materialization through recent managerial methods of what Michel Foucault described as the “biopolitical” management of individual bodies and national populations. Foucault distinguished between liberalism and American neo-liberal capitalism through the conscious effort of the latter to abolish the boundaries that had implicitly separated the economic from the social and private spheres. The association that Foucault established between the American neo-liberal model and the “marketization” of the exercise of government – meaning that free market ideology has now become the structuring logic of political life – informs many of the testimonies recorded in the films and the filmmakers’ narrative references. Two obvious examples can be given here: first,

91 Nigel Thrift, Knowing Capitalism, 117-118.

“American neoliberalism seeks […] to extend the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it proposes, and the decisionmaking criteria it suggests to areas that are not exclusively or not primarily economic.”
many of the people relating their experiences in *Ils ne Mouraient pas tous* or in *La mise à mort du travail* attribute the sudden deterioration of social relations in their workplace to mergers with American companies. In *J’ai (très) mal au travail*, a large number of the commercials illustrating the de-humanization of the workplace and the behavioral conditioning of individuals are in English or Japanese: for instance, one Japanese commercial shows a young couple about to get in bed when work responsibilities take over and the wife finds herself kicked out of bed by the boss of her husband; other commercials, for FedEx and Alaska Airlines, define their products by their abilities to compress time and relieve individuals from the pressure of instantaneity and what sociologist Nicole Aubert describes as the now common category of “very very urgent” tasks which throw employees in a state of permanent stress and frenzy.

*Figures 2.2-2.4. From the invasive presence of work in individuals’ most intimate moments to the compression of time, which means every task is of the most urgent matter. Boundaries collapse between work and private life, and between importance and urgency. From the left: unidentified commercial, Alaska Airlines, FedEx. *(J’ai (très) mal au travail*, Jean-Michel Carré, 2007 © Les Films du Grain de Sable)*
Growing rates of unemployment and the generalization of precarious jobs have revealed a profound rupture between the notions of production and subjectivity. But most importantly, sudden serial suicides committed by the employees of high-profile companies, including France Télécom in the late 1990s, have brought to the fore the psychological suffering of a higher number of people in the service sector, low-rank employees and managers alike. Health professionals, sociologists and filmmakers therefore looked closely at the reasons behind such acts. Neo-liberal managerial methods were soon blamed for precipitating the “plague” of the early 21st century, pathological stress, and the slow disintegration of human civilization ensuing from the normalization of abusive practices. Dejours, but also the clinicians and the legal counsels filmed and interviewed in *La mise à mort du travail* and *Ils ne mouraient pas tous* attest to the standardization of discriminations, harassment, and threats. The three films discussed in this chapter are less concerned with the depiction of injustice and the experience of sufferings per se than understanding what makes such practices normal and unquestioned.

As pessimistic as this may sound, the small corpus discussed in this chapter has crystallized around two central arguments made by Christophe Dejours. First, filmmakers have reprised the equation of neo-liberal management as a totalizing, even totalitarian, system which draws its strength from its ability to banalize the evil nature of its ideology. Second, documentary filmmaking has adapted itself to the clinical responses that have been designed in response to the recent pathologization of work, particularly what Dejours calls the “risky listening process” engaged by his colleagues. This process takes place between individuals who have gotten sick of their work and the “professional experts” whose role is to verify the pathological nature of management and to find clinical, legal and sociocultural remedies – yet do so in the margins of existing institutional discourse and categories, due to lack of precedents.
In the first part of this chapter, I will focus on Jean-Michel Carré’s and Jean-Robert Viallet’s exposition of the totalizing nature of neo-liberalism. Through extensive use of archival audiovisual materials and a more traditional reliance on “experts,” *J’ai (très) mal au travail* deconstructs the convergence of economic, social, political, cultural, and judicial practices in what is presented, and largely accepted, as the ideology of voluntary submissiveness. Jean-Robert Viallet’s *La mise à mort du travail* investigates more closely what Paul Ariès, a French political scientist, describes as the “corporatization of the world” in Jean-Michel Carré’s *J’ai (très) mal au travail*. Viallet’s investigation distinguishes three stages that characterize the neo-liberal systematic de-humanization of employees and entitles the three parts that compose the film according to this progression. First, “la destruction” introduces several individuals whose bodies as well as social and human dignity have been damaged by work; the second part, “l’aliénation” documents the institutionalization of “alienation” now that management is taught in business school and the social valorization of aggressiveness and competitiveness; finally, Viallet concludes his exposé with “la dépossession,” which affirms the absolute superiority of shareholders in the global economy and demonstrates the extent to which labor is systematically dispossessed of their financial compensations by invisible decisionmakers and investors.

Viallet’s denunciation of neoliberalism is the most methodical and exhaustive account of the three films presented here, and as such, its efforts to link the three processes of destruction, alienation and dispossession as necessary components of a thoughtfully devised scheme sound as alarming, although not quite as provocative, as Christophe Dejours’s assimilation of neoliberalism with Nazism. In the first section of this chapter, I will study in greater details how

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93 Paul Ariès, a French political scientist well known in France for his rejection of the free-market promotion of economic growth, appears several times throughout Jean-Michel Carré’s documentary *J’ai (très) mal au travail*. He is the author of *Les Fils de McDo, The McDonaldization of the World* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), among other publications.
Jean-Michel Carré and Jean-Robert Viallet use documentary devices to unveil and neutralize the totalitarian nature of our current economic order.

**Documenting Neo-Liberal Totalitarian Drifts and the De-Humanization of Work:*

*J’ai (très) mal au travail, Jean-Michel Carré (2007) and La mise à mort du travail, Jean-Robert Viallet (2009)*

Both in his book, *Souffrance en France*, and in his interventions as expert in the three films mentioned above, Christophe Dejours establishes a central parallel between neoliberalism and Nazism. In his view, what has made both of these systems successful in their respective contexts is their capacity to banalize evil and the suspension of all ethical reason. Dejours maintains that today the fear of unemployment and social precariousness motivates people to do things they would not if they were not under such pressure. He further argues that they deploy strategies of self-protection to compensate for the ethical and subjective alienation that modern forms of management inevitably generate.94 Those who cannot overcome the consequences of such practices suffer. While subjective alienation simply refers to the subject’s incapacity to function according to self-imposed values and the experience of a traumatic de-socialization when experiencing physical and psychological harm, the category of ethical alienation is typical, in Dejours’s view, of totalitarian manipulative techniques that force individuals to qualify their professional skills and success through tasks and actions that have a destructive impact on others. It is therefore the symptom of a profound discrepancy between the employees’ belief in the self-realizing value of work and their engagement with acts that they would otherwise condemn as morally wrong.

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The assimilation of systems of labor organization with an effort to discipline bodies and optimize the mechanical productivity of human beings is not new in cinema; as early as the 1920s and 1930s, films in France and in the United States mocked the automatization of Taylorist work practices, in such films as *The Crowd* (King Vidor, 1928), *A nous la liberté* (René Clair, 1931), and *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin, 1936). Yet, in each of these films, free-spirited individuals, often males, would succeed in escaping standardizing and alienating social, urban and structural pressures. In documentary filmmaking, such *rapprochements* between the productivist impulse of capitalism and totalitarianism have been rarer. It is only indirectly that documentarians would evoke the subjective dispossession of human beings by the system, and George Franju’s brutal depiction of late 1940s Parisian slaughterhouses, *Le sang des bêtes/Blood of the Beasts* (1949), is a good example of such documentary allegories. Overall, documentary films have highlighted collective reclamations of a political agency by workers rather than suggesting the complicit submission and collaboration of individuals with the system. If the assembly line provided filmmakers with a highly symbolic aesthetic motif, Carré and Viallet have had to find ways to represent what Dejours calls “subjective and ethical alienation” on the screen and to break through the a-filmic nature of management. For Jean-Michel Carré, the solution was to deconstruct neo-liberal communication strategies and then appropriate them to produce a counter-narrative that exposes the contradictions of neo-liberalism.

Jean-Michel Carré started his career as a militant filmmaker in the aftermath of May 1968. His cinema reveals how individual subjects are often caught in social and structural projections and determinations. He has scrutinized among other milieux, for instance, the education system (*Alertez les bébés!* 1978; *Une question de classe*-s, 1999), prostitution (*Les trottoirs de Paris*, 1994; *Les travailleuses du sexe*, 2010) and politics (*Le système Poutine*, 2007).
Co-founder of Les Films du grain de sable in 1974, Carré admits having never ceased to promote a cinema of social intervention. Work has informed his films in many ways, but most recently, it became the central theme of *Charbons ardents* in 1999 about a group of Welsh miners choosing to make the old ideal of workers’ movements, self-management, come true when their mine was closed down, and of *J’ai (très) mal au travail*. Variations on the theme of global capitalism, these two films could not be more different aesthetically: while the influence of *cinéma-vérité* remains strong in the former, Carré turns to archival compilation and the expertise of “talking heads” in the latter. This shift can be understood as a broader reflection on the necessity to adjust documentary intervention to the changing nature of ideological conditioning in our global, technologized societies.

*J’ai (très) mal au travail* adopts a now commonly used documentary approach that consists in editing archival images, interviews with experts, and testimonies to support an unambiguous argument. In this case, Jean-Michel Carré’s film claims that both Taylorism and management have infiltrated the most intimate dimension of our lives and instrumentalized a certain conception of happiness achieved through consumption to ensure its unique capacity to provide for our needs in spite of massive human collateral damages. A brief introduction sets up the aesthetic and informative strategies that will prevail throughout the rest of the documentary. First, a montage-sequence (of images showing crowds of people in public transportation and on the streets going to work as well as lines of cars stuck in traffic-jams) frames several snippets of interviews that illustrate the ambivalent dimension of work and Carré’s efforts to validate his understanding of the situation. This last aspect is expressed through editing and through the expertise of consultants, who almost unanimously condemn the current dominant system. Thus, a manager from Dassault, the largest aerospace contractor in France, speaks highly of her position,
her company and the essential role her professional activity has had in her life, both psychologically and financially. A man, identified then as “printworker,” reinforces this idea of work as a central aspect of human existence, saying that “without a job, [one] is nothing, and life has no importance.” It is only later in the film that spectators will understand the underlying meaning of these words when the same man reappears, this time to explain that after undergoing humiliation at work and eventually losing his job, he attempted to commit suicide. Back in the introductory sequence, two “experts” provide scientific rationalization of what has just been said: first, a psychologist who explains that work has always had a strong socializing dimension for individuals, and second, a sociologist, for whom the identification of work with happiness is the exact reason why work can also generate profound suffering and distress. In just a few minutes, Jean-Michel Carré establishes what will be the main editing strategies of the entire film. *J’ai (très) mal au travail* essentially questions the socio-economic and subjective meaning of work in contemporary society and its current failures at providing either. This is done through continuous interactions between images and interviews, ordinary employees and “experts,” and the result is therefore a dialectical audiovisual exposé based on a series of illustrations, reinforcements and extrapolations of the same ideas.

The core of the documentary traces the evolution of successive models according to which work has been organized throughout the twentieth century. Until the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, workers were able to subvert the disciplinary nature of Taylorism and Fordism through the development of an affective investment in the production process, pride in a certain *savoir-faire* and a sense of collective belonging. Now, however, Carré’s interviewees argue that management erodes the possibility for such pockets of subjective reclamation. As a result, new psychological pathologies have appeared, symptomatic of a denial of the recognition
of employees’ personal skills, of the individualization of the workplace and of the emergence of ethical crises as individuals are forced to harass, survey and distance themselves from others.

This audiovisual deconstruction of the reality of work today continues with the incrimination of evaluation as the primary means by which individuals are sorted out, between those who will insure the perennity of the system and those who will be its first victims – the young, the elderly and, perhaps surprisingly, the managers themselves. Finally, Jean-Michel Carré’s counter-narrative to the neo-liberal pensée unique of our times ends with a review of possible, successful, obsolete and dangerous symptoms of the system and responses to it: the increasing implication of judicial organizations and professionals in the resolution of work-related issues, the appearance of new health and physical pathologies leading at times to suicides, the growing difficulty of trade unions to keep up with new statuses and dubious practices used to get rid of employees, social violence against the system and institutions, and most importantly the ideological penetration of popular culture and behaviors by television shows such as Survivor or The Weakest Link that tend to glorify competitiveness and aggressiveness as positive social qualities while consumerism continues to promote a common ideal image of what happiness means. Thus, J’ai (très) mal au travail seeks to provide a fairly exhaustive overview of the modus operandi, motivations, symptoms and future consequences of our early 21st century “plague” – neo-liberal management.

J’ai (très) mal au travail functions in relation to a broader collection of audiovisual materials produced by firms, governmental agencies, television, and cinema. Citationality has become common practice in documentary filmmaking, especially since the success of Michael Moore’s 1989 first-person investigation Roger and Me. For Matthew Bernstein, Moore’s substitution of the audiovisual narration of dominant ideology – reconstructed and subverted in
his films through the inclusion of archival footage – with the “dicta of [his own] authoritative voice-over narration” undermines the political effect intended.\footnote{Matthew Bernstein, “Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes: Michael Moore’s Roger and Me,” in Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (eds.), Documenting the documentary: close readings of documentary film and video (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 397-415.} Unlike Moore, Jean-Michel Carré does not identify directly with the voice-over that occasionally intervenes to provide viewer with a brief context or statistics. Similarly, if the extracts selected and inserted were obviously chosen by Jean-Michel Carré, they in no way summon Carré’s life into the documentary narrative, as is often the case in Moore’s films. By avoiding any clear authorial statement, Jean-Michel Carré, like Pierre Carles, whose films will be analyzed in the following chapter, reproduces the continuous editing of unidentified snippets, leaving the spectator in charge of making sense of this uninterrupted flow of images, declarations, comments and cultural representations.

Like Pierre Carles, Jean-Michel Carré chooses highly evocative clips but never tells his spectators how to interpret them. For instance, shortly after the introductory sequence described above, a series of interventions and archival footage allow Carré to engage his spectators in the etymological ambivalence of the French work, “travail,” which in English can in fact be translated either as work or labor. Andreu Solé, a sociologist, recalls the evolution of the notion of servitude from Ancient times to the Middle Ages, while Corinne Maïer, the author of the controversial book \textit{Bonjour Laziness}, explains that the sociological dimension of work was basically reversed with the advent of modernity.\footnote{Corinne Maïer is the author of an international best-seller, \textit{Bonjour Paresse: De l'art et de la nécessité d'en faire le moins possible en entreprise} (Paris: Michalon Editions, 2004), now available in English as \textit{Bonjour Laziness: Why Hard Work Doesn’t Pay} or \textit{Bonjour Laziness: Jumping Off the Corporate Ladder} (Pantheon, 2005).} Initially restricted to slaves and poor people, work gradually became a privilege while idleness was socially stigmatized. Two interventions are then included, a testimony by Maguy Lalizel, a former Moulinex worker, and excerpts of the
French stoner comedy *Brice de Nice* (James Huth, 2005) and *L’An 01* (Jacques Doillon, Gébé, Alain Resnais and Jean Rouch, 1973). Through the juxtaposition of these segments, Carré points to the mobility of the meaning attributed to work over time, more than it identifies one given definition. Thus, Carré seems to oppose semantic and interpretive fluidity to the economic determination of the term; the film is not about proposing one alternative meaning for work but to allow the question “why do we work?” to be raised. In fact, this is how the film ends, with Solé asking a similar question followed by a montage-sequence of key moments from the film and the poster of Christophe Dejours’s book cover held over a crowd demonstrating in the streets of Paris. *J’ai (très) mal au travail* is mostly about inviting spectators to look twice at the ideological indoctrination to which they are subjected on a daily basis through commercials, business training, societal goals and norms.

In *J’ai (très) mal au travail*, technology becomes central to the biopolitical management of individuals: on the one hand, computers and cell phones function as prosthetic devices which insure that the individual’s time is permanently plugged into the corporate space; on the other hand, technology manufactures and circulates the needs that justify this self-regimentation of individuals in their daily life. The first dimension is made clear by substituting a PC monitor for

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97 Moulinex underwent major restructurations and massive layoffs throughout the 1990s, which not only received lots of media coverage but were also the subject of numerous documentaries: *Sauf la lutte* (Catherine Tréfousse, 2002); *Moulinex, la mécanique du pire* (Gilles Balbastre, 2003); *Ex-Moulinex, Mon Travail, c’est capital* (Raphaël Girardot, Laurent Salters and Marie-Pierre Brêtas, 2000). Through Maguy Lalizel, Carré evokes the social agenda of numerous documentaries produced in the decade that preceded the release of his own film and the long-lasting myth of the working class, victim of exploitation and a symbol of work as the source of social pride. *Brice de Nice*’s main character is a happily unemployed surfer with no ambition in life but to catch the perfect wave – a satire of cult American movies from the 1990s, in particular *Point Break* (1991) starring Keanu Reeves. In the sequence included, Brice, sunbathing on the patio of a café, nonchalantly asks the waitress what it feels like to work. The excerpt from *L’An 01* offers a counterpoint since we see four office employees reading different newspapers or magazines during what could be their break or simply a down time. Aside from the fact that the papers’ headlines refer to newsworthy political or social events, their leisurely activity ends when the telephone rings. At that point, each returns to a well-defined task which essentially defines them: “Vous la dactylo, dactylez !” (You, the typist, type!) Coluche’s character orders.
the head of a former IT executive with a PC monitor as he testifies to the constant pressure of his work.

*Figure 2.5.* The computeroid testifies to the vicious luring of future executives into the system by means of free laptops, cell phones and Internet connections. (*J’ai (très) mal au travail*, Jean-Michel Carré, 2007 © Les Films du Grain de Sable)

Today, Taylorist and Fordist robotizations of the worker may happen less in the form of repetitive gestures atrophying the body and impinging on individuals’ social relations than in the technological interferences that remove managers from their family life, from their interpersonal social interactions and also radically alter their relationship to time. Thus, the stultified Taylorist worker, who indiscriminately slaps labels on meat carcasses or fellow moviegoers, is now driven by the equation of efficiency with rapidity, and has become a time bomb, always on the brink of insanity.

*Figures 2.6-2.7.* Taylorist unconscious repetition of the same gesture again and again, at work and outside. (*J’ai (très) mal au travail*, Jean-Michel Carré, 2003 © Les Films du Grain de Sable)
Quite paradoxically, technology is simultaneously presented as the means by which individuals can regain their autonomy and rebel against a system that standardizes behaviors and lifestyles and reduces men and women to docile crowds. This is where Jean-Michel Carré’s citation of Apple’s famous 1984 commercial introducing the Macintosh, not once but twice in the film, activates the filmmaker’s critical appropriation of the neoliberal performative use of advertising, television and the uncritical juxtaposition of media materials.

Shot by Ridley Scott for the Superbowl and inspired by George Orwell’s anticipation novel, *1984*, this groundbreaking commercial marked a turning point for the American brand and for home computing. Scott confronts the spectator/consumer with a grim and stern-looking dystopian future in which human civilization has been reduced to an army of nameless, clone-like bodies entirely subjected to the dictatorial authority of a male leader, who controls the crowds by means of highly theatrical screen appearances. By the end of the commercial, a young, athletic woman, wearing a white T-shirt and red pair of shorts, runs away from the police patrols towards the gigantic screen in order to throw a hammer at the threatening voice and face. Obviously, in 1984, the free-spirited woman was meant to embody Apple’s revolutionary home computing products.

In Jean-Michel Carré’s film, the commercial is first inserted like any other archival footage at a key moment of the narrative constructed by *J’ai (très) mal au travail*: it comes just
after Paul Ariès’s equation of neo-liberal management and global capitalism with the latest expression of totalitarianism and just before sociologist Nicole Aubert’s introduction of a new sequence about the alteration of time experience as the most direct effect of instant technologies (computers, emails and cell phones).\footnote{This commercial first appears at time mark 19’’33 and recurs at 1’17’’14 in a parallel montage-sequence, this time interwoven with other materials.} Apple’s appropriation of Orwell’s Big Brother’s menace will reappear in the last few minutes of the film, again at a transitional point when the film moves from a discussion of the role of consumption as the other side of the neo-liberal coin to the consequences today’s dominant ideology will have on future generations first and human civilization more generally.


The second time, though, Carré edits the commercial in a parallel montage-sequence alternating segments of the commercial with footage filmed in the Parisian subway, in the streets or in
stores. By choosing images that match the action and the visual composition of the commercial, Carré naturalizes the dystopian sci-fi world of 1984. The images below sketch the progression of the sequence: a crowd moving almost unconsciously in the same direction, channeled by the stairways and escalators of mass public transportations, mimicking the uniformed people of the commercial, leads to images of the desiring machine-like impulses of hordes rushing to the palaces of brand consumption alternating; these alternate with images from the commercial of police repression running after the individual spirit of freedom (Apple) ready to destroy the controlling screen and the authoritarian voice coming out of it. The circular tracking shot around the mannequin’s head (figure 2.19 below) signals Carré’s diversion of the initial commercial sequence. By substituting this mannequin onto the screen image of the dictator’s head in Apple’s 1984 commercial, Carré suggests that nowadays, the dictating voice manipulating crowds is consumerism while the rebellious spirit is incarnated by younger generations who reject the neo-liberal model (and who now come to streets to protest).
Jean-Michel Carré simultaneously appropriates and reverses the interpretation claimed by Apple in 1984, since the totalitarian discipline that crowds of commuters abide by has now become capitalism and the dream that Apple chose to embody then: the individual freedom of home technology and brand-identification. Yet, Carré does so by using the same strategy initially adopted by Apple, which had similarly distorted Orwell’s denunciation of state surveillance and manipulation of civil servants. The diversion came from Apple’s interpretation and assimilation of 1984 protagonist Winston Smith’s individual resistance against the system with the brand, the symbol of consumerist capitalism. This last intertextual reference also confirms Dejours’s description of management as a skillful banalization of harassment as a technology of domination.

The recurrence and narrative expansion of this highly iconic commercial twice in the film captures the main trajectories built in the argument crafted by Jean-Michel Carré through his careful selection of testimonies, experts, issues addressed and audiovisual materials. First, it creates a sort of teleological inferno long planned, which is alluded to by several accounts of the logical connections between early twentieth-century Taylorism and the management methods introduced in the nineteen-eighties. The telos of capitalism is also expanded through the intertextual references implied in the date of 1984, George Orwell’s own political and historical context of the 1940s and the more recent riots of 2005 mentioned by Dejours, as well as various other organized protests against governmental socio-economic reforms. Second, it also sums up the ideological argument sustained throughout the film connecting management, the devalorization of work, consumerism, psychological and ethical alienation, pathologies and globalization, in other words what Paul Virilio sees as the emerging “globalitarianism” of
Finally, by choosing a commercial of Apple, a company whose slogan, “think different,” cultivates a certain ambiguity as regards the standardization of behaviors promoted by management, Carré stresses quite effectively here the essential contradiction of the neo-liberal ideology as stated by Craig Browne: “neoliberal discourse is thus caught in a contradiction of its making between its utopian vision of the fully autonomous, self-realized individual and the reality of its politics of fear.”

In his documentary *J’ai (très) mal au travail*, Jean-Michel Carré relies extensively on the confrontation of archival footage and interviews of professionals who unambiguously condemn the negative impact of neoliberalism as a perverse system. It is by hijacking and resignifying commercials, particularly those which present individual dedication to a firm or a brand and the technological compression of time and space as success and progress that Carré’s film is the most efficient. Whereas in the past, interviews and testimonies were used to validate, question or personalize archival footage, I would maintain that here, the authorial role is reversed: the commercials and film excerpts that Carré inserts at specific moments of the narrative prevent these interventions from being immediately dismissed as anti-capitalist propaganda. To some extent, what Carré pursues through such aesthetic choices might be less the persuasion of the spectator than the latter’s suspension of belief in contemporary social and economic values.

The second film, *La mise à mort du travail* (Jean-Robert Viallet, 2009), which I will now discuss, also stresses the critical engagement of the spectator with what has now become “ordinary.” If Jean-Michel Carré provides a comprehensive survey of the origins, the methods, and the effects of neo-liberal capitalism as well as possible responses to it, Jean-Robert Viallet models his three-part film after a clinical case study: he identifies the company as the central

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point from which contemporary society’s disease is spreading. Then, he analyzes the three most significant individual and collective symptoms: destruction, alienation and dispossession. Jean-Robert Viallet’s prizewinner triptych La mise à mort du travail (2009) relies on long-term investigative sociological and documentary immersion and establishes the “ordinary” workplace as the central institution of financial capitalism and of a society released from its human obligations. Unlike Jean-Michel Carré whose main goal clearly appears to be the production of a counter-narrative to the ideological diversion of popular culture and mainstream media, Jean-Robert Viallet’s immersion in the workplace facilitates a more profound understanding of the psychology, behaviors and structures through which neoliberalism not only extends its influence but most importantly where it reproduces itself.

La mise à mort du travail basically concurs with the conclusions formulated at the end of J’ai (très) mal au travail by Christophe Dejours, who intervenes as an expert on occupational pathology in the film: “We are living decadence, […] inasmuch as Humankind is denying its own existence, that’s today’s reality of work […] we can change it, it’s up to us!” However, Viallet’s documentary methodology is completely different from Jean-Michel Carré’s reliance on a countrapuntal editing of interviews and archival footage. Initially created for and co-funded in large part by French public television channel, France 3, this film examines in detail three effects of the redefinition of work in the late twentieth century: first, the physical, psychological and social “destruction” of individuals employed through this system; second, the “alienation” of employees and managers alike by methods valorizing aggressiveness and self-surpassing; and third, the “dispossession” of producers and employees by stockholders, or national and local workforce by global financial capitalism. By suggesting connections between the increasing number of pathological symptoms diagnosed every day by occupational physicians as well as the
explosion of judicial litigations registered and prosecuted by the Prud’Hommes – Labor Conciliation Boards – the generalization of management practices in the industrial and service sectors and the criteria of productivity imposed upon firms and their employees by shareholders obsessed with profits, Viallet exposes the reification of a society determined by economics.

The film concentrates geographically on a small radius encompassing Paris’s business district, La Défense, west of the city center, and the western industrial suburbs of Courbevoie and Nanterre, where Viallet had access to Marie Pezé’s clinical consultations specializing in occupational pathologies and the largest Labor Conciliation board of the area. This fairly circumscribed area in the film symbolizes spatially the ideological imbrication of what the film gradually exposes. Furthermore, La Défense provides Viallet with a metaphor of the totalizing glass cage that now envelops, surveys and determines individuals at work but also conditions their life once they return home. It is only in the film’s second part that Viallet introduces panoramic and long establishing shots of La Défense, a futuristic islet west of Paris, which will be the last image of the film at the end of the third part.

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101 Incidentally, Nanterre was also one of the main sites for the students’ uprisings of 1968, and at the time, it was the location of a vast shantytown where immigrant workers would live in miserable conditions.
La Défense’s architecture alone sets this district apart from the French capital’s historic buildings and scenic promenades along the Seine river. Instead, a gigantic frame stands erect in the middle of a vast esplanade to which Viallet repeatedly returns as if to better affirm the minuscule presence of human beings in this palace of concrete structures, opaque façades and functional design. In Viallet’s critical observation of the ordinary rhythm of life, what makes neoliberalism totalizing or totalitarian, is first and foremost its imprint on the daily routine of individuals, their convergence towards open space cubicles in the call centers of multinational companies, the subjective dispossession that takes place inside the seminar rooms of those glass-covered high rises and the seeming tranquility of this microcosmic mise en abyme of global capitalism.
Viallet’s filming of the multinational Carglass’s premises in “l’aliénation” (part 2) accentuates the deceptive depth and spatial decompartmentalization of the workplace as well as the subsequent melting and multiplication of employees’ silhouettes. To his critics, including the representatives of Carglass who sued the filmmaker shortly after the release of the film for defamation, Jean-Robert Viallet replies that: “We do not accuse human beings but the systems to which they bring their collaboration.”¹⁰² The subjective alienation of the title becomes figural in this second part which introduces spectators to the training of future managers, the tormented tormenters of the workers met in the first part.

¹⁰² This is my translation. The original statement, “Ce ne sont pas les êtres humains qu’on accuse, mais les systèmes auxquels les humains collaborent” was included in the review Libération published on the occasion of the televisual broadcast of the film in the fall of 2009. http://www.liberation.fr/medias/0101599274-comment-on-se-tue-au-travail (26/10/2009).
Through such visuals as those presented above, Jean-Robert Viallet overcomes the undramatic quality of non-industrial workplaces and records the disappearance of human presence under economic rule.\textsuperscript{103}

Viallet films ordinary workplaces, service providers, call centers, with the same logic that Frederic Wiseman or Raymond Depardon decided to shoot in schools, hospitals, police stations or housing projects. If the filming strategies differ, these filmmakers all identify those places as the institutions of a given social order, a given system of values according to which individuals will be sorted out between those who are normal, fit for the system, adaptable and those who will always be marginalized, different, stigmatized and excluded. In today’s neoliberal order, the workplace has become the site of selection, as Viallet himself states:

Cameras went into courts, prisons, psychiatric hospitals…documentary films talked about work. But the workplace – particularly in its most mundane aspect, that which is typical of Castorama, Saint-Maclou, Halles aux chaussures, and so on, which

\textsuperscript{103} In several interviews, Jean-Robert Viallet declared having “had the impression to observe a world in which economics was no longer in the service of humankind but where humanity served the economic rationalization of the world.” (“En immersion dans le monde du travail pendant ces deux ans et demi, j’avais le sentiment d’observer un monde dans lequel l’économie n’est plus au service de l’homme, mais l’homme au service de l’économie.”) http://yami2.com/films/la_mise_a_mort_du_travail_fr.php
stand on the outskirts of urban centers – is rarely filmed. First, because private enterprise is one of the most closed spaces of our society and it is extremely difficult to get inside. But, also, more fundamentally, because it is usually not interesting to those who seek the exceptional. As a result, we don’t know how to look at it and we rarely give ourselves the means and the time to learn how to do it.104

As a matter of fact, Viallet’s camera succeeds in getting inside the call centers, offices, seminars and meetings that define today’s most unexceptional workplaces. Rather than taking the time to learn how to look at these situations, Viallet throws the spectator in the middle of the room with the people filmed, whether it is a group workshop for managers in training or at courtroom hearings opposing harassed employees to their former employer. By doing so, Viallet’s tactic consists in confronting the spectator, along with his own self, directly with the banal, ordinary nature of situations. One sequence in particular brings together the unexceptional quality of many of the sequences edited in the film and the endless process of selection taking place behind those doors.

After having been introduced to the three levels literally layered down in the building, from the top executive on the third floor to managers on the second and low-level employees answering phone calls ten hours a day on the first floor, the camera attends a group interview screening. The female voice-over, to which I will return later, anticipates at the onset of this sequence Dejours’ concluding remarks about the alienating nature of work: “work is no longer a


“Des caméras sont entrées dans les tribunaux, les prisons, les hôpitaux psychiatriques…, des documentaires ont parlé du travail. Mais le monde de l’entreprise – surtout à son niveau le plus commun, celui des Castorama, des Saint-Maclou, des Halles aux chaussures, etc, qui peuplent les alentours de nos villes – est très rarement traité. D’abord bien sûr parce que l’entreprise privée est l’un des espaces les plus fermés de notre société et qu’il est extrêmement difficile d’y pénétrer. Mais, aussi, plus fondamentalement, parce qu’elle n’offre généralement aucun intérêt à qui cherche l’exceptionnel. Par conséquent, on ne sait pas la regarder et on se donne rarement les moyens et le temps d’apprendre à la faire.”
service we provide but a task we execute.” At the same time, the camera follows a woman ready to get into a train; it will soon turn out she is a recruiter for Carglass. The voice-over goes on and explains that hiring is costly for companies, “hence the selection of future hires follows extremely specific criteria: find individuals who will have no other choice but to subject themselves to the system.”

Throughout the sequence, the camera alternates between close-ups of the recruiters and the candidates and longer shots seeking to set up a variety of group and interpersonal dynamics. The largest share of the sequence records an exercise, unrelated to the skills required in a call center, which will determine the final selection agreed upon by the few recruiters observing. As the voice-over briefly explains to the viewer, each “unemployed” individual receives a piece of paper with instructions: they will have to talk the rest of the group into choosing a destination for their next vacation. Specifying the job seekers’ status as “unemployed” emphasizes here their vulnerability insofar as it implies a certain desperation. During the exercise, the camera
alternates between close-ups of the candidates defending their assignment and the attentive, scrutinizing managers evaluating the best fit for the enterprise. After a moment, several candidates are asked to comment on their own performance and that of others. As the camera watches them exit from the room, the voice-over concludes: “that was the objective: find the unemployed who will accept to bring down the performance of other unemployed candidates. The technique of *The Weakest Link* adapted to real-life workplace” (“l’aliénation,” 17’24-23’50). The camera then stays and listens closely and carefully to the debriefing that ensues.

The first part of the documentary accounts for the growing number of people who are victims of stress injuries, both physical and psychological, whereas the second and third parts meticulously observe the “extraction” of knowledge, behavioral coping mechanisms and individual adaptability that define management as an organizational method. Like Jean-Michel Carré’s co-opting of advertising strategies for critical purposes, Viallet’s camera perspicaciously probes into the psychological devices and technologies of manipulation that take place in ordinary firms across France, and implicitly in the global workplace. Therefore, the last comment made by the voice-over and quoted above helps the viewer read through the surface and make sense of the ordinary situations recorded – in this case, a job interview. By doing so, Jean-Robert Viallet’s documentary immersion in the institutionalized workplace and the “normal,” or at the very least undramatic, situations that are typical in such an environment participates in a voluntary injunction of the spectator’s active scrutinizing of the scene.

The three-part documentary *La mise à mort du travail* by Jean-Robert Viallet is hard to categorize insofar as several stylistic conventions and modes – to borrow Bill Nichols’s term – constantly succeed and build upon one another.105 This cannot just be due to the fact that it was

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105 In *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols presents his typology of documentary based on six “modes.” These, unlike the notion of models, are in his view are “specific to cinema” and “form the conceptual backbone of most
conceived for television, but it can be seen as the intentional staging of the learning process filmmaker, producer and spectators share about a world and issues they knew little about at the onset of their investigation. The role of the voice-over(s) is in that regard quite significant. I would like to return briefly to the televsual quality of Viallet’s film, and particularly his exploitation of the blurred boundaries separating documentary cinema from its televsual counterparts as well as the continuum characterizing the variety of subgenres in the latter. *La mise à mort du travail* conforms to the formal, practical and narrative requirements of televsual documentary that Jacques Mouriquand characterizes as follows:

The subject of documentary is therefore at the crossroads of content and a point of view. Content, which should easily be summarized in just a few words, needs to be strictly determined through careful investigation. As for point of view, if there were one technique that could shape it, we would all know about it. It is the expression of the author’s profound nature, of his or her empathy towards the witnesses, of his or her personal implication in the subject.106

If Jean-Robert Viallet’s position on the subject of neo-liberal management and the ensuing perversion of work is clear, he nonetheless remains absent from the film and entrusts instead the female voice-over with the authorial role.

The voice of jazz singer Emmanuelle Yacoubi acts as a thread that alternately orients the thematic focus and progression of the film, provides background information on the people

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filmed, interviewed and introduced, draws conclusions from what is presented to us and discussed onscreen and most importantly raises questions about certain behaviors and situations. A few features are particularly noticeable: first, the ambiguous identification of the voice-over narrator as “we” which either refers to the crew which made the film or intends to include the spectators in her reflections, doubts and observations; second, the recurrence of the word “why?” which relinquishes the omniscience traditionally invested in voice-over narration; and third, the poetic quality of the commentary.

As an aerial shot tracks in over the Seine at the beginning of the third part, the voice-over reframes the main topic within the broader international context of financial capitalism. What started as a geographically limited narrative, in the underground stations of the Parisian subway at 6:48 am on a weekday, about individual suffering, has gradually become a more universal indictment of globalization. Throughout, the same soft-toned voice-over helped us read and question images, facial expressions, and conversations. But in the opening seconds of the third and last part, remarks sound more dramatic and conclusive:

Behind the opaque windows of business districts, inside offices, factories and retail stores, in France as in Europe, on every continent, every employee is worried. Economies shake, collapse, an abysmal gap opens in a world that imagined itself comfortably sitting on a thirty-year reserve of phenomenal profits. It might be the point of no return of a capitalism entirely devoted to finance. (“la dépossession,” 0’01-0’58)107

This statement marks a new iteration of the argument slowly developed over three self-contained parts. Throughout the film, Viallet gradually transforms the strictly localized example of the

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107 My translation: “Derrière les fenêtres opaques des quartiers d’affaire, dans les bureaux, les usines et les commerces, en France comme en Europe, sur chaque continent, tous les employés s’interrogent. Les économies tremblent et s’effondrent, un fossé abysmal s’ouvre dans un monde qui se pensait confortablement assis sur trente ans de profits phénoménaux. C’est peut-être le point de rupture d’un capitalisme entièrement dévoué à la finance.”
global management of the workplace and individual trajectories (La Défense) into a universal indictment. The voice-over will continuously mediate this movement between particular cases and the abstraction of information and larger mechanisms determining the individual experiences filmed. In the process, the voice-over will bend the conventional authorial role typically expected from such narration.

On several occasions, it is as if this voice-over were the loud expression of the filmmaker’s reactions and thinking process in the face of certain situations. For instance, after a long sequence recording the encounter of a few employees of a supermarket, all recently fired, with two attorneys specialized in workers’ rights, we can hear what sounds like off-the-cuff reactions to what has just been said: “this meeting had not totally convinced us; of course, the story of the stolen gum seemed absurd but one could as easily imagine that a group of relentless moaners was concentrating their anger on a new management team for no good reason. Three months later, though, we met Magali, the checkout manager, again at Marie Pezé’s consultation.” Serving both as a narrative and temporal transition, these remarks insist on the critical function of the voice-over, something that is usually absent from traditional documentary narration. Not only does the voice-over here question the attitude and sincerity of the subjects filmed – which could undermine the “truth” of the documentary – but it simultaneously calls into question the inclusion of the sequence in the film. The last sentence both validates the good faith of the women previously heard and the filmmaker’s faith in his material.

Similar examples occur at various moments in the film. These brief and minor diversions of the voice-over from its “role” allow Viallet to avoid the authoritative discourse he is precisely

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108 Translation is mine, here is the original voice-over dialog: “Cette réunion ne nous avait pas totalement convaincus. Bien sûr, l’histoire des chewing-gums semblait grotesque. Mais on pouvait tout aussi bien imaginer qu’un groupe de râleuses systématiques focalisait leur hargne sur une nouvelle direction, sans cause réelle et fondée. Mais trois mois plus tard, nous avons retrouvé Magali, la chef de caisse de l’hypermarché à la consultation de Marie Pezé.” (28”07-28”33, “La destruction,” La mise à mort du travail, 2009)
dismissing; instead the voice-over, although distinct from the filmmaker’s, claims the subjective implication that didactic films usually conceal. Bill Nichols, Michael Renov and other documentary theorists have long affirmed that objectivity can only be a false pretense for documentary since it is always a “form of re-presentation, never clear windows onto ‘reality’” and the filmmaker is always “an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are.”

If Nichols intervenes once again in the long-lasting debate about the truth-telling dimension of documentary, I prefer to see Viallet’s slight diversion of voice-over narration as part of a reclamation of didacticism as informed critical resistance to deception and manipulation and no longer as the vehicle of totalizing institutional discourses.

In fact, even though the voice-over intervenes often and at length throughout the film, it is not the film’s main “voice.” Aside from the direct addresses of subjects to the camera, other “voice-overs” come and go, but they do not compete in any way with the main female narrator’s guidance. Thus, as the first part opens with a montage-sequence of morning commuters half asleep in the subway, waiting on platforms and walking hastily to work, a male voice-over whispers what could be random thoughts crossing these people’s minds: “I am a manager,” “raise,” “time pressure,” “I wake up early,” “I go to bed late,” “tired,” “work, work, work.” Through this brief allusion to each and every passenger’s obsessive focalization on work, the film triggers an implicit connection between those anonymous bodies and the spectator. A symbol of alienation, this immaterial voice foreshadows similar uses of voice-over at later moments of the film to symbolize the ethical crisis undergone by some people. This is particularly effective in the film’s second part, which documents the recruitment and formation

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of the service employees and managers of Carglass, a multinational company with hundreds of stores across France. After having introduced the executive structure of the company, the various stages through which employees are gradually coached and conditioned before being assigned a given position, the second half of “l’aliénation” focuses on the experience of Pascal, one of these newly hired managers. Highly enthusiastic and docile throughout the training period, Pascal’s ethical standards are put to a severe test once in charge of a small garage in a Parisian suburb. Long hours, impossible expectations and an insufficient workforce quickly generate profound disillusionment. As Viallet continues to film Pascal at work, trying his best to “manage his team” while attending to endless secretarial tasks, his body and his voice separate. He then starts expressing his growing frustration by means of a voice-over after the female voice-over is done describing how standardized suburban service providers, their infrastructures, the colors, the schedules, and every task are. Pascal’s voice-over then takes over and provides his own interpretation of the job, the pressure that leaves him “without a choice” and ends with his resignation at the end of “l’aliénation.”

Jean-Robert Viallet documents the gradual extermination of the socializing and subjectivizing dimensions of work. The three parts of this televisual documentary investigation draw up a clinical diagnosis of a society governed by corporate values. Like Jean-Michel Carré, Viallet scrutinizes the other side of a smoothed over picture of normalcy in order to first, identify the spatial and ideological structures of social management, and second, to engage in a critical didactic project that will guide the spectators to mistrust the ordinary. Throughout his film, Viallet balances two notions, work and death. If the French title, La mise à mort du travail, suggests that work is about to be “killed,” the relationship between these two terms is questioned and altered several times: as the first and second part demonstrate, work certainly sentences
individuals to death; but financial capitalism is clearly engaged in a systematic extermination of labor in its race for endless accumulation; work itself has become deadly. Nothing seems salvageable from the managerialization of work: unlike industrial manufacturing for which cinema was able to differentiate between the alienating nature of the organization of labor and the aesthetic quality of the workers’ gestures, no pride can be extracted from managerial skills. After looking at the role of voice-overs in *La mise à mort du travail*, I will now conclude this chapter on the mobilization of documentary as a “listening cell,” which situates *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* both in continuity with the mission of 1960s militant cinema as a site of *prise de parole* and in rupture with the silencing of individual suffering in 1968 by fear of undermining the project of collective political consciousness at the time.

**Turning Documentary into A “Risky” Listening Cell – From Political to Subjective Affirmation.**

*Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (2005) is Marc-Antoine Roudil’s and Sophie Bruneau’s first feature-length film. Upon its release, this 76-minute film received quasi-unanimous critical approval for its formal integrity and drew audiences – approximately 27,500 spectators – in spite of its limited national release in ten theaters only. The filmmakers explain that after reading Christophe Dejours’s book, *Souffrance en France*, they felt they needed to add a filmic contribution to the debate, but even though the book is referenced in the opening credits just before the prologue, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* is not an adaptation of Dejours’s argument. Rather, their goal was to capture, almost paradoxically, off-screen taboos, untold humiliations and the physical expressions of psychologically exhausted
individuals. The documentary was titled after the seventh verse of one of Jean de Lafontaine’s fable, “Les animaux malades de la peste” (Anthology II, Book VII). The parallel here would thus be between the plague of Lafontaine’s fable and what is presented as a system that relies on the subjective and ethical alienation of all its participants.

Three main sections compose the film: a prologue, in which the stationary camera faces a physician sitting at her desk and presumably talking on the phone with a colleague about a patient. The second part, and main body of the film, is made up of four consultations filmed in three distinct hospitals scattered across Greater Paris: Garches, Nanterre and Créteil. Each consultation opposes a patient and a psychiatrist or pathologist specialized in work-related diseases and health problems. Described as a series of closed doors sessions, these clinical encounters are filmed at a slight distance, again relying on the neutral positioning of an immobile camera recording the exchange. In *La mise à mort du travail*, Jean-Robert Viallet had filmed a few of Marie Pezé’s consultations in Nanterre; unlike Roudil and Bruneau, Viallet’s camera did not hesitate to get closer to hands, faces, almost brushing against the bodies in such pain or psychological distress that they could no longer work, causing at the same time additional social precariousness or suicidal thoughts. The close-ups typical of Viallet’s immersion in the subject matter of his film have been replaced here with a more distant and patient camera. Long takes, for the most part, frame patient, physician, or both sometimes as if to emphasize the encapsulating space of these still experimental consultations.
Figures 2.35-2.41. The four consultations filmed for *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau, 2005 © alter ego films sprl; Courtesy of Marc-Antoine Roudil)

Often, both patient and doctor leave the room while the camera continues to record a now empty room. The filmmakers explain that, in order to respect the clinical protocol and to impact as little
as possible on the fragile relationship slowly established as part of the medical interaction between the persons sharing their experience and the professional listening, they would simply set up the camera and leave the room.\textsuperscript{110}

An epilogue, entitled “Viatique,” was added at the end; it reintroduces the three clinicians present in the consultations who are now joined by Christophe Dejours himself. This title strangely evokes the last sacraments traditionally given to the dying, or more commonly the food or money allowance that travelers could receive for a trip. In the context of the film, none of these definitions really seems to work, and yet, one is tempted to interpret this semantic choice as an attempt to reinforce the atypical, yet crucial, role played by these physicians and consultations for individuals who have nearly exhausted all institutional forms of assistance. Reviewers seem to agree on the somewhat artificial nature of this last sequence; yet, several also affirm its usefulness to mediate the raw brutality, or what \textit{Première’s} reviewer described as the “hostility,” of the sequences filmed in the hospitals.\textsuperscript{111} This sequence inserts some scientific rationalization into an aesthetic that had thus far given ample space and time to the words, twitches, grins and emotional contractions of patients. Yet, if \textit{Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés} is not about the medical profession per se, this last part calls nonetheless into question the role of institutions, the health sector in particular, in the normalization of moral harassment in the workplace, the withdrawal of medicine into old and inadequate clinical rubrics and the impossibility for physicians to maintain their role as professionals, as working subjects and human and social beings entirely separate at the end of the day.

\textsuperscript{110} The betacam format provided them with greater recording autonomy, up to forty minutes instead of the twelve that a 16 mm camera would have allowed. They later converted the entire film into 35 mms for theatrical releases.

\textsuperscript{111} Gael Golhen considers the aesthetic decisions made by the two filmmakers to be “downright hostile for the spectator.” \url{http://www.premiere.fr/film/Ils-ne-mouraient-pas-tous-mais-tous-etaient-frappes/(affichage)/press}. 
My analysis of the film will examine two aspects more closely: first, the filmmakers’ intention to “stage” the verbal release of sufferings in the encapsulating space of the physician’s office, itself encapsulated by the documentary frame, and the aural commitment of those doctors towards their patients; second, I will study how Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau’s ethical visuality calls into question the clinical gaze, traditionally associated with institutions both in the theoretical works of Bill Nichols and previous similar filmic experimentations, especially Frederic Wiseman and Raymond Depardon whose names have been mentioned in reviews of *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* as well as in interviews with the filmmakers.

Critic and academic Patrick Leboutte assimilates each shot of Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil’s film as “listening cells,” which echo and expand one another:

> It is by connecting together in the same film personal memories which, until then, had felt like isolated experiences that Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil succeed in telling a common story, the antidote to the laws of the market.¹¹²

Leboutte’s words suggest that cinema itself provides the perfect sequential metaphor for the socio-medical experiment conducted by the three clinicians brought to the table at the end: its narrative progression reproduces or mimics the material and informative uniqueness of each shot; similarly each sequence, separated from the others by a black fade-out, offers a certain organic coherence. Yet, as the film narrative progressively unrolls, shot after shot, and sequence after sequence, a larger meaning shapes up and brings each material, formal and narrative unit together. Unlike most films discussed in this project, what characterizes *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* is the minimalism of its cinematography and narrative. What

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guides the filmmakers’ enterprise is an attempt to skim off any element that could prevent these persons’ voices from coming through, their most imperceptible bodily symptoms to be caught by the spectator’s eye and most importantly to preclude any sort of symbolic, social or political recuperation of their stories. As such, the film skillfully stages what Laurent Willemez describes as a social need to “re-collectivize” work and our experience of work, even though it is done here at a micro-level. To some extent, Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau take Willemez’s injunction almost literally since their film documents the opening up of each of these persons’ social, psychological and professional isolation.113

To expand a bit more on Gael Golhem’s comment that Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés is extremely hostile to the spectator, I would like to suggest that unlike many documentaries which have and continue to target the spectator’s social and political consciousness in order to solicit further engagement, what is at stake here is the ability of spectators to focus on listening. In the same way that it constructs the dis-individualization of people, first through the clinical encounter, it also forces viewers to deal with their passive, observing and listening position. If this is a risky position for the physician, as psychoanalyst Marie Pezé explains in the last sequence, it is a risky position for the filmmakers to rely on – as Golhem suggests – and for the spectators to be forced into without the professional expertise of the former. To some extent, I propose here that in the same way that Christophe Dejours sees the intensification of individual suffering in the workplace as symptomatic of the crisis of the social fabric, we see Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil’s project as a critical destabilization of spectatorship. This certainly sounds conceptually at least strangely close to the formal experiments conducted in the 1960s that sought to disrupt what Jean-Louis Comolli then called

the cinematic apparatus. However, here, it is not the ideological *embourgeoisement* of spectators that is targeted but what Christophe Dejours refers to as the “precarization” of subjectivity: “the intensification of work and sufferings,” “the neutralization of collective organization against alienation” largely by either preventing its expression or by reiterating the threat of unemployment for whoever would react against it, and finally the increasing “individualization” of all forms of experiences (social, professional and even emotional). Therefore, this film uses documentary practice, the ethical pact which is implicitly contracted between those who film, those who are filmed and those who watch, to create a space of interlocution for a speech and a voice that are otherwise unsustainable because they cannot be performed.

As I mentioned earlier, May 1968 was a pivotal moment in the cinematic treatment of subjectivity. If the period is most often remembered in film studies for the breakthrough of new voices whose political resonance had thus far remained unsuspected or silenced, particularly women, immigrants, and youths, it was also a time for the de-politicization of subjectivities. In June 1968, the woman shouting and crying in front of the camera in *La reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* refused to go back to what she felt was a dirty jail; those who talked her into going back nonetheless were local elected officials and trade union representatives, not the police or business owners. Such interventions radically changed the nature of politics and politicized personal experiences, feelings and self-representations. The physical, emotional and internalized suffering narrated by the voice-over in the famous sequence from Bruno Muel’s *Le sang des autres* (1974) well exceeded the class-based exploitation denounced by trade unions and leftist ideologies and fought by workers on factory sites. In Muel’s film, the voice is disembodied; the body which experiences rough, demanding tasks everyday and which, at night, is unable to carry a child or touch a wife, is never to be seen in the sequence. This voice becomes the symbolic
expression of the subjective alienation that industrial work, time shifts and productivity impose on individuals.

*Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* is not only about the voice but also, as Pascal Bonitzer explains, the “body” of this voice.114 Meeting the “body” of this voice (its texture, as Barthes would say), this waste of meaning, it is meeting the divided subject of this voice, the subject relegated to the rank of object, unmasked.

By re-embodying the expression of sufferings in specific bodies and persons, Roudil and Bruneau structure the filmic space and the spectators’ engagement with what is on screen around the political convergence of a speech – that which testifies to the daily humiliation, the moral harassment and the ethical self-alienation – and voices, which all have a given texture, tone, rhythm, that materialize and singularize the experience narrated.115 All the patients included in the film talk as much through their bodies as through the words they use and the facts they give. This is especially emphasized in two consultations. After a few minutes into the first consultation, Marie Pezé asks her patient whether she has “always spoken that fast.” This remark leads the patient to share her feelings that she has become the machine she is expected to be at work. Recent changes in the organization of work have intensified the robotization of employees, constant pressures and humiliations as improved performances are penalized by ever higher

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115 Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma*, Essais: Les Cahiers du cinéma (Paris: Editions de l’Étoile, 1982), 13. “Par quelle incompréhensible étourderie se prend-on, dans le système d’un cinéma pourtant baptisé parlant, à ‘oublier’ la voix? C’est qu’on la confond avec la parole, on ne retient le plus souvent que les significations qu’il véhicule, en oubliant cette ‘modalité’: la voix. La voix est d’ailleurs là pour être oubliée dans sa matérialité, et c’est à ce prix qu’elle remplit son office premier.” (“By what incomprehensible omission have we taken to ‘forgetting’ the voice in a system that has been called *talking* cinema? The reason is that we mistake it for speech, we usually only remember the meanings it conveys and forget this ‘modality’: the voice. The voice is in fact made to be perceived outside of its materiality: and it is in such a way that it fulfills its primary function.”)
expectations. Her explanations stress a snowball effect from her adaptation to new managerial methods along the assembly line to the alteration of her family life as a result of her self-annihilation in this process. In the short included in the bonus features of the DVD, “Mon diplôme c’est mon corps” (“My degree, it’s my body”), Marie Pezé receives Mrs. Khol, a cleaning woman. An opening intertitle screen reads, “feeling they had reached an impasse, Mrs. Khol’s doctors directed her to the consultation with a note indicating: ‘the patient is originally from Morocco and illiterate…’.” If the first half of this comment is quickly noted through the patient’s accent, what comes through as she answers at length Marie Pezé’s usually broad and open-ended questions combines a sense of pride in her profession and the social function of cleaning and a class complex as she compares herself to teachers and clerks. She reveals thereby that the constraints of her profession prevented her from being and feeling like a woman.

Figures 2.42 and 2.43. Mrs. Khol talking to occupational psychoanalyst Marie Pezé in “Mon diplôme c’est mon corps.” (Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés, Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau, 2005 © alter ego films sprl; Courtesy of Marc-Antoine Roudil)

While her declarations attest to the lack of social and professional recognition which Christophe Dejours signals as being one of the main sources of subjective alienation, the subtext that gradually emerges, and which Marie Pezé leads her to render explicit further by the end of the consultation is that Mrs. Kohl’s relationship with her body is her only means of social existence and mobility. Not only does she feel betrayed by her health problems and her body, since she can
no longer work as she used to, but through the pride she developed in her professional activities, she was also seeking to gain a social status as a woman, and not just a mother or a wife. As a matter of fact, one last piece of information concludes her story: “Mrs. Khol wrote a book. Its title is ‘Women are books the title of which is their husband’s name.’ We thank her most particularly for her participation.”

If for some patients, the body has internalized and physically manifests years of psychological pressures and unavowed alienation, for others, symptoms are less visible but surface nonetheless through the patient’s verbal flow. This is particularly evident in the case of a middle-aged man, who came to the consultation after losing it on the job. A former manager, he explains to Dr. Soula in the feature-length film that his position forced him to mediate constantly between higher executives’ objectives and the realistic performances that could be expected from his subordinates. He may not complain much about the physical deterioration caused by repetitive tasks, but his repeated emphasis on his preference for affective management rather than authoritarian methods, might be seen as his own internalization of modern methods of management the principles of which are depicted in La mise à mort du travail. In the film’s second part, the trainer of future managers explains that management is not about being firm with or hard on one’s employees, but suggests instead that being able to manipulate emotions might prove more effective. The patient appears to be a perfect product of this method.

In the self-enclosed and protective space of the doctor’s office, the four persons whose consultations are filmed and edited in the film have finally found an interlocutor; however, it remains a precarious type of testimony, not one that could easily be delivered directly to the spectator, as is the case with the traditional “talking-head” subjects of documentary testimonials. In other words, the presence of the physician is necessary insofar as it triggers and mediates
speech and draws attention, occasionally, to the materiality of the voice more than the mere content of the speech generated.\textsuperscript{116} By foregrounding the collaborative nature of the clinician-patient relationship in each case, the filmic device deployed in \textit{Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés} recalls what Bill Nichols identifies as the documentary’s clinical gaze (which will be explained further shortly).\textsuperscript{117} Yet, Roudil and Bruneau divert this distant, disengaged gaze from its traditional association with institutional authority.

The institutional space is only slightly present in this film, mostly through the white coats worn by the physicians and the background noise heard over the black transitional shot between the opening credits and intertitles and the prologue. Telephones ringing, doors closing, barely audible conversations done in hallways and the sound of multiple steps suggest the audible atmosphere of a hospital and are only perceptible during credits, while the institutional brouhaha is hushed as soon as the camera enters the offices where consultations take place. More than a documentary about the clinical structures expected to take care of these patients broken by their stressful working conditions, Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau film the experimental response that a few doctors gradually organized on the margins of traditional occupational medicine. This is what Doctor Soula explains in the final sequence after Christophe Dejours asked them what brought them to develop these consultations, which “is not a usual position for an Industrial doctor”:

\begin{quote}
I could not link the brutality that some patients were undergoing at work to the clinical diagnosis that I had met before as a doctor. There was a disproportion between what the patient was telling me and the usual diagnosis. I couldn’t relate to my usual
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116} To some extent, the role of the physician recalls the function of the filmmaker as “surrogate interlocutor” in \textit{Rêve d’usine} (chapter one) in lieu of the absent management team.

professional values. We had to find other ways of working. We started to work with Marie and others. To confront the brutality that the patients were evoking, we had to find other solutions because the actual diagnosis is not valid. We questioned our own practice, that’s how we made some progress.¹¹⁸

By extracting the work of these doctors from the institution, relegated out of the frame here, and encapsulating it in a sort of isolated space and time, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* diverts a type of documentary gaze traditionally used to criticize institutional power, authority and domination to reveal the ethical and subjective suffering that has become constitutive of contemporary experiences of work and social interactions. Just like the physicians divert from their traditional diagnostic tools and “values” to understand and make sense of new pathologies, the documentary camera also has to adjust its position as regards traditional gazes to capture the “precarized” subjectivity of individuals whose suffering is essentially marginalized and dismissed. The “listening cell” and clinical framing is therefore not representative of institutional expertise here but rather serves the materialization of a listening praxis and cooperative interaction through which subjective reclamation is promoted.

The stationary camera and limited variety of shots displayed and edited together in this film recall what Bill Nichols has defined as “the clinical or professional gaze” in his terminology despite the fact that never are the spectators exactly placed in the clinician’s position.¹¹⁹

The clinical gaze operates in compliance with a professional code of ethics that trains its adherents in the art of personal detachment from those with whom they work. The professional seeks out what others stumble upon but chooses to signal neither helplessness nor empathy. The intent is neither intervention nor a humane response but a

¹¹⁸ This is a transcript of the English subtitles track of the commercial DVD. (1’00”27-1’01”25)
¹¹⁹ The only exception might be when the second patient, trying to remember the date of the 1998 World Cup, turns to the camera and addresses directly whoever is standing behind as “Doctor.”
disciplined one inoculated against display of personal involvement. The clinical gaze testifies to a special form of empowerment whose fairly elaborate, professional codes are symptomatic of its location at the boundaries of the ethical. […] This inoculation against the display of personal involvement goes by the name of objectivity.  

If the film does not entirely preclude empathy – which the inserts of the clinicians’ reactions mediate – we are always somewhat on the side of the professional gaze. The hostile nature of the film pointed out by a reviewer mentioned earlier participates in the efforts put forth by the filmmakers to maintain a certain distance between the patients telling their stories and the spectator less to preclude any humane or empathetic response than to avoid the immediate recuperation and de-singularization of the subjective suffering expressed during the consultation. It is meant here to construct a space for the listening process to take place not to accentuate the victimization or discredit of the patient’s experience. Simultaneously, by forcing the spectators to sustain this personal disengagement from the interaction, the filmmakers reproduce the “abject response, the symptom of a social pathology that carries detachment beyond a justifiable limit,” and which Christophe Dejours and the other physicians hold responsible for the psychological and physical breakdowns they witness in their practice.  

Nichols’s qualification of the clinical gaze mirrors almost perfectly Dejours’s diagnosis of contemporary society and behaviors that plague the subjective wellbeing of its members.

*Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* stands out in the growing corpus of documentaries produced about the impact of globalization and new managerial methods on individuals and subjective formation. This film breaks away from the social narratives traditionally used to promote the political consciousness of spectators either against the

120 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 87.
121 Ibid., 88.
continued exploitation of low-skilled workers or the industrial relocation of entire manufacturing sectors abroad, leaving the national workforce unemployed. More importantly, Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau have made risky aesthetic choices in the context of this film by stripping the voice, the speech and the release of sufferings normally ignored, silenced or dismissed as mere psychopathologies of anything that might prevent them from being heard and attentively listened to. While the emphasis put on the verbal release of suffering situates the film in continuity with the political priorities of numerous documentary filmmakers since the early 1970s, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* tackles through documentary ethics and axiologics the “precarization” of subjectivity and social cohesion by unsettling the viewer’s capacity of empathy and suspended rationalization through a risky listening process.

**Conclusion**

One of the major differences between the militant experimentations of the late 1960s and contemporary documentary practices concerns the intended identification mediated through the camera address and the location of the constructed subjectivity in the process. Medvekin and Cinélutte films, while extending the demographic range of the working-class, still operated within the logic of class antagonisms and social compartmentalization. The political awareness crafted through cinema at the time aimed first at providing women and immigrant workers with a sound box where they could express their experiences and a space where they could affirm their social and subjective visibility. As a result, militant cinema sought to win the spectators over from their own class and sociological assumptions to the political struggle fought by workers. Today, class-based struggle may persist in some films, most notably those discussed in the first
chapter, but a growing number of films is more concerned with what is presented as the totalizing system of global financial capitalism. In this context, cinema adopts less a logic based on societal antagonisms than on the opposition of a universal humanism to economics – if the etymology of the word originally meant “management of the household,” it is as such that critiques of economics as an ideology now extend it to the management of the world in its totality. Thus, while there is still a concern for the vulnerability of low-paid, low-skilled employees, contemporary documentary filmmakers use their practice to promote spectators’ consciousness of their own subjective alienation, whether they are employees, employers, executive managers or demanding customers. This is where I see the end of work as defined by capitalism and the more radical end of work as a defining social and subjective value converge. André Gorz and Dominique Méda justify a gradual exit from the centrality of work as what structures individual lives and collective cohesion whereas Christophe Dejours reasserts the necessity to preserve or rescue it. Yet, they all agree on the alienating dimension of the current dominant economic ideology insofar as individuals are forced to do things they dismiss and would not ethically condone if they did not fear losing their job.122

For Dejours, the martialization of social relationships for economic purposes erodes the capacity of individuals to exist and perceive themselves as subjects: this is what he calls the “precarization of existence.” It is therefore the entire process of subjectivization that becomes impossible, and, one may add, this would also imperil the historical mission of militant and political documentary filmmaking as a result. For the psychoanalyst, this is where contemporary

122 Dominique Méda, Le travail: une valeur en voie de disparition? (Paris: Champs-Flammarion, 1995); André Gorz, Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 93: “I term alienation the impossibility of willing what one does, or of producing acts that can be taken as ends both in their results and in the forms of their accomplishment. An alienated individual’s reply to the moral question, ‘Can I want to do that?’, will always be, ‘It isn’t me…’; ‘It had to be…’; ‘There was no other choice…’ etc.” Christophe Dejours, Souffrance en France, 99. “Le retournement de la raison éthique ne peut être soutenu publiquement et emporter l’adhésion des tiers que parce qu’il est fait au titre du travail, de son efficacité et de sa qualité.”
forms of alienation and exploitation differ from what was taking place and denounced throughout the twentieth-century:

What we tried to reveal – the process that consists in banalizing evil through work – is neither new nor extraordinary. What is new is not the inequity, the injustice and the suffering imposed upon others by means of domination and power relationships that are coextensive to them, it is merely the fact that such a system can pass for reasonable and be justified; that it be given as realistic and rational; that it be accepted, even approved, by the large majority of citizens; that it be in the end openly promoted today as the model to embrace.123

Therefore, it is the normalization and immunity to political, social and ideological critiques which such methods and rationalizations have been able to cultivate for their own interests that filmmakers such as Jean-Robert Viallet, Marc-Antoine Roudil, Sophie Bruneau and Jean-Michel Carré attack in their own audiovisual “critical diagnoses of contemporary society” in *La mise à mort du travail*, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* and *J’ai (très) mal au travail*. They go about it in quite opposite way, however: Jean-Michel Carré unveils the ideological packaging that makes such an ethical disengagement possible while Marc-Antoine Roudil and Sophie Bruneau observe how psychoanalysts and physicians work with patients to help them externalize the profound causes of physical and psychological symptoms in order to retrieve their subjective autonomy. Jean-Robert Viallet’s project is more comprehensive insofar as it attempts to train the spectator’s eye to become more critical to the banality of everyday

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“Ce que nous avons tenté de mettre au jour – le processus de banalisation du mal par le travail – n’est pas nouveau ni extraordinaire. Ce qui est nouveau ce n’est pas du tout l’iniquité, l’injustice et la souffrance imposées à autrui par le truchement des rapports de domination qui lui sont coextensifs, c’est seulement le fait que ce système puisse passer pour raisonnable et justifié; qu’il soit donné pour réaliste et rationnel; qu’il soit accepté, voire approuvé, par une majorité de citoyens; qu’il soit enfin prôné ouvertement aujourd’hui comme un modèle à suivre.” (This my translation)
situation and large-scale consequences of individual behaviors. The “precarization of existence”
described by Dejours might prove to be the most difficult for filmmakers to engage with, but
these films give evidence of conscious efforts to address the destruction of the link between
subjectivity and work.
Chapter Three

Turning Idleness into New Productivity: Searching for Alternative Subjectivities, The Unemployed and The Gleaner

In this chapter, my goal is to provide a double counterpoint: first, to the lingering engagement of filmmakers with the dissolving working class that was the focus of chapter one, and second to the critique of the neo-liberal corruption of work and its subsequent alienating impact on the individual subject and the collective ethos which oriented chapter two. In this third chapter, I will examine the introduction in recent contemporary French documentary filmmaking of two unconventional figures: the unemployed and the gleaner. Traditionally relegated to the margins of society, these two alternative modes of being and producing share and embody many of the values put forth by post-Marxist and post-materialist attempts to subvert the neo-liberal consumerist drive of late capitalism. Yet, my interest focuses primarily on the role these figures have been assigned in three documentaries in particular: first, in two fairly provocative films by Pierre Carles in collaboration with Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello, Attention, Danger, Travail (2003) and Volem rien foutre al païs (2007), and second, in undoubtedly one of the most popular French documentaries of the first decade of the twenty-first century, in France and internationally, Agnès Varda’s Les glaneurs et la glaneuse/The Gleaners and I (2000).

Pierre Carles’s films unquestionably adhere to the “refusal to work,” a critical posture that is not new in French cultural production: in 1883, at the height of the Industrial Revolution and Bourgeois Capitalism, Paul Lafargue published a short pamphlet entitled The Right to be Lazy (1883). The social, political and ethical contestation of work as a category precedes nineteenth-century libertarian utopianism, since competing notions of what human activity and
production are already subject to philosophical debates in Ancient Greece. Similarly, after almost a century of Marxist critiques of capitalism, the rejection of work as the ideal pursuit of an other society, perhaps even an altermodernity, resurfaced in the 1970s, and have more recently been evident in the discourse of the most radical proponents of a convergence between anarchism, autonomism and anti-globalization movements. In a social context combining high rates of unemployment, the precarization of social and living conditions, and the unquestioned faith of governments in the triumvirate of economic growth, consumption and work, Carles’s glorification of voluntary unemployment certainly sets the cat among the pigeons. Yet, it also participates in a broader critical reconstruction of human activity and production that has gained ground among scholars eager to produce a counter-discourse to what they dismiss as the inevitable conversion to globalization and the economicization of the world.124

In the second half of the chapter, I will revisit Les glaneurs et la glaneuse/The Gleaners and I (2000) by Agnès Varda, a film whose approach is as far away from the aesthetic and militancy of Attention, danger, travail and Volem rien foutre al païs as can be. Yet, like the unemployed interviewed for these two films, Varda’s gleaners and their joyfully embraced praxis of gleaning stand at the crossroads of a reclamation of the artisanal or craft(wo)man’s ethos, (long subsumed within productivist norms and mass consumption) and a fragile critique of the global commodification of art. I will argue here that The Gleaners and I is, as the title suggests, an ethical and honest questioning of the antagonistic relationship between the “gleaner” and the artist. The former reclaims her subjective and social autonomy from commodification whereas

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124 Several recent critical accounts focusing on the status of work in sociology and critical theory have covered in greater detail the historical basis of such arguments and authorial variations: Edward Granter (ed.), Critical Social Theory and the End of Work (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) and Colin Williams, Rethinking the Future of Work: Directions and Visions (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) for instance offer comprehensive overviews of the ideological stakes permeating such debates. One can also mention here the increasing attention paid to another contemporary subversive figure of our technological times, the hacker. The debate has bridged a variety of disciplines, including economics, philosophy, sociology and environmental studies.
the artist finds herself (un)willingly bound to reinforce capitalism as she creatively appropriates and re-presents society’s waste materials through her art. In that regard, Varda’s film is a rare two-way critique of the wasteful nature of global capitalism, both in terms of material and human waste, and of sustainability as a discourse which would tend to hide its conservative aestheticization of the world behind ethical prescriptions. Agnès Varda successfully engages in this film with a timely suspension of political belief – if I may coopt such a phrase – at the exact pivotal moment between the twentieth century dominated by the assertion of capitalism as a global model and the beginning of the twenty-first century as an open field of possibilities and new goals for human civilization.

A Brave New World! Idleness in Attention, Danger, Travail and Volem rien foutre al païs (Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coelho, 2003; 2007)

Pierre Carles, a fervent admirer of Pierre Bourdieu and well-known for his endless provocative audiovisual statements against the alleged media-politico-economic complex since the mid-1990s, struck again in the mid-2000s to challenge what he sees as the biggest lure of our times that consists in saying that only through work can individuals gain access to happiness and become full subjects. The first two parts of what should have been a trilogy, Attention, Danger, Travail (2004) and Volem rien foutre al païs (2007), thus went against the generally accepted notion that unemployment means social death. The result of a collaboration with Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coelho, Attention, Danger, Travail (2003) and Volem rien foutre al païs (2007) respectively focus on individual and collective acts of resistance against what they see as the unquestioned domination of waged employment. Screened and debated in various contexts, these
two films provoked a wide array of intense reactions. Conceived as a trilogy, the third part, *Qui dit mieux?* which remains unfinished, would have given the floor to individual voices denouncing voluntary unemployment and/or proposing arguments in favor of a third way between the status quo sketched out in *Attention, Danger, Travail* and the revolutionary projects introduced in *Volem rien foutre al païs*. By following up on the premise that unemployment does not necessarily mean social exclusion and tragedy, the filmmakers shatter major cultural and political assumptions and target primarily the discourse of governmental officials, business representatives and liberal economists. This is nothing new for Pierre Carles, who has become persona non grata in the French media, after being repeatedly fired from various French television channels for exposing institutional hypocrisy and conniving practices between media and political circles. He has since embraced independent documentary cinema as a space that gives him the freedom to explore controversial topics. His filmography includes films such as *Pas vu pas pris* (1998), a quite successful inquiry on behind-the-door ties between media and political institutions, recently expanded in *Fin de concession* (2010), but also a rare documentary portrait of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology (*La sociologie est un sport de combat*, 2001), a provoking film inquiry about the use of violence by radical groups such as Action Directe and ETA (*Ni vieux, ni traîtres*, 2006) as well as a tribute to Georges Bernier, the irreverent leading figure of satirical magazines *Charlie-Hebdo* and *Hara-Kiri* in the 1970s and 1980s – (*Choron, dernière*, 2009).

Like Jean-Michel Carré’s film *J’ai (très) mal au travail*, discussed in the previous chapter, *Attention, Danger, Travail* exposes the contradictions underlying the media, social and economic mechanisms by which neo-liberalism imposes itself as the dominant ideology of the late twentieth century: “the utopian vision of the fully autonomous, self-realized individual
“[employee and consumer]” is necessarily achieved by means of a “politics of fear.”  

In Pierre Carles’s hands, documentary filmmaking is largely conceived as a scathing compilation of interviews and all sorts of archival footage, including television broadcasts, commercials, reportages and other films. Recalling the principle of “radical scavenging” pioneered by American filmmaker Emile de Antonio in the 1970s, Pierre Carles describes the films as antitheses of mainstream promotions of waged employment and conformist definitions of happiness.

Reacting to television’s lack of critical and analytical coverage of American politics, particularly war, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, de Antonio devised a new documentary aesthetics that would not simply rely on the editing of archival footage and contrapuntal collisions between audio and visual tracks, but one that would turn editing into “opinionated” “democratic didacticism.” Unlike voice-over narration, which prevailed in traditional documentary filmmaking throughout the 1940s and 1950s, de Antonio believed in the spectator’s ability to interpret the information pieced together without explicit explanations or guidance. He wrote:

The goal of a truly didactic work is to go beyond [the message] and to suggest the “why”. I like to describe my own feelings as democratic with a small d, which means that if you don’t want to teach things to people but to reveal things to them, you will permit them then to arrive at the same conclusion as yourself. That’s a democratic didacticism,

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without having to say “firstly, secondly, thirdly.” And that’s why I insist on the word “reveal.”  

Like de Antonio, Pierre Carles mixes an eclectic selection of materials and believes in the viewer’s ability to make sense of the meaning emerging from the “cross-examin[ation]” that then takes place among the audiovisual materials. Only in relation to this conception of spectatorship does he accept to be regarded as a “militant” filmmaker, in fact:

This label [militant] is often used to disqualify. “It is militant, therefore it is not cinema.” Then again, if one fights for the recognition of spectators’ intelligence, their free will, so that they won’t always hear the same speech again and again, which is often the case with a lot of so-called militant films, then I don’t mind being called “militant.” But a lot of leftist films literally take spectators by the hand and tell them what to think. You need to trust spectators; they are smart enough to avoid simplistic shortcuts.

While Carles’s editing is arguably not free of any such “simplistic short-cuts,” his approach to documentary is worth considering, particularly insofar as it provides a rare critique of televisual complacency towards the official discourses surrounding employment, economic priorities and social productivity and as it sets itself in reaction to more traditional forms of social documentary. Extensive footage comes from the works of other activist fiction and non-fiction filmmakers. It is not just a question then of re-presenting history but also of broadening the space in which history is made and told.

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Rejecting what they consider to be the moralizing tone of traditional militant and social documentary cinema, Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello prefer to appropriate and subvert contemporary documentary formats. As Goxe states:

If we made a film that goes against the grain of dominant discourses about work and how unemployment is experienced, another one should be done about massive layoffs. When you watch television: the workers of Michelin, Danone, Moulinex, their lives are always presented as social tragedy. Of course, for people who have nothing else beyond their job, it’s a slap in the face. But let’s face it, in factories, people are fed up with their jobs. […] The proletarian crying because he lost his job is ideologically correct.130

Goxe reacts quite virulently to what he sees as the lack of real questions in contemporary media about the alienation that threatens individuals in their workplace. As the interviewer remarks, Goxe’s comments reference clearly recent documentaries, some of which have in fact been analyzed or mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation – Luc Decaster’s *Rêve d’usine* (2003), Marcel Trillat’s *300 jours de colère* (1999) or *Silence dans la vallée* (2007). Rather than interpreting Goxe’s statements as mere cynicism about those workers whose lives are totally shattered when they are laid off, I think it is more productive to read his comment as addressing the reproduction by militant cinema of the dominant belief that work is essential to the production of the subject. In other words, while asking about the status of the working-class and working conditions under capitalism, traditional militant and social documentary films have not, according to Goxe, really questioned the self-accredited inevitability that capitalism, and now neo-liberalism, has claimed for its own profits. The radical approach deployed in *Attention*,

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Danger, Travail and Volem rien foutre al païs is first and foremost directed at this broad manufacturing of consent about work – to borrow Noam Chomsky’s words.

Pierre Carles’s accusations against elected officials for giving in to financiers’ diktat echo a common postulate among anti-corporate and anti-neoliberal critics, namely that the instrumentalization of the fear of unemployment and social exclusion has become the most effective weapon in the ongoing “economic war.” This is particularly well foregrounded in Volem rien foutre al païs, which ends with Carles’s inquiry about the possibility of a military repression of the homeless, the unemployed, vagabonds and any other person marginalized and stigmatized as ill-adapted to our contemporary society. As one might expect, no answer will be provided as Defense Secretary Michèle Alliot-Marie refuses to respond to such a fanciful and absurd scenario. As spectators, we are therefore left pondering Carles’s bomb while end credits roll. Yet, his suggestion is not entirely unfounded as others before him have laid out such ideas in, admittedly, more scholarly terms: Canadian activist Naomi Klein, French architect and critic Paul Virilio and the late Brazilian geographer Milton Santos have all identified, in more or less explicit terms, globalization with a totalitarian system that capitalizes on individual and collective fears.¹³¹

Unlike Jean-Michel Carré or Jean-Robert Viallet, whose similar denunciation of a politics of fear were studied in the last chapter, Pierre Carles takes a more radical stance when it comes to proposing alternatives. Considering that work has been reduced to waged labor by economic liberal and neo-liberal ideologies, his view is that individual and collective emancipation can only be conceived outside of existing structures. His absolute rejection of employment can thus be described as a radical interpretation of André Gorz’s and Dominique Méda’s theses according

to which what needs to be advocated for is the “end of work.” Yet, what both Gorz and Méda argue for is less the end of all types of work than the abolition of certain forms of employment, particularly alienating waged labor. André Gorz clearly states this himself in the introduction of *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (1997):

> The polemics stirred up by Jeremy Rifkin’s book, *The End of Work*, are significant here. What he calls the “end of work” is the end of what everyone has become accustomed to call “work.” It is not work in the anthropological or philosophical sense of the term. […] It is urgent that we recognize that *real work is no longer what we do when “at work”: the work, in the sense of poiesis, which one does is no longer (or is increasingly rarely) done “at work”; it no longer corresponds to the “work” which, in the social sense of the term, one “has.” […] In fact, the opposite is the case: we have to exit from “work” and the “work-based society” in order to recover a taste for, and the possibility of “true” work.*

This contrast that Gorz establishes between the work one “has” and the work which one willfully undertakes is key to the debate in which both Carles and Varda are engaged. To a large extent, Carles’s polemical negation of work should also be understood in terms of all kinds of activities in which individuals do not engage in an autonomous manner. When filming small communities often set up in rural areas, one discovers people who are in fact busy rehabilitating old houses and farms, gardening, repairing cars and other amenities, cooking or taking care of animals. Yet, as one man quite unambiguously explains in *Volem rien foutre al païs*, “you create your own reality.” What these people condemn is the rupture that capitalism caused between production

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and needs, between the individual and the reason behind the task. Although Pierre Carles does not address the issue in his films, another dimension of work that has systematically been deprived of any “use-value” to use André Gorz’s term is the domestic work traditionally performed by women at home, but also more broadly family and social care. To a large extent, filmmakers, including Marcel Trillat or Dominique Cabrera, have addressed the feminization of precarious labor – to be understood both as the larger presence of women in low-paid service jobs and as the extension of “domestic” and “care” jobs traditionally reserved for women to an increasingly male working population. Only few filmmakers, such as Agnès Varda as I will show later in this chapter and Colline Serreau in the context of the battle between industrial and sustainable forms of agriculture, have engaged in a gendered deconstruction of “work” as the product of a male and patriarchal ethos.

While Jean-Michel Carré does not question the social function of work, Pierre Carles radically departs from the traditional distinctions maintained in cinematic representations between economic ideologies and systems of production, especially capitalism, and work as the means by which individuals can participate in social and political spheres while gaining a sense of self-fulfillment. Leftist or militant cinemas have in fact not only been long influenced by Marxist theories but they have also somewhat implicitly, like Marx, contributed to propagating the belief that work is not the source of social ills, only its instrumentalization for economic and ideological profits is. For most of the twentieth century, leftist and militant cinemas...
documented the political struggles of the workers and trade unions. In *Attention, danger, travail* and *Volem rien foutre al país*, Pierre Carles invites viewers to see work as a major impediment to individual subjectivity and engages in the requalification of the unemployed and through them idleness or voluntary unemployment.

*Attention, Danger, Travail* puts more emphasis on the process of individual and collective subjectification implemented through various modes of management and highlights how “work” is essentially a rhetorical construction to political and economic ends. Interviews of long-term unemployed individuals, many of whom worked for years before making this choice, alternate with various types of archival and newly recorded footage. These clips and sequences introduce economic and political arguments shared by elected officials or business representatives, they illustrate the overall argument pursued throughout the film with different workplaces, examples of corporate cultural environments, and so on, in an effort to show how ideas of autonomy, participation and flexibility have been subverted by the neo-liberal ethos.

Commercials are particularly effective and effectively selected to emphasize the cooption of family values, representations of happiness and self-realization away from the private sphere into enterprise. Two commercials are particularly evocative of such transfer: first, a clip from a Microsoft musical from the late 1980s-early 1990s in which the lyrics sung by the employees literally identify the company with a family, and a depiction of the workplace by the Prud’hommes which starts as a colorful, happy milieu to end more strongly on the idyllic nature of such a fantasy.

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and saw its disappearance, or (almost total) reconfiguration as inevitable. This incredulity might spring from the fact that Marx and Marxism have always been linked to the political struggles of ‘the workers,’ or those supposedly acting on their behalf. The erstwhile Soviet superpower that many saw as operating on Marxist principles, and liked to present itself as such through the use of Marxian hagiolatry, appeared orientated around the elevation of the (industrial) worker, and by extension (traditional heavy industrial) work.”
Completed a few years later, *Volem rien foutre al païs* examines how “work” or rather its refusal can constitute the ethical basis for alternative types of collective social organization. A similar interweaving of disparate materials structures this second part of the incomplete trilogy. Two main narratives continuously collide throughout the film with a common focus on the relationship between work and criminalization. One thread consists of the filmmakers suggesting that those who find themselves excluded (voluntarily or not) from society – the unemployed, youths, but also individuals and communities pursuing alternative lifestyles, most notably those refusing to consume and waste beyond their real needs – are doubly marginalized and criminalized by official discourse. The other thread raises questions about the thin line between crime and revolutionary practices, particularly as the film presents several radical and anarchist groups whose solution to the system is simply to steal and squat on the basis that private property and monetary exchanges are abusive and only legitimized by capitalism itself.

Through contrastive editing, both films highlight how neo-liberalizing institutions – governments, political parties, unions and the media – have consistently and simultaneously objectified workers and de-corporealized the unemployed. A montage-sequence in the early minutes of *Volem rien foutre al païs* conveys quite effectively how the scission between the glorification of work and the blaming of the unemployed has been repeatedly reinforced morally and politically. Extracts from Presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy calling “the working France” to vote and from newscasts describing the violence of employees towards their managers or the destruction of buildings during strikes are juxtaposed with examples of another violence, this time the psychological harassment exerted by managers towards their employees. This is quite vividly evoked in a commercial showing a manager slapping his employees.
As on can see above, a wide range of materials compose these audiovisual “patchworks.” Thus, the repeated injunctions that politicians and members of the union of business owners, the MEDEF, give to everyday citizens collide with footage filmed in typical enterprises such as Domino’s Pizza, call centers and other workplaces where the individual and social pride claimed
by the former is crushed by practices of de-personalization and automatization of the human being. At other times, audiovisual montages of film footage showing various types of work and workers is immediately undermined and criticized by the lyrics of “Feniant,” a song written and performed by the Occitan band Dupain and included on their album *L’Usina* (2000). With the juxtaposition of anarchist films with political statements, musical clips and film archival footage, contemporary documentaries and commercials, the filmmakers maintain a certain ambivalence and allow the documentaries to be as much a montage of experiences as a window on both positive and negative outcomes of the current situation.

The materials lined up throughout the film were selected for their ability to quickly deliver a clear message and create a colorful, contrastive dialogue between those who “sell” work and those who refuse to see it as the only way to a happy life. For instance, about one third of the way into *Attention, Danger, Travail*, Pierre Carles lines up a series of short clips which at first seem unrelated or randomly selected: first, an extract of a speech given by the President of the MEDEF, a national organization defending the interests of business owners, during which he called for sanctions of people who turn down jobs; second, an old commercial from the 1960s for the national bank, Société Générale, in which a young couple is musically introduced to the range of services offered by the bank – it is also an occasion for Société Générale to do its self-promotion as an employer and introduce the different types of jobs available, from clerk to cashier to security guard to manager; immediately after, another commercial follows, showing this time Microsoft and its self-presentation as a family providing for all its employees and gaining in return their loyalty; after this series of archival and live footage, Carles inserts an extract from an interview with one of the expert-unemployed, “P. activist-unemployed.” Born and raised in the region with the second highest rate of unemployment in France, Provence, P.
recalls his family history before explaining his choice. The son of an industrial worker and a maid, his experience of work can be summarized as absentee father, physical pains, pungent odors clinging to his parents’ clothes, and precariousness. As a result, happiness became a life-long political project for him and a way to prove to relatives and people around him that unemployment is not a fatality, it is not synonymous with laziness, ignorance and self-destruction but offers instead the space and time to pursue education, engage oneself with social issues, exert one’s right as a citizen to participate and contribute to democratic debates and set the rules of one’s own happiness. One more sequence prolongs this sample: the short extract that Carles takes from Bruno Muel’s 1974 documentary *Le sang des autres*, and particularly the part where a voice-over monologue comments on the physical pain endured as a result of work and the impact this has on one’s psychological health but also the most intimate relationships with family and loved ones. In other words, the physical and moral sufferings caused by work bleed out of the workplace and contaminate the most personal and private moments of an individual.

Why choose to detail this series of materials carefully selected for *Attention, Danger, Travail*? Across those few clips, Pierre Carles generates different kinds of interactions from one clip to the next and across the sequence. P. is the archetype targeted by the business representative speaking first; yet, as he explains his rationale for not taking a traditional job, the businessman’s rhetorical question: “What do you think of people who refuse to go to work today?” finds a counter-argument that is both supported with valid reasons and could give way to new questions, including “why do you think people would wish to go to work every day nowadays?” Muel’s film both reinforces P.’s own family memories and provides a response to the question initially asked. Another layer of connections concerns the comparison established between the workplace and the family. While P. and Muel’s narrator denounce the erosion of
family life as a result of harsh working conditions, schedules and expectations, the two commercials suggest that the enterprise becomes a surrogate family providing for all ages, all capacities and most importantly, it is a place of comfort and happiness. What started as a fairly consensual question about individuals who refuse to abide by social norms suddenly becomes more complex and the sugarcoated world of the utopian workplace dissolves into personal testimonies of sufferings, regrets and lessons learned the hard way. Carles’s intention is therefore not simply a question of silencing politicians and entrepreneurs in order to allow the unemployed to speak. Rather, through montage, mainstream media representations, testimonies and silences that contrast with or reinforce each other. The constant interweaving of contradicting voices and images forces them to enter into an otherwise impossible dialogue that triggers reactions, either because that dialogue raises questions or because it simply upsets viewers' assumptions.

Formal interviews are absent from *Volem rien foutre al païs*; instead, three social visions alternate: first, the actual capitalist system equated with production, consumption and, as Georges Pompidou publicly declared on French television in the late 1970s, risk; second, local autonomist communities whose priorities lie in sustainable lifestyles, ecological awareness and communal cultivation of resources; and third, revolutionary groups such as Spanish-based Dinero Gratis, advocating for public expropriation of corporate and private property. Other films have similarly juxtaposed individual and collective experiments and actions conceived in reaction to the dominant promotion of consumerism, marketization and human disposability. The general narrative structure of *Volem rien foutre al païs* is more circular than *Attention, Danger, Travail*. The dominant discourse exposed by the filmmakers frames and encloses alternative options at the core of the film. Isolated communities carry out non-violent

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136 “I want neither this society nor the happiness it proposes. I searched for those who do not accept the neo-liberal totalitarianism and who refuse to surrender to the doctrine of profit at all cost.” This is Manuel Poutte’s mission statement as he prepared his 75-minute documentary *En Vie!* Released in 2001. (Prod.: Lux fugit film)
experiments that recall the neo-ruralist utopians of the 1970s while the Spanish radical revolutionary group gives the example of an attempt to undermine capitalist market economy at its core, monetary trade. Once again, these reactions alternate dialogically. The film starts and ends with images of institutional violence and the criminalization of individuals who cannot or will not be part of the vast industrial system – George Pompidou's defense of economic liberalism and widespread social insecurity, soldiers training for urban warfare or institutional methods of surveillance and control imposed upon the unemployed, including job centers and complicated bureaucracy. By emphasizing or mocking the inability of welfare agencies to do anything but channel individuals who have somehow dropped out of the system, the film is as critical of traditional socialist policies as it is of capitalist pursuits. The violence of political and economic institutions and of radical revolutionary groups stealing from stores and squatting empty apartments contrasts with the societal reflections fostered by more moderate experiments. Non-violent and non-divisive, these local communities do away with traditional political and ideological antagonisms and replace them with new concepts such as autonomy, responsibility, solidarity, self-sufficiency and sustainability – in other words, economic degrowth. This may explain why the two sources of violence documented in the film, that of the economic and political systems and that performed by radical anti-capitalist groups, polarize the overall argument, one on the outer edge of the narrative knot and the other at the core of the editing logic. The central rim, composed mostly of sequences filmed in small neo-rural and autonomous communities in France, acts as a sort of neutral site through which both extremes can be brought into question. In fact, these sequences are often occasions for open debates about energy policies, the demonization by governments of individuals choosing to live differently and outside the system, the ethical dimension of theft as a means of resistance, the difference between freedom
and anarchy, and possible definitions of work and human activity in relation to subjective expression.

In these pauses, *Attention, Danger, Travail* and *Volem rien foutre al païs* position the viewers in between two social dreams or utopias, two ethoi. Rather than drawing conclusions for the spectators about which one should prevail, the films invite them to reflect on their prejudices, social values and other biases towards one or the other. Bill Nichols distinguishes between formal and political reflexivity in documentary filmmaking, the latter “point[ing] towards our assumptions and expectations about the world around us [...] and remind[ing] us how society works in accord with conventions and codes we may too readily take for granted.”¹³⁷ Several moments of political reflexivity are carved out through montage in the course of the film. The thought-provoking interventions punctuating *Attention, Danger, Travail* take a different form in *Volem rien foutre al païs* that addresses more specifically the tensions that animate the processes of liberation and domination between the State, the market, and social movements. In this game, all parties display different modes of domination: the institutionalization of social insecurity and the criminalization of non-working individuals by governments, capitalism's consumption-driven production and the spread of anarchy across social movements.

In order to maintain the tensions that are essential in keeping various forms of domination to a minimum, André Gorz has added a neutral, yet highly mobile, space: politics.¹³⁸ He defines politics as an empty space where society becomes aware of its own production process: politics is not the site of power and should not be confused with political formations. It must be and remain a neutral site where tensions between subjectivity and objective rationality – in other words between social movements, governmental constraints and economic pressures – can be

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¹³⁸ André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, 117-118.
endlessly debated and reflected upon. On several occasions, the subjects in *Volem rien foutre al païs* react to the actions taken by other groups and debate the ethical and social impact of both governmental and market options and alternative experimentations. These pauses build into the narrative structure of the film times and spaces for spectators to virtually attend political debates. While the good and the bad roles may seem to have been pre-determined, considering Pierre Carles's positions, these short moments open up the debate, reinserting politics into the core of the editing process. Two sequences are particularly worth describing and commenting on in details.

Certainly the most controversial moment of the film concerns a sequence filmed in Spain on the occasion of a raid by the radical collective Dinero Gratis.139 Turning their slogan, “I steal” into revolutionary praxis, members regularly declare brand-name stores, supermarkets and other spaces as outlaw zones.

*Figures 3.7. and 3.8.* Dinero Gratis's public actions: requisitioning retail stores and setting up big public banquets with stolen products. (*Volem rien foutre al païs*, Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello, 2007 © C-P Productions)

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139 More information, including their manifesto and media interventions, can be found in several languages on their website http://www.sindominio.net/eldinerogratis.
In other words, as the clip shows, the group justifies stealing mass amounts of clothes and food or at times squatting empty apartments by the fact that retail stores and private property symbolize a form of expropriation of private interests. Inspired by the Situationists of the 1960s and squatters’ movements of the 1980s, the politicization of theft as subversion of economic rationality, commodification and consumerism is not without ethical ambiguity. Instead of having a sociological or political “expert” comment upon such practices, the filmmakers choose to question the moral dilemma raised by the sequence through editing. Immediately following this depiction of Dinero Gratis’s activities, a lengthy debate-sequence recorded this time in a small autonomous community living in rural France provides a sort of reflexive pause for the viewers as well as these proponents of alternative lifestyles. They had initially been shown getting ready to watch the footage from Dinero Gratis, and they now engage in a post-screening debriefing.¹⁴⁰

![Image](image_url)

**Figures 3.9. and 3.10.** Watching a film about Dinero Gratis and debating together of the ethical and political stakes of the Spanish group's actions. (*Volem rien foutre al país*, Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello, 2007 © C-P Productions)

¹⁴⁰ This practice of filming and integrating reactions to recorded footage is not new: Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin established this self-reflexive exercise as an essential part of the cinéma-vérité approach in their 1960 documentary *Chronique d’un été/Chronicle of a Summer*. However, here, the purpose seems to be less about claiming a truth or the authenticity of emotions and testimonials recorded as it is about fostering a political and ethical reflection.
Jokes and personal anecdotes lighten, but do not preclude, more serious discussions of the thin line separating freedom from criminal behavior, theft as individual action from political strategy, and so on. This internal confrontation has the merit of avoiding patronizing and moralizing attitudes projected onto the subjects filmed and of weaving political expression, in its most fundamental sense – the rule of the polis, of society – into the core of the film.

Other similar moments recur punctually throughout the film, and often, such a priori mundane conversations reveal the theoretical engagement of the film and the subjects filmed with broader debates about the end of work, echoing ideas introduced by sociologists and philosophers throughout the twentieth century, tensions between individual freedom and collective responsibility, ecology, social declassification, and the political value of utopianism. Another short sequence captures the encounter of young couples whose daily lifestyle and priorities affirm their pursuit of sustainability, a refusal of consumerism and work with their neighbors, a retired couple whose conception of life and responsibility revolves around work. As the former show the latter around and explain the reasons why they have chosen to live this way, ideological conflicts get talked through less with the intention to convince the other party than with a desire to understand and accept each other’s priorities and values. Not only does this sequence highlight generational, cultural and ideological differences between the two but it also acts as a didactic moment through which viewers learn about the practicality and everyday dimension of what autonomous living and being mean.
While the large majority of French social documentaries continue to focus on “workers” and unemployment remains a permanent concern for individuals and governments, *Attention, Danger, Travail* and *Volem rien foutre al païs* depart radically from the ambient pessimism inevitably associated with unemployment. I will now examine more closely how these two films demystify work as the excuse for governments and capitalist interests to keep individuals and consumers in check. By drawing attention to new political agents, the unemployed, they render manifest André Gorz’s efforts to update Marxist social and political categories in the face of the two synchronous crises of capitalism and socialism. As Gorz put it in his book, *Farewell to the working-class*, refusing work also means refusing traditional strategies promoted by workers’ movements and unions. These two films show individuals who, instead of appropriating social structures of production as workers, re-negotiate their political and social subjectivity by simply refusing to function as workers, initiating thereby Gorz’s post-industrial revolution.141

Preferring compilation and montage to the cinéma-vérité style that remains dominant in contemporary “social” cinema, these films rely on three main subversive strategies. First, the interviews filmed by Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello displace speech from workers to the

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141 André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, 75.
unemployed. Second, through editing choices, the voices of the unemployed are granted authority; and third, the montage, particularly in *Volem rien foutre al païs*, creates moments of political reflexivity that facilitate a virtual debate that brings together the subjects filmed and the viewers. The convergence of these three strategies result, first, in what Jacques Rancière would describe as the political subjectivization of the unemployed and, second, in a post-industrial critique and rehabilitation of politics. In other words, I argue that these two films operate a political shift from militant cinema by replacing the figure of political consciousness commonly associated with the industrial, capitalist society, the worker, with unemployed post-industrial subjects.

Since the sixties, militant cinema has been a vehicle for workers' speech, a speech that burst through the screens during May 1968. However, thirty years later, this speech has lost its power, deprived of its political ideals and its collective resonance. As Jean-Louis Comolli regrets, workers have been silenced by their inability to satisfy the demand for endless spectacle and excitement; the speech that once exhilarated young generations cannot express anything but lassitude today. This statement and the testamentary nature of most contemporary social documentaries exposing the dissolution of the working classes and their political ideals point to a changeover from the old political avant-garde, the working class, to new voices for social change. During the mid-nineties, new social movements started making headlines. Symptomatic of widespread social exclusion and the precarization of industrial and service jobs, *les sans-travail* / the unemployed, *les sans-logis* / the homeless, and *les sans-papiers* / undocumented immigrant workers dominated the public discourse and galvanized new forms of militancy. Traditional social discourses and political strategies also had to adapt, or at the very least, acknowledge a whole new set of claims. These people, historically marginalized and denied

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participation in the citizenry, demanded the right to have a political voice and exist physically. In a society focused on work and workers, the unemployed and homeless are indeed too often reduced to statistics while undocumented workers are confined to clandestinity.

For militant cinema, workers' speech was a political intervention, an utterance that disrupted established functions and strictly defined spaces; Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello operate a similar disruption as they authorize the testimonies of individuals who are not only unemployed but who have reclaimed such a frowned upon social condition as an opportunity to exist fully as subjects again. Through montage, the filmmakers give them the quality of “experts.” They are indeed introduced through their capacities to discuss the topic in an informed manner. Intertitles preceding each interview present their non-working status on an equal footing with any other profession: D. is a survivor of the ongoing economic war, J. is a former worker, and is currently unemployed / “une chômeuse,” P. is “un chômeur militant” – in other words, militant about being unemployed, or an unemployed person who also happens to be an activist – F. is enjoying anticipated early retirement and H. is a selfless deserter of work.
It should be noted that here the French language appears to offer creative ambivalence insofar as the term “chômeur” – “unemployed” – can function as a noun and therefore as an active social category. In English, the only form available is the passive adjectival noun used to designate the group. More than offering testimonial layers on a similar event, these individualized interventions expand the range of perspectives from which unemployment can be lived, conceptualized and, more importantly, justified these days. In contrast, those who are normally
summoned to share their expertise, politicians and entrepreneurs, are unable to even recognize that unemployment could be a condition that anybody would wish for. The only traditional expert, sociologist Loïc Wacquant, is here only indirectly consulted since he participates in the discussion not in the form of an interview but through a clip showing him at a conference. Although this does not diminish his statements, it nonetheless reduces his intervention to the same level as other archival footage.

Attention, Danger, Travail and Volem rien foutre al païs collect the testimonies, social opinions and political declarations of people who define unemployment as a way of life and a political act. Concerned about how consensual “social” documentary cinema has become, Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello find in what André Gorz identified as the “non-class of non-workers” the incarnation of new political ideals at a time when both capitalism and socialism are failing. In this “non-class of non-workers,” Gorz includes all individuals pushed out of the production process as a result of increased automatization or under-employed in their professional capacities as a result of the industrialization of intellectual work. This surplus, made of actual and virtual, permanent and temporary, as well as full or part-time unemployed individuals, was symptomatic of the decomposition of the old society; in his view, work, its social utility and the individual desire to work can no longer define social relations.143

In Attention, Danger, Travail and Volem rien foutre al païs, unemployment is presented as a new beginning more than the social death commonly portrayed in the media or in “social documentary.” In the same way that the sixties witnessed workers appropriate and formulate their experiences, turning speech into a political weapon, these films are among a few that listen to individuals who have unemployment in common but who cannot be lumped together into a well-defined social category. Singularity and individual subjectivity are their primary claims and

143 André Gorz, Farewell to the Working Class, 67-68.
their collectiveness defies fundamental social criteria. They constitute a group insofar as they are in excess of the system and not members of any other professional group or category.

Discussing the notion of political subjectivization, Jacques Rancière recalls how Auguste Blanqui's self identification as a proletarian asserted the political significance of the term and was a case of political subjectivization through declassification. Fast-forward to the turn of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century and the term “chômeur” matches the meaning that Rancière reads in Blanqui's chosen identity. Wrong “from the vantage point of policy,” since being proletarian was not a profession, for Rancière, the term was “right from the vantage point of politics: proletarian was not the name of any social group that could be sociologically identified. It is the name of an outcast. An outcast is not a poor wretch of humanity; outcast is the name of those who are denied an identity in a given order of policy. […] Proletarians was thus well-suited for the workers as the name of anyone […]: those who do not belong to the order of castes, indeed, those who are pleased to undo this order.”

Looking at the works of Pierre Bourdieu on social misery in the late nineties, and considering the official term “sans-emploi” – person without work – it is clear that the unemployed are outcasts in Rancière's sense, but when it comes to the happy and voluntary unemployed of Attention, Danger, Travail and Volem rien foutre al païs, the part that underlines the pleasure outcasts have in undoing the social order strengthens the parallel. By implicitly performing the question “what is your profession?” and mimicking Blanqui's prosecutor's denial through the silences and declarations of politicians and entrepreneurs, the films re-stage the process of subjectivization described by Rancière in a contemporary context. One could argue that comparing these voluntarily unemployed outcasts to what Marx defined as

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lumpenproletariat, the underclass composed of the poorest of the poor, the nomads of industrial society, would seem more appropriate. Lumpenproletariat, in contrast, “suggests less the political emergence of a class than a sartorial category,” what in Peter Stallybrass’s study of nineteenth-century artistic and literary representations amounted to “the depiction of the poor as a nomadic tribe, innately depraved” yet turned into “a spectacle of heterogeneity.”¹⁴⁵ As such, I will be more inclined to apply and explore the politically subversive nature of this label to the gleaners filmed by Agnès Varda in the last section of this chapter. Yet, I would like to maintain that at least in Pierre Carles’s films, the political goal pursued both by these renegades of the omnipotent and omnipresent capitalist system is the constitution and recognition of an individual and collective identity and status in reaction to, and simultaneously indissociable from a system defined by work. After all, as some critics have remarked in and off the film, what allows these people to survive economically is a set of social allowances, even if as one unemployed person explains, these are independent from the contributions withheld from the paychecks of those who do work. The unemployed are subjects therefore insofar as they are in-between statuses, both citizens and non-citizens.

Attention, danger, travail and Volem rien foutre al païs are among a few French documentaries to question radically the political and social functions of “work” in post-industrial, capitalist societies. While Carles’s methods can be questioned, particularly as he indulges in tricking publicly elected officials in front of the camera, and the fact that the economic survival of these happy unemployed individuals is practically sustainable thanks to the very system they reject, these two films give evidence of an effective use of montage for political and subversive ends. As a matter of fact, deconstructing and exposing mainstream media

manipulations and their complicit reinforcement of political authorities and economic interests defines Pierre Carles's signature documentary style. No matter whether one is in agreement with such a positive view of unemployment or not, Carles’s films nonetheless have the merit to suggest an unusual, thought-provoking and alternative interpretation of unemployment as a condition that individuals may choose rather than endure. This reversal undermines the very definition of unemployment through which governments but also trade unions justify their continued emphasis on jobs, namely that unemployment is necessarily temporary. Political scientist William Walters suggests that unemployment has served various purposes: on the one hand, it has certainly constituted an economic marker but, on the other, the control of unemployment and its strict definition have had, in his Foucauldian-inspired analysis, social implications.

The definition of unemployment promoted by insurance is a very particular one. It is defined as a temporary, not protracted, interruption in a person’s employment, attributable to impersonal and industrial factors. […] 146

This is precisely the meaning of “interruption” that all the persons presented in Attention, danger, travail and Volem rien foutre al païs contest, since they instead see employment as a cause of unwanted disruptions of their lives, their social security and their self-realization. It is for this same reason that scrutinizing the evolution of the concept of “involuntary unemployment” can help critics turn what has been seen as a technology of domination into a space of emancipation. Walters argues therefore that if the concept has already been “traced at the level of the history of economic ideas,” “an alternative history is conceivable, one that considers involuntary unemployment at the level of the administrative technologies which

produce it as a manipulative space of government.”¹⁴⁷ I therefore suggest that these two films explore this indeterminate space that Walters points at here, and will add that the perceptible political progression between both films reinforces such project.

By confronting radically opposite views, and creating space within films that are clearly polemical for debates and often virulent disputes, Pierre Carles, Stéphane Goxe and Christophe Coello achieve more than public agitation. Their films participate in the political subjectivization of unemployed individuals and turn documentary filmmaking and editing into democratic space – reiterating time and again the necessity to constantly re-open social possibilities. As far as the themes discussed in *Volem rien foutre al païs* are concerned, many of them have been key to *altermondialist* films and campaigns: economic degrowth, autonomy and environmental sustainability as will be discussed in the following chapter. I will now turn to Agnès Varda’s intriguing fascination for the gleaners that roam through the fields, streets and markets of contemporary France.


Released in 2000, Agnès Varda’s *The Gleaners and I* is certainly one of the most acclaimed and discussed French documentaries of the last decade. This reflection on the traditional custom of gleaning and its modern adaptations to today’s economics introduces a multi-faceted portrait of contemporary France. Not only does the filmmaker meet people who glean in accordance with old traditions, including a young organic chef, local populations taking advantage of apple orchards or complacent wine producers, but she also comes across

individuals for whom gleaning has become a mode of daily survival (a choice or a necessity in various cases). As a result, the custom joyfully described in the early minutes of the documentary has more recently started to be frowned upon when it is practiced outside of locally acceptable customs by individuals who appear to live on the margins of society. The experience of these people who feed themselves by picking up various food refuse and left overs from the strictly standardized agribusiness or the surplus discarded by supermarkets both redefines the social value of traditional practices as a response to current economic dysfunctions and reveals the highly wasteful nature of late twentieth and early twenty-first century society. Agnès Varda adds another layer to her meandering portrayal of today's wide-ranging manifestations of gleaning. She raises the question of whether or not gleaning can be seen as a site of resistance to economic and social exclusion, as a critique of the endless and limitless process of accumulation that underlies capitalism, and ultimately as an ambivalent practice that can both short-circuit the economic rationalization of the dominant system of exchanges or extend the trade value of discarded objects once they have been turned into artistic creations. As she ironically juxtaposes art installations made from recycled materials with the interviews of individuals whose life depends on the waste of the system, Varda calls into question the political role of art in a system based on inequalities and excess and the ultimate consequences of her impulse as an artist to aestheticize what she observes.

Critics have long been drawn to the autobiographical and self-reflexive dimension of Varda’s filmmaking: the reception of The Gleaners and I is no exception.148 This traveling portrait of “the underbelly of [contemporary] France” is also in continuity with Varda’s long-

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lasting cinematic and social engagement with precarious and marginal characters, particularly if we consider the recurrence of poor and homeless people and vagabonds throughout her corpus, to various degrees.\footnote{Phil Powrie, “Heterotopic Spaces and Nomadic gazes in Varda: From Cléo de 5 à 7 to Les glaneurs et la glaneuse,” L’Esprit Créateur, 51, 1, (2011), 68-82, 78.} Alison Smith convincingly establishes such aesthetic and thematic continuity throughout Varda’s corpus, noting “the prevalent poverty” from \textit{La Pointe courte} to the “lost population frequent[ing] the rue Mouffetard (\textit{L’Opéra-Mouffé}) and of course the Provence of \textit{Sans toit ni loi} […]”\footnote{Alison Smith, \textit{Agnès Varda} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 83-84.}

Critics have noted the thematic and visual continuities between her 1985 fiction film \textit{Vagabond/Sans toit ni loi} and her recent documentary \textit{The Gleaners and I}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{earthycolorpalett.jpg}
\caption{The earthy color palette of Agnès Varda’s films. (\textit{Vagabond}, Agnès Varda, 1983, and \textit{The Gleaners and I}, Agnès Varda, 2000 © Ciné-Tamaris)}
\end{figure}
The fields where the gleaners and Varda collect unclaimed potatoes produced in surplus recall the stern color palette and emptiness of the landscapes through which Mona (Sandrine Bonnaire's character in *Vagabond*) walks and where she will eventually be found dead. Later in the documentary, Varda directly refers to the unruly behavior of a group of young people squatting the streets of a French town with their dogs as being “sans toit ni loi” – homeless and lawless like the heroine of her previous film. While *The Gleaners and I* has often been presented as the non-fiction version of this 1983 film starring Sandrine Bonnaire, Smith’s description of a sequence in *Documenteur* (1981) suggests that Varda’s fascination with the ambivalent value of gleaning had started earlier.

A tracking shot moves from Emilie and a friend appropriating a sofa from an alley, across a number of skips and dustbins where tramps are rifling through the rubbish. Clearly, Emilie and the tramps are engaged on much the same errand, although she is looking for more substantial booty.\(^1\)

Varda’s cinema certainly makes evident the filmmaker’s continuous attraction towards poverty but this last tracking shot in *Documenteur* foreshadows later singularizations on specific figures, particularly the gleaner, even though Smith uses the word “tramp.” It is precisely this dual qualification that Agnès Varda questions in *The Gleaners and I*. Why is gleaning seen as the reproduction of a local tradition or part of the creative process of an artist in some instances and evidence of someone's poverty, marginality and inability to function according to social norms in others? In other words, what determines the social, and incidentally economic, value of one type of activity while others are systematically devalorized and even dismissed as anti-social?

The reason why I stress these recurring motifs is that while most critics have largely focused on the “I” of the title of the documentary, meaning Varda herself as the central

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\(^1\) Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda*, 84.
subjectivity expressed, I would like to reverse the equation here and see how Varda redefines her own production through the subversive subjectivity of the gleaners she films. I will then suggest that this invites us to reconsider Varda’s experimentation with videogleaning as an attempt to de-technologize and reclaim the artisanal quality of her practice and distance herself from contemporary art.

Figures 3.22. and 3.23. Gleaners picking food left behind in fields and on trees. (The Gleaners and I, Agnès Varda, 2000 © Ciné-Tamaris)

So, first, I will show how the implicit differentiation that is being performed between gleaners and scavengers in the film acts both as the means by which gleaners are subjectivated politically and socially and as a critique of the recent aestheticization of waste by contemporary art. As regards this last aspect, I will add that Agnès Varda is less critical of the revalorization of waste per se, since this subverts capitalist categories, than she is of the economic recuperation of such projects. In other words, like the other films mentioned in this chapter, The Gleaners and I also calls into the question the arbitrariness of social, economic and political categories defining work, production, productivity and waste. Unlike the unemployed filmed by Pierre Carles, gleaners do not reject work; they in fact reclaim the productive nature of their activity but they extract “work” from the cycle of economic production, consumption and waste. For instance, one
of the gleaners Varda meets in the potato field (left image on the previous page), whom she will then interview at length in his trailer, confides in her that it is better to work for a while and pick up potatoes in a field than steal from a store.

In her article “The Work of Art in the Age of Global Consumption: Agnès Varda’s *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*” published in 2007, Ruth Cruikshank concurs with S.D Chrostowska’s previously published argument that Varda’s focus on gleaning functions as a counter-discourse within the larger context of globalization.\(^{152}\) Cruikshank’s argument nonetheless warns about the possible recycling, by global capitalism, of the heteronomous dimension of gleaning and dual movement at stake in the practice known in France as *La Récup*. In fact, in *The Gleaners*, a legal distinction is made between gleaning and scavenging as the lawyer interviewed by Varda in the streets of Paris in front of various home appliances abandoned on the sidewalk reminds viewers. The major difference pointed out has to do with the question of (private) property in both cases: gleaning necessarily impinges on someone else’s property, and is often conducted in a rural context insofar as people glean food items; salvaging is by essence the action of appropriating objects and refuse that have deliberately been abandoned by their previous owners.

If gleaning presupposes picking up food items that are still the property of someone else who has authorized (or not) such activity to take place, then picking up potatoes, grapes, apples, herbs or the figs Varda herself eats directly from the trees, people rummaging in the dumpsters of supermarkets are in fact taking possession of food items that have been discarded and are no longer the property of anybody – except when the business owners purposefully reclaim it by spreading chemicals over garbage. Although a priori minor and never emphasized by critics, this slight distinction turns out to be quite significant in Varda’s positioning as a gleaner while the other artists she introduces would be more correctly described as scavengers. It may seem like splitting hairs about semantic nuances, but the semantic distinction between gleaning and scavenging still stresses what Cruikshank calls “the marginalizing mechanisms of global consumption.”\(^{153}\) It makes more obvious Varda’s stress of the aesthetic reversal that the “homogenizing and marginalizing [pull] of global consumption” has been promoting.\(^{154}\) What then would justify the sociological distinction between “outcasts” and artists? Who decides


\(^{154}\) Ibid., 122.
which refuse still have a value after they have been discarded and which cannot be revalued or simply re-appropriated in fact?

Agnès Varda’s persisting aesthetic commitment to marginality and nomadic subjects, her cinema, and particularly The Gleaners and I have not been analyzed in the light of contemporary French documentary cinema’s reassessment of its political and ethical engagement with work. Phil Powrie, for instance, has recently compared gleaners to nomads, emphasizing thereby more their physical mobility and “eccentricity” than their insubordination to economic norms. In fact, his interpretation quickly shifts from Varda’s embrace of nomadic and heterotopic characters to her own embodiment of “a gleaned image, a marvelous and yet terrifying object located in mobile and transitory spaces,” – in other words the heterotopic anamorphosis that only cinema mediates and which, in her case, continuously reinstates Varda as the “mobile and eccentric” structuring gaze of her films.155 Powrie’s goal in this recently published article is to qualify the authorial subjectivity of the filmmaker, but the gleaners she films can arguably be seen as having a heterotopic dimension of their own in relation to the social, economic and political normativity imposed and mediated through work in our modern societies. While this may apply to all forms of gleaning, which by essence invalidates the traditional binary between private property and common wealth, gleaning offers a means for individuals who are otherwise excluded from society and economic structures to reclaim a certain individual agency.

In Critique of Economic Reason, André Gorz both described and deplored the fact that “the right to accede to the public, economic sphere through one’s work is a necessary part of the right to citizenship.”156 Not only does Gorz point to the close relationship implicitly established between citizenship and employment but he also implies that whoever is deprived of work risks

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losing their status as citizen. While the political citizenship of Varda’s gleaners is not directly brought into question, a few scenes draw attention to the endangerment of what Robert Castel calls by contrast “social citizenship.” To his own question, “what is social citizenship?,” Castel responds that “[…] it can be characterized by the fact of having a minimum of necessary resources and rights to ensure one’s social independence.” While his focus lies more on social rights such as pensions and minimum wages that preclude any vulnerability and subjection to others’ control, one could easily see the precarious conditions suffered by some of the gleaners filmed by Varda as examples of such imperiled social citizenship. Indeed, while the chef, the artists and other people glean for their pleasure, to excite their creativity or simply to perpetuate local traditions, others like Alain, the persons collecting potatoes for Les Restos du Coeur, the older women shown picking up food on street markets, Salomon as well as the two men living in a trailer all lack the basic financial and material resources to ensure their social and physiological survival, let alone independence. This lack is highlighted in the montage-sequence over which Varda’s rap song describes the uneasy feelings one may have when seeing people pick up leftover food on the sidewalk and in trashcans. This pitiful gaze is somewhat dismissed by the gleaners themselves, and this may explain why the scene that Varda films in the trailer can raise some ethical questions as to Varda’s position, and as a result, the viewer’s. The man’s assimilation of his gleaning activity to work, as mentioned earlier, may come therefore as a surprising attempt to compensate for the fatalistic observer of his life and his imperiled social citizenship. Although legally ill defined, gleaning becomes a way for him to reclaim active social participation in lieu of the social exclusion of which he is the victim, both in real life and

158 Ibid., 135.
159 In fact, this is a scene that students reacted to fairly negatively when I discussed the film in one of my courses. Several of them explained that, through the questions and remarks she said, Agnès Varda accentuated the marginality of these two men in comparison to other gleaners filmed and presented in a much more positive light.
symbolically through the cinematic gaze that is directed at him. This subjective intervention of the gleaner can therefore be seen here as an exception to what Powrie describes as Varda’s controlling gaze throughout the film. One could also see the strange mirroring effect established between the gleaners filmed in the fields, now subjectively and visually naturalized in a social activity, work, and the *tableaux vivants* that defamiliarize, on the contrary, the few professionals (a chef, the lawyers and the filmmaker) presented. By staging these professionals’ interventions in an artificial way, Agnès Varda uses documentary performativity as the site of representation, contestation, and inversion of everyday normality and “hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity.”¹⁶⁰

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¹⁶⁰ Phil Powrie, “Heterotopic Spaces and Nomadic gazes in Varda: From *Cléo de 5 à 7* to *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse,*” 68.
As this discussion of the gleaner as a possible figure of political and economic resistance suggests, *The Gleaners and I* also becomes in Varda’s hands a broader reflexion on aesthetics as, on the one hand, the construction of new subjectivities and a redistribution of social roles through the resignification of waste, and on the other, the most immediate sense of aestheticization as the visual prettying of waste. Agnès Varda’s assimilation of the documentary process to gleaning, a praxis that S. D. Chrostowska labeled “cinéglanage /cinegleaning” in reference to Varda's early description of filmmaking as “cinécriture,” articulates here her timely political engagement against the excess of neoliberal capitalism and her de-technologization of digital video as the medium of early twenty-first century artisanal visual production.161

In “Vis-à-vis the Glaneuse,” S. D. Chrostowska establishes a parallel between Varda’s gleaning persona and the different types of modern-day gleaners she films and the ragpickers of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris. Varda’s decision to film the outcasts of our society of consumers has indeed cinematic precedents, particularly Pierre Chenal’s *Les petits métiers de Paris* (1933) and George Lacombe’s *La Zone* (1928), which documented the daily work shifts of ragpickers through the back alleys and suburban shantytowns of the French capital. These two films differed from the leftist cinema of the time which remained focused on more traditional, and often unionized, professions such as construction, metal and auto workers. In her article, Chrostowska claims that, unlike the flâneur / flâneuse, now a widely recognized figure of film theory and cross media studies, gleaners have yet to draw the attention of film theorists in spite of their postmodern quality and their ability to cut across the persisting urban

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and rural dichotomy. More specifically, she pursues that by focusing on gleaning as a social and filmic praxis, Agnès Varda advocates for “a culture of reclamation – a culture in which this wasteland is all we have.”

This last remark connects what Ruth Cruikshank sees as Varda's Francocentric project to more recent documentary productions, in particular Oscar-nominee Waste Land (Lucy Walker and Karen Harley, 2010, USA/Brazil) and PBS-production Garbage Dream (Mai Iskander, 2009, USA). The first follows Brooklyn-based artist Vik Muniz, who returns to his home country, Brazil, to pay homage to the catadores, a group of pickers of recyclable materials in one of the world's largest garbage landfills. While he initially intended to paint them with garbage materials, the film documents how they decided to create photographic portraits of themselves out of the garbage they live on and from. The second film is about three boys born in a garbage village, where the Zaballeen live, near Cairo: they are a social group known in Egypt for picking up waste materials from one generation to the next. While the Zaballeen have gained a social status and role through their role as garbage gleaners, the filmmaker shows how the globalization of the recycling trade leads those people to adjust and find a new meaning in life. All three films, while depicting specific local and national material and symbolic handling of waste, highlight the recent convergence as a result of globalization of the political, aesthetic and economic recuperation of refuse. This convergence also means that the capacity of gleaners, scavengers and garbage pickers to subvert a system that produces large amounts of waste and controls what is to be discarded by reassigning value to such materials has itself been reappropriated and invalidated in the process.

For Chrostowska, “modern gleaners, in whom [Varda] discovers a deeply critical socioeconomic and environmental awareness, philosophical and spiritual fraternity and continuity with the past, embody a gathering ethos: a reaction against waste as useless and harmful […] and against the stigmatization of waste-users by the skewed priorities of the market economies.” In other words, while the flâneur would incarnate, appropriate and have the capacity to subvert the new spatial experience of modernity and capitalism, gleaners, although they are in appearance the stigmatized residue of the capitalistic cycle of accumulation and disposability of labor and resources, would be quintessential figures of a “true” non-alienating and autonomous form of work. Flâneurs turn life into an aesthetic specular art of living. Gleaners creatively piece together the residual memories and waste surplus of society or simply use old traditions to make visible the exclusionary nature of today’s society of abundance and consumption and subvert its enforcement of strict economic modes of exchange. Chrostowska adds that this “enaction” does not have to be mediated through the gaze and presence of others to validate a sense of subjective production; in fact, Varda’s gleaners are more often filmed wandering alone through the streets, fields and refuse. Yet, it is arguable that the aesthetic destabilization of current meanings of economic and social activity, in the sense of being active participants, is only revealed through the documentary’s aestheticization.

Furthermore, as the recurring motif of the capitalistic recuperation of recycling in recent documentaries worldwide suggests, the documentary aestheticization and subjectivation performed in films like The Gleaners and I, Waste Land and Garbage Dreams reaffirm the inclusive marginality of these subjects, counter-acting the capitalization of garbage picking and recycling pursued in the name of the economic rationalization of all forms of human activity. Of

165 Ibid., 128.
course, whether it is in the context of France in Varda’s film or in the two American-produced documentaries mentioned above, the aestheticization, both political and artistic, of people commonly perceived as outcasts, marginals and poor, is not devoid of ethical problems. As Agnès Varda herself remarks, the deciding factor is strictly financial: “I can tell you that this film has been screened almost everywhere in France and across the world. It always raises the same question. It is not that of a sustainable economy, of fair trade, it is that of a society organized around cash, profits, overproduction, overconsumption, over-waste therefore wastefulness.”

Art installations and creations made of materials acquired through scavenging can still enter the commodification cycle, especially when they are valued as art, exhibited in galleries, museums and catalogs – which is the case of those showcased at the Fondation Cartier for instance.

Figures 3.29 and 3.30. Art made from recycled materials (left) and Louis Pons, scavenging artist (right). (The Gleaners and I, Agnès Varda, 2000 © Ciné-Tamaris)

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The food picked up from the street markets, gleaned on fields before they rot or in the dumpsters of supermarkets because their tagged expiration date is imminent is completely perishable, materially and economically. As a result, the value of someone is also, almost synecdochally, indexed on the value of what they glean, scavenge and create out of it – self-reproduction and survival is therefore worthless, socially and economically speaking, in comparison to “artworks made from discarded consumer products, […] the mythologizing [and one may add, mythologized] sign systems of global consumption, revealing how they conceal empty promises predicated on waste.”\(^{167}\)

I would like to propose here that, by exploring, juxtaposing and contrasting the various meanings and manifestations of modern-day gleaning, scavenging and salvaging performed across the social, geographical and aesthetic categories mapping contemporary France, Agnès Varda resists in fact the “aestheticized focus on gleaning as art” if aestheticizing and art are essentially reduced to the recognition of an object’s plastic status. By doing so, she identifies the ethical conundrum of documentary less as one based on authenticity than as one determined by the commodifying impulse of art and cinema. This is, in my view, key to the ongoing shaping of a transnational politics of documentary filmmaking in reaction to global capitalism.

Rather than “provid[ing] a refuge from the suffering of the excluded, and thus recuperat[ing] it, rendering cultural producer and consumer complicit with the marginalizing mechanisms of global consumption,” Agnès Varda aesthetically redefines gleaning as an art of living – from the most basic urgency of surviving to turning one’s life into a work of art.\(^{168}\) Gleaning becomes the action through which individuals not only reclaim access and enjoyment of the material and ecological wasteland produced by the global economy but also can claim


\(^{168}\) Ibid., 129.
their right to live and actively participate in society, even if it is achieved by defying the norms established to protect private property and the legitimacy of our culture of wastefulness. To some extent, like she suggests herself, *The Gleaners and I* do not oppose sustainability and consumerism, recycling and wastefulness; it is the impulse of modern society to recuperate and recycle everything for profits rather that comes under Varda’s fire. This is why she chooses to focus on the gleaner since this figure escapes, better than the scavenger in a sense, the totalizing economic rationalization insofar as gleaners short-circuit the cycle of expropriation, appropriation and privatization that underlies global commodification.

As such, in her film *The Gleaners and I*, Agnès Varda constantly walks the line between this creative dimension of waste insofar as reevaluating its political and aesthetic potential is concerned and the risk of starting another cycle of exploitation by admitting its necessary existence. Like Pierre Carles’s unemployed subjects, Agnès Varda challenges the aesthetic, political and ethical meanings that the current ethos has attributed to human and material waste. In addition, and this aspect has surprisingly remained overlooked so far in the critical readings published on *The Gleaners and I*, Varda’s focus on gleaning and the figure of the gleaner operates a major gender reversal. I say surprisingly because Agnès Varda has long been regarded as a feminist filmmaker. Now, why a reversal? Because, first, historically, gleaning was associated with women as Varda immediately reminds her viewers when she defines the term in the opening sequence and also through the paintings of famous and less famous gleaners she collects throughout the film. The second reason why I see a gender reversal at play in the filmmaker’s political motivation of gleaning here has to do with the association she gradually constructs between gleaning, materials handling and artisanal production. This will be the second and last aspect I will now develop about *The Gleaners and I*. 
Throughout the film, Varda cross-genders traditional artistic and social representations of gleaners and artisans. As she explains, gleaning refers to the activity of picking up grains after the harvest has been completed. In the beginning of the film, she quotes the Larousse dictionary entry for “gleaner”: “The Gleaner is a person who gleans.” The definition is accompanied with a reproduction of the three gleaners Millet painted in 1857.

Figures 3.31-3.33. Top: “The Gleaners” by Millet (in the Larousse entry to “gleaner,” left), and the painting exhibited at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris (right); Bottom: Agnès Varda gleaning potatoes with her left hand and images of her gleaning potatoes with the camera in her right hand. (The Gleaners and I, Agnès Varda, 2000 © Ciné-Tamaris)

Varda is a woman and would easily be seen as the embodiment of past gleaners; after all, she stages her own superimposition with Jules Breton’s solitary gleaner, with the difference that wheat has been replaced with the little digital camera Varda uses to glean images. However, many of the subjects she films throughout the documentary are men: the volunteers for the
charity Les Restos du Coeur, the two men living in the trailer, Salomon who repairs fridges and other electronic devices, Alain who eats on the markets during the day and teaches literacy in a SONACOTRA shelter at night as well as the artists she interviews, RV 2000, Louis Pons among others. Of course, there are some women but they are easily outnumbered through the film.

Furthermore, one could compare Agnès Varda’s *tour de France* – she travels to various regions in the course of the film – with the journey apprentice-artisans had to complete before being acknowledged as masters in their profession. Originated in Ancient times, this custom survived through centuries, reaching its peak in the late nineteenth century. Young apprentices had to travel around France, spending some time with several masters from whom they could learn and refine their professional skills. Revived in the twentieth century, this custom still exists to this day. Exclusively restricted to men for centuries, the organization of apprentices recruited a few women in the early years of the twenty-first century, just a few years after Varda filmed *The Gleaners and I* – the comparison suggested above would thus have some transgressive value.

The reason why I am proposing to look at Varda’s enterprise in the light of a long-established tradition celebrating craftsmanship as a non-alienated form of work results from her definition of art as craft and productions that awaken our senses and reconnect us to our world. Throughout her peregrinations across France, Varda inventories various pictorial representations of gleaners, exposed in museums, hidden in archives or random copies that she finds unexpectedly in flea markets. In addition, she creates new frames of material alterations of molded ceilings, her own aging hands and hair, self-portraits quickly drawn, and so on. She also stages characters whom she interviews: for instance, two lawyers and a local chef, immortalizing them incongruously in a cabbage field, on a bridge in town or in front of their restaurant.
In *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett explores the radical dissolution of craft practices throughout the twentieth-century and even more rapidly over the last fifty years, as engineered by new economic standards based on short-term productivity and profitability as well as the intellectual and social disconnection operated between the worker's hands and head. Following C. Wright Mills, Sennett emphasizes the profound social, intellectual and personal engagement driving partisans of craftsmanship.

The laborer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself; the satisfactions of working are their own reward; [...] The worker can control his or her own actions at work; skills develop within the work process; work is connected to the freedom of the experiment; finally, family, community and politics are measured by the standards of inner satisfaction, coherence and experiment in craft labor.

Personal engagement and experimentation certainly characterize Agnès Varda’s continuous exploration of film as a medium, in all its expressive and technological complexity, and by describing her film practice as gleaning, all the expertise and skills she invests in filmmaking reflect also on the craft of gleaning. Another aspect of crafts(wo)manship which Sennett stresses is the connection between hands and head; digital video might in fact, quite paradoxically, allow Varda to de-technologize the practice of cinema insofar as it permits her “digital” manipulation of images.

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170 Ibid., 27.
Digital manipulation, in front of and on the screen, allows her to transform the images filmed into paintings and the screen into an interactive canvass. As Lev Manovich points out,

The manual construction of images in digital cinema represents a return to the pro-cinematic practices of the 19th century when images were hand-painted and hand-animated […] Consequently, cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting.171

Instead of subordinating painting and older forms of arts to the latest digital technology, Varda reverses the genealogy that links painting, the prototype of visual arts, to the digital image. As

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she breaks away from the indexical quality of documentary by more than touching up the images she has been collecting, Varda establishes an equivalence between the paintings of gleaners found in the Musée d'Orsay, the artistic creations made of recycled materials exposed at the Fondation Cartier and her own touched up images of contemporary gleaners. Unlike painting, or even cinema, video documentaries are not necessarily acknowledged as art. Ironically, museums and galleries have been somehow more open to digital media and these “prototypes” than television or movie theatres. But I would like to shift the focus of what is artistic in Varda's film from the medium and the product to the actual subjects, and as a result, show how she is able to move from the artistic aestheticization of gleaners to their political aestheticization.

Post-industrial precarious workers, the unemployed, and alternative members of the citizenry are, or were in the early years of the new millennium, being pushed to the margins of the global economy, but this may be changing as a result of the current crisis. Yet, visual artists and documentarians have, on the contrary, made them recurrent subjects of their works. However, following Jacques Rancière, Varda seems to presume that “in order for the mechanical arts to give visibility to the masses, or the anonymous individual, they must first be recognized as arts. In other words, they must be practiced and acknowledged as more than mere techniques of reproduction and diffusion.”172 In *The Gleaners*, Varda uses her digital camera to approach the world from a different angle; in some way, one may suggest that the long-lasting marginality of documentary filmmaking has been clear evidence of the essentially artistic, rather than technical, nature of the genre. But Rancière also adds that “only because anonymous individuals have become subjects for art can their recording/filming become artistic.”173 Art is not in the sole hands of the artist any more, it is created instead in the encounter occurring between artists, the

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173 Ibid., 32.
mechanical arts and anonymous subjects. Rancière distinguishes between the romantic “community of aesthetes” and the “aesthetic community” which enhances sensibility, senses and more importantly presupposes “disconnection.”

If social documentary is once again the new political art form, filmmakers are participating in the aesthetic disconnection described by Rancière: first, by extracting subjects who are socially defined by their relationship to work and often invisible in society at large and, second, by making them visible as artistic subjects. Furthermore, in the case of Varda, a second aesthetic break occurs insofar as the pre-defined roles of artist and subject are blurred. While cinéma vérité first created a breach in the traditional system of representation revolving around the central position of the camera as a divider between the scene filmed and the profilmic, by provoking interaction, cinéma vérité practitioners did not however contest their status as filmmakers. They simply broke the wall of representation by allowing interactions between the filming crew and the subjects filmed. What I am suggesting here is that Varda, among others working in the genre today, is going one step further by superimposing the artists at work (themselves) and the subjects at work (in the case of Varda). By doing so, they break the last remaining wall between filmmakers and their spectators, in order to promote a space where all of the participants could and should be subjects engaging in the same world. Unlike what Rancière describes, it is not the place of work that is redefined along aesthetic lines but the “place of free gaze” originally occupied by the artist, and behind him or her, the spectator, that is now redefined as a workplace. The body of the artist is reinserted where only his or her “point of view” used to be seen, or in the case of nineteen-sixties militant cinema, was erased in order to be replaced by the workers’ point of views. Varda takes her film in her own hands, literally.

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artist is now back into the artisan's role; paradoxically, it is only through the aestheticization of ordinary, anonymous subjects that mechanical arts accede to the status of art while the technician at work becomes simultaneously an artisan-artist. Where post-structuralism and postmodernism violently rejected the romantic notion of the artist as an “auteur” and the expression of a subjectivity, current social and political documentary is suggesting a return to a pre-romantic notion of the artisan-artist, two activities that were synonymous until the seventeenth century.

Conclusion

As I hope to have successfully shown, Attention, Danger, Travail, Volem rien foutre al païs and The Gleaners and I participate in the current debate about globalization, work and subjectivity in fairly unconventional ways. By establishing the unemployed and the gleaner as subversive models for alternative subjectivities in the early twenty-first century, Pierre Carles and Agnès Varda extend social documentary cinema’s critique of global capitalism but they go beyond the exposition of the system as de-humanizing, alienating and wasteful. Their aesthetic empowerment of the unemployed and gleaners pushes long-lasting boundaries and call into question the very system of social normativity. Pierre Carles and Agnès Varda have taken up on Robert Castel’s task to understand the new “social question.” Writing in the 1990s, French sociologist Robert Castel pointed at the necessity to address the status of an increasing number of individuals falling through the cracks of existing social categories:

The goal was thus, and remains, to get a sense of this new contemporary variable: the presence, apparently more and more insistently, of individuals who virtually drift about within the social structure, and who populate these interstices of society without,
finding any established position within it. Vague silhouettes, at the margins of labor and at the frontiers of socially consecrated forms of exchange – the long-time unemployed, inhabitants of abandoned suburbs, recipients of a national minimum income, victims of industrial downsizing, young people in search of employment who carry themselves from place to place, from menial jobs to temporary work – who are these people, where did they come from, and what will become of them?175

To Castel’s fairly bleak postulate, Varda and Carles oppose individuals who may serve as a model for alternative social relations or values and who may not have a “job” but are nonetheless involved in some meaningful types of activities.

Simultaneously, these films question the capacity of documentary filmmaking to mediate a more profound critique of the ideological determination of contemporary societies and its capacity to escape its own commodifying impulse. The “combat cinema” advocated for by Pierre Carles and Agnès Varda’s digital experimentations explore the interstitial space described by Castel as a place that may hold the solution to the double-bind that globalization represents for individual subjects today. In doing so, they seek to go beyond the most common social critique put forth in social documentary cinema, and to a large extent much of the sociological and economic accounts of neo-liberalism, namely that individuals are alienated by the simultaneous destructive impact of new methods of management, which transform “work” into systematic subjectivation in a Foucauldian sense and the focus of global capitalism and neo-liberalism on development, growth and consumption which have rendered impossible individual subjectivation – this time in a Rancierian sense – meaning their disidentification from their roles as laborers. As such, this chapter fulfills the pivotal transitional position it occupies in this dissertation between

the first two chapters which studied the changing nature of patterns of, and responses to, exploitation and alienation and the last two which will explore the renewal of social movements and utopias in reaction to the stronger assertion of globalization as inevitable in the last ten to fifteen years.
Chapter Four

From Workers’ Politics to Consumers’ Ethics: Is Another World Possible?

Altermondialisme is the newest expression of the emancipatory struggle humankind has now been fighting for several centuries against all forms of human domination.

- Pierre Khalfa.176

As I have shown in the first three chapters of this dissertation, the approach chosen by French documentary filmmakers since the late 1970s, and even more so since the late 1990s, has given evidence of a sustained commitment to general questions of individual and collective emancipation and alienation, to echo Pierre Khalfa’s words. This commitment has been articulated through a renewal of the formal and thematic priorities of the militant cinema of the late 1960s. In recent years, altermondialisme, also known outside of France as alterglobalization or anti-corporate globalization movements, has provided filmmakers with new opportunities to explore the political and ethical potential of documentary.177 This chapter will question both the globalization of a system of domination, exploitation and expropriation of workers and citizens by neo-liberal capitalism and the political project of altermondialisme, or alterglobalization social movements. While approximately twenty five years separate Genèse d’un repas/Origins of a Meal (1978) from Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’OMC (2004), Luc Moullet and Vincent

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177 I will use both altermondialisme and alterglobalism in this chapter. The former will be used to refer to French expressions of alterglobalism, which will therefore be seen as the transnational “movement of movements” which has rejected the neo-liberal version of globalization and promoted more humane, inclusive and sustainable lifestyles that would respect bio-and cultural diversity as well as democracy as essential principles for our global society.
Glenn share and display in their films a similar faith in the documentary’s ability to expose structures of political, social and ideological domination and to mediate spectators’ ethical consciousness about their role and position in the world at large. Ethical here will simply mean what relates to the constitution and reproduction of the world and humankind as an ethos, a common habitat and a common sense of belonging.

Since I will trace through the comparative analysis of these two films the shifting emphasis from workers to consumers as the central figure of a cinematic critique of capitalism, work will be relatively absent from the discussion – contrary to the other chapters. This paradoxical change of perspective will in fact show filmmakers’ attempts to counteract the subjective dislocation by which global capitalism disperses individual and collective ethical and political consciousness. This chapter will cast light on the triangular relationship that neo-liberal capitalism puts forth between labor, consumption and citizenship; it will also cast light on the negotiation by filmmakers of three concomitant phenomena: the economic globalization of national markets, the formulation of a new political project for modern democracies, a.k.a. *altermondialisme*, and the emergence of a global consciousness of our *mondialité*. Philippe Zarifian contrasts the techno-economic binding homogenization of the world, “globalization,” with the political awareness that we all share our humanity and that we should see this *mondialité* as the basic cement of new forms of subjective emancipation.¹⁷⁸ Inspired by Edgar Morin’s notion of a “world-community,” Zarifian’s efforts to make sense of contemporary struggles, antagonisms and urgencies privilege what can reconcile past and current sectarian, ethnic and class conflicts. In his view, focusing on these divisive issues achieves nothing but

serving the interests of globalization and pulling us away from the real stake: the threat that globalization poses to humankind.

*Origins of a Meal* and *Pas assez de volume* give evidence of similar attempts to reset our priorities when it comes to fighting the right struggles. Luc Moullet shows, for instance, that contrary to available evidence, the enemy of French workers is not the cheaper Senegalese or Ecuadorean laborer but their own consuming selves; class struggles have to be reconfigured in order to be truly effective and not to take the bait that Capitalism throws at them. In Vincent Glenn’s film, the conflict is first and foremost ecological; the systematic privatization of all resources replaces our sense of collective responsibility with individual rights granted through the monetary commodification of access to material, intellectual and social resources; as a result, short-term economic trade and rewards gradually erode the ethical protection of common interests. Both of these films engage with this timely reflection on the roles of laborer, consumer and citizen through the very physical presence of the filmmaker and the construction of a “spectating presence.” 179 If the first goal of this chapter is to highlight the thematic repositioning of documentary filmmaking in reaction to globalization, the second goal will be to show the gradual autonomy of contemporary filmmaking from the dogmatic formalism of militant cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the affirmation by *altermondialist* filmmakers of new aesthetic subversions of capitalism and consumerism by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Starting with Luc Moullet’s film will be the occasion to see if, as Alison Smith maintains, *Origins of a Meal*, like most films produced during the 1970s, bears the traces of the “spirit of 68” while opening the way for new interrogations and formal experimentations. 180

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179 This is very much in continuity with what I have already shown in Agnès Varda’s self-mediation of gleaning as an occupation that subverts the commercial trade of food.

The juxtaposition of these two films, produced roughly a quarter of a century apart, materializes a political and ethical transition between the proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century and the politicization of consumption in the twenty-first century. A pure product of neoliberal capitalism, the consumer has been redefined in recent years as the subversive agent of our modernity. The first section will consider Luc Moullet’s *Origins of a Meal* as a proto-alternmondialist film in its capacity to mediate a transition from previous emphases on working-class politics in France to the global redistribution of economic roles: Western consumerism and Third World production. The rest of the chapter will focus on Vincent Glenn’s investigative journey in *Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’OMC* (2004). This film unambiguously rejects the exclusionary nature of privatization, commodification and accumulation—three key principles of global capitalism that *altermondialisme* equates with the systematic destruction of what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have most recently defined as the common. More subtly deployed throughout the film, Vincent Glenn’s use of music also acts as an actual and metaphoric subversive detour inspired by Gilles Deleuze’s concept of intercession. As Ronald Bogue explains, “intercession is a form of positive dissonance, made possible through an openness to interferences that disturb one’s regular harmonic vibrations,” “the process of intercession” participates in “the formation of community, to ‘the constitution of a people’. ” In *Pas assez de volume*, Vincent Glenn highlights actual acoustic dissonances and audiovisual interferences in

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181 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), viii. “By ‘the common’ we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty – which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together. We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its customer, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. In the era of globalization, issues of maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in both these senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central.” Gilles Deleuze, *L’image-temps* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985), 163-164.

order to trace creative alternatives to the “regular harmonic vibrations” of the globalized neoliberal economy.

Like Naomi Klein in her best-selling frontline account *No Logo* (2000), activist Hilary Wainwright sees in the focus of anti-corporate globalization movements, and *altermondialisme*, on “brands” and multinational companies the suggestion that today tastes, pleasures and consumption patterns should be recognized as involuntary forms of labor.183 This is exactly what Luc Moullet and Vincent Glenn strive to make clearer to the spectators, namely that their consuming capacity is no longer just the beneficiary of economic production but has now become a key component to the functioning of global capitalism. This chapter will therefore insist on the re-focalization of militancy on the question of consumerism in the last thirty years and the perceived impasse between the pursuit of democracy as a social model by citizens and the impossibility for social subjects to be anything but consumers when the most basic social interactions and access to natural resources are being privatized and commodified. Zygmunt Bauman recently affirmed that “the consumer is an enemy of the citizen.”184 In their films, however, Luc Moullet and Vincent Glenn attempt instead to awaken the citizen in every consumer; they do not patronize consumers for participating in the global privatization of our world resources. Contrary to the militant cinema of the 1960s that unambiguously drew the line between alienated workers and the representatives of the exploitative structures of production,

183 Alex Callinicos, “Que pensent les Marxistes de l’altermondialisme?” *Actuel Marx*, 44, 2, 2008, 12-30. Hilary Wainwright, who was one of the Marxists interviewed for this article suggests that *altermondialist* campaigns have given evidence of such redefinition of work.

“On pourrait soutenir qu’une notion de travail plus étendue a surgi, quoique encore trop étroite, de la conscience acquise par l’altermondialisme des efforts des grandes sociétés visant à étendre leurs marchés. Dans les analyses et actions altermondialistes autour des ‘marques’ et de leur importance dans la concurrence entre ces sociétés, ainsi que dans les critiques de l’usage des nouvelles technologies sociales de mise en réseau visant à l’identification des nouvelles opportunités de marché, les altermondialistes et les marxis tes identifient la manière dont nos plaisirs et modes de consommation peuvent être utilisés comme une forme de ‘travail’ involontaire au bénéfice de l’expansion du capital.” 20.

the consumer, often embodied by the filmmakers themselves, has become in recent French documentary productions the incarnation of contemporary subjectivization. Becoming subject, which until the 1960s was seen as a historical and political process achieved through antagonistic, class-based struggles, is now identified with the possibility of individuals to accept responsibility towards themselves and others. Therefore, not only does the recurring figure of the consumer in recent documentaries point to a direct critique of consumerism, the necessary pendant of (global) capitalism, but it also captures related debates about democracy, the opposition between free-market economy and welfare societies, public resources and private property, which have all fed the rhetoric of social movements, critical theorizing and political discourse since the mid-1970s.

The Alterglobalization documentary film: a new multifaceted genre?

My choice to focus exclusively on two films that are representative of a significant repositioning in documentary cinema should not obscure the huge corpus of films produced by and about the anti- and alterglobalization movements over the last thirty years. If boundaries can be somewhat arbitrary at times, four main thematic and formal clusters can nonetheless be identified. First, starting in the late 1970s, as evidenced in Luc Moullet’s *Origins of a Meal* (1978), numerous films have followed a similar program: unveiling the cogs and wheels of the international division of labor underlying globalization using what can be described as a top-down approach. Typically, such films take the spectators through the chain of consumption, production and eventually what turns out to be exploitation as they search for the origins of products Western consumers take for granted in their daily lives.185 Third-Worldist arguments

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185 As early as 1978, Luc Moullet made *Genèse d’un repas / Origins of a Meal*, an essay about the global implications of an ordinary meal eaten by an average middle-class French couple in the late 1970s. Moullet’s
are often palpable in such films as the message conveyed traditionally emphasizes the neo-colonial practices of global capitalism and the social divide separating Western consumers from the populations of the Global South maintained in poverty to provide multinational companies with cheap labor.

More recently, especially since the mid-to-late 1990s, a second set of films has exposed the overwhelming, and essentially unregulated, power of global financial markets in the now globalized economy and denounced the resulting lack of transparency and stability. Traders and supranational business elites, in charge of the financial markets and international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, have therefore appeared as the main protagonists of a narrative commonly told by recent documentary films.¹⁸⁶

Third, following the victorious “Battle of Seattle” in 1999, a sub-genre emerged: films documented major international as well as smaller local protests organized to promote altermondialist ideas and protest the practices of the same international organizations referred to above. Filmmakers saw in the series of international “events” such as the World Social Forums and other alterglobalization gatherings taking place in Europe, North and Latin America both new sites of contestation and the making-of-in-progress of a social movement, or “a movement of movements.” While some films have essentially chronicled the day-by-day logistics and activities necessary for the success of such events, others have instead compiled memorable


¹⁸⁶ These films first appeared in the late 1990s, exposing the unchallenged economic and ideological rule of neoliberalism promoted by new international elites. In 2000, Eric Rochant introduced the new puppeteers of the world economy, *Traders – la bourse ou la vie*, but many others followed, including *Un monde en fusion* (Julie Bertuccelli, 2003), Denis Robert and Pascal Lorent’s series about the politico-financial Clearstream scandal, in *Les dissimulateurs* (2001) and *L’Affaire Clearstream…racontée à un ouvrier chez Daewoo* (2003), *Dominium Mundi* (Gérard Caillat, 2007) or more recently *Bulles, Krachs et rebonds* (Michel Kaptur, 2008).
moments and images from high-profile protests, particularly Seattle (November 1999), Porto Alegre (January 2001) and Genoa (July 2001). These three moments trace not simply the trajectory of the transnational movement from its sudden visibility and crystallization in 1999 to the first major defeat suffered by activists in Italy only two years later, but they also define successful and failed attempts by alterglobalization movements to distinguish themselves from past social uprisings. Seattle established new targets (global capitalism and the international organizations in charge of the economic governance of the world) as well as the new agents of twenty-first century contestation (where Marxism and Communism saw workers and farmers as the avant-garde of a new social model, alterglobalization is about reclaiming citizenship as a political, social and ethical affirmation of free subjects). Porto Alegre inaugurated new modes of organization and established participatory democracy as a model for a non-centralized, non-bureaucratic and egalitarian integration of social and political activism, knowledge production and cross-cultural dialogue. The recurrence of similar footage from one film to the next and their contemporaneity reinforced the visibility and historicized the impact of a movement which many critics have nonetheless been quick to dismiss and consider already dated. While the large majority of these films has celebrated these events as the proof of an unprecedented spontaneous, and hopeful, international collaboration, Gêne(s)ration (Alexis Mital Toledo, 2002) offers a more nuanced addendum to this early visual endeavor of historicization (1998-2002) by revealing also the cracks of altermondialisme. It does so through the prism of the tragic turn that

187 Among the events recorded and portrayed, Seattle certainly takes the lead: Mondialisation: Violence ou dialogue? / Globalization: Violence or dialogue? (Patrice Barrat, 2002), L’Autre mondialisation (Frédéric Castaignède, 2000). Other major events have also been featured prominently, including the Genoa G8 Summit (Gêne(s)ration, Alexis Mital Toldeo, 2002), Davos and Porto Alegre (Davos, Porto Alegre et autres batailles, Vincent Glenn, 2002; Le monde entier regarde, Emanuel Danas-Caillet, 2000; Vers un autre monde, Jean-Christophe Victor, 2002; Pas Assez de volumes: Notes sur l’OMC, Vincent Glenn, 2004), other social forums (Un autre film est possible, Vincent Gaillard and Jérôme Polidor, 2003; Coup de Soleil sur Millau, Eric Pitard, 2001; Larzac 2003: Genèses et coulisses d’un rassemblement, Grégory Auzuech, 2003; Planète Millau: un contre-pouvoir citoyen en marche, Christophe Gay and Louis Zollet, 2001; Le rendez-vous de Nice, Vincent Goulet, 2000; 8 Clos à Evian, Gilles Perret and Fabrice Ferrari, 2004).
the Genoa G8 Summit took in the summer of 2001 after the local police shot dead one of the protesters, Carlo Giuliani. Vincent Glenn’s *Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’OMC* (2002), in contrast, shapes up as an *altermondialist* view of what our social, environmental and cultural priorities should be as its exposition of WTO policies essentially highlights their destructive impact.

Finally, the strong presence and influence of farmers’ movements within *altermondialisme* has also promoted a growing number of films warning against the dangers that global capitalism and multinationals represent for public health and environmental resources. If agribusiness and large corporations have become easy and recurrent targets for such films, the arguments raised by filmmakers have promoted a growing international public debate about the wellbeing of future generations as well as basic social and environmental priorities to be set for the reproduction of humankind.188


In this first section, I will study how *Origins of a Meal* brings into question the possibility of a global community, which Bauman sees as the essential unit in the strengthening of communal interests, or rather if it records the persistence of internal social and ethnic divisions. Luc Moullet does so mostly by filtering the emerging globalization through the persisting grid of colonialism, which has determined the political and economic relationships France has

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developed with— or should we say in— Africa and its overseas territories. Nancy Fraser’s concept of “misframing,” or what I will simply describe here as the continuous reassertion of national political and social safeguards against supranational economic structures and networks, provides a useful model to monitor how documentary filmmaking itself has adapted to new international prerogatives. \textsuperscript{189} For Fraser, “misframing arises when the state-territorial frame is imposed on transnational sources of injustice.” In fact, \textit{altermondialisme} has repeatedly struggled with its own tendency to misframe the social inequalities denounced all the while resisting it by designing a new transnational space of militancy and alliances and by striving to make the utopian slogan, “Another World is Possible,” a reality. This question of misframing appears, to various degrees in most alterglobalization films, but insofar as it predates globalization theories, Luc Moullet’s film essay \textit{Origins of a Meal} most explicitly engages with it. In fact, misframing has a double value in Moullet’s film: it is first presented as a means by which global capitalist interests can be pushed through insofar as global labor is being fragmented along national boundaries, but Moullet also intentionally “misframes” globalization as a replay of France’s past colonial hegemony in order to reframe global labor exploitation as a development inextricably linked to that of Western consumerism, and vice versa.

Although associated with the New Wave and the critics of the \textit{Cahiers du Cinéma}, Luc Moullet has occupied a relatively marginal place in the recent history of French cinema. To some extent, it is a position that he himself has cultivated and one where he has found more freedom to pursue his own conception of filmmaking. Over the years, Moullet has blended fiction and documentary aesthetics and experimented with short and feature-length formats, but low-budget,

\textsuperscript{189} Nancy Fraser, \textit{Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 114. Fraser primarily discussed this idea of misframing in relation to second-wave feminisms and their efforts to “reframe” gender justice and recognition outside of the traditional “state-territorial frame” in order to match the spread of “transnational sources of injustice.”
comedic narratives have become the signature style of a filmmaker who has been described as “the true heir of Luis Bunuel and Jacques Tati.”[^190] Playing across genres, Moullet’s films often provide a sociological portrait of contemporary France, including Parisian student life (*Brigitte et Brigitte*, 1966), heterosexual relationships (*Anatomie d’un rapport*, 1974), agribusiness (*Genèse d’un repas*, 1978), unemployment (*La comédie du travail*, 1987) or more recently, death (*Le prestige de la mort*, 2006). Denied the popular and critical success his New Wave colleagues enjoyed, Luc Moullet has remained faithful to artisanal filmmaking; aesthetics and economics continue to define his unique cinema and have provided him with the freedom to pursue often atypical subjects and approaches.

In her short review published last year, Sally Shafto argues that Luc Moullet’s 1978 feature-length essay, *Origins of a Meal*, anticipated the recent wave of documentaries about the damages wrought by industrialization on our food supply, but it also went further than most in its indictment of French responsibilities.[^191] Many contemporary productions tend to forgo national history and policies and blame globalization for skyrocketing rates of unemployment, the deregulation of labor and the exploitation of migrant workers. On the contrary, Luc Moullet’s film shows how French wholesale retailers took advantage of the colonial past to compete internationally. In the film, this is shown both by reproducing in economic terms the previous political and social forms of domination that took place in Senegal, a former French colony, and by symbolically extending the national space. If Ecuador never was under French domination, Martinique and Guadeloupe, two overseas territories in the French Caribbean islands, compete with the countries of the southern hemisphere like Ecuador in the production and exportation of

[^190]: This comparison was made by fellow filmmaker Jean-Marie Straub.
[^191]: Sally Shafto, “Luc Moullet’s Food Lessons: *Origins of a Meal*,” *Gastronomica*, 10, 3, (Summer 2010), 93-96. “In addressing economic and dietary concerns long before the current wave of food documentaries, *Origins of a Meal* goes beyond these later films in its wide-ranging conclusions. It is a film à charge against Western capitalism, particularly in its French and American manifestations.”
bananas for instance. Moullet explains that French wholesale retailers increase the market value of products from the French Caribbean islands to increase their sales among French consumers. As such, *Origins of a Meal* is more critical than the recent wave of documentaries towards the neo-liberal practices of France. Since the 1990s, American imperialism and corporate culture have been blamed for social and environmental damages, a position which has enabled filmmakers to avoid addressing French neo-colonial practices in Africa as well as for instance the persistence of economic inequalities in overseas territories.\(^{192}\) Moullet reminds viewers that the local populations of Ecuador and Senegal are paid extremely low wages, but more insidious forms of exploitation take place, particularly as vast land surfaces are appropriated by foreign companies to mass produce one single product, banana in Ecuador, peanuts in Senegal, and so on, not for the local populations but for Western consumers. As Moullet mentions in passing, Senegalese people do not like tuna and Ecuadorians do not really eat that many bananas in the first place. Although the issue of monocultural land use is not further developed in the film, it has certainly become a recurrent and prominent theme in recent films: as French, Indian and Brazilian activists have argued, monoculture has a destructive impact on local agriculture, the environment and is a major cause of local food famines.\(^{193}\)

The format of *Origins of a Meal*, a 112-minute-long documentary, served as a model for dozens of French and international films that have been made about the cogs of globalization over the last thirty years – some recent examples include *Darwin’s nightmare* (Hubert Sauper, 2004, French-Belgian-Austrian), *A Day in the Life of a Tire* (Richard Puech and Alexis Mital, 2005, French-Belgian-Austrian), *Food Beware: The French Organic Revolution* (Jean-Paul Jaud, 2008), and *The World According to Monsanto* (Marie-Monique Robin, 2008).

\(^{192}\) The recent labor struggles in Martinique and Guadeloupe in 2009-2010 illustrate perfectly how social unrest remains tied to the financial and business monopoly of families who came from metropolitan France and settled over time.

\(^{193}\) The unsustainability of agribusiness and monoculture has been developed, among other films, in *Solutions locales pour un désordre global* (Coline Serreau, 2010), *Food Beware: The French Organic Revolution* (Jean-Paul Jaud, 2008), and *The World According to Monsanto* (Marie-Monique Robin, 2008).
2001, French), *The Isle of Flowers* (Jorge Furtado, 1982, Brazilian) or *Our Daily Bread* (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005, Austrian). Determined to unveil the origin of food items commonly consumed at French tables – tuna, eggs and bananas – Luc Moullet travels thousands of miles to meet workers, store managers, transporters and retailers in France, Senegal and Ecuador. The film basically alternates and juxtaposes sequences filmed at all stages of the production and transportation process for each of these items as he seeks to demonstrate that consumers pay for an artificially fabricated and marketed origin – the brand – while the true origin, labor, has less and less value. While interviews and footage recorded here and there address the working conditions of employees, gender differences, child labor, poverty, the demise of the public sector in several countries as private companies extend their influence as well as local development, Moullet’s goal appears in the end to be less the empowerment of workers, as it was the case in the militant films of the late 1960s and early 1970s, than to expose the invisible “chains” that increasingly distance producers from consumers for increased financial profits.

Focusing on three distinct products allows Moullet to multiply the assembly lines depicted; the Fordist model targeted by militant cinema becomes an intricate network of local, regional, national and international mechanisms. The following shot filmed in Senegal captures the complexity of global capitalism’s multi-directional and multi-level backbone: the assembly line. If in 1978, derivatives and virtual commodities had not taken over economic transactions as they now have, one could nonetheless see in Moullet’s focus on this basic mechanism an attempt to demystify the unfathomable dimension of global capitalism – which has been stressed by its proponents to facilitate the assumed ineluctability of neoliberalism.
After showing several similar lines in France where eggs are produced and calibrated before being stored and packaged in the warehouses of Rungis, France’s largest wholesale market located on the outskirts of Paris, Luc Moullet takes his viewers further down the internationalized food circuit, in what is now referred to as the Global South. His voice-over explains:

“Our effort to understand the ingenuity of the chain, and the picturesque quality of its role in the packaging assembly line of tuna cans or in the fourth line of banana production, where supermarket orders are packaged in Rungis, leads us to forget how cruel the work that eats up most of the life of hundreds of millions of human beings can be.”

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194 This is a transcription of Luc Moullet’s comments over a long sequence of footage filmed along the many segments of the line of production that often originates abroad and ends with the daily consumption by Western consumers of such common food items as bananas, eggs and tuna. “Notre effort pour comprendre l’ingéniosité de la chaîne et le pittoresque de son côté joué dans la chaîne de montage des boîtes de thon ou dans la quatrième chaîne de la banane, le conditionnement à Rungis pour les supermarchés, tend à nous faire oublier la cruauté de ce travail qui engloutit la plus grande part de la vie de centaines de millions d’hommes.” (The English translation is mine)
By “going South” and symbolically dismantling the imbricated lines visible in the still image above, Moullet reveals as much the profound injustice of global capitalism as the ethical contradictions facing well-intentioned Western militants in general and documentary filmmakers in particular.195

Michael Chanan recently drew attention to the “paradigmatic shift” that documentary filmmaking has been negotiating as a result of globalization. Inspired by Brazilian aesthetic statements, particularly starting with Cinema Novo’s “aesthetics of hunger” in the late 1950s, Chanan sees in the current focus of many documentary traditions around the world, the expression of “a form of negotiation of modernity [...] a discourse on modernization as the promise of a future impossible ever to reach, modernization as a process so riddled with contradictions basically economic in origin that it negates its own potentialities.”196 In the case of this documentary, Luc Moullet certainly puts the oppositional spirit of the French New Wave in the service of a broad-ranging critique of the emerging paradigm of the late twentieth century, globalization.

Where militant cinema focused essentially on local conditions and empowering workers in their immediate environment through strikes and political organization, Origins of a Meal emphasizes how by extending the “chain of production,” global capitalism successfully undermines the political unity of labor and de-humanizes not only production but consumption as well. In a more recent interview on the occasion of a programming series celebrating his career, Luc Moullet justified his deviations from the militant cinema of the late 1960s:

After May 68, militant films were booming, but they often lacked precision: they talked about oppression and struggles but failed to go to the source, labor. This is why I

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196 Ibid., 149.
went to South America, Africa and Picardie to observe what was really taking place, leaving out any preconceived ideas I may have. I filmed the chain of production of several products, the working conditions of employees, and the living conditions of livestock. It was a fascinating work of investigation, especially since nobody had ever shot in Ecuador or Senegal before to study the economy of banana and tuna production. This film was both ahead of its time and the more recent explosion of documentary films about food business, but also behind if we consider critical accounts that had already been published, René Dumont’s writings for instance.197

This retrospective statement tactfully points to the obsessive, and quite narrow-minded, focus of militant cinema which turned the political affirmation of workers into a cinematic event. In other words, in Moullet’s view, theoretical abstraction misguided his fellow filmmakers away from the actual scope of the problem. In the same time, he also acknowledges his own failures at integrating the emerging ecological concerns of the time into his work.

By the late 1990s, such deconstruction had become commonplace in political documentary narratives and altermondialist rhetoric. In this film, Moullet mediates several


“A la suite de Mai 68, les films militants fleurissaient, mais ils manquaient souvent de précision: ils parlaient d’oppression et de conflits sans retourner à la source, le travail. C’est la raison pour laquelle je suis allé en Amérique du Sud, en Afrique et en Picardie pour voir comment ça se passait réellement, sans idées préconçues. J’ai suivi la filière de fabrication d’un certain nombre de produits, j’ai vu les conditions de travail des salariés, les conditions de vie et d’élevage des animaux. C’était un travail d’enquête passionnant, d’autant que personne encore n’était jamais allé tourner en Equateur ou au Sénégal pour se pencher sur l’économie de la banane ou du thon. Le film était à la fois en avance par rapport à tous ces documentaires sur l’alimentation qu’on voit aujourd’hui sur les écrans, et en retard par rapport à toute une littérature sur la question: les écrits de René Dumont, par exemple.”

René Dumont was one of the fathers of contemporary ecology: focusing as early as the 1950s on the long-term damages of productivism on world food resources, energy policies, he was among the first people to promote “sustainable development” in opposition to the Green Revolution. This term was used to describe the modernization and mechanization of agriculture in the first half of the 20th century. In 1992, Bernard Baissat directed the film René Dumont, citoyen de la planète / René Dumont, a citizen of the Earth for French television. More recently, French Canadian filmmaker Richard D. Lavoie released, with the support of the National Film Board, a 25 mn-long video portrait of the agricultural scientist and activist René Dumont, l’homme-siècle/René Dumont: Global Ecologist (2001).
discourses, but the two most obvious and consistent lines that both conflict and intersect at the very core of a phenomenon, soon-to-be-widely-named globalization, are traditional trade unionist struggles for workers’ rights and neo-colonialism. Although exceptions can be spotted, generally speaking, the first half tends to focus on working conditions, wages, productivity standards, while the second half affirms the socioeconomic differences between the everyday life of a worker in Senegal or Ecuador and that of a French worker.

The sequence where the French trade unionist discusses the increasing threat that overseas labor represents for employment in France is a perfect example of how Moullet uses editing to convey such discursive shifts. We first listen to three French workers, two women working on the production line of eggs and a male union representative (left shot below). The workers first explain what their daily conditions at work are and what they would prefer them to be. This first part ends with the trade unionist describing the changing dynamic of employment in France and in the world, since increased competition with labor abroad not only threatens jobs in France but undermines the possibility for workers to ask for better conditions. A fade-out and prolonged black shot (middle) allows Moullet to basically rephrase for us the major stakes of the methods used by multinational companies to divide and conquer before introducing ways in which French employees do take advantage of the new international competition: “Business owners promote the worldwide competition of all waged labor: a strike and they relocate the factory abroad. They also set different salaries for the same job in the same country.”
Figures 4.2-4.4. French workers with their trade union representative, fade to a black shot, over which Luc Moullet’s voice-over comments on the practices used by companies to create competition among labor. The third shot introduces us to two fishermen, exemplary of the situation previously described: a Senegalese national and a French expatriate French, both working on the same boat for the same company but on two different pay scales. (*Origins of a Meal*, Luc Moullet, 1978 © Moullet et Cie)

After this imageless transition, a third sequence is inserted, introducing this time two fishermen working on the same boat in Dakar, one from Senegal and the other one from Brittany (right image). Similarly, Moullet asks them to talk about their working conditions and the Breton fisherman will be the only one to answer.

In this three-part sequence, Luc Moullet starts with representations that militant cinema would typically address – the precarious situation of women in the industrial sector, male-dominated trade unionism emphasizing wages, requesting more humane conditions and denouncing common practices used by companies to undermine the politics of trade unions by threatening employment. As he juxtaposes the three different working conditions described above, the apparent national “misframing” of economic exploitation, however, gradually reveals Moullet’s intention to reframe the scope of exploitation on ethnic discrimination and in this case colonial hegemony since the two men, on the right, work in Dakar, Senegal. Most importantly, the visual composition of each image does not simply replicate what Moullet states, but it also provides additional interpretations that sharpen and add to the basic argument made by the voice-over and the sequence. Thus, in the first image, the two women let the union representative speak for them, while random numbers written all over the blackboard rationalize the exploitation of
labor in France and the legitimacy of union politics. The second image also conveys an implicit power dynamic between the two men. Only the fisherman from Brittany on the right answers Moullet’s questions while the Senegalese worker on the left sits back quietly. Their postures signal a clear recognition of who has authority on the boat. To a large extent, this short sequence captures one of the major shifts that the film establishes all along, both in relation to the militant cinema of the previous decade and to the geopolitical implications of globalization: in 1968, cinema focused on the plight of French and immigrant workers in French factories, since the 1970s, filmmakers have often taken their camera abroad in an effort to compare labor conditions but also illustrate how capitalism operates across national boundaries and is thus able to use national disparities in terms of workers’ rights to its advantage.

In the sequence that follows, Moullet details the inequalities experienced by “black” and “white” fishermen, based in Dakar – home for the Senegalese employees and the country where French expatriates can enjoy the luxury lifestyle that their higher wages allow. Here, voice-over and images work against the “French” narrative. In Origins of a Meal, there is no consistent point of view sustained throughout the film. Like the production lines filmed in the early minutes of the film, the camera adopts multidirectional points of view that allow Moullet to throw the spectator in a variety of positions. This particular sequence makes clear the racialization of the global workplace and the superimposition of a colonial grid onto emerging global markets and partnerships. The first shot adopts Breton fishermen’s high-angled points of view onto the Senegalese employees working on the lower deck – another spatial metaphor of social hierarchy. Similar sequences occur earlier in the film, using this time parallel editing to contrast the low impact, and somewhat undemanding, tasks performed by French dockers and the fast-pace, physically taxing comings and goings of Ecuadorean carriers of banana cases up and down the
loading docks.

*Figures 4.5. and 4.6. Post- and pre-mechanization of the conveyance belt, in France (left) and in Ecuador (right). (Origins of a Meal, Luc Moullet, 1978 © Moullet et Cie)*

If a clear contrast is established visually, irony plays a major role, as in the sequence on the boat in Dakar, to destabilize the framing preferred by the French employees. All along we hear voice-over comments from French workers complaining about the physical injuries that the work causes. While the truth of such claims is not questioned, what Moullet’s juxtaposition and superimposition of audio and visual tracks does is to relativize the conditions experienced by French employees and suggest what the filmmaker will say later, e.g. that everybody at all levels takes advantage of this system, either to improve their conditions, to have a job that will allow them to feed their families or to keep costs low. They are all part of a well-oiled chain that needs to perpetuate social and economic inequalities, not to promote development and prosperity for all but to produce maximum profits for itself.

But I shall now return to the boat sequence, and see how in this case the colonial past is clearly present as a subtext. The discrepancy that is made evident between the two tracks creates irony insofar as the slackers turn out to be the French workers, protected by better work regulations and social status. Although inequalities get wider between both groups, Moullet
explains that French workers complain that “Black” employees “work little and badly.” Yet, the camera shows the latter at work, carrying heavy pieces while the French stand relaxing on the upper deck as the voice-over repeats words which at that particular moment lose complete credibility: “we have to do everything,’ the French say.”

Luc Moullet’s voice-over:
“Inequalities increase. 1,000 Francs for the “Black” fisherman below; 10,000 to 25,000 francs for the French officers above, who complain about the Black work do not do much and unsatisfactorily. ‘We must do everything,’ the French say.”

Figures 4.7-4.9. Exchanging Black and White points of view: Watching the “Black” workers below and catching the “White” slackers up on the deck. (Origins of a Meal, Luc Moullet, 1978 © Moullet et Cie)
Somehow, the filmmaker finds the perfect solution to appease, and at the same time, to supplement the racial tensions sensed throughout the sequence described above with an additional meaning. By using the negative image of his celluloid material in the image shown below, Moullet reverses skin colors, symbolically putting the “white” men back to work. Indeed, the two workers whose silhouettes are hardly recognizable appear to be light skin but they are in fact from Senegal.

Figure 4.10. Celluloid Black Skin White Mask effect. (Origins of a Meal, Luc Moullet, 1978 © Moullet et Cie)

“White employees seem to wish an inversion of the amount of work that only film can offer,” we hear Moullet say. This sentence echoes other allusions to the relocation of work outside of France in countries where labor is cheap, a common business practice that causes unemployment to rise in France. Here, Moullet’s visual effect recalls Frantz Fanon’s famous analysis in Black Skin, White Mask (1952) of the postcolonial complex of the Black subject living in a white world. The colonial experience, however, is here suddenly reframed as globalization. At a time
when companies seek maximum profits through lower labor costs, jobs become scarcer in France and reappear in the decolonized world. The social benefits acquired by French workers over the years now turn out to be a handicap in some way and the producers of yesterday are now reduced to consumers. By playing with the surface of the medium, Moullet suggests that globalization may in fact superimpose a second complex onto what Fanon described in the early 1950s. This time, Western workers too experience some kind of psychological complex as globalization forces them to lower their expectations in order to protect their social status and jobs. In other words, they envy the employability of their Black fellow workers, all the while refusing the social depreciation that is now required by companies.

By presenting the globalization of French economy as the economic extension of colonialism, Luc Moullet is in fact both in line with the Third worldist discourse of the 1970s and later altermondialist rejections of the debt imposed on the countries of the Global South by the IMF, the WTO and the World Bank. Indeed, what ATTAC and other activists have denounced is the systematic financial choke held on poorer countries, as a result of policies determined by these international organizations. Yet, if *Origins of a Meal* foreshadows later emphases on immaterial labor, brands and consumerism, big multinational companies are alluded to but never targeted directly in the film. Only a few years later, though, the new evil hand of global capitalism, the corporation, will appear and embody the dangers of globalization as in Amos Gitaï’s personal take on agribusiness, for instance, *Ananas Connection* (1984).

I will now conclude this analysis of *Origins of a Meal* with a consideration of the second central shift in Moullet’s engagement with the globalizing economy: the increased role of consumers’ responsibility and the filmmaker’s subjective repositioning in documentary politics. The inclusion of the spectator into the chain of production and the central role of consumers in
the determination of value departs from traditional militant cinema. To a large extent, the sinuous
structure of the narrative through economic, political and geographical entanglements leaves the
spectator/consumer aware of the profound injustices holding the system together while erasing
the line previously drawn between exploited and exploiters. As a consumer, the spectator is
inevitably part of the system criticized by the film. About halfway through the film, Luc Moullet
addresses directly the French spectator at the end of a short statement that reads the latest form of
exploitation through consumption patterns:

        French people benefit from the wage extortion taking place in the tuna industry:
        by buying at a very low cost products coming from Third world countries, they take away
        their purchasing power and waste it. Everybody takes advantage: those who exploit and
        those who are exploited, rich and poor. You, spectator, you take advantage; and I do too!
        But to what extent do we in fact benefit from this high purchasing power?

As he makes this declaration, images of standardized apartment buildings and French people
buying produce at a market or checking out in a supermarket bracket a quick shot of Ecuadorean
farmers running through the banana plantations with loads on their backs. This short interjection
directed at the spectator in the middle of the film both condenses the general structure of the film
– cheap labor abroad enables Western consumers, and workers, to gain access to low-cost food
items and to maintain a comfortable lifestyle – and draws attention to the paradoxically
damaging effect of this new affluence on health. Shortly after, an expert interviewed by Moullet
will explain that Western dietary habits cause new diseases for instance, in the same way that
poverty is responsible for deficiencies and physical ailments. Moreover, as Moullet’s girlfriend
uninhibitedly demonstrates in front of the camera, if it were not for all the commodities imported
from abroad, Western consumers would find themselves stripped naked. It is this double bind
affecting all consumers and producers – populations in France and in the countries where production is being relocated as well as the militant filmmaker himself – that *Origins of a Meal* reveals.

Yet, rather than adopting a condescending and moralizing attitude towards the spectators, Luc Moullet concludes the film by acknowledging his own hypocrisy, questioning thereby the nature (if not the possibility) of militancy in this holistic, or rather inescapable, system as the filmmaker describes in the last few minutes of the film. This also anticipates, to a large extent, more recent representations of globalization and neo-liberal capitalism as an all-encompassing, and therefore totalizing, machine which motivated psychological and political reconsiderations of subjective and ethical alienation as discussed in chapter two. By embodying the ambivalent position of Western individual subjects, Moullet modifies the didactic mission of 1968 militant cinema insofar as *Origins of a Meal* is more about using documentary to reflect on the changing referentiality of the world now that it is globalizing than exposing the ideological undercurrents of traditional cinematic representations – which militant cinema did, to varying degrees. Luc Moullet’s voice-over concluding remarks at the end of *Origins of a Meal* question both his problematic position as a French filmmaker and the more general ethical dilemma he is faced with as his investigative process reproduces the structures of social and economic inequalities it seeks to denounce:

> Even our film contributes to exploitation. My technicians requested to stay in the only hotel in Machata that had hot water, which would make the owner, a well-off banana plantation owner, slightly richer than he is already. Our driver had no choice but wait for us for hours. My budget being limited, I paid 50 Francs for interviews in the Third World but 120 Francs in France. But I can get moral, and maybe even, material
advantages from my film. Obsessed by my film and the impact I thought it could have, I forgot immediate actions I could have taken then. I was so ashamed of being French in Dakar that I preferred running away. I would walk through empty streets to avoid encounters while I should have sought them. So many people sleep in the streets, but I preferred to keep the bed next to mine in my hotel room empty by fear that the subsidy hidden under my pillow would get stolen. And to choose my shots, I found myself in the same position as supervisors in the canning factory as if knowledge itself was just a subtle form of exploitation.\textsuperscript{198}

With this list of inconsistencies, Luc Moullet calls into question the ethical impasse which may be the essence and the strength of his documentary filmmaking. However, unlike past theoretical and aesthetic subversions of the ideological nature of the medium, Moullet does not target here the seductive nature of cinema as deployed through technological and narrative features.

Although I see in \textit{Origins of a Meal} the crystallization of ideas and representations that are now central to the alterity pursued by \textit{altermondialist} movements, Luc Moullet’s self-scrutiny by the end of his film conflates the filmmaker with the many personae he has endorsed throughout the film: advocate, consumer, producer, colonizer, supervisor, exploiter, and so on.

\textsuperscript{198} “Même notre film participe à l’exploitation. Mes techniciens réclamèrent le seul hôtel de Machata à eau chaude, enrichissant ainsi un peu plus son propriétaire, un bananier bien nanti. Notre chauffeur était résigné à nous attendre des heures. Mon budget étant limité, je payais 50 F les interviews dans le Tiers-Monde et 120 F en France. Mais moi, je peux tirer du film un bénéfice moral et peut-être même matériel. Obsédé par mon film et la portée que je lui supposais, j’oubliais l’action immédiate que je pouvais avoir. Je préférais la fuite tant on ressent à Dakar la honte d’être français. Je marchais au milieu des rues les plus désertes pour éviter les rencontres alors que j’aurais dû les rechercher. Beaucoup dormaient dehors, mais je laissais vide l’autre lit de ma chambre craignant qu’on me vole ma subvention cachée sous mon oreiller. Et pour choisir mes images, je me trouvais ressembler aux surveillants des conserveries du Sénégal comme si la connaissance n’était qu’une forme subtile de l’exploitation.”
By mediating the exploitative nature of the inescapable economic rationalization of human interactions, Luc Moullet embodies here Fredric Jameson’s “aesthetic of cognitive mapping.” The documentary becomes, therefore, the means by which as “individual subject” the filmmaker negotiates “some new heightened sense of [his] place in the global system […] this enormously complex representational dialectic.”¹⁹⁹ Jameson’s aspirations for “the new political art” finds in *Origins of a Meal* one possible materialization; and Moullet explores the political and ethical potential of the latest capacity of the documentary “mode [to] represent [the world space of

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multinational capital], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion."\textsuperscript{200} By going South, Luc Moullet does not only go to labor, what is in his view the source of exploitation; he also undertakes a geographical, social and political repositioning of the filmmaker as engaged global citizen, a role which filmmakers have widely embraced in the last ten years.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.15.jpg}
\caption{Running away from the responsibilities that History projects on him, Moullet searches for the empty streets of the new global space. (\textit{Origins of a Meal}, Luc Moullet, 1978 © Moullet et Cie)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{200} Fredric Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism}, 54.
What Luc Moullet successfully grasped in this documentary about the globalization of the economy and the metamorphic nature of colonial and imperialist pursuits is the inadequacy of old models and forms of militant cinema to accommodate the non-binary nature of the current global system and the necessarily subjective and personal implication of the filmmaker.

From his debut film on, Moullet always saw the budget constraints of his cinema as being an integral part of his aesthetic pursuits; in fact, he rejected the systematic division established between artistic vision and financial expertise:

> When I wanted to produce my first feature-length film, I didn’t have any money. So I was forced to rethink the economic system of production. In the end, it’s something fascinating. It’s generally thought that the economic side of filmmaking is a bloody nuisance for a filmmaker, and that it doesn’t correspond to his “vocation.” I think that finance is something too important to entrust to financiers.201

The financial modesty of *Origins of a Meal* is tangible from the handwritten credits that open and close the film to the homemade quality of everyday life scenes filmed with his girlfriend Antoinetta Pizzorno at lunch. By the end of the film, the economic and aesthetic elements of documentary cinema merge with a third “nuisance,” namely the ethical responsibility of the filmmaker himself, which also becomes integral to the “vocation” of the documentary filmmaker in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Following in Luc Moullet’s steps, Vincent Glenn embarked on a similar journey with his 2004 documentary, *Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’OMC*. The title came from the bank’s refusal to sustain funding for the film based on the assumption that it was not, and would not, generate enough financial profits. Basically, before its release, “financiers” – to use Moullet’s...

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word – had already determined the film’s worth solely on financial terms. Almost twenty-five years later, Vincent Glenn’s self-inscription in his films seems to repeat Moullet’s early attempt to frame the “ethical” mission of documentary filmmakers. This time, however, the filmmaker is less the “cognitive mapper” of a new experience of the world than the “intercessor” who manually short-circuits processes of global commodification. After examining the proto-altermondialist misframed neo-colonial reframing of globalization by Luc Moullet in *Origins of a Meal*, I will now examine more closely Vincent Glenn’s *altermondialist* electro-magnetic subversion of neo-liberal closed circuits.


As his professional and personal engagements clearly show over the years, Vincent Glenn’s social activism and his rejection of mainstream media circuits are indicative of the broader role assigned to contemporary French documentary filmmaking by many of its practitioners in today’s world: enforce cognitive emancipation. Beyond filmmaking, Glenn has also been involved with various production and distribution experiments, aimed at freeing the circulation of knowledge, ideas and intellectual exchange from profit-seeking media conglomerates. After the production co-operative Co-errances, of which he was one of the founding members, was dissolved, Glenn joined Lardux films, an independent production company which supports the works of independent, often politically radical filmmakers. Recently, he associated himself with a new cooperative, founded in 2006, DHR: Direction
Humaine des Ressources, Oeuvriers Associés. In his home Parisian suburb, he has been involved with various associative projects, including “Ralentir Travaux, Citoyen Spectateur,” where residents are invited to meet and discuss the work of artists and filmmakers in relation to broader social and political issues. I will return at the end of this section to the significance of Glenn’s involvement with such projects as regards his conception of documentary filmmaking as a political “intercessor” of meaning and counter-information.

Pas assez de volume was Vincent Glenn’s second feature-length documentary film and not his first take on the altermondialist movement. In 2002, he and Christopher Yggdre, co-founder and member like him of Co-Errances, had collaborated on Davos, Porto Alegre et autres batailles, a 91-minute mirror coverage of the World Economic Summit in Davos, Switzerland, held since 1971, and the newly set up Counter-Summit in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Unlike other films released at the same time, such as Mondialisation: Violence ou dialogue? / Globalization: Violence or Dialogue? (Patrice Barrat, 2002) or L’Autre mondialisation (François Christophe and Frédéric Castaignède, 1999), which compiled footage from Seattle, interviews by activists and their critics and other forums and used a medium-length televisual format, in Davos, Christopher Yggdre and Vincent Glenn adopted a feature-length subjective and contrastive approach to what quickly appears in the film as a battle between clear geographical, ideological

202 http://www.lardux.com
His latest affiliation, DHR: Direction Humaine des Ressources, Oeuvriers Associés, was created in 2006 and brings together about 90 artisans, artists, musicians, cultural entertainers,[…]who share esthetic, political and ethical affinities. http://coopdhr.free.fr
While Co-errances intended to serve as an alternative platform of knowledge production, circulation and distribution, DHR goes one step further by linking the production of knowledge to the setting up of alternative economic, social, industrial structures and infrastructures. “La coopérative a pour objet la production, la réalisation, la diffusion et l’édition de tout objet artistique ou artisanal, matériel ou immatériel sous tous supports connus ou inconnus à ce jour, […] la formation et la documentation, sous forme d’actions, de sensibilisation, et […] toutes activités annexes, connexes ou complémentaires s’y rattachant directement ou indirectement ainsi que toutes opérations civiles, commerciales, industrielle, financières, mobilières, immobilières, pouvant se rattacher directement ou indirectement à la réalisation de l’objet social.”
and political oppositions.203 This personal investigative documentary approach continues to orient his films, including Pas assez de volume and his latest production, Indices (2010), which was released in France during this writing. While Pas assez de volume looked at the daily consequences of the WTO’s enforcement of extensive measures of deregulation for corporate interests, Indices questions the systematic rationalization of happiness, growth, development and wellbeing through mathematical indexes.204

Pas assez de volume is in fact the product of wide-ranging personal interests and professional activist encounters, most importantly with the organizers of the Nuits Atypiques de Langon, a world music festival that French economist Serge Latouche described as an “alternative global village.”205 Following the first edition in 1992, the association and annual festivals have since become a recurrent meeting point for artists, musicians, activists, intellectuals, and alternative economic structures to debate cultural diversity, development, sustainability, globalization, etc. Created by Patrick Lavaud, a fervent Occitanist, altermondialist and ethnographer and philosopher by training, the festival has welcomed high-profile activists over the years, including José Bové (Confédération Paysanne), Bernard Cassen (co-founder of ATTAC) and Malian political activist Aminata Traoré – whom we see in the film.206 In 2001, Vincent Glenn was shooting at the festival when recurrent mentions of the WTO, one of the themes discussed that year, caught his attention and steered his original project in new directions.

203 The personal commitment of both filmmakers clearly shapes up obviously, which led to heated debates between Glenn and some critics. A review by Isabelle Régnier from Le Monde, published on January 8, 2003, entitled “Quand les méchants skient en Suisse, les gentils dansent au Brésil” infuriated Glenn who publicly responded to what he saw as the expression of misconstrued and essentially false political correctness in an open letter, “De l’art de dire n’importe quoi à propos d’un film.” Available at http://www.acrimed.org/article931.html.
http://www.alternatives-economiques.fr/documentaire--indices--par-vincent-glen...html
http://www.critikat.com/indices.html
205 Serge Latouche, “D’un village planétaire à l’autre,” 1998,
http://www.nuitsatypiques.org/docs/articles/latouche.htm
Working across several documentary styles and genres, *Pas assez de volume* can best be described as a personal investigative, expository – yet candid – journey through the meanderings of WTO history, and policies, and the simultaneous construction of an *altermondialist* ethical account of our daily life, now and in the future. The film is formally divided into two parts: the first is about the World Trade Organization, its prerogatives and mission as presented by its representatives and seen through the eyes of its principal opponents, and the second part is a demonstration of how the WTO intends to privatize, commodify and gradually despoil human societies and beings of their cultural identities, environmental resources and social infrastructures thanks to the signature of the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) referred to throughout the film as AGCS, its French acronym. By literally guiding the viewer through his discoveries, cogitations, reflections and associations of ideas throughout the film, Vincent Glenn conceives of *Pas assez de volume* and the documentary practice more generally as an (auto)didactic quest for knowledge with one goal: remedy the uncritical, consensual and increasingly limited information distilled by mainstream institutions and the media conglomerates whose economic interests conflict at basically all levels with those of democracy.

It becomes clear, particularly in the second part of the film that the controversial financial and sectorial diversification and expansion of Vivendi-Universal, one of France’s largest media and industrial conglomerates, constitutes a key subtext of Vincent Glenn’s quest for uncovered truths. The other thread running throughout the entire film is the making of the documentary itself: from the financial constraints and difficulties faced by Glenn in carrying out a project

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207 Vivendi-Universal was created just a couple of years before the filming of Glenn’s documentary, through the 2000 merging of several European and North-American television broadcast, telecommunications, Internet, publishing, cinema and music assets with the Paris-based energy supplier Compagnie Générale des Eaux, founded in 1853, which had gradually invested the sector of mobile technologies and telecommunications throughout the 1990s. Vivendi-Universal made headlines soon after as his CEO, Jean-Marie Meissier was forced to resign for financial embezzlement.
deemed worthless by the banks to the collection of audiovisual materials, their editing and the transformation of the documentary product into a vehicle of social, ethical and political consciousness that mimics the self-education process of an engaged citizen. For militant cinema in the 1960s, political consciousness and action was pursued and propelled through strictly determined aesthetic forms, intellectual montage and the production of a counter-ideological viewing and filming experience. Here, Vincent Glenn operates more out of a desire, similar to Luc Moullet before him, to return to an artisanal, amateurish-looking style. I will first describe Vincent Glenn’s version of an altermondialist film, and then examine further what I mean by this cross-media ethic of the collage or what Glenn sees as an “aesthetic of the détour.”

Eight different types of materials are intermeshed, juxtaposed, and contrasted throughout *Pas assez de volume*: interviews with representatives of the WTO, altermondialist activists, artists, economists, and so on; images of book covers and other publications by the “experts” of the altermondialist movement; footage shot on various occasions, including local and international street protests; recordings of official meetings, press conferences and hearings at the WTO and the European Parliament; official media newscasts; vignettes of Glenn’s personal daily life as well as recordings from musical performances in Langon and series of photographs from the collective Tendance Floue, whose members are devoted to shooting the complexity, the diversity and the evolution of the world.

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209 Tendance Floue was created in 1991, information about the photographers, projects and blog can be found at http://www.tendancefloue.net/
In the course of the first part, Vincent Glenn not only details the points of contestation that oppose altermondialist activists to the WTO, he also largely shapes the transnational amplitude and geographical breadth of the movement which materialized in 1999 in Seattle. By
the end of the first part, what started as a very local and personal concern for regional identity and cultural diversity has gradually integrated itself in a broader discontent with the hegemony of neo-liberalism and the primacy of markets over human interests. In other words the informative “detours” that Vincent Glenn takes, and shows the viewer, end with this sudden awareness of being part of a wider movement, symbolized by a highly climactic montage-sequence edited to the rhythm of African percussionists playing in Langon in the last few minutes of this first part. The fast-paced flashing of images throws together footage from political officials, industrial films depicting various major manufacturing sectors, footage from Seattle, instances of heavy police presence and brutality, as well as various contemporary popular uprisings in Palestine, China or other countries. Some repeat themselves several times, emphasizing certain discourses, particularly the increasingly repressive response of national governments towards protests. The accelerating intensity of this montage-sequence ends abruptly on a black and white photograph of protesters whose mouths have been covered with a black cross in sign of forced silence.

Figure 4.24. This is what democracy looks like now. (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)
Dressed in black, these three protesters recall the theatrics of the Black Bloc, a group of anarchists who appropriated the symbols of the Zapatista movements in the late 1990s and have made a name for themselves, often against the will of other activists, from the material damages they usually do to the downtown areas of cities hosting alterglobalization protests. But the last words of this investigation about the WTO are given to the Zapatista movement and their representative, Comandante Marcos, who tells a local tale, a metaphorical account of today’s power relationships. A few photographs from the people of Chiapas, again from Tendance Floue, precede this statement – announcing an aesthetic strategy that will occur even more in the second part: the use of photography to provide a meditative pause on the evolution of our global society.

A formal intermission separates the film’s two parts, which are connected and yet slightly different both as far as the topic addressed and the tone adopted are concerned. As in early silent films, the formal intermission is announced by way of a retro-style intertitle card and lasts for a brief moment as random sounds, comments and keywords, like the famous AGCS, can be heard. With this formally emphasized break, Vincent Glenn situates *Pas assez de volume* in relation to narrative structures that are traditionally identified with entertainment, live performances while situating his documentary film on a continuum between theater, cinema and television. Although left undetermined, this marked pause in the film narrative could signal a space for a commercial break, the closure of one conflict before the exploration of other tensions, invite spectators to stretch their legs, reflect on what they have seen and thus design within the flow of images a space and time to distance oneself from it. Unlike in television, for instance, where commercial breaks are inserted to promote targeted products to the consumers gathered for the occasion of one programming, here, the break is left open – only revealing an audio loop of comments and utterances reflecting the film back onto itself. Through this very brief, and a priori insignificant,
moment, Vincent Glenn is able to keep the social network and narrative spaces of commodification open. In other words, his film resists any attempt to categorize, recuperate and lock it in pre-determined patterns and circuits of consumption.

Figure 4.25. Vincent Glenn pulls down the curtain between his investigation of what the WTO is about and his deconstruction of what is at stake in the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)

The second part of the film is more militant: Vincent Glenn’s audio and visual comments are less descriptive and voluntarily naïve than in the first half and seek to engage viewers more directly with future consequences of present decisions and passivity. Its focus is now on one text signed by the WTO, which intends to gradually integrate basically everything to the market economy: the GATS (also known as General Agreement on Trade in Services). In France, this agreement quickly became a warhorse for altermondialist activists, cultural entertainers and trade unions. What worried them all was the extent to which the agreement would radically alter the existing structure and accessibility of public services, which the large majority of the French population supports. Other documentary films have in fact addressed the profound destabilization of notions of public and private on key social infrastructures and domains in France: some recent examples are the fairly atypical film Sans Valeur Marchande (2005), made
by fellow *altermondialist* and Lardux filmmakers Doris Buttignol and Samuel Sagon, which features the farcical local resistance of a group of *altermondialist* cultural entertainers, dressed up as Gauls, against the complicity of regional public authorities with the economic elites, and *J’en voulais pas* (2002), a medium-length meditative multi-faceted portrait of disillusioned employees in France by Marie-Francine Le Jalu, which sketches the demise of the French public sector.

This second part of *Pas assez de volume* is more directly involved with what has increasingly been described as the systematic destruction of the communal dimension of the world’s social, cultural and environmental resources as a result of privatization. Indeed, Vincent Glenn’s interviews, personal vignettes and editing decisions highlight primarily questions regarding the management and distribution of energy resources, particularly water, university administration and consumers’ knowledge about the origins of the product they buy and eat. Therefore, if Vincent Glenn’s daily vignettes might appear as mere comic pauses, completely unrelated to the overall purpose, in fact they reinforce the everyday perspective of *altermondialisme*, its attempt to reclaim the world as habitat from the multinationals and international institutions that seek instead to expulse individuals from their natural, social and cultural environments. They also have the advantage of transposing these issues on a personal level. While gas, electricity and trash have already been slowly transitioned over to private companies, water crystallizes in the film the ethical dimension of the debate about who owns and who gets access to environmental resources. By positioning these as crucial issues to be addressed, Vincent Glenn echoes, but also renders more concrete and immediate, what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have recently conceptualized in their book *Commonwealth*:
In the era of globalization, issues of maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in both these senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central.\textsuperscript{210} In Vincent Glenn’s documentary practice, these three stakes of maintaining, producing and distributing not only apply to environmental resources, but they also become constitutive of the fundamental principles of documentary’s political and ethical responsibility and resistance to the invasive neo-liberal appropriation of the world. Beyond the fact that Vincent Glenn shares and affirms throughout the film a point of view clearly identified with the \textit{altermondialist} movement, the film successfully walks along, and never crosses, what is admittedly a somewhat thin line, between democratic didacticism (a term already raised in the last chapter in relation to Pierre Carles’s films) and ideological propaganda. A good example of this non-committing engagement with clear ideological positions can be found in the sequence filmed at the international conference about water that was held in 2002 in Créteil, a suburb of Paris, and most particularly the heated exchange between a top executive from Suez-Endéo, Gérard Paillin, and Ricardo Petrella, President of the Association “For a World Water Contract.”

What I mean by non-committing engagement is that viewers are simply put in the same position as someone who would have been present that day listening to both sides of this argument; they are not forced to side with one or the other from the get go. After Gérard Paillin explains his company’s engagement with the extension and improvement of water infrastructures worldwide, Petrella’s doubtful, not to say outraged, response insists on the promises the private sector and international institutions like the World Bank have endlessly made and failed to keep since the mid-1970s. Rather than taking sides or commenting on the two declarations, Glenn chooses to show a series of footage and photographs. These visually evoke the unequal

distribution and access of clean water across the world – once again without any additional comment of any kind. As with the Chiapas series at the end of the first part, these photos are provided without any comments – Petrella’s voice-over ends shortly after the first set of documentary footage. The photographs that follow Petrella’s flare-up against private and public authorities both disengage the viewer from the ideological antagonisms conducted through interviews and other direct declarations and force them to draw connections, any connections they would like to draw, between the photographs and other statements made throughout the movie. Once again, the insertion of photographs acts as a meditative pause during which the viewers are called upon through emotional and sensory sensitivities – these are heightened by the soundtrack made up of natural water sounds and electronic rhythms.211

To what extent does Vincent Glenn’s manipulation of documentary’s epistephilic drive and his experimentation with a more fluid, perhaps musical, form of documentary investigation allow the filmmaker to superimpose the globalization of our mediascape and landscapes and foster the consciousness of an altermondialité?212 While in the first part of the film, Vincent Glenn’s general attitude is to collect information, educate himself and listen to people, the second part allows him to apply what he learned in the first phase and start looking at the world around him more critically. Whether it is through vignettes from his daily life, ironical comments uttered in reaction to specific statements or in the use of background locations. On repeated occasions, we can see brief cameos of Vincent Glenn attending to daily tasks, whether it is taking the trash out, cooking, recycling glass and other materials or paying attention to various types of media – television, radio, newspapers, magazines.

211 Raymond Bellour has described the “pensive” effect of the intermedial collision of photography and cinematic fiction narratives in L’entre-images: Photo.cinéma.vidéo (La Différence: Paris, 1990), 77.

212 For Bill Nichols, the pleasure of documentary is to be found in its exposition of a quest for knowledge and the satisfaction of the spectator’s intellectual curiosity, what he calls “epistephilia” in Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 178.
Figures 4.26-4.30. While self-inserting himself in the film, what Glenn really seeks to point out is the impact the appropriation of energy resources and public services would have on our most mundane daily activities: clockwise from top left, food like coffee, gas, water, trash, organic vegetables? (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)

Stressing viewers’ immersion in a well-known environment and leading them to imagine what their common landscapes and activities would be without some of their most basic elements runs throughout this second part. In opposition to the stillness of photography, Glenn uses on a few occasions the mobility of traveling shots to showcase the inconspicuous omnipresence of these public services and infrastructures.
One sequence entirely filmed inside a train, seemingly empty except for an employee pushing the food cart from car to car superimposes the recurring theme of threatened public transportation systems with the demonization of large corporate conglomerates that are repeatedly accused of extending their control on resources, daily activities, consumption patterns and basically human bodies. Considering its prominent role in French society at the turn of the twenty-first century, Vivendi-Universal serves as a symbol of this panoptic corporatization and privatization of life, insofar as their multinational economic interests encompass a vast array of sectors, from water services to telecommunications, media, energy, technology, and cultural productions. During the train sequence, Vincent Glenn reads an anonymous e-mail he received and which, in his view, perfectly summarizes the threat such “liberalization” of culture and services represents. The reason why I have decided to quote it at length is that, as it describes a typical day in the life of an average French family, it effectively grasps the omnipresence of corporate interests in the life of children and adults alike, from the most mundane gestures like picking up the phone and making a call to most explicit cultural activities, like reading a magazine or listening to certain kinds of music:
I received an anonymous e-mail, I am going to read it to you, and maybe this will help me figure out who sent it. Let’s imagine a family from St-Etienne (a town in the central part of France) and their life on an ordinary day. Their son drinks a glass of tap water, calls a friend of his by dialing “7,” does his homework using Nathan or Bordas textbooks, looks up a word in the Larousse dictionary, checks out something in Quid, he reads *L’Etudiant* to inform himself about education options, listens to a CD by Nirvana or Eminem, goes to the movies to see *Mulholland Drive* or *A Beautiful Mind*. Back home, he sits at his computer where his younger brother was playing the game “Adibou,” he inserts “Evil 2” and then logs onto the gaming site flipside.com. Next to him, his father puts aside *L’Express* or *L’Expansion* to read José Bové’s *The World is Not For Sale* while listening to a Verdi opera. He turns on the TV, and after briefly watching itelevision, he switches to Canal + and finally chooses a documentary on Planet, a channel from the Canal Satellite package. Before going to bed, he takes the trash out, which will be collected by Onyx. His wife takes the tram home, managed by Connex, from the local UGC movie theater. She logs onto the website Vivento, to buy tickets to see Guy Bedos’s show at the Olympia and makes a call on her SFR cell phone. In the course of all their activities, this family never left Vivendi-Universal. It could be added that the conglomerate Matra-Hachette-Lagardère, which already owned apparently 80% of the market share of paperbacks and textbooks, recently bought Vivendi’s book operations. This proves at least one thing, one can sell military weapons and education while being the world leader of print media.²¹³

²¹³ Vincent Glenn reads this email out loud in the second half of *Pas assez de volume*. (The English translation is mine)
In other words, the privatization of services, energy resources, cultural and knowledge production results in the total subjection of individual freedom to financial profits. Described in such terms, corporate capitalism amounts to soft-controlling bodies and behaviors, giving individual the impression to act, move and evolve freely. This quote both reinforces the film’s overall enterprise and questions the real capacity of the documentary to escape a system that insidiously succeeds in incorporating seeds of dissent at its core. With this reflexive injunction, Vincent Glenn sets a new goal for the film: not only does it bring up a case against neo-liberal practices but it also raises questions about the possibility of any effective resistance against a system that seems to have the capacity to absorb and neutralize dissent. What are the implications of José Bové, an international iconic figure of *altermondialisme*, getting published by the very corporation he denounces? Similarly, why would Vivendi-Universal produce the shows of a long self-proclaimed leftist French comedian, Guy Bedos? What the quote suggests is that where economic interests prevail, ideological and political contradictions have no bearing whatsoever. This is exactly what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argued in their 1999 book, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*: Capitalism draws its strengths from its ability to account for its critiques.\(^{214}\) Much of their claim concerned the co-optation of what they call the “artistic critique” of post-May 1968, meaning that calls for greater freedom and increased autonomy from institutional structures and authority were heard, but instead of serving the interests of workers, more flexibility and private deregulations further isolated employees and neutralized collective forms of resistance. While the impact of such transformations in the workplace has already been shown in previous chapters, Vincent Glenn suggests here that similar effects can be seen in the public sphere. Media corporations have been attentive to voices accusing them of indirect forms of censorship, of concerns about the “pensée unique” that dominated cultural and intellectual

production throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result, they have bought out the popularity of anti-globalization campaigns and exert some economic control over their critics.

Therefore, as in *Origins of a Meal*, if social and artistic contestations are recuperated and inevitably caught up in the very system they denounce, to what extent can Vincent Glenn exit this closed loop? This is what I would like to examine now in conclusion of this section. Unlike the large majority of compilation documentary filmmaking which tends to flatten out the specificity of each material integrated to the overall narrative – and Michael Moore’s films would provide a nice counter-example – I want to suggest that Vincent Glenn’s ideological critique of the system leads him to experiment with the surface of the image, aesthetic collages and superimpositions. As such, Vincent Glenn seeks to create ethical and political conflicts between the different types of visual materials and diverging audio tracks, not only insofar as they introduce opposite views – which would apply to interviews – but also and mostly as they collide footage with different purposes. This is particularly clear as regards the musical interludes inserted throughout the film and the other sound tracks that have more direct relevance to the political meaning of the film.

Vincent Glenn opens his film with a sequence that denaturalizes and short-circuits the audiovisual panorama that we have come to accept as our global reality. A few minutes later, after hearing the three letters of the “O.M.C.” being slammed one by one by a French hip-hop artist, Glenn reappears this time to guide us through the meanderings of the new global economy, defended by some and lambasted by others. In the few minutes described above, Glenn introduces two motifs that will recur through the film, superimposition and waves – by this, I refer to airwaves coming from electronic devices such as radio, television, the acoustic waves of
music, and photonic waves traveling across the screen. Earlier I compared Vincent Glenn’s presence in his film to that of an “intercessor,” but only insofar as he determines the narrative structure of the film and selects its components. In Gilles Deleuze’s thought, intercessors are the cinematic layers that enable the image to transcend its temporal boundedness – they are associated with the image-time. Gilles Deleuze has also used a less abstract meaning of the intercessor, particularly as regards its political potential. Whether it was in the context of cinema or politics, Deleuze saw intercessors redirecting all kinds of thoughts, ideas and knowledge outside of the static system of pre-determined markets or traditional political circles, and one could naturally see artists play the same role. In fact, he and Félix Guattari borrowed this term from electromagnetics: through “creative interference (in the sense of an interference between sound or light waves),” these entities, enunciating subjects or materials open parallel circuits. I would like to suggest here that, while the mission statement of Co-errances paid homage to the “parallel circuits” of Deleuze and envisioned similar roles for the cooperative, Vincent Glenn adopts the literal definition given above as he repeatedly foregrounds the interference of “sound and light waves” on the surface of the screen.

The sequence reproduced below encapsulates Vincent Glenn’s workings through, around and within the financial, creative and political constraints of his times. The acronym vilified by altermondialists since Seattle is here reappropriated and expanded as the “Ode Maladive

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216 “Co-errances n'est pas un diffuseur ou un distributeur au sens classique du terme. En premier lieu, co-errances est animé par le désir de "diffuser les idées" et non de faire du profit. Le choix de se constituer en coopérative n'est pas anodin, il correspond à la volonté de s'éloigner des modèles économiques dominants. Co-errances est avant tout un regroupement de collectifs – qui s'est constitué par le jeu des affinités - qui souhaitent se donner ensemble les moyens d'une diffusion autonome. En ce sens, le travail de diffusion et de distribution n'est pas limité à la seule mise en place des productions dans des lieux de diffusion, mais est élargi à d'autres modes de circulation, et surtout il est lié à une activité permanente pour valoriser et rendre visible des savoirs, des cultures, des expressions qui nous rendent vivants. Il s'agit également de dynamiser la réponse de ceux à qui s'adressent ces démarches. En somme, co-errances souhaite inventer “ce marché noir” ou “ces circuits parallèles” qu'évoque Gilles Deleuze en exergue, pour faire circuler des textes, des pensées, des sons et des images qui nourrissent des combats, inaugurent de nouveaux savoirs et par là de nouveaux possibles.” [http://www.litt-and-co.org/editions/editions_a-d.htm](http://www.litt-and-co.org/editions/editions_a-d.htm)
Critique” – which could be translated in English as the “Pathologically critical ode.” An ode is typically associated with a lyrical form of poetry, but it can also be used as a suffix, meaning a conduit, as in an electrode, for instance. Creativity and critical observation become the pathways to alternate structures; as a result, what was initially perceived as forms of systematic enclosure (as in the initial image superimposed on the title above) becomes the source of a new music, new creativity.
Figure 4.33.
“O.M.C” – Text by Lyor

O.M.C
Aux Oublieux Mielleux, Croyants,
Obtus, Machinalement Circonspects
Aux Obus Malsains, Crus,
Obstruant la Mémoire Craignant la Paix!
Voici l’Ode Maladive Critique,
Dédiee à l’Oeuvre Majeure des Cons!
Une Offrande Méthodique Contempee
avec Opiniâreté, Musique et
Concentration…
Obnubilé Malheureusement Constamment
Par l’Objet Maléfique Concocté,
J’en Oubliais Même Carrément
D’Orienter les Mots Clés Constatés:
Outrages, Meutres Conscients,
Omniscience du Mal Cathodique
Odieux, Mauvais, Cyniques
Officient dans un Manège pas très
Catholique…
Obtempérer, Motiver et Construire
n’Obligera pas la Machine à Moins de
Condescendance.
Les Obstacles Maîtrisés sont Conquis,
Les Opposants Muselés par leur propres
Conséquences!
Off-shore, Mafias, Conglomérats,
Onguents de Monnaie Curative,
On Marche Comme des rats
Oblitérant le Monde de façon Compulsive!
Oisifs, Maintenez le Cap!
Les Ogres Miteux vous Connaissent!
D’Obscènes Mutants Coupables vous
traquent
Et les Optiques Mutines Comparaisent!
L’Odeur Manque de Cash
Et l’Olive Masque le Champ
D’Oliviers Mûrs et Chers…
Et l’on s’Offusque des Mots en se Cachant
…Derrière des sigles.

Figure 4.34. An extreme-close-up of the mouth slamming these words can barely be noticed in superimposition over the stamp of the title. A third image, which resembles a traveling shot filmed from the inside of the car that Glenn himself drives at night (based on previous images) generates the rays of light that traverse the screen. (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)

Figures 4.35 and 4.36. As the slammer utters the last words, “hiding behind acronyms,” a fourth image – a drawing of hands hanging on to the bars of a prison cell, appears and quickly rotates to take the shape of the strings of an instruments vibrating. (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)
The two major threads that Glenn weaves through the film, his musical and worldly experience in Langon and his expository deconstruction of the WTO and its destructive impact on societies, run parallel, and merge only occasionally. When they do, it is often during highly climactic moments that show the unsustainability of the current system socially, economically and politically but also aesthetically. Like Origins of a Meal, Pas assez de volume ends on the destructive impact of consumerism and its false promise of individual freedom. But a second conclusion, in the form of a musical act, concludes the film, closing the framing narrative of the music festival of Langon and its embodiment, in Glenn’s view, of a truly humane version of globalization that is respectful of cultural diversity and artistic creativity. In an interview, Vincent Glenn explained that part of his intentions with this film, and one might say with all his documentaries about globalization, is to find alternative definitions of wealth to the seemingly uniquely viable economic and financial interpretation that has imposed itself in the last twenty years. Therefore, suggesting even metaphorically the possibility of other modes of exchange and experience of the world becomes his creative challenge with each new project. He does so essentially through the insertion of other arts – music, photography, tales – which, as he explains, enrich his take on life:

As for photography, which has been given a large place in the film, it is also due to this same emphasis upon evoking all that can express a certain relationship with the world and the arts which allow time to shape the way we look at something, listen to something or read. In contrast to the dominant aesthetic according to which the spectator, bombarded with images, is simply and purely nothing more than a target. I believe that music – like photography – allows me to take a detour, to reaffirm that my point is not
just to “deal with my topic” most effectively, but to consider all the nuances and potential “treasures” to be found in life.\textsuperscript{217}

These constant detours, pauses and visual dualizations of the image and the narrative tend to immobilize the regular flow of commodified images while inserting new modes of circulation of images.

Reclaiming time and escaping the efficiency of linearity and focus becomes a way for Glenn to resist the logic of a minimum of time for a maximum of efficiency, in other words productivity, which he sees permeating the documentary aesthetics in certain instances. His preference for feature-length films made for theaters and not for television acquires a different meaning than one might expect as a result. To some extent, he voluntarily chooses a long format less to extend the length of the narrative than to expand the temporal and visual density of his subject, and most importantly of his subjective interpretation and experience of the subject. If cultivating difference as the source of all possibilities for cultural creation, social emancipation, democracy and ethical pursuits has been a clear priority of \textit{altermondialisme}, Vincent Glenn uses a recurring motif to symbolize the transverse nature of his documentary practice: sound and light waves traversing the screen or interfering with one another to create a variegated cacophony. The

\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Entretien avec Vincent Glenn – Extraits d’un entretien à paraître dans Materia Prima (Venezuela), http://www.lardux.com/spip.php?article300}

“Cette réduction du réel au champ de l’économie ne relève pourtant certainement d’aucune fatalité. […] Il était important pour moi, de façon métaphorique, que la possibilité d’autres rapports au monde soient suggérés, et en particulier, le caractère irremplaçable d’activités et de gestes qui mettent en avant le principe de gratuité. […] La musique en elle-même peut raconter cette élémentaire capacité humaine d’être ensemble à travers une écoute partagée, une synchronie, qui ne doit évidemment rien à l’exigence de rentabilité qu’impose les visions économistes. Dans le film, la musique prend progressivement une place qui vient minimiser le temps attribué aux considérations économiques.”

(Translation is mine: “Quant au langage de la photographie, auquel le film donne également une large place, il rejoint la même exigence d’évoquer tout ce qui peut être de l’ordre d’un rapport au monde et aux arts où l’on se donne le temps de produire un regard, une écoute, une lecture. A contrario d’une esthétique dominante où le spectateur, bombardé d’images, est considéré purement et simplement comme une cible. Je crois que la musique – comme la photographie – me permet de prendre le temps du détours, de réaffirmer que je n’ai pas pour seul but de "traiter mon sujet" de la façon la plus efficace possible, mais de considérer toutes les nuances et autres formes possibles de "richesses" que la vie comporte.”)
musical intertext and the intermittent apparition of parallel “waves” running through the entire film enable *Pas assez de volume* to be more than just another pro-alternmondialist documentary demonizing the WTO and the ideology of neo-liberal capitalism.

David Joselit’s study of the rise of the American television network, *Feedback*, identifies the 1960s and 1970s as a period that forced American artists to rethink the relation between visual arts, democracy and politics. Although the contexts are somewhat different and Vincent Glenn voluntarily operates outside of television networks and narratives, Joselit’s formal inventory of subversive visual tactics that would break through the endless “capitalized flow of information” offers productive insights into the way Vincent Glenn might be seeking to open
aesthetic breaches in the global horizon. For Joselit, American television has been “a major impediment to democracy,” and as a result, visual artists have devised tactics to “break into [the] floating world [of network television] and launch counterpublics from within it.” Moving away from the traditional opposition between “commercial practices of video (television) and supposedly noncommercial ones (art and activism),” he focuses on three alternative metaphors for the image-event: feedback, the viral and the avatar. To some extent, contemporary documentary filmmaking and especially altermondialist projects face a similar double bind: they seek to denounce the commercialization of the world – “the world is not for sale!” – but by doing so, they show both the limitations of past models of artistic subversion and the omnipresence of corporate control over media and knowledge production. I would like to suggest that, although television is not the main target of Pas assez de volume, Joselit’s model for reorienting the flow of commodity and structures of commodification from within offers an insightful interpretive framework for Glenn’s recurrent use of superimpositions and all sorts of waves – airwaves, optical waves, rays of light – throughout the film. In Pas assez de volume, the wave becomes a metaphor of alternate modes of living, exchange and production that is both unpredictable and defined by mobility across materials, space, and time.

This project is clearly foregrounded as early as the first few minutes of the film, minutes which emphasize the careful intertwining of audio, visual and written materials. Images and audio of an experimental voice performer at the festival are intermittently covered by various unidentified urban night shots, revealing the blurred trajectories of a train or a metro line. The performer abruptly brings his musicians to silence and the stage to dark, Vincent Glenn's silhouette then appears through the train's window, though driving a car, still at night, and

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219 Ibid., xii.
glancing directly at us. As he turns towards us, his voice-over starts explaining the genesis of the project, and the urban scenery becomes clearer, revealing a line of well-known brands lighting up the night. Images from the festival concerts and debates, televisual screens and colorful letters now float across the screen, creating a transparent mural that invites us to dive in until the background soundtrack mixing music and airwaves coming from newscasts gets louder and louder, creating a “short-circuit.”

Figures 4.41-4.46. The entire opening sequence of the film is a series of audiovisual superimpositions and fade-outs which collapse onto the screen footage from the music festival in Langon, Seattle street protests, urban skylines towered by logos and brands, Vincent Glenn’s own “trajective” persona and the final short-circuit triggered by the saturation and intensity of information, images, sounds symbolized by the control board. (Pas assez de volume: Notes sur l’O.M.C., Vincent Glenn, 2004 © Lardux Films, Les Nuits Atypiques de Langon – Co-Errances; Courtesy Vincent Glenn)
Superimposition, according to Joselit, “makes for a good performance whose ultimate goal is to make the pictures behind pictures congruent to one another and thus to neutralize the instability of the figure-ground relationship, accounting for the inertia or stasis of postwar American politics.” Looking at the stills proposed above from *Pas assez de volume*, one might easily transpose Joselit’s analysis of postwar America onto the inertia of the global mediascape and economy today. Through superimposition, the geopolitical and electromagnetic stereoscopic horizon that Paul Virilio sees as the product and medium operandi of globalization may start disintegrating, at least virtually, and it becomes easier to see through it and maybe beyond it. If this rosy reading of critical engagements with neo-liberal capitalism only works on the aesthetic level of this documentary, it may nonetheless gesture towards the distortive efforts of hackers, peer sharing and other examples of attempts to redirect flows of capital, information and creativity.

Joselit concludes that artists seized the “trajective” movement of electroacoustics to reroute the assigned flow of commodity. If a commodity's meaning results from its circulation, it is possible to develop a politics whose goal is not to abolish or “critique” commodification (objectives that are utopian and inefficacious by turn) but rather to reroute the trajectories of things.

Although I would maintain that Vincent Glenn’s personal and filmic engagements do reject commodification, his aesthetic experiments nonetheless confirm his efforts in “rerouting” cultural productions less in circuits that would feed the system but outwards where knowledge about it can be redeployed critically. Glenn's body, but perhaps more accurately documentary, becomes a vector through which the spectator can engage with the world; technological motility

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is then turned into a mode of political emancipation as it opens doors, suggests new interpretations, and invites the passive spectator/consumer to take notes, read, listen and watch carefully. As a result, it might be more correct to see the real intercessors in the film as the brief musical interludes, contemplative photographic moments and apparently unrelated materials that nonetheless expand the space and time of the primary narrative. These moments constantly bounce the meaning of the documentary off of what is presented as the principal narrative.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that globalization has led French documentary filmmakers to reflect on practical modes of militancy, particularly those deployed visually and politically throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, and operate a shift in identification. Throughout the twentieth century, leftist and militant cinemas worked on closing the gap between spectators and workers’ experiences. Since the late 1970s, a new connection has been established between spectators and consumers. Unlike the cross-class political alliance pursued through Marxist and Maoist critiques of cinematic apparatus and ideological conventions, documentary filmmaking is now mediating spectators’ own emancipation from their consumers’ selves. Or to be more exact, the two films discussed here resist the ethic of consumerism defined by neo-liberal global capitalism but they do not completely reject the spectator’s status as a consumer. As the ethic of consumerism became the warhorse of anti-corporate and alterglobalization movements, the globalizing critique of neo-liberal capitalism recycled – no pun intended – the famous slogan “everything is political,” which characterized 1970s cultural and sexual militancy, in order to oppose this time the neo-liberal motto “everything is marketable.” Whether it is at the level of
spectatorship, knowledge and material consumption, documentary filmmakers have sought to challenge and reorient the ethic of consumerism by treating consumers as political agents, informed citizens and ethically conscious subjects. The workers’ politics that dominated the twentieth century gradually gave way to what I have called a consumers’ ethic. Zygmunt Bauman summarizes the logic behind new physical and ideological antagonisms.

Just as the easily satisfied “traditional worker” (a worker who wished to work no more than absolutely necessary to allow his habitual way of life to continue) was the nightmare of the budding society of producers, so the traditional consumer, guided by yesterday’s familiar needs and immune to seduction, would sound the death knell of a mature society of consumers, consumer industry and consumer markets.223

As he draws an evocative parallel between yesterday’s “society of producers” and today’s “society of consumers,” Bauman identifies both as having a similar problem, meaning producing the subjects that will not become grains of sand in such well-oiled systems.

Since consumers have become highly valuable to the reproduction of neo-liberal capitalism, both their role in the global economy and their central presence in documentary as political agents have also resulted in attempts to extend existing definitions of labor and production, or at the very least question their current univocity. This has been done primarily through the work performed by the filmmakers themselves as producers of critical knowledge and ethical interrogations of the world’s order. As I have shown, filmmakers have also sought to position themselves both in relation to globalization and in relation to movements like Third Worldism in the 1970s or altermondialisme starting in the late 1990s, largely to emphasize the changing nature of cognitive and knowledge production in the same time. This is the reason why,

although this chapter might be the least explicit about work, it is nonetheless closely connected to the general argument sustained throughout this dissertation. As French anthropologist Alain Bertho remarks, *altermondialisme* is not just against neo-liberal capitalism, it is also a movement that has defined itself in contrast to the cognitive and epistemological categories identified with modernity: “labor,” “nation-state,” “the city,” and “society.” What Bertho suggests is that *altermondialisme* sees such notions and spaces antiquated in the global world today insofar as maintaining such political references can only put emancipatory struggles at a disadvantage against an economic order that has long stopped to function by, for and according to these categories. Considering the persistent relevance of these categories within national contexts, alterglobalization movements have themselves been divided between the more moderate tendencies joining hands with trade unions, reformist projects like ATTAC’s taxation recommendations and more radical actions that have somewhat “disqualified past workers’ movements” and the masculine values they symbolized, as Eddy Fougier notes. These new models, particularly de-centralized and autonomous anarchist and environmentalist units, play a central role to Pierre Carles’s disassociation of subjectivity from waged labor, which was studied in the previous chapter.

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Chapter Five

Documentary Filmmaking Turns to the Land in Search of a Residual Ethos and
RedisCOVERs its Narrative Roots

In chapter one, I charted the dissolution of the working class as a cohesive political agent and its replacement with a broad-ranging precariat, and chapter two addressed the systematic annihilation of individual subjectivity through neo-liberal management. Chapter three and four explored the recent cinematic production of alternative subversive figures to the worker; the unemployed, the gleaner and the consumer have all been invested by filmmakers with a critical role in the context of global capitalism. This last chapter will look at filmmakers’ return to the land and rural values; however, I will argue that this return is not motivated in the films discussed in the following pages by resurging nationalistic sentiment but rather by the revalorization of living and common cultural, social and environmental resources. The active role played by farmers' unions and associations in the anti-globalization campaign has in fact promoted a new return to rurality some thirty years after the first wave of neo-ruralism in the nineteen-seventies. Yet, the films and filmmakers that I am about to discuss have not expressed particular affiliations with such movements and seem to seek within their connections to rural life and the terroir the model of an altermodern humanist engagement with the world.226

Following the re-politicization of the peasant from the nineteen-seventies onwards as part of a larger theoretical, social and geographic reflection on subjectivity, autonomy and sustainability, rural life has become more than a social and political instrument to denounce the

226 The use of the adjective “altermodern” here is not meant to engage any critical debates other than the expression in recent alterglobalization movements, leftist farmers’ movements such Confédération Paysanne and Via Campesina, and more generally the reinvestment of rural lifestyles of alternative values to those of productivism, scientific and technological performance that have driven the Industrial Revolution of the last few centuries in the name of modernity.
excess of urban industrialism – as it was during the first half of the twentieth century. The construction of the “moral peasant” throughout the late nineteenth century in literature, and in the early years of the twentieth century in cinema, has been seen as a reaction against the political affirmation of workers' movements in urban centers. Either because they were present on the screen or absent from it, peasants were therefore more symptomatic of urban concerns about social changes than representative of rural issues. I will now look at the aesthetic and narrative reflection that the rural has recently inspired in the works of some documentary filmmakers whose works do not necessarily contribute to the activist activities of social movements such as altermondialisme. As I draw on examples by Georges Rouquier (Biquefarre, 1983), Raymond Depardon (Profils Paysans: L’Approche, 2001, and Le Quotidien, 2004, as well as La vie moderne, 2008) and Jonathan Nossiter (Mondovino, 2004), I intend to connect their encounter with the rural in the broader reflection about subjectivity that has become a key stake in the debate that opposes pro- and anti-globalization political, economic, social and environmental movements.

The globalization of industrial and scientific progress as the only model of economic growth, social development and individual well-being has become increasingly contested and conceived of as what Michel Foucault calls biopolitics. For the French philosopher, such control over the living means the systematic destruction of individual autonomy as all aspects of the

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228 Bernard Genzling, “Mémoire, image, regard,” Cinéma et Mémoire Rural, Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque, 41, (1984), 92. “Peasant cinema does not comment on the reality of countryside life, but reveals how it is perceived in urban areas […] it plays the role of a seismograph, of a machine recording motion and change.” (“Le film paysan ne témoigne pas de la réalité des campagnes, mais bel et bien du regard qui est porté sur elles […] il joue un rôle de sismographe, d'enregistreur du mouvement, du changement.”)
subject as a social, biological and political being are controlled and subordinated to private economic interests. As nineteen-sixties’ anti-capitalism gradually evolved into a larger critique of globalization from the early nineteen-eighties onwards, new perspectives reshaped the political discourses of resistance and subjectivity. Ecology, although marginal(ized) among political institutions, gained ground as a new theoretical, semantic and ethical vehicle. Several French philosophers, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and André Gorz, reformulated the question of politics and subjectivity in relation to a larger ethical conception of the living. André Gorz, who probably embodies best in France the critical shift, or in fact the expansion, that led from Marxism to eco-ethics, affirmed the indissociability of a critique of alienation and the critical advocacy of ecological responsibility. In the following quote, Gorz denounces the instrumentalization of techniques as a means of domination, which should not be misunderstood as a radical dismissal of technology.

Ecology has its full critical and ethical impact only if the devastation of the Earth and the destruction of the natural foundations of life are understood as the consequences of a mode of production; and if that mode of production demands the maximization of output and has recourses to technologies that violate biological equilibria. I contend then, that the critique of the technologies in which the domination of human beings and nature is embodied is one of the essential dimensions of an ethics of liberation.

Gorz illustrates here the repositioning of several French critics from the late sixties, and even more so during the eighties, against the Western philosophical tradition that opposed mankind and nature in its promotion of progress through science, technologies and economic growth. Instead, as Verena Conley suggests, these authors revive the “sociopolitical and environmental

awareness” already present in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who defended the “aesthetic pleasure in difference” and “appear[ed] to be on the side of slower, ‘cooler’ societies that are more diverse in their relations of cognition and habitat.” Autonomy was therefore not simply postulated in economic terms but more broadly as a mode of being in the world, as part of a living organism. While Ecology as a philosophical discourse is now fully integrated in anti-globalization critiques, this chapter will trace its influence on the renewed interest for the rural expressed by documentary filmmakers who are not directly associated with local and international activism.

During the nineteen-seventies, as French agriculture was undergoing radical transformations in its modes of production, several critics drew attention to the anticapitalist nature of peasants. For Georges Duby and Michel De Certeau, peasants exist outside of “Western history” – meaning the history of Western modernity. In fact, as Leftist political discourses (the French Communist Party or Marxist critics) focused their critique of capitalism on the working class, the radicalization of farmers' movements during the sixties away from both previous nationalist agendas and more contemporary class-based struggles did not receive much scholarly or political attention compared to the workers' strikes and students' revolts that occurred during May 1968. This applies to film scholarship as well. While sociological and historical studies emphasized the disappearance of French peasantry, film criticism overlooked


“Western development, because of the favor accorded to industrialization and social conflict, has ‘created’ a ‘history’ for itself in which ‘nature’ only figures as an object of labor and the terrain of socioeconomic struggles. It has no value other than the negative one of peasant ‘resistance’ to be overcome, of a biological limit always to be transcended, or of a traditionalist anchoring to be rejected.”

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the growing production of documentaries about contemporary rural issues – regionalist struggles, gender relations, land ownership and environmental concerns being mostly predominant at the time.\textsuperscript{233} The persistent association of militant forms of cinema with urban and industrial contexts was visible in CinémAction’s recent special issue, “Le cinéma militant reprend le travail,” since only one article addresses specifically cinematic interventions on rural issues.

For the time being, I will therefore focus on the presence of rural subjects not in “militant” or activist films per se, but rather art documentaries that highlight the stylistic and thematic evolution of such films and the emergence of an ethical function for analog and digital documentary cinema. By looking at films as varied as those made by Georges Rouquier, Raymond Depardon, and Jonathan Nossiter, I will trace the reshaping of rural space and subjectivity across various aesthetics, from various geographical perspectives and different auteurist postures. Before examining more closely each of these projects, I would like to summarize the aesthetic and ethical stakes that traverse them as a corpus. First, these films record the gestures and rhythms that typify agricultural work and its evolution through industrialization while constructing through rural culture a reflection on documentary filmmaking as a subjective, creative work. As such, these three films revisit the political relationship established between work and subjectivity throughout most of the twentieth century from a new perspective. Second, the filmmakers considered engage with several genres associated over time with representations of rural space and life: rural cinema, which has long been the fictional vehicle of “national imaginaries,” intervention cinema about rural and agricultural issues (1968-1980) which could be seen as the rural equivalent of working-class

militant cinema (1967-72), introspective auteur cinema which places the filmmaker's own subjectivity at the center of the project, and finally the non-filmic literary genre of micro-narratives that, in the late nineteenth century, would inventory the local savoir-faire and cultural practices slowly replaced by industrialization. This leads to my third point which concerns the cinematic redefinition of rural space as ethical narrative, and more particularly as an open space of memory, while it seemed destined to survive only as what Pierre Nora calls a “site of memory.” While politics of memorialization tend to folklorize and museify rural space, Georges Rouquier, Raymond Depardon and Jonathan Nossiter emphasize, to various degrees, residual forms of movement in a space that vanishes little by little and where the imminence of mortality seems to define, paradoxically perhaps, first and foremost subjective experience. They all, although differently, ground subjectivity in a sense of “somewhereness” – a term borrowed from Jonathan Nossiter – acquired through one's experience with, in and of the world through relationships and transmission. This is why I would like to argue that the recent return to the land of several French filmmakers participates in an ethical reconceptualization of subjectivity that places rural space and rural subjects at its core. For Michel Foucault, a free ethical attitude “privileg[es] experience over engagement[...] trajectories, not [...] position taking [...and] is rooted in an ethics and not a morality, a practice rather than a vantage point; an active experience

234 Film scholarship on rural cinema remains fairly marginal compared to the number of studies done about urban space, themes and role in the development of the medium. Moreover, the large majority of works related to French cinema has mostly focused on a few specific periods, particularly Occupation cinema and more recent fictionalizations of France's regional history and landscapes during the nineteen-eighties and nineties – a genre that has come to be known as the films de patrimoine or heritage films. For more information about heritage film and film de patrimoine, see Maria Esposito, “Jean de Florette: patrimoine, the rural idyll and the 1980s,” in Lucy Mazdon (ed.), France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema (London: Wallflower Press, 2001), 11-26; Phil Powrie, French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Phil Powrie (ed.), French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

rather than a passive waiting.”

Similar attributes could distinguish previous moralizing, totalizing cinematic gazes at rural culture from the more interactive experience crafted by the three filmmakers discussed. The rural is an increasingly contested and violated space, either as a result of urban sprawls or of the impact of modern agricultural practices and methods on the environment. Yet, in the work of these three filmmakers, it becomes a space of self-expression, self-knowledge and experience with the others. This resembles much what Michel Foucault sees as key elements of the ethical production of the self. The chapter will therefore trace a continuum between Rouquier's extraction of the peasant's body from his documentary fiction or fictional documentary, Depardon's framing of peasants and rural space as ethical wandering and Nossiter's broader contrast between the temporality of speech, as the expression of terroir, and the visual spectacle of “terroirized” landscapes.

Aside from physical mobility, these films also resist the global and technological compression of time by turning cinema into an expansive narrative of individual and collective memory. Paul Virilio situates the “eradication of memory, like that of biological diversity, as a necessary step in the program of transnational capitalism.” He therefore asks how time and space, and also narrative and writing, can be reintroduced in the image. By filming and recording disappearing gestures, traditions and landscapes, documentarians re-territorialize the image and unfold memory, the frame and the visual insofar as they turn the cinematic frame into “a physical and mental space that allows for movement between and toward subjects.” Rural subjects are therefore revealed in the limits and the folds of pre-determined representations, moving from the fundamental aesthetic distinction between fiction and documentary to narratives of space, as

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237 Ibid., xix.
238 Conley, *Ecopolitics*, 89.
239 Ibid., 89.
speech or spectacle. Cinema in these films is therefore less a medium of political change, as was militant cinema, than one that questions our experience of, and place in, the world. Georges Rouquier's *Biquefarre* (1983), Raymond Depardon's trilogy (2001-2009) and Jonathan Nossiter's *Mondovino* (2004) not only document the work and life of rural dwellers in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but they also reflect on the ability of cinema to share the truth of peasant life and the ethical lessons transmitted through rural traditions.

**Georges Rouquier, Biquefarre (1983) – The Ontological “Truth” of Peasant Bodies.**

Despite the long-lasting international recognition of *Farrebique* (1944), his first feature-length film, Georges Rouquier remains a marginal figure of French cinema.\(^{240}\) An autodidact, Rouquier admired the work of Robert Flaherty, Soviet cinema and the early technicians of cinematic artistry, including Abel Gance and Charlie Chaplin. A filmmaker and an actor, he mixed and worked with a wide variety of people, including Jean Painlevé, Chris Marker and Costa-Gavras. His films can best be described as hybrid fictional documentaries or documentary fictions, and this is exactly what his palimpsestic portrayal of French agriculture, *Farrebique* (1944)-*Biquefarre* (1983) is.

Rouquier's two films, when considered together, superimpose two conceptions or functions of time. In *Farrebique*, time is organic, it is what connects humankind to the natural world; time is that which allows the poetic dimension of rural life to emerge to the surface of the cinematic image. In *Biquefarre*, time is, on the contrary, what reveals the gradual severance of this connection; time makes change visible. However, as Rouquier stages the artificiality of

modern agriculture and its destructiveness, his last film nevertheless reasserts the filmmaker's belief in the restoration of an ethics of time and memory, as experience of the world, through cinema. For Rouquier, rural cinema is not about the objectification of nature through landscapes; it is first and foremost a cinema of the peasant body that becomes the primary site of narration/story. I refer here to Gilles Deleuze's distinction between the “récit” and “narration” which are key to his conceptualization of the development of the cinematic image away from movement and action to an experience that is time-based. More importantly, I would like to argue that in Biquefarre, Georges Rouquier achieves with his peasant subjects something similar, and yet distinct, to what Deleuze saw in Pierre Perrault's and Jean Rouch's works: a rejection of pre-established truths that determined cinematic and political imaginaries, and the emergence of a new kind of utterance. While Perrault and Rouch saw direct cinema as a way to liberate speech from fictional truths, Rouquier chooses to reverse the process by reasserting the revelatory power of fiction when provoked by reality. As he accentuates the fictional dimension of speech, reality is asserted through the corporeal presence of peasants.

In 1944, Georges Rouquier accentuated the documentary feel in Farrebique, which gained him André Bazin's support in the controversial reactions the film sparked upon its release. Bazin, who was then about to publish his seminal essay, “Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1945), celebrated Rouquier's “ascetic enterprise whose purpose is to deprive reality of all that has nothing to do with it, especially the parasitism of art.” He added that “Rouquier's genius” was to have “understood that verisimilitude has slowly taken the place of truth, that reality has slowly dissolved into realism. So he painfully undertook to rediscover reality.” As the debate about cinematic realism versus reality continued, particularly with the turn to direct cinema and

cinéma vérité in the nineteen-sixties, Rouquier continued to search for reality inside the cinematic image. In 1983, as direct cinema had become the dominant aesthetics of documentary filmmaking and would soon influence fiction realism, Rouquier continued to explore the potential of cinema to express “truths” through the collision, rather than the merging, of fiction and documentary. In fact, Biquefarre is an even more controlled, written narrative than the more poetic and lyrical Farrebique.

Back in Goutrens, a small village in Aveyron, in the central south of France, Rouquier once again films his relatives. This time, the microcosmic world of the family farm is immersed in a larger economic context: except for a few establishing shots and flashback inserts, little of contemporary Farrebique appears in the second film. Rouquier extends his portrait to the surrounding farms and families in order to show the changing economic dynamic of modern agriculture. This also gives him the opportunity to point to the social transformations taking place in rural domestic life. While Farrebique, the farm and the original film, remain central to Biquefarre, the purpose is less ethnographic and touches upon contemporary sociocultural issues while giving evidence of Rouquier's mastery in subjecting cinematic art to ontological truth and presence. Organized around the sale of a neighboring farm, Georges Rouquier composes, as Dominique Auzel writes, a “realistic statement about the agricultural world of the nineteen-eighties, about ‘modern’ agricultural workers and peasants, but also the discourse of a man and a sensitive auteur who […] wants to leave a trace and give the spectator both his vision of the world and his vision of cinema.”243 For Dominique Auzel, Biquefarre is thus “a film where real

243 Dominique Auzel, Georges Rouquier, 291.
“Discours à tendance réaliste sur le monde agricole des années quatre-vingt, sur les agriculteurs et les paysans ‘modernes’, mais bien discours, celui d'un homme, d'un auteur sensible qui, […] entend laisser sa trace et fournir au spectateur, à la fois, sa vision du monde et sa vision du cinéma.” (The English translation is mine)
people express their live(s) through a fictional narrative; it is a reconstituted truth.” While André Bazin stressed Rouquier's ability to extract the reality of peasant life from cinematic artifice, Auzel suggests a more active collaboration between filmmaker and the subjects filmed in getting this truth out. Rouquier condemns the destructive nature of modern farming practices through cinema and by means of dialogues, but the truth of the people filmed is not to be heard but glimpsed through their gestures and postures that escape fictional reconstruction. This connects Biquefarre to two debates: one contemporary concerning the aesthetic specificities of rural intervention cinema that had just developed during the previous decade and the other, more general theoretical inquiry about whether documentary and fiction are indeed two opposite categories.

Although they take various forms throughout the film, these two problematics traverse Biquefarre in the contrasts and parallels that connect the bodies of Roch Rouquier and Marcel, a younger farmer. Roch's paralyzed body actualizes the cinematic memory of Farrebique while Marcel acts more as a vector of Rouquier's sociocultural critique of modern-day agriculture. Their presence, both as real farmers and as actors, situates the film in relation to two cinematic approaches to the rural: the poetic, romanticized representations of rural cinema and the more politically assertive intervention sought by cinema about farming issues, and at the aesthetic intersection of fiction and documentary. During the shooting of the film in the fall of 1982, Roch Rouquier was victim of a stroke, which left him paralyzed and forced the filmmaker to modify the script. As he was starting to recover, Georges Rouquier rewrote Roch's part to allow his presence at the end of the film.245 Marcel's poisoning and temporary inability was part of the

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244 Dominique Auzel, Georges Rouquier, 287-288. (The English translation is mine)

“Biquefarre est un film où des personnes réelles expriment leur(s) vie(s) à travers une fiction; c'est un vrai reconstitué.”

245 Dominique Auzel, Georges Rouquier, 294.
narrative trajectory of the character, who we see repeatedly handling bags of pesticides, chemical products and other substances that are now commonly used in agricultural practices. As a matter of fact, his sickness is naturally edited in the overall progression of the film, foreshadowed and reinforced by several other sequences, close-up shots and montage.

Figures 5.1. and 5.2. Roch Rouquier recovering from his stroke (left) and Marcel after poisoning himself with pesticides (right). (*Biquefarre*, George Rouquier, 1983 © Mallia Films, Paris - Les Documents cinématographiques, Paris)

These two characters instill a tension at the very core of the film as they pull the film in two directions that appear at first contradictory: on one hand, Roch's tragedy turns *Biquefarre* inward towards *Farrebique*, leaving the modern issues of agriculture off-screen; on the other hand, Marcel's accident appears to orient the narrative outward towards more contemporary, social, economic and environmental issues. However, in the interstices of the weighing past that haunts Roch and the impending menace that modern agriculture constitutes for the environment and those who perform it, Georges Rouquier locates the present of Farrebique and opens a space where the truth of the peasant he films can come out, neither as a folklorized cliché nor as an already politicized collective. Militant forms of cinema about rural issues had already materialized during the previous decade and the rural space has been recuperated by political, historical and cultural discourses to reclaim national and regional identities threatened by
Biquefarre is rather about capturing through cinema the peasant as ontological presence and body as much as it is about alerting against the corruption of an activity long defined as the product of an ethical connection between humankind and nature.

For critic and filmmaker Alain Aubert, May 1968 marks a distinct evolution from the rural cinema that prevailed during the first half of the twentieth-century and a cinema refocused on agricultural and farming issues throughout the nineteen-seventies.246 While rural cinema had thus far projected a fairly homogeneous image of rurality and caricatured portrait of the peasant, the later production showed a stronger political and social consciousness and largely supported local, regionalist peasant struggles against the industrialization and internationalization of agriculture. However, Aubert suggests the limitations of both fictional “positive” realism and didactic documentaries about specific issues, experiences or struggles, he opts for a new type of intervention cinema that would frame the socio-cultural and environmental concerns of documentary into more dramatic fictional reconstitutions. Thus, in addition to intervention cinema, which he broadly describes as a sort of heavily-ideological direct cinema seeking to transform society, Aubert identifies two other modes: subjective and contemplative documentaries and documentary fictions – what he calls fictions documentées. To these two alternative treatments of rural transformations, he adds a third category that resembles in many points Biquefarre.

Fictional reconstitutions that postulate through their aesthetics and political views a fictional and experimental intervention cinema [have] a stronger potential than direct cinema. Any film is based on the interplay of five elements: space, time, action, drama

and semantics. Although direct cinema can be effective, fiction cinema can play across those five axes more easily.\(^\text{247}\)

Aubert's attempt to extend the generic and aesthetic range of cinematic depictions of agricultural transformations throughout the seventies can be seen as a replica of some of the aesthetic experimentations that animated workers' militant cinema during the late sixties and early seventies – Jean-Luc Godard and Marin Karmitz explored the political and structural effectiveness of fictional elaborations on real events with professional and non-professional actors in *Tout va bien* (1972) and *Coup pour Coup* (1972) for instance.

In *Biquefarre*, Rouquier manages to play with various a priori antagonistic approaches belonging to fiction and documentary, but also to direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*. Brian Winston contrasts French *cinéma vérité* and American direct cinema based on the reliance of the former on the filmmakers' presence in the frame as a guarantee of “truth” and the invisibility of the latter as an “ethics of non-intervention.”\(^\text{248}\) Yet, in Rouquier's case, one may argue that although he favored fiction to *cinéma vérité*, he is able through his collision of fiction and non-professional actors to capture the “truth” of his subjects while remaining at a distance. As such, while Rouquier takes charge of the fictional reconstitution, it is “the subject who ends up being the mak[er] of the documentary.”\(^\text{249}\) In other words, fiction allows Rouquier to intervene and provoke a certain truth, but thanks to the fictional framework that presupposes his non-presence in the frame, he is able to confer onto the non-professional actors cast and filmed – who are true

\(^{247}\) Alain Aubert, *Georges Rouquier*, 96. (The English translation is mine)

“On en propose une troisième: les films de fiction avec reconstitution dont le postulat de départ est de s'inscrire esthétiquement et politiquement dans un cinéma d'intervention fictionnel et expérimental, offrant un potentiel que n'a pas le direct. Tout film se fonde sur le jeu mêlé de cinq logiques: spatiale, temporelle, actionnelle, émotionnelle, sémantique. Sans contester les mérites du direct, le film de fiction est plus à l'aise pour jouer successivement de ces cinq axes.”


\(^{249}\) Ibid., 51.
farmers – the final “truth” captured by cinema. This is particularly obvious in the sequence showing the local cattle market. The meticulously crafted manipulation of cinematic codes and aesthetics through editing and visual composition enables the filmmaker to extract the peasant bodies from the cinematic reconstitution. The peasants can thus produce their own documentary truth within a tightly constrained fictional narrative.

This sequence is inserted very early in the film (4'28 – 8'51), just after Rouquier is done situating *Biquefarre* in relation to Farrebique, the farm and the film. After introducing the various members, generations and additions to the Rouquier family, the second facet of the film, the economic dimension of present-day agriculture, is presented. Hortense, Henri Rouquier's sister-in-law and mother of Marcel who will be one of the interested buyers of Biquefarre, is at the open market running errands for herself and her sister. As she leaves, she leads the camera towards another site of trade, the cattle market where local farmers and merchants gather to sell and buy sheep and calves. Most of the sequence is spent inside the large shed recording some of the negotiations taking place between merchants and breeders. Every now and then, Rouquier inserts short scripted scenes that allow him to introduce some of the main protagonists – Raoul Pradal, the owner of Biquefarre, Marcel and Christophe, two young farmers who will compete with the Rouquiers to buy the property for sale. Incidentally, these also enable him to frame his political agenda. For the time being, I would like to focus on the effect of such staged dialogues on the more documentary nature of the images gleaned in the shed.

In 1948, André Bazin commented on Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique* as an example of what he called the “law of amalgam,” a mode of cinematic social realism. Because “the non-professionals are naturally chosen for their suitability to the part, either because they fit physically or because there is some parallel between the role and their lives,” “when the
amalgamation comes off [...] the result is precisely that extraordinary feeling of truth.”

Thirty-eight years later, the “amalgam” is once again a success especially as Rouquier gives even more prominence to the fictional dialogues, accentuating further the unnaturalized acting of the non-professional actors. Although Bazin feared that the process should not be repeated to preserve optimum success, the presence of new characters and the time span between the two movies keeps the inexperience intact. Moreover, the artificiality of the utterances inserted throughout the sequence described above contrasts with, and reinforces the authenticity of the footage showing farmers defending their financial interests with merchants and handling the animals in and out of the trucks. Furthermore, the scripted encounters leave us with the impression of a staged profilmic space, which maintains a comfortable distance between the subjects and the camera and places the former in the center of the frame. The rest of the time, the camera feels more constrained and forced to adapt to the crammed space, more often witnessing than determining what goes on inside the frame. For instance, most of the time, the camera's access to the human subjects is restricted by animals, rows of wooden pens or simply blocked by other people. The first two stills illustrate the camera's adjustments to the profilmic space while the second set shows examples of staged set-ups.

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However, in spite of apparent obstacles, these images provide a wider profilmic space, in which farmers are free to move as they would normally, speak naturally, and perform the gestures they have learned and appropriated over the years. The fluidity of their movements and the natural quality of their interactions with each other and the animals inverts the cinematic relationship set up thus far. Here, the peasant body takes over Rouquier's controlled technique and narrative. The reconstituted truth is transcended by the documentary truth of the corporeal presence of the individual behind the actor. However, while it reveals the real presence of the farmers, this sequence also triggers Rouquier's personal statement about “modern” agriculture. Therefore, the scenes that he inserts at varying intervals punctuate the flow of reality and open up spaces in
which he can deliver his personal political and social commentaries through the borrowed bodies of non-professional actors. The two opening sequences – the montage introducing the Rouquier and modern-day Farrebique in relation to what _Farrebique_ showed, and the cattle market – immediately establish Georges Rouquier's aesthetic, political and self-reflexive construction of rural problematics.

As Aubert suggests, the nineteen-seventies marked a transition in the way rural life was represented in cinema. Rouquier's diptych exemplifies such shift from a poetic representation of rural life, somewhat cut off from contemporary issues (_Farrebique_), to a cinema that seeks to address more directly the changing nature of farming practices. Yet, it would be more exact to say that rather than resolving the tensions between both cinematic approaches to the rural, _Biquefarre_ exposes them. I will therefore examine three types of sequences in order to show how the peasant body stands at the limit of Rouquier's hybridization of fiction and documentary, as well as rural and farming cinemas – _cinéma rural_ versus _cinéma agricole_.

First, I will briefly come back to the sequence at the cattle market, emphasizing this time the political and economic problematics of nineteen-eighties French farming practices, second, the scenes showing farmers taking care of their animals, and finally, the dramatization of the peasant body.

The conversations staged by Rouquier during the cattle market sequence express concerns about three main issues: first the control of farming production by European policies that de-nationalize the space of agriculture, second the emergence of global competition and third, the influence of consumers' tastes on agricultural products and practices. Beyond the

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251 Alain Aubert, _Georges Rouquier_, 91. “Après 68, les narratifs [fiction] vont être travaillés par [le socio-économique et l'environnemental] (mauvaise conscience) et les documentaristes par le désir d'aller jusqu'au bout de ces interactions (conscience concrète). Telle serait la mutation à l'œuvre dans le cinéma intervenant dans l'univers de la paysannerie, qui du monde rural se recentre sur le monde agricole et de là sur les luttes paysannes.” (Translation is mine) (“After 68, fiction will focus on [socio-economic and environmental issues] (bad conscience) and documentary filmmakers will seek to push such interactions to their limits (concrete consciousness). Such are the ongoing mutations affecting the cinema addressing peasant culture, which from the rural will emphasize agricultural issues and, as a result, focus on peasant struggles.”)
specific examples mentioned by the farmers – overseas competition, quotas and price control over milk production, and the industrial promotion of certain tastes that drive consumers away from local producers, using the example of the color of veal – Rouquier points to major pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy, which has been accused, by farmers' associations and unions, of subsidizing and privileging agribusiness over small farmers, and of favoring large crop producers over cattle breeders. In other words, these conversations position the film in relation to ongoing debates about the evolution of agriculture and of the progressive transformation of local, independent peasants and farmers into agricultural laborers and land managers dependent on various economic interests and the markets. While the farm presented in Farrebique was a self-sufficient microcosm where nature and human beings would mutually nurture each other, Biquefarre highlights the subordination of agriculture to economic rules. Techniques bypass natural limitations and cycles of self-preservation to create demand and generate their own need and value. In other words, nature becomes more of an obstacle than an essential element – something that Georges Rouquier stresses through various close-ups of dying insects and plants as the machines spray pesticides over the fields later on in the film.

The second set of sequences show farmers at work with cattle or doing seasonal activities in the fields. Once again, these highlight how Rouquier's film does more to show the transition from rural cinema to farming cinema than to reflect one or the other. Two main aesthetics and sociopolitical agendas run through these scenes: on the one hand, they express Rouquier's critique of the industrialization and increasingly violent nature of modern agriculture; on the other hand, these allow the director to capture a few moments of natural harmony, something that was present throughout Farrebique. The first short section (19'-21'50) stresses the increasing size of sheep flocks and cattle herds all the while depicting the simultaneous industrialization of
cattle breeding. The milking process looks more like a chain production line: the cows move along a circular pathway, while the farmer, standing at a lower level, attaches and removes milking tools one by one. Similarly, as Christophe distributes hay to his sheep (on the right still), the visual composition of the shot emphasizes the number of animals, even though compared to the milking process shown previously, this flock seems spared from the mechanical violence inherent to industrialization. Georges Rouquier composes his shots in order to extend the duration of the process, or to emphasize the mechanization of all stages of care.

![Figures 5.7. and 5.8. Industrialization of agriculture: the milking process (left) and increasing size of cattle stock (right). (Biquefarre, George Rouquier, 1983 © Mallia Films, Paris - Les Documents cinématographiques, Paris)](Image)

Later on (31'20-32'48), a shorter vignette recalls one of the conversations overheard at the cattle market, namely the generalization of battery meat production and the difficulties then encountered by traditional methods to maintain customer loyalty. Editing alternates the two modes of breeding; however, this time, Rouquier's montage has a contrastive, not just cumulative, effect. Léon and Albertine, introduced briefly at the cattle market, continue to breed calves reared by the cows, although they are born out of artificial insemination. Another neighboring farmer, in contrast, has transitioned to milk formula, seeking to produce the “white” veal meat valued by contemporary customers – as was suggested in the conversation recorded.
earlier. Georges Rouquier films the two methods slightly differently, stressing one more time his personal leaning toward less industrialized and more “natural” practices. The numerous close-ups of calves feeding on their mothers in the first method are replaced with several close-ups of the material and products used to prepare the formula milk. In the first case, the camera focuses on the animals, pausing for an almost contemplative moment of nature's beauty while machines and human hands keep the camera away from the animals in the second option. When Rouquier finds an angle from which he can zoom in on the young animals' heads, the farmer pushes them back inside their pens in order to remove the feeding buckets.


Already these sequences draw out two types of agriculture; however, if there seems to be a generational gap, according to which younger farmers are more inclined to try new methods and convert to chemicals and machines, Rouquier's approach does not necessarily demonize the young while glorifying their elders. Biquefarre does not seek to pass a moralizing judgment on these men and women, but rather to reaffirm what makes, or made, the beauty of the profession. If he literally points his finger (or camera) at the chemical and structural drifts of modern
agriculture through close-ups of hazardous products used to feed animals and fertilize the soil as well as the violence of certain methods and practices towards animals, Georges Rouquier finds some unusual beauty and cinematic quality in the mechanical ballet of tractors and harvesters that continue to signal the end of a cycle every year. A third type of montage characterizes therefore the sequence that occurs just after Raoul shares with his friend Henri Rouquier his decision to sell Biquefarre to Farrebique, which, in his view, is the family farm which deserves the extra land the most. Another cycle, semantic this time, comes full circle: Biquefarre enables the survival of Farrebique, and by the same token, Biquefarre maintains, perhaps temporarily, its ethical integrity instead of being absorbed within either of the bidding industrializing farms.

After watching Christophe lead his sheep across the image, the camera cuts to a close-up of a mechanical harvester that starts rotating; the movement and noise made by the machine set off the music that will accompany the whole sequence (57'40-1'01''05). Aside from the very last minutes filmed at the cemetery with Roch and Henri Rouquier, this is the only time during the film that music is added onto the image. Evoking early Soviet cinematic reconciliations of modernity and folklore – for instance Alexandr Dovzenkho's *Earth* (1930) – the sequence emphasizes less the destructive dimension of mechanization and assimilates instead the various tasks performed by each and every one of these farmers to a visual symphony. Putting his concerns aside, Rouquier revives here the poetic dimension of rural cinema, reproducing a modern version of *Farrebique's* summer season, which described the arrival of seasonal workers to help the family harvest cereal crops and store hay.

*Biquefarre* concludes Georges Rouquier's career as a cinematographer while marking the aesthetic transition that had started to take place in cinematic representations of rural life. As fiction and documentary pull the film in two opposite directions, peasant corporeality pierces
through Rouquier’s rural world and extends the temporality of the film across the past and the present. As it completes the fictional story of Farrebique, it throws rurality in the ongoing transformation of French agriculture and the increasingly thin line between rural and urban spaces, between agriculture and industry.

**Raymond Depardon (Profils Paysans: L'Approche (2001), Le Quotidien (2004) and La Vie moderne (2008)) – Subjective Wanderings through Rural France.**

Filmed over ten years (1998-2008), Raymond Depardon's recent trilogy is his most personal and challenging work as it leads him to face his own origins and guilt for choosing a different path than his family. Born and raised on a farm, the photographer and filmmaker maintained a discreet but long-lasting relationship with rural culture after leaving for Paris in the late fifties, where he could pursue his career. It is through photography that he first reconnected with his rural origins, shooting on the family farm in Le Garet, immortalizing politically active farmers in the early seventies and contributing to collections commissioned by various French publications, including Le pèlerin in 1986 and Libération in 1990. In 2005, long after his father's death, he finally brought his camera and filmed a ten-minute long conversation, Quoi de neuf au Garet?, with his brother, Jean, in which they discussed the past and the future of the family farm. Photography permeates Profils paysans and La vie moderne, a film series that pays homage to a profession and a way of life. Depardon’s long-lasting investment in these landscapes and characters was also the occasion for the filmmaker to engage in self-inquiry and invite his viewers to reflect on France’s changing faces. The three films, L'Approche (2001), Le Quotidien

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(2004) and *La Vie moderne* (2008), are thus the result of a long process through which Depardon appeased his relationship to rurality and part of a larger reflection on space as subjective orientation in the world. As such, it resonates with some of Depardon's previous works and collaborations, including his collection of essays and photographs, *Errance* (2004), a photographic “tour de France” commissioned by the French Ministry of Tourism (2003-2008) showing French regional and environmental particularisms, and more recently, the exhibition “Terre Natale: Ailleurs Commence Ici” (Fondation Cartier, Paris, November 2008-March 2009), which he prepared with Paul Virilio.

Depardon's “portrait of a craggy culture and a disappearing profession” is also about rural dwellers and the difficult encounter of cinema and photography with the rural. Filming the people who reappear throughout the three films is as much about their life, their work and their ethos – their character – as it is about filmmaking and being this person who happens to be on the other side of the camera. As a result, these three films expose, more than they resolve, the aesthetic and ethical tensions that underlie Depardon's immersion, or what Paul Virilio would call “empaysement,” in the rural landscape and his encounters with the men and women who live there, in the topographical folds of the panorama.

As the filmmaker appropriates principles that have guided cinéma vérité and direct cinema, he finds himself forced to bend them through what becomes a more interactive,

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interpersonal experience. In the first film, Depardon introduces several families and individuals who live on small remote farms, hidden in the depopulated mountains of south-central France. Most of them will reappear in the other films as the filmmaker returns and films them at work or engages in discussions about professional and personal issues. Over time, Depardon's camera gets closer as the filmmaker himself participates more in the interactions that take place in the frame. Unlike Georges Rouquier's collision of documentary and fiction, Depardon explores the limits of direct cinema and cinéma vérité. His preference for fixed-frame cinematography – dominant in L'Approche – which allows him to respect the intimacy of his subjects and stay off-frame, soon becomes insufficient. As a result, Le Quotidien marks a transition: as Depardon endorses what he himself refers to as a “Parisian” persona and initiates conversations, tensions arise in the interactions per se and in the visual aesthetics initially set up. However, following the ethical breakthroughs that punctuate Le Quotidien, La vie moderne offers a somewhat ambivalent conclusion: Depardon asserts even more strongly his successful “empaysement,” mostly through recurrent long takes of his wanderings inside the natural milieu, and yet, he returns to more composed, photographic portraits and shots that accentuate the impending disappearance / modernization of rural life, or more precisely a certain type of rural life as he purposely chose only small farms in regions where traditional livestock farming remains the dominant activity.

Raymond Depardon's wanderings through the landscapes, the cinematic horizontality of nature, pierce and defy traditional representations of the rural. However, if the road becomes a vector of immersion rather than the outside limit of the imaginary landscape in Profils Paysans and La vie moderne, his camera inevitably comes up against the presence traditionally effaced from cinematic landscapes, the peasant, a presence that is in fact threatened by imminent disappearance because of its exteriority to urban, technological and scientific development. Like
\textit{Biquefarre, Profils Paysans} and \textit{La vie moderne} are about a transition taking place between two types of agriculture, but also a generational transition between individuals who never left those mountains and for whom work became a lifestyle and a younger generation who chooses to live there.

\textit{L'Approche} (2001) starts with a forward tracking shot that slowly moves the camera, and the audience, further onto a narrow winding road clasped between the valley and the rocky wall of the mountain to the right. This immediately throws the audience into the landscape with Raymond Depardon. After the musical score stops, Depardon's voice-over addresses us, viewers, directly with his artistic statement:

\begin{quote}
We are expected on small peaceful agricultural farms. Retired and single peasants or low-income couples, they are too often forgotten. This film will be about the approach, our approach to these farms and those who live there. We will come back several times over the years to document the evolution of these small mountain farms. Many farmers are reaching retirement age or are already retired; most of them continue to live and work on their own farms, often until they die. Young certified farmers are looking for farms to run, there is only a handful of them, they want to live in these mountains.\textsuperscript{257}
\end{quote}

As Depardon explains, these films are as much about the filmmaker's, and implicitly the audience's, movement towards these people and these remote places as it is about showing their way of life. It is therefore less about objectifying these farmers who seem to live outside of modernity than about changing our approach to rural life in ways that are both physical and

\textsuperscript{257} Raymond Depardon, \textit{Profils Paysans} (ARTE Video, 2006). In the opening sequence of \textit{L'Approche}, the first film of the trilogy, Depardon addresses the audience with his artistic statement (0'59-1'58): “Nous avons rendez-vous dans des petites exploitations agricoles sans histoire. Paysans, retraités, célibataires ou couples modestes, ils sont trop souvent oubliés. Ce film est consacré à l'approche, notre approche, de ces fermes et de ces habitants. Nous allons revenir sur plusieurs années pour suivre l'évolution de ces exploitations de moyenne montagne. Beaucoup d'agriculteurs arrivent à l'âge de la retraite ou le sont déjà; ils continuent pour la plupart à vivre et à travailler dans leurs propres fermes, souvent jusqu'à la fin de leur vie. Des jeunes agriculteurs diplômés recherchent des fermes à exploiter, ils sont peu nombreux, ils veulent vivre dans ces montagnes.”
conceptual. Depardon's aesthetic experiments and readjustments throughout the trilogy question both what motivates a movement towards a place and the framework that conditions such a movement. As he sets up the geographical and sociological frames of his project, the road digs further and further the cinematic frame, emphasizing at times the depth of field as the road shoots straight up or accentuating the texture of the natural milieu when the camera almost touches the trees and slopes that surround its sinuous trajectory.

(Figures 5.11 and 5.12. Filming the road. (La vie moderne, Raymond Depardon, 2009, and Profils Paysans: L'Approche, Raymond Depardon, 2001 © Palmeraie et Désert)

The bird's-eye-view perspective that typically puts the observer in a dominating, but distant, position is here replaced with an embedded mobility through the land/scape. This is not simply a shift in spatial terms, but more importantly, as the shot focuses on the mobility facilitated by the road, it restores a sense of time in the movement, which is absent from the totalizing, instant framing of panoramic views.

The slow unfolding of the road combines with Raymond Depardon's emphasis on the social and cultural oblivion that “too often” applies to the people who will soon be at the center of the frame in setting up an invitation to remember and generate memories. As such, the opening sequence of L'Approche activates a device that Gilles Deleuze identifies with the cinematic conversion to time during the second half of the twentieth-century.
Our point is that depth of field creates a certain type of direct time-image that can be defined by memory, virtual regions of the past, the aspects of each region. This would be less a function of reality than a function of remembering, of temporalization: not exactly a recollection but “an invitation to recollect...”

Here, it is less the strict emphasis on depth of field that matters than what Deleuze sees as a topological stratification of the image and the invitation extended to the audience to remember. While rural cinema has traditionally been associated with the repossessing of a cohesive national imaginary, Depardon uses depth of field as a mode of orientation through the regions and sediments of rural time. However, where Deleuze's description of depth of field insists on the actualization of virtual past layers, these films seek more to capture the sedimentation of memory and its continuous reactualization through the preserved “empaysement” of individuals. The mobile landscapes that initiate L’Approche, and punctuate La vie moderne, orient the image in the present, and more specifically in Raymond Depardon's present roving attitude towards rural life.

In fact, the numerous road sequences inserted in this third film before practically every visit with the farmers we have become accustomed to seeing in Profils Paysans create a quasi meditative suspension. This state is reinforced by the music and, new to La vie moderne, by the silent contemplation, or sensory experience, of the natural environment brushed by the wind, covered with snow or bathed in the golden sunlight of the summer. The visual absorption of landscapes is reversed as the subject finds himself absorbed within it. It is in fact the light murmur of the wind that first introduces the natural environment in La vie moderne. Compared

to the initial break through the panoramic surface at the beginning of *L’Approche*, the road literally frames, punctuates and pieces the various sequences together in *La vie moderne*.

For Gillian Helfield and Catherine Fowler, in rural cinema, the road has a metaphoric function, it essentially traces a “journey [...] of (re)discovery: a means of traveling back to the strong time of cultural and national origins, the source of a collective heritage, while at the same time traveling forward, to social, cultural, and national self-realization.” In Depardon's recent trilogy, the road does engage the audience in a double movement that goes backward while pushing forward; yet, it becomes a trigger for cinematic narrativity/narrativization of the rural and materializes the filmmaker's ethical orientation of his wanderings through the countryside. The road is a wandering connector between Depardon and the farmers he invites his audience to remember: “at the end of the roads, there are the farms. I come back to these farms, happy to see these men and women again, because over time I have gained their trust (1'45-2'14, *La vie moderne*).” If a metaphor, the road is less that of a cyclical journey back to the national home than the transversal line that cuts across and holds together the various layers, ages and spatial experiences of our being in the world.

For Sarah Cooper, Raymond Depardon's trilogy, and more so the first film, *L'Approche* (2001), exceeds the spatial limits of the cinematic frame to explore “the complexity of our place in the world, our relation with and infinite responsibility to its landscapes and other inhabitants, without which we would not be who or where we are today.” She describes Depardon's construction of “intimate, spatial geographies” and “vivid emotional landscapes of mortality and loss” as the ethical visualization of subjectivity across “interior and exterior worlds.” Largely

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262 Ibid., 57.
inspired by the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas and Michael Renov's more recent attempts at theorizing documentary filmmaking in relation to ethics and subjectivity, Cooper adds a spatial dimension to her analysis that resonates with contemporary concerns about the global determination of subjectivity. Without directly locating her reflection in relation to globalization, she nonetheless points to a certain tendency in contemporary art documentaries to transcend traditional reductions of subjectivity to a focalization on the individual self and introspection. Instead, these films project this subjective process outward in the space, which creates both distance and a shared space for individuals. I would like to finish this section by examining how Raymond Depardon's films reveal, beyond the filmmaker's good intentions, the a-cinematic nature of rural subjects or rather the limitations of existing cinematic devices in capturing the rural ethos.

Raymond Depardon's cinema has continuously tested the ethical limits of the photographic and documentary image, posting the camera in the least expected places, including courts, police stations, or emergency rooms. His cinema is also one of encounters beyond cultural boundaries, be it in Africa or, in this case, the French countryside. The titles of the three films, L'Approche, Le Quotidien, and La vie moderne, suggest a narrative progression as Depardon slowly makes his way into the houses and life of his subjects and into his own cinematic frame. These films do reflect on the necessity to adapt and alter cinematic narrativity to accommodate rural subjectivity, which differs from urban, industrial experiences. The distant observation that has been identified as Depardon's signature style is here replaced by experimentations with the frame as what aestheticizes rural culture and what ethicizes documentary filmmaking as it provides the filmed subjects the freedom to avoid their cinemactic

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characterization and mediates the filmmaker's own subjective production.

This essential tension is highlighted across the progression staged in the two parts of *Profs Paysans* and in the contrasts created between these first two films and what has been seen as a postface, *La vie moderne*. In other words, Depardon's tactful approach and negotiated proximity in *L'Approche* and *Le Quotidien* are counter-balanced by the filmmaker's return to tighter photographic frames in *La vie moderne*. This aesthetic ambivalence expresses the dual significance that Depardon, and perhaps more generally speaking, documentary filmmaking invests in rural culture: on the one hand, it mediates a broader ethical consciousness about human and environmental connections, which has become a key component of late concerns about global capitalism, and on the other hand, the ethical questions it raises are tied to its imminent disappearance. This translates into Depardon's alternation between what becomes a more fluid cinéma verité style and the photographic suspension of certain poses, situations and characters.

*L'Approche* largely preserves some distance between the camera and the subjects, who are predominantly filmed across kitchen tables with a limited number of intrusions on Depardon's part. He typically remains an absent observer of the numerous conversations that are filmed throughout the three films and which involve several of the recurring characters introduced in the trilogy.
By the end of the film, however, a first change is introduced as the filmmaker arranges a more traditional interview set-up with Monique Rouvière to talk about the late Louis Brès. After showing the last images of Louis recorded at the nursing home where he stayed, Depardon cuts to Monique, sitting in her kitchen. This time, however, she is framed in a medium close-up, facing the camera as she answers Depardon's questions that can be heard in a low, off-screen voice. His presence, although asserted by the traditional interview set-up, is only implied; yet, this announces the more interactive nature of the shots that will become more common in *Le Quotidien*.

If, by itself, this sequence is fairly conventional and compares to numerous documentary testimonies marked by honesty and emotions, Depardon's attempt to reiterate the experience with Monique's uncle, Marcel Privat at the beginning of *Le Quotidien* shows the fragility of interviews on some occasions. Less prone to sharing his feelings about his friend's recent death, Marcel stretches the limits of Depardon's frame in order to elude his questions: he repeatedly
escapes the camera by walking away into the depth of field, forcing Raymond Depardon to follow him. After a brief prologue reminding the viewer of Louis Brès' funeral four months earlier, *Le Quotidien* projects a more open, natural décor, which is after all Marcel Privat's and many of these farmers' daily workplace. Once again, a pathway traces a trajectory inside the image, deepening the field. Marcel followed by his flock of sheep leads the eye down into the folds of the slopes and tree lines. Shortly after, the camera catches up with him; he is standing, in profile to the camera, with a serious look on his face. Depardon stays for a while on him, silently, before moving closer – not zooming on his face, but walking towards him – to ask him about Louis. Marcel immediately moves back, and says facing the camera, that he will not say anything, mumbling something about his memories.

*Figures 5.14-5.17. Marcel Privat. (Profils Paysans: Le Quotidien, Raymond Depardon, 2004 © Palmeraie et Désert)*
The filmmaker is therefore cut short as Marcel walks away, and the camera is forced into following him, only able to show his back for a few more shots. Even in the next sequence, Depardon's inquiry about Marcel's visible anxiety is first answered with a long silence, as the close-up of his face, once again in profile, reveals tears.

The cinéma vérité style developed through this sequence is undermined by two elements that, in the end, strengthen the impact of the scene while maintaining a certain equality between what is forced onto the subject filmed and what he is willing to give. First, unlike scenes in which Raymond Depardon would film conversations across the kitchen table, this is one of the first instances where he films a farmer at work. However, as Marcel's work consists in leading his sheep outside through the fields, this does not provide good cinematic material as literally nothing happens. Second, as the filmmaker attempts to compensate for the lack of action with speech, Marcel chooses to remain silent. However, as this should bring the cinematic framework to an end, Depardon is able to capture a more humane interaction and, in the end, record a few words from the subject himself about his relation to his work.

Although not all attempts to generate some kind of speech from the farmers filmed end up in a visual and ethical crisis as this one, they all point to the distinction of rural speech in comparison to the testimonial nature of post-second world war documentaries – Marcel Ophüls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) or Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1983) – or the political capture of speech that characterized workers' militant cinema in the late sixties. Instead, rural speech emerges slowly, and often reluctantly, not because it relates a trauma as in testimonial statements, but rather because it is forced out by the cinematic encounter. Thus, even as he employs a variety of elements from cinéma vérité – traditional medium-close ups facing the camera, in action as the farmers go about their daily activities, or in somewhat stereotypical poses – Raymond
Depardon produces a new type of speech that is not necessary for the subjects themselves but is important to maintain cinematic integrity, while bringing it to the edge at times. If Marcel's strong character allows him to remain in control of the scenes where Depardon wants him to talk more than he would like to, others are less successful. Daniel Jean Roy, whom we first meet with his parents in *L'Approche*, is pinned in a slightly low-angle shot in *La vie moderne*. Sensing Daniel's unhappiness with his professional situation, Raymond Depardon is quite insistent in asking the farmer whether he likes what he does or not, what he would have liked better and if working with his parents is a problem. Here, Depardon adopts a risky approach, particularly due to the duration of the scene and the vulnerability it creates in the character.

More generally, speech connects the cinematic integrity that needs to be maintained between the filmmaker, the camera and the subjects filmed and the audience. As rural work is somewhat a-cinematic, as I have already shown, most of it is in fact conveyed through the explanations, comments or reactions volunteered by the farmers. Thus, several of them describe their work as hard, as a profession that requires a lot of personal, social and financial sacrifices. Raymond Privat, Marcel's brother, and others point to the demanding rhythms of rural life that are similarly imposed on the shooting. Invited to film in the early morning hours, or in the snow and the rain, he also happens to stop by during down times, when they have lunch, or breakfast or simply when the weather really prevents them from doing much. In a more indirect manner, the camera often catches conversations among the farmers themselves, or when they negotiate with the merchants who buy their cattle. As the speech sounds freer than when they are asked to answer his questions, such exchanges are often rich in comments about the status of agriculture, the viability of certain practices and the absurdity of certain policies based on their experiences and knowledge. *Le Quotidien* is particularly rich in such impromptu commentaries that add more
pieces to the image that Depardon gradually constructs about the agriculture practiced on these small, mountainous farms. Rural life would not be complete without addressing the impact the profession and the environment in which it is performed have on social and family life.

Many of the farmers filmed in the course of the ten years that it took Raymond Depardon to make the films are already in their eighties: some are sick, others died and some hang on as long as they can. Younger families are discouraged by the administrative and financial burden imposed on them as they try to take over existing farms or starting their own. For some, moving back to those remote, isolated areas gives them new opportunities, as space and infrastructure become available for various rehab projects. Louis Brès's house was bought by a writer who, willing to honor the historical significance of the architecture and traditions of the regions, converted the barn into a musicians' studio. Other abandoned farms are bought and refurbished as vacation houses. Rural space is therefore slowly altered or diverted from its initial agricultural function. As a matter of fact, Nathalie, who with her husband Jean-François, moved to L'Hermet when they were in their early twenties – at the beginning of L'Approche – tells her son, an aspiring farmer like his father, that when he is old enough, the profession will not exist anymore, and if it does, it will be much different. “Soon enough, farmers will not be needed anymore.”

As pessimistic as this may sound, Nathalie says out loud what some of Marcel and Raymond Privat's silences seem to imply and what tacitly motivates Raymond Depardon's urge to immortalize the life of these people, their proximity to the land and their values. Marcelle Brès, who passed away at 93 years old before Depardon’s return to L'Hermet for La vie moderne, had rightly grasped the filmmaker's enterprise when he last filmed her in Le Quotidien. Then the last inhabitant of the small hamlet, she had simply replied to a reluctant passer-by, suspicious of the

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camera's presence, asking why Depardon was filming her: “because you are here!”

Indeed, in spite of the difficulties and ethical quandaries that complicate his task as a filmmaker, and that some critics have assimilated with weaknesses in the overall project, *Profils Paysans* and *La vie moderne* seek to capture the last traces of a way of living and a profession that is already disappearing as its last characters age and eventually pass away. After exhausting several cinematic styles to record and highlight specific traits of life on those small farms, where people survive, forgotten by most, he returns to photographic shots, accentuating the accelerating compression of present and past in these mountains. Paul Argaud's standing portrait in *Le quotidien* announces Raymond Depardon's return to more visually composed shots in *La vie moderne*, which leave the audience with memorable family or individual portraits of these farmers.

Figures 5.18. and 5.19. Paul Argaud and his tractor (left) and the Jean Roy family (right). (*La vie moderne*, Raymond Depardon, 2009 © Palmeraie et Désert)

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266 Emmanuel Didier, “Triste Cire: *La vie moderne* (Raymond Depardon),” Critikat.com, available at http://www.critikat.com/La-Vie-moderne,2550.html. Didier criticizes Depardon’s “moral incoherences” as he, in his view, traps reluctant, stony-faced rural subjects within the frame or freezes them into typical poses in the series of portraits that concludes *La vie moderne*. 
While these portraits can be seen as reinforcing stereotypes and clichés about rural culture, I prefer to see them as a more complex play on Depardon's part with stereotypical representations of small farming that dismissed their archaic methods to promote large-scale modernization and industrialization. Furthermore, they are being introduced towards the end as Depardon has fully reconciled his own self to rural culture. The filmmaker admits that, as he remembers seeing such interview set-ups in the INA archives, this is a shot that would make people laugh nowadays.267 One could wonder if it would make people laugh at the way this farmer is being portrayed by the filmmaker, rather than at the farmer. In an early article about peasants and photography, Pierre Bourdieu draws attention to the fact that such posture is in fact commonly adopted by the rural subjects themselves, which is a mark of respect.268 He adds that frontal portraits allow peasants to control the image they agree to give to the photographer, and to preserve their dignity as they expose themselves to the lens.

Figures 5.20. and 5.21. Closing credits. (La vie moderne, Raymond Depardon, 2009 © Palmeraie et Désert)

268 Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu, “Le paysan et la photographie,” Revue française de sociologie, 6, 2, (April-June 1965), 164-174, 171-172. “Il n'est pas jusqu'à l'attitude que le paysan adopte devant l'objectif qui ne semble exprimer les valeurs paysannes et plus précisément le système des modèles qui régissent les rapports avec autrui dans la société paysanne. Les personnages se présentent le plus souvent de face, au centre de l'image, debout et en pied, c'est-à-dire à distance respectueuse.”
Through the final series of medium close-up portraits, it is Raymond Depardon's turn to honor each of these farmers who have complied with his camera and repeated visits over the years. This time, it is he who complies with their ethos; as they take this last pose, they are able to look back at the filmmaker and the audience. This also enables Depardon to essentialize through these portraits the presence of these people and to perform the memorial function of his films.²⁶⁹


*Mondovino*, a two-and-a-half-hour-long documentary by American-born filmmaker Jonathan Nossiter, was released in theaters in 2004 after winning a last minute slot in the official competition of the Cannes International Film Festival that year. The title, *Mondovino*, borrowed from the Italian, is a neologism that can be translated either as “the world of wine” or “world-wine.” Since its initial release, the film has been featured in numerous programming series about wine, globalization and contemporary French cinema. In 2006, Nossiter re-edited a ten-disc mini series from the more than 500 hours of footage he had recorded over four years. Broadcast on French television in June 2007, the series is now available on DVD. Finally, Nossiter completed his serial obsession with wine, cinema and the *terroir* in his book *Le goût et le pouvoir*, initially published in French in 2007, and later translated into English as *Liquid Memory: Why Wine Matters* (2009).²⁷⁰


Of the three filmmakers discussed in this chapter, Jonathan Nossiter is certainly the most explicit about the impact of globalization on local production, in this case the production of wine, while exploring the rural ethos from a translocal perspective. While Georges Rouquier and Raymond Depardon address their concerns about the disappearance of a certain rural ethos essentially in aesthetic terms, Jonathan Nossiter's *Mondovino* is more directly anchored in ongoing socio-cultural and political debates about globalization. Through what seems to be unsophisticated documentary style, *Mondovino* engages, both in its theatrical version and in the television mini-series, a broader transnational reflection about the specificities of *terroir* as ethical narrative. By suggesting that *terroir* be the ethical antidote to the global homogenization of human experiences – a position that some critics see as problematic and which recent political controversies in France have certainly accredited – Nossiter’s point of view nonetheless offers the advantage of cutting across existing binary geographical paradigms: local/global, national/regional, national/supranational.\(^{271}\) Furthermore, Jonathan Nossiter, a professional sommelier as well as a filmmaker, questions the persistence of older ideological geographies, particularly American capitalism versus European traditionalism. Instead, through the example of wine, he prefers to raise concerns about the necessity of imagining more fluid, transversal affiliations as global capitalism is based on the implosion of such boundaries. Nossiter is in favor of reintroducing individual singularity to the universal enjoyment of the common social and

\(^{271}\) I am referring here to the semantic hitch that opposed French parliamentary representative and former farm trade unionist Christian Jacob to head of the International Monetary Fund and member of the French Socialist Party Dominique Strauss-Khan in February 2011. Jacob had accused Strauss-Khan, then a potential candidate for the 2012 Presidential campaign of not being “terroir” enough. Reactionary regionalist feelings were quickly associated with a resurgence of public antisemitism in the media coverage of Jacob’s declaration. For the anecdote, it is worth noting Jonathan Nossiter himself refers to his Jewish identity in his book, *Liquid Memory*, as something that is not incompatible with a cosmopolitan taste for local, “organic” wines: “Although I’m happy to see a wall advertising organic wines, it’s also an identity trap if applied indiscriminately. It occurs to me, as a Jew, that it’s critical that there are communities and institutions that function as public displays of Jewish culture but it’s equally critical for me that the Jewish identity isn’t an all-consuming and all-excluding denomination.” 73.
environmental world, a stance that certainly expresses a somewhat utopian belief in pre- or post-national cosmopolitanism.

*Mondovino* does place the *terroir* as a central stake in the two conceptions of wine that are currently pulling international wine production in two opposite directions. *Terroir*, for which no English translation exists, is a century old idea which was recently endorsed anew by French farmers, wine makers, but also politicians and cultural activists. Former French Minister of Agriculture (1961-1966), Edgar Pisani, defines *terroir* as “one of the modalities for an alternative vision of the necessary coherence of territory, economy, socio-cultural and politico-administrative factors, [a site] of invention and mediation between organs and organizations, unity and diversity, the present and the long term, economy and society, villages and the local, national and global rural space.”\(^272\) Labels and certifications, such as *terroirs* and AOC (Controlled Designation of Origin), are intended to protect agricultural products from market opportunism by basing their quality on specific geographical origins. What makes the quality of a product is therefore the result of the localized concentration of geological and climatic elements that enhances and reveals a distinct taste. Traditionally limited to wine, *terroir* has now been extended to coffee, fruits and cheese.\(^273\) In the 1990s, France’s oppositional strategy to


Edgar Pisani introduced a conference on the future of agricultural spaces in 2001, where he defined *terroir* as follows: “Le terroir est sans doute une des modalités de cette autre vision de la cohérence nécessaire des acteurs que sont le territoire, l’économie, le socio-culturel et le politico-administratif...[un lieu] d’invention des médiation entre organes et organismes, unité et diversité, présent et durée, économie et société, village et espace rural local, national et mondial.”

\(^{273}\) Largely developed through wine production, the designation AOC (Appellation d’origine contrôlée, which in English could be translated as Label for Controlled Origin of Production) was first introduced legally in 1919 in order to institute a right of collective property. In 1935, a law extended the usage to other sectors of production, although the Roquefort cheese became the first officially recognized AOC in France in 1925. In the nineties, variations were introduced and resulted in the 2006 creation of a National Institute, the INAO, in charge of overseeing all regulated origins. AOC labels protect agricultural products typically made in a local region with long-established and transmitted *savoir-faire*. Tied to the characteristics of the local *terroir*, the quality of such products results from a combination of environmental and human factors that is unique and cannot be reproduced elsewhere. A *terroir* is commonly defined as the interaction taking place between physical and topographical features favorable
globalization was largely based on the principle of “cultural exception,” later renamed cultural diversity. The 1993 GATT negotiations about the liberalization of cultural goods as market commodities put the country in a position of leadership in the resistance against globalization; however, the focus on national cultural diversity reaffirmed the debate about globalization in terms of sovereignty. The French model of exceptionalism became a symbolic safeguard against American-based global capitalism and the “imperialism of the universal.”274 During the same period, the French government implemented new administrative cut-outs that opened the way for “a new form of différencé [... ] predicated upon decentralized political power, upon the reaffirmation of territorial distinctiveness and upon multiple senses of place and belonging (multi-appartenence).”275 The creation in 1992 of pays and paysages de reconquête may have been conceived as a way to infringe further upon global and supranational economic structures by giving local territories, products and cultural traditions a political and economic legitimacy.276 However, this also unlocked the national as the only rampart against globalization and allowed for new local narratives to emerge. Subjected to the urban-based national narrative, rural France was now a paysage de reconquête for economic and political interests. Terroirs were re-emphasized during the same decade, largely out of protectionist instincts by French food producers. This strategy proved to be more effective than the more abstract principle of exceptionalism applied to cinema, music and other cultural creations in the early 1990s.

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276 The notions of pays and paysages de reconquête are quite hard to translate in English, but pays refers to a largely rural or remote region defined by a local identity and traditions, speciality products, sometimes even dialectal specificities. The Basque region in France is commonly called Pays Basque. Paysages means landscape and one could describe paysages de reconquête as rural regions whose economic and demographic re-development will be based on foregrounded local specificities – cultural, geographical and environmental, linguistic, professional, and so on.
Elizabeth Barnham argues that, when protected by labels attesting to their geographical origin, regional products are in fact “re-embedded” in a specific time and place and can therefore no longer circulate in a “virtual” world without time or space defined by market-valued brands.277 Global capitalist interests nonetheless started to see in terroirs profitable economic opportunities: from a territory reconquered, terroir has now become a territory to conquer, or simply to produce artificially.

If Jonathan Nossiter focuses more on the persons who make the wine business today than the product itself, the way he presents them, frames them and inserts them in the film narrative reproduces the distinction that Elizabeth Barnham establishes between “embeddedness” and floating virtuality. In the film, Opus One, a joint-venture between French-based Mouton-Rothschild and Napa Valley Mondavi, is the perfect Euro-American example of such virtual geographies. The partnership symbolizes the new borderless and rootless global freedom to create artificial terroirs, which would evoke any locale desired by the customer. In this vision, wine is a lifestyle, a commodity that can be designed to provide a temporary “elsewhere,” a tasty dépaysement that is free from any real geographical experience. As the tour guide explains, Opus One sells the landscapes of Italy and Southern France in a bottle, not because it was made there but because it has been packaged as a story, “[…that] let[s] you imagine you are in the Chianti region.” He then adds, “created from nothing, [Opus One is] the best of Italy and the best of California, […] a wonderful space like a showcase.” (22'15-22'32) In other words, wine is detached from its agricultural process, its terrestrial and mundane roots and is reduced to infinitely reproducible consumer goods. With the turning of bottles of wine into pieces of commercial art, overpriced items destined to be bought by a certain elite, wine literally becomes

a liquidity, another reflection of one's lifestyle along with other consumer goods. Jonathan Nossiter opposes to this artificiality a vision of terroir that is anchored in actual “somewhereness” – an idea he develops further in the book. Unlike the Mondavis’ and the Rothschilds’ products, his idea of wine is not the empty vessel of some imaginary travel, it carries the specificities of the soil, the traditions and the people who produce it.

Mondovino and Liquid Memory celebrate local particularisms insofar as they participate in the endless renewal and preservation of the world, as a diverse community of free individual subjects. Jonathan Nossiter transcends therefore the economic dimension of terroir and turns it into an ethical residue of individuality in today's global tapestries of “market-valued brands.” In his Liquid Memory: Why Wine Matters, the filmmaker-writer focuses this time more on wine than those who make it. In his book, Nossiter equates terroir with individual freedom and democracy, insofar as it strips power from private ownership and replaces it in the hands of a collective co-management of natural resources.278 Like art, Nossiter explains, a terroir wine “encompasses an individual expression that can attain nobility only with the passage of time. […][terroir] it's the sharing of privilege with the world at large.”279 For Nossiter, wine is

278 The book, originally published in French, Le goût et le pouvoir (Paris: Grasset, 2007), allows Nossiter to develop further his own philosophy about the cultural and political attributes of wine. All quotes from the book provided in the following pages come from the English version, Liquid Memory: Why Wine Matters (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

“This book is a highly personal journey through the liquid looking glass, an insider-outsider view of the world’s most mysterious, contradictory, and jubilatory drink. […] For those who’ve seen a film I made about the wine world, Mondovino, please note that this book is not a continuation of Mondovino by other means. While the film traces a kind of comic anthropology of the wine world, it barely brushes on the fact of wine itself, its taste, its use, its physical existence, and what has always fascinated me the most: its profound relation to the general culture. […] By my mid-twenties, I was making wine lists for restaurants in New York and sporadically writing wine articles, which were even more sporadically published. But because filmmaking has been my primary craft for the last twenty-five years I’ve always been an outsider in the clubby, sometimes Mafioso, and always culty world of wine. […] Surely we’ve plunged through a (‘dark berrylike’) hole and find ourselves, like Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, trying to comprehend the Mock Turtle’s school curriculum, caught between ‘reeling and writhing’ and ‘laughing and grief.’ […] A reappraisal of wine might also lead us to reconsider how and why we acquire a sense of personal taste (in wine, the arts, politics, anything) and how we might be able to affirm that crucial liberty without fear of intimidation by those who profess to know all – or, worse, by those who proudly profess to know little or nothing.”

intrinsically ethical insofar as it reveals and carries the ineluctably communal essence of individual subjects.

Both the film and the television series reaffirm the social, temporal, but most importantly, the affective anchoring of wine. The focus of Nossiter's conversations with the various wine producers and of his camera's shots suggests that today's practices fail to account for the communal dimension of wine as they turn to technological innovations and rely on scientific knowledge that are detached from lived experiences. Furthermore, family fuss, political rivalries and other unforeseen events often make what would have been fairly regular conversations a little bit spicier, renewing somewhat the traditional succession of talking-heads so often seen in documentary cinema. Although editing does undoubtedly reinforce the contrast, Nossiter's experimentation with an extremely lightweight digital camera and a three-person film crew allows for intimate exchanges and unburdens the film from sophisticated stylization and composition. The filmmaker explained, on several occasions, that the recurrent incongruous zooming effects (that can at times be somewhat distracting) were due to the low resolution of the digital lens used. The resulting, imperfect visual style of the film thus accidentally grasps a central tension between the two main “casts.” Jonathan Nossiter himself prefers to use the term “cast” to refer to the subjects of his film, thereby referring directly to the influence of nineteenth-

“A wine – or a painting – of terroir encompasses an individual expression that can attain nobility only with the passage of time. Terroir is an expression of liberty of the individual, but within a communal and historical context. And in that case, I’m a co-citizen of the terroirs of Jean-Marc, Christophe, Alix, and Dominique. The simple fact of drinking these wines places me in the world. I don’t need to be the owner of the land. It’s for that reason that terroir is as democratic a concept as any museum. It’s never a question of ancestral ownership, of an inherent quality. The opposite: it’s the sharing of privilege with the world at large.”

One can note also that Nossiter’s conversational style, as effective in French, English, Italian or Spanish — a fluency due to his international upbringing — recalls to a certain extent Marcel Ophül’s lengthy interviews edited in a simple, yet highly conversational style in his two-part films The Sorrow and the Pity (1969) about the Vichy government.

The crew consisted of himself and two close friends, Uruguayan filmmaker Juan Pittaluga and Caribbean-Brazilian photographer Stephanie Pommez. In an interview for Cinéaste, Nossiter explains that he did about 65% of the camera work, Pittaluga 25% and Pommez only 10%.

Dan Georgakas and Barbara Saltz, “Entretien avec Jonathan Nossiter,” Cinéaste, (Summer 2005), 12.
century realist novelists, particularly Balzac’s use of “types,” on his work. As transnational as Jonathan Nossiter himself, these casts transcend national and historical boundaries and share instead common values about life, identity, and legacy.

In *Mondovino*, Nossiter’s conversations with these characters unveil the internal politics of the wine business, transatlantic financial partnerships, the more prominent role of wine critics and consultants and how all of this changes the ethics of wine production. Thus, the Mondavi and Staglin families, based in Californian Napa Valley, can easily be seen as playing the part of capitalist entrepreneurs ready to conquer an emerging global market and impose upon French producers their modern techniques and marketing strategies. On the French side, local Communist mayors and small producers are the unfortunate victims of American imperialism while world-renowned autodidact wine critics and “flying winemakers” spread the gospel of “oxygenated” wines to new wine-producing countries and amateur brand-owners. However, *Mondovino* resists such a black and white image of today's business world. Wine critic Robert Parker may be an American lawyer with no family history in the business, but the “flying winemaker” is French and counts clients in India, Argentina, as well as France and Italy. Similarly, while some of the most renowned châteaux in the Bordeaux area are converted to new management methods and ready to alter their signature tastes to compete on international markets, small Argentinean or American producers and importers perpetuate the notion of *terroir* and traditions. Of course, one should not forget that Jonathan Nossiter himself was born an American, lived and studied in several European, South-East Asian and Latin American countries, and is here supporting small-scale independent production while using a digital
I will now describe how, as two groups – the “terroirists” and the global entrepreneurs – take turns in front of the camera, two notions of individuality take shape.

The first cast is largely made up of “the terroirists,” a term coined by their competitors. The group brings together well-established French producers Hubert de Montille and his children (Burgundy), more recent wine makers such as Yvonne Hégoburu (Pyrenees), angry traditionalist/regionalist Aimé Guibert (Languedoc), as well as non-French small producers Battista Columbu (Sardinia) and Antonio Cabezas (Argentina). In the second cast, Nossiter lines up big international brand names such as representatives of French aristocracy, the Rothschild family, their Italian counterparts, the Antinoris, family-based French corporations like Boisset (Burgundy), but also New World entrepreneurs, including the Staglins and the Mondavis in the Napa Valley and rich Argentinian estate owners. Nossiter insists on the guiding influence of a French-American duet: The Wine Spectator’s famous critic Robert Parker who, through his highly-anticipated annual rankings, calls the shots in the global wine trade, and Michel Rolland, one of the most influential and in-demand wine consultants across the world, whose international contracts perpetuate the success of branded wines. While the defenders of terroir spontaneously confide in the filmmaker telling personal stories about their relation to winemaking, the “incorporated” cast hides behind more formal protocols and business plans. Jonathan Nossiter never conceals where he stands in this chess game where multiple ideas about tastes and individuality compete with one another. He nevertheless always allows his interlocutors enough

282 Jonathan Nossiter is the son of New York Times foreign correspondent Bernard Nossiter. Due to his father's job, the family lived in several countries during his childhood, including France, Italy, Greece and India. After completing a degree in Classics at Dartmouth College, Nossiter studied art history in Paris and worked as an assistant director for various stage and film directors, including Fatal Attraction's David Lynn. The author of several documentaries and fiction films, Jonathan Nossiter first won international recognition for his film Sunday (1997) and his collaboration with actress Charlotte Rampling in Signs and Wonder (2000). In addition, Nossiter trained as a sommelier and composed wine lists for many high-ranking restaurants in New York and Rio De Janeiro. Married to documentary filmmaker and photographer Paula Prandini, Nossiter now lives in Brazil, and enjoys dual citizenship between the United States and his adopted country, Brazil.
time and space to express their views and detail their “philosophies” about wine.\textsuperscript{283} It is Nossiter's acute sense of observation and visual irony that express better than words his position and ethical engagement with the world, and his profound divergences with the proponents of brands.

Obvious differences in individual style quickly appear. Throughout the film, two opposite attitudes battle through the characters composed. While Battista Columbu, Hubert de Montille and Aimé Guibert really come out as individual characters, in the multiple evocations of the term, the Mondavis, the Staglins, the Antinoris and the Rothschilds seem to be more national variants of a single, transnational entrepreneurial type. \textit{Mondovino} breaks away from the stereotypical equation between individuality and national tradition, as well as between rural and national imaginary spaces. For the “terroirists,” winemaking is mostly affective and invested with humanistic values. Almost nothing of the actual winemaking process is shown during the encounters, even though wine is often tasted. Instead, we listen to them explaining what growing a vine means for them, how they like their wine, what makes the difference between a good and a bad bottle – just like some people are more attractive and likable than others. Nossiter's conversations often digress from wine to family stories, blending comments about business with words such as “respect,” “love” or “life.” Nossiter's presence, questions and camera never feel intrusive in their interactions with these people, instead, the filmmaker is welcomed and accommodated. In Napa or at Mouton-Rothschild, from PR attachés to “winemaker” or technical and marketing directors, the experience is much less personal and more mediated and controlled. Personal anecdotes are instead replaced by cold assessments of high productivity standards, gross revenue products, and business investments.

\textsuperscript{283} In the director's commentary on the DVD of the theatrical version, Jonathan Nossiter explains he let his subjects free to decide when and where they would be filmed.
This is particularly obvious in the juxtaposition of two encounters: one with Hubert de Montille and the other with the corporate representatives of Mouton-Rothschild at the Pauillac headquarters, near Bordeaux. These two arrival sequences illustrate perfectly the two distinct attitudes I have just mentioned, and what’s more, they both introduce French characters – challenging once again national and cultural stereotypes. In this sequence, two elements singularize Hubert de Montille, his stage presence and his voice. In the first few seconds of the sequence, a voice-over commentary by Montille himself introduces the freethinking spirit that will leave an unforgettable mark on *Mondovino*. “Where there is wine, there is civilization. There is no Barbarism.” Montille’s humanistic comment follows the Californian Garren Staglin’s recollection of his time in the Vietnam War and the ideological underpinnings of the ensuing Cold War between Communist regimes and the capitalist promise of bringing the American lifestyle to everybody.

*Figures 5.22. and 5.23. From the villas of sunny Napa to the historical longevity of Burgundy vintners. (Mondovino, Jonathan Nossiter, 2004 © Goatworks, Les Fils de la Croisade – Diaphana Films; courtesy Jonathan Nossiter)*

Here, not only does the cloudy, Burgundian autumn day contrast with the sunny Californian lunch we have just witnessed but Nossiter’s editing confronts an American soldierly approach to international relations with a French universalist humanistic attitude. Similarly, the Staglins’ extravagant contemporary pieces of furniture and art on display, according to the fashion of the
day, are here replaced with century-old house furnishings, classical paintings and tapestries, attesting to the passage of time and the historical roots of Montille’s family status. Throughout the Burgundy sequence, Hubert de Montille’s voice acts as the suture that holds all the shots and scenes together, as he takes his hosts to his vines and later brings them to his own cellar. If his mannerisms heighten his charismatic presence on the screen, Montille’s voice, memorable explanations about his personal oenological tastes and more general proverbial remarks continue to resonate with the spectator long after the end of the film. These include a matter-of-fact theory about why good husbands, good lovers and good sons-in-law rarely converge in the same man, and the acknowledgement that his son’s wines might be “more civilized,” “more polished,” “smoother,” than his that had “more … edge.” What immediately characterizes Hubert de Montille’s personal style as a man, a vintner and a cinematic presence are his naturalness, his inscription in, and respect for, a historical tradition that exceeds his own legacy and regional roots and belongs to the cultural heritage of humankind – he succeeds in doing so in an unpretentious way.

In Pauillac, at the corporate headquarters of Château Mouton-Rothschild, Nossiter interacts more formally with his hosts, which imposes more distance on the interviews. The faster-pace tune of “Ah! Un Foco Insolito” from Gaetano Donizetti’s opera buffa Don Pasquale that accompanies Nossiter’s car’s arrival at the modern, reflective glass headquarters of Mouton-Rothschild establishes a parallel with their previous visit in Volnay. But it also hints at the commedia dell’arte tradition of exaggerated types. Jonathan Nossiter, who is otherwise casually dressed throughout the film, now wears a suit and looks slightly less at ease than he normally does. While the Baroness, of course, is never in sight, his questions are answered by a series of PR attachés, technical and marketing directors. These corporate representatives lack Hubert de
Montille’s charisma, but as they impose formal constraints on Jonathan Nossiter’s interview, the camera wanders even more loosely than usual through the backgrounds or, on the contrary, stays still and reinforces such imposed rigidity and unrewarding recording and viewing experience.

Figure 5.24. Complying with Mouton-Rothschild’s strict framing protocol. (Mondovino, Jonathan Nossiter, 2004 © Goatworks, Les Fils de la Croisade – Diaphana Films; courtesy Jonathan Nossiter)

So, when the PR attaché warns Nossiter that their marketing director is used to being tightly framed for media statements, the frame suddenly reveals a manifold of visual compartments of all sides and nature: wall paintings and photographs, square accessories placed on the desk, and of course a careful attention to the conventional cinematic framing that creates a deeper sense of space within the frame by making obvious the physical distance between Nossiter and his professional interlocutor sitting on the other side of the desk and the room. This contrasts with the more intimate settings that occur throughout Mondovino. It is necessary to point out here that the light camera used by Nossiter had fairly poor focus, which partially explains the shallow depth of field that characterizes another visually memorable interview conducted at Mouton-Rothschild, that of the “winemaker,” Patrick Léon.
What was a technical flaw though becomes in this scene a vehicle of visual irony. Our attention as spectators is directed towards a goofy employee, easily identifiable from his blue overalls, commonly worn by manual laborers in France. The camera and the viewer, by the same token, watch him repair infrastructures in the background while Léon, the technical director of Mouton-Rothschild, recalls the genesis of the Opus One joint venture with the Mondavis in the Napa Valley. The duration of this visual trick creates a certain implicit game with this man. As a result, Léon’s explanations will remain as blurry in our minds as his visual features on the screen. The constraints imposed by his hosts do not discourage Nossiter from scanning the frame in search of unusual situations and characters. Initial technical limitations soon become a playful escape for the filmmaker, especially when his interlocutors provide confused and confusing information. Documentary filmmaking conventions are somehow hijacked by the PR protocols imposed upon Nossiter: the camera wanders through the background while the foreground falls into shallow focus, “talking heads” disappear in the midst of cluttered visual composition. Yet, it is precisely in the recovered backgrounds that Nossiter finds the creative space that has been denied to him.

The first idea of individual production, embodied by Hubert de Montille, is a long-term, often cross-generational, pact with environmental factors, cultivating and making the best of
natural resources. The second, represented here by Mouton-Rothschild, praises entrepreneurship as autonomous agency, invested in innovative and profitable business expansion: what has become associated with American economic liberalism and, more recently, global capitalism.

For Olivier Torrès and Pascale Blandin, the Mondavi affair illustrates the profound divergences that have historically defined French and American entrepreneurship. The affair, which has become a case study in the economic and structural transformations of the wine industry, is alluded to in the film in the sequences featuring Aimé Guibert (9'53-20'27). A wine producer in southern France, he waged a war against the Californian company's project to buy lots in the area. Torrès and Blandin argue that, transposed to the wine business, American liberalism promotes a deterritorialization of ownership and, largely through technological innovations, engineers can produce consuming subjectivities by designing new tastes and creating new demands. As such, they seek to impose the rule of brands in a practice thus far dominated by geographical denominations. The French corporatist model is more defensive and tends to withdraw into its traditional reliance on notions of artisanal craftsmanship, geographical and historical anchoring for self-preservation.

The question of individual freedom versus traditional determination traverses the whole film and series; however, Mondovino suggests instead reconciliation, more than a disjunction, between individual freedom and tradition. If wine maintains a privileged relationship to terroir, the notion was and still is a productive way out of global/local/glocal theoretical deadlocks. To some extent, one may see Mondovino as precisely this: the re-formulation of terroir through what may be the least adequate medium, digital video. By systematically contrasting two conceptions of what wine should reflect and taste, the film questions the systematic “dis-

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organicity” performed in the name of globalization. By that, I mean the dismantlement of organic forms of production, identification and expression through technological substitution and the replacement of a world understood as ethos – the common habitat of free, organically connected subjects – by one endlessly perfectible and constantly revalued globe from which more and more people are excluded. Paradoxically, the film does not address the recent popularity of so-called organic wines rejecting any kind of chemical or mechanical treatments. In *Mondovino*, wine can thus be seen as a metaphor of such a process: the result of human collaboration with nature, it has become a product, increasingly engineered and subjected to financial and social capitalization.

Reducing *Mondovino* to global turf wars between Old European fiefdoms and New World bulldozing entrepreneurs would leave aside Jonathan Nossiter's primary concern, namely individual freedom and the possibility for a world citizenry to exist in the current globalization of human, social and cultural narratives. In the following passage from *Liquid Memory*, Nossiter brings together notions of humanity, artisanry and freedom:

> If we abandon the fierce defense of regional difference, we abandon an essential notion of human identity in the face of transnational marketing and homogenization. Transnoche, indeed. The inexorable logic of those who seek to subjugate cultural difference for personal profit – whether a multinational corporation or a carpetbagging “artisan” – is to transform us from citizens asserting our tastes to consumers fooled into an illusion of choice as an expression of taste.\(^{285}\)

In episode 6 of the television series, Hubert de Montille, the self-proclaimed free-thinker spokesman of Nossiter's views, cynically envisions a nightmarish scenario of such domination of mass-produced tastes: “I will mention something completely eccentric: if a consumer says ‘what

I like in wine is its coke taste,’ well, believe me, they will make wine that tastes like coke because they will have stats proving a large majority of consumers like that. What we do, on the contrary, we make wine, we don't make wines egoistically for us, we make wine that reflects the terroir.” Beyond the fact that each winemaker's personality meets the terroir halfway and that, therefore, Hubert de Montille's wines do reflect his own particular tastes, what Jonathan Nossiter defends in the quote above and throughout the film is individual freedom versus market standardization. When France reasserted cultural exceptionalism as a fundamental principle in the early nineties, it was meant to undermine the changes that were shifting sovereignty away from national governments to supranational entities or a less circumscribed global sphere of economic activity. In Mondovino, defending regional differences, terroirs and local tastes certainly protects local political and economic interests but it also manifests a more general ethical concern for the individual as a free subject.

While these two general characterizations are easily noticeable in Mondovino, Jonathan Nossiter problematizes the two models outside of strict national identifications and prefers distinguishing two ethical relationships with the world. These two modalities are further developed in episode 7 of the mini series, which alternates between those who praise the freedom of consumers to influence production and those who reassert the ethical responsibility of men and women towards their natural environment and history. Mondovino obviously stands by the latter: in addition to placing terroir at the center of the production process, Nossiter questions the claim that New World entrepreneurs democratize wine production and consumption. The Wine Spectator editor-in-chief, Tom Matthews, interviewed in the series, argues that wine should only be judged according to the individual's subjective sensory experience and not to an authenticity
expressing the standards of higher authorities.\textsuperscript{286} Below, Matthews puts terroir, Communism and God on an equal footing, opposing thereby individual self-affirmation to doctrinal principles. The following quote explains the origin of the term “terroirism,” which denies terroir its claim of authenticity and associates its assertion with some radical (almost literally) form of protectionism:

It seems to me that this appeal to authenticity in wine is this appeal to a higher power, one that locates authority outside the self, outside the sensory. I want to bring it back and make an argument about subjectivity. What do you like and why do you like it? It's not that I like it because God, the Communist Party or the terroir says it's better. I like it and I'll defend it on my own terms.

As Matthews unabashedly identifies subjectivity with absolute self-determination, his argument stems from a notion of the subject that has been embraced by advocates of political and economic liberalism. According to this position, individualism stands as a safeguard against the repressive nature of any form of collectivism, whether political, religious or philosophical. However, one may contest that where he compares the terroir to religious and political ideologies as instances that restrain individual freedom, he forgets that economic rationality justifies another form of higher authority, the market.

By allowing diverging opinions to be heard, Mondovino situates the tensions that tear wine production apart in a broader debate about subjectivity. For the proponents of economic liberalism, subjectivity is identified with individualism. However, it is subjectivity as the ability to produce one's individual self that focuses reactions against global capitalism and what is seen as the standardization of tastes and a complete disregard of environmental factors. For Aubin Deckeyser, this gap is precisely where Michel Foucault locates the ethics of subjectivity:

\textsuperscript{286} Mondovino: La saga du vin (Jonathan Nossiter, TF1 Video, 2006). Episode 7, “All roads lead to Rome.”
The subject is a function of the individual but is not the individual, and vice versa, individuation is a function of the subject. […] It is only when human beings are already, essentially, subjects, that the aberration of equating subjectivism with individualism becomes possible. But it is also when human beings remain subjects that the struggle against individualism and for the community as the field and goal of all efforts and all sorts of utility becomes meaningful.287

Here, Deckeyser’s distinction between individuation, individualism and subjectivity supports the distinction Nossiter pinpoints throughout *Mondovino* between the branding of individualism on the one hand, and *terroir* as the terrain where individuation can be experimented and achieved, on the other. Economic and political liberalism conceives of subjectivity as what is produced through individual choice and consumption of commodities and the absolute autonomy of the individuals as being their own limits. For those who refuse the widespread standardization of such a system through global capitalism, subjectivity is not produced through what one consumes, rather it is a pre-existing essence that gets fully expressed in one's capacity to remain singular as part of a community and through one's participation in the common world.

Nossiter's repeated visits with a varied sample of winemaking traditions, old and newer, seem to lean towards the second definition of subjectivity and suggest that a reliance on the connection established between individuals and their environment through progressive learning and respect may be more democratic. For him, basing everything on technological creation and the financial investments this requires certainly is elitist and capitalizes on the disconnection.

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287 Aubin Deckeyser, *Ethique du Sujet: Problématiser à partir de Foucault* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 71, 74-75. (English translations are mine) “Le sujet est une fonction de l'individu mais n'est pas l'individu, et réciproquement, l'individuation est une fonction du sujet. […] Ce n'est que là où l'Homme est déjà, par essence, sujet, qu'est donnée la possibilité de l'aberration dans l'inessentiel du subjectivisme au sens de l'individualisme. Mais ce n'est également que là où l'Homme reste sujet que la lutte expresse contre l'individualisme et pour la communauté en tant que champ et but de tout effort et de toute espèce d'utilité a seulement un sens.”
between production and consumption and, more generally speaking, between individuals and the world. In his view, the argument according to which non-terroir wines allow the consumers to exert their own agency is unsustainable since what is thought to be a personal taste is in fact fabricated and forced upon them by lack of market variety. As the conversations with Haitian immigrants in New York about mango trees or Antonio Cabezas, an indigenous Argentinean producer, illustrate, the location plays a tremendous role in the quality and the cultural function of agricultural production. (127′53-131′) Nossiter recalls that, in Cabezas' case, his wine is in fact the product of enmeshed complicated and contradictory historical and geographical narratives: the techniques that he now uses to make his wine were imported by the same people who massacred his people, the Spanish conquistadors. At the same time, this wine is also the expression of the soil where his people settled.

It is therefore not a coincidence if Antonio Cabezas’s words conclude this two-and-a-half hour-long meditation. Far into the Argentinian pampa, Jonathan Nossiter meets this independent farmer whose daily life is miles away from the privileged villas, châteaux and old houses of

Figure 5.26. Sharing a glass of wine in Argentinian mountains. (*Mondovino*, Jonathan Nossiter, 2004 © Goatworks, Les Fils de la Croisade – Diaphana Films; courtesy Jonathan Nossiter)
Napa, Bordeaux and Burgundy. Working the land barely allows him to survive. When asked why he does not sell his land, he humbly explains that “he is a Native, his father was pure blood indigenous;” therefore, this land is his life, what defines it and more or less his only asset. He owes it to his people to keep holding to this land in order to preserve their history and their memory. This last encounter encapsulates perfectly the notion of finding and sharing the common sense of dignity and civilization in the singular that Nossiter holds dear. When Antonio Cabezas insists on giving the glass of wine we see in the illustration above and a bottle to Jonathan Nossiter and his friend Stéphanie Pommez, the camera’s suddenly silent awareness of its intrusive scanning of Cabezas’s life and limited belongings reinforces the beauty of the moment, as it is experienced by Nossiter himself.

Beyond the wine industry, the terroir, when detached from nationalist affirmation, becomes in Nossiter’s view the ideal alternative to the neo-liberal promotion of consumerism as the ethos of individual freedom. His book Liquid Memory: Why Wine Matters elaborates further on the relevance of terroir as the expression of world diversity in lieu of global homogenization. Unlike past reactionary withdrawals into nationalistic and local particularisms, his definition of terroir seeks to defy pre-established boundaries insofar as it is predicated on the principle of diversity and difference more than it asserts the superiority of one local expression:

Without terroir – in wine, cinema or life […] –, there is no individuality, no dignity, no tolerance, and no shared civilization. Terroir is an act of generosity. The last thing it should be is sectarian or reactionary. […] It is a way to share what is essentially local, not to exclude, but rather to include, to initiate each one of us to the mystery and the specific beauty of ‘another.’ Any ‘other’.”

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Now, this universalistic elevation of *terroir* as a counter-model to global exclusion, as idyllic as it sounds, could be somewhat undermined by the choice of characters introduced throughout the film – largely distributed along New and Old Worlds’ lines. However, the last sequence, filmed in Argentina with Antonio Cabezas relativizes the Franco-American ideological antagonisms that have essentially guided Nossiter’s opposition between brands and *terroir* wines throughout the film. Still, his view of *terroir* certainly betrays Nossiter’s reverence for the ethics of cosmopolitanism – which has made a comeback in American and European philosophy in the last few years.289

To conclude this section, I will look more closely at Nossiter's experimentation with digital video and documentary narrativity as his focus lies primarily on the materialization of “traditionalité.” Following Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda, all of whom have embraced the last digital revolution of cinema, Nossiter transposes visually what Paul Ricoeur initially saw in literature: “the interplay of innovation and sedimentation,” what he calls “traditionalité.”290 While local critiques of globalization are often dismissed as traditionalistic, Ricoeur prefers to distinguish between traditionalism, which establishes traditions as a guiding authority, and “traditionalité,” which reaffirms the temporality of knowledge and subjectivity. Like *terroir*, “traditionalité” transcends individual time and connects us to humanity and to the endless layers of innovation and reinvention whose sediments have aggregated over time and across generations.291 Like Georges Rouquier and Raymond Depardon, Jonathan Nossiter

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reclaims the narrative dimension of documentary and its ability to become a repository of residual forms of knowledge, memories and stories. However, more than the other two, it is the ethical dimension of speech that matters most; visual narrativity seems to simply support and reinforce what is being said and the values that traverse the narration.

Globalization converged in time with the digital cinematic revolution. As Nossiter repeatedly says in interviews and his book, *Mondovino* is as much about wine as it is about cinema. By choosing to work within the technical, spatial and narrative constraints of the lightweight digital camera, Jonathan Nossiter is making a statement about the possibility of digital documentary filmmaking. Film critic Pascal Bonitzer denies (digital) video the ability to capture the nuances of the world it films, to develop a narrative in time and defines the digital image as a flat, empty metamorphic surface.

Metamorphosis is the natural regime of video, it has therefore no natural connection to any kind of reality, the notions of shot and field are irrelevant when referring to it [...] With video, space is pure surface, that is why one does not say “mise-en-scène” but “page layout” when describing the electronic image. [...] Video does not tell a story, it unrolls a short visual poem, a haiku (or it reflects on the visible).292

Pascal Bonitzer's Bazinian approach to cinematic realism is quite unforgiving to the specificities of digital video; yet, I would like to argue that in the case of *Mondovino*, the limitations generated by the digital medium are compensated by Nossiter's focus on the conversational

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(The English translation is mine) “La métamorphose est le régime naturel de l'image vidéo, elle n'a donc aucun rapport naturel à une quelconque réalité, les notions de plan et de champ ne lui sont pas pertinentes [...] L'espace vidéo est pure surface, c'est pourquoi on parle à propos de l'image électronique non de “mise en scène” mais de “mise en pages”. [...] La vidéo ne raconte pas d'histoire, elle développe un petit poème visuel, un haïku (ou bien elle philosophe sur le visible [...]”).
narrations recorded. It is speech, in its various forms – stories, statements, or mundane conversations – that expand the flat surface of video and drive Nossiter's subjective inquiry in the world wine business. The suggested, more than explicit, depth of the terroir contrasts with the sophisticated, composed displays of terroirized landscapes.

Hero of the film, Hubert de Montille is the charismatic elderly gentleman vintner and incarnation of wine's liquid memory in the film, which may explain his presence on the film's official poster. If the series really explodes the main problematic in a mosaic of characters, Montille is the central character of the theatrical version, probably because his story allows Nossiter to branch out in a variety of directions. A modern representative of French small provincial aristocracy, he is a renowned Burgundy wine producer, a region that has recently challenged Bordeaux's national supremacy among foreign imports of French wine. In addition, his own family illustrates some current changes in the whole industry: his son, while being loyal to his father's tradition, seeks to leave his own mark on the family business, seduced by the notoriety that a magazine like The Wine Spectator offers; his daughter, who currently works for one of the largest locally-based multinational companies, finds her work clashing more and more with the values she shares with her father.

From the moment the camera enters Volnay, moving through the narrow streets of the old Burgundy village, there is a tacit connection between the man and the geological environment. When they are not in his home, Nossiter interviews him in his vineyards, Montille usually stands in the foreground while the Burgundy landscape unrolls towards the horizon. His slightly bent silhouette seems to wander through each sequence filmed in Volnay, even when the focus is on his son or daughter. Montille's equation with Jonathan Nossiter's definition of creation as a universal compromise between the human and the environment is best summarized in the shot
that shows him walking away along a dirt path between two vineyards. All the elements that materialize the force of terroir converge in the tableau shown below. Montille's human presence leads the viewer's eye deep into the bushy horizon along a path lined with stone walls, tracing the limit and melting of wild and tamed nature.

Figure 5.27. Hubert de Montille. (Mondovino, Jonathan Nossiter, 2004 © Goatworks, Les Fils de la Croisade – Diaphana Films; courtesy Jonathan Nossiter)

Yvonne Hégburú, Battista Columbu and Antonio Cabezas, are similarly immersed in the terroirs they praise: Nossiter stresses the human-environment symbiosis that underlies the notion of terroir.

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293 For Jonathan Nossiter, “any art form” requires to find the perfect balance “between the imposition of an artist’s ego and the humble recognition of the fragility of any individual in the universe.” (Liquid Memory, 164)
As we can see, Yvonne Hégoburu almost disappears within the depth of her vines, melting into the landscape. The lighting accentuates Battista Columbu’s “embeddedness” in his natural environment as the warm yellow palette of the background reflects and illuminates his face. As for Antonio Cabezas, the entire sequence emphasizes his solitary, yet symbiotic, existence on his ancestors’ land.

By choosing to insert himself into his film, Jonathan Nossiter embodies both of the relationships to the world and the natural environment sketched out all along: on one hand, his physical presence re-embeds him in the landscape alongside Hubert deMontille, Yvonne Hégoburu and the Columbus, but, on the other hand, as a filmmaker, he could also be seen as replicating through the screen frame the commodifying, or at least aestheticizing, vignette-like scenery promoted on the labels of Mondavi wine bottles. By presenting terroir as a contentious concept in today’s international wine industry, Mondovino cuts across the economic, cultural,
political and environmental stakes of globalization. If it seems to be replaying the Franco-American culture wars that took place throughout the 1990s, *Mondovino* reveals a more complex critique of today’s dominant ethos: the neo-liberal promotion of consumerism sold worldwide as individual freedom. More importantly, Jonathan Nossiter finds in the *terroir* a terrain of formal and ideological experimentations where the relationship between traditions, modernity and twenty-first century reinventions of subjectivity can be renegotiated. This is something he certainly shares with Agnès Varda, and like in *The Gleaners and I*, *Mondovino* leads Jonathan Nossiter to explore the subversive nature of digital filmmaking, a medium that combines the latest technological revolutions with the most immediate artisanal approach to creation.

**Conclusion**

Georges Rouquier, Raymond Depardon and Jonathan Nossiter offer three different views of the relationship between the rural ethos and subjectivity. They allow us to look at the evolution of cinematic representations of rural space over time while highlighting the convergence of such different approaches in the expression of documentary narrativity. This last chapter ends this dissertation and positions rurality, in a broad sense, at the core of the current debate about globalization around their films. If the resurgence of utopian agrarian values in recent documentary films signals the ideological and political impasse which French society faces today, the revival of *terroir* as a progressist ideal has nonetheless been successful in bringing out crucial cultural contradictions, issues and debates. Most significantly, their emphasis on interconnectedness and the necessity to conceive of the globalized society as an ethos more than a network of economic, financial and technological transactions offers a fruitful counter-
model to late twentieth-century multiculturalism – which developed concomittantly to the emergence of vast metropolitan urban sprawls and provided nation-states with models to manage the massive arrival of immigrant populations following decolonization.

Georges Rouquier and Raymond Depardon focus on rural culture as a way of life that is increasingly threatened and displaced by modernization and industrialization. Their idea of rurality is in fact fairly traditional as they film farmers in small villages and remote regions. Jonathan Nossiter adopts a similar approach to the impact of technologies and mass production but, in *Mondovino*, the ethics of *terroir* and embeddedness challenges traditional distinctions between rural and urban practices. In the films discussed throughout the chapter, the rural ethos transcends strict geographical and social boundaries as it gradually becomes a narrative, a fictionalized and temporalized space where the filmmakers locate alternative manifestations of subjectivity and individuality. As they also intend to move away from earlier cinematic and cultural projections of national imaginaries onto the rural landscapes, these three filmmakers explore the alterations of documentary aesthetics as it confronts rural subjects and ethical experiences of the land.

However, telling the rural and the *terroir* differs from fictional representations of landscapes and rural ways of living; instead, it requires capturing and narrating various forms of knowledge through which people situate themselves in relation to their natural environment. Workers' political subjectivities have been based on the reappropriation of skills, *savoir-faire*, as the knowledge owned by workers, and therefore what can define their autonomy. For rural subjects or those who reproduce the rural ethos, *savoir-faire* is also essentially *savoir-dire* – “know-how-to-tell” – insofar as the gestures performed by farmers or wine producers mediate a
specific relation to the environment, time, and space.\textsuperscript{294} As these filmmakers narrate what the subjects have to say about their practices, documentary does with rurality presented as the ethics of local singularity and individuality what late nineteenth-century novels and micro-narratives did with artisan craftsmanship as machines replaced and reduced them to folklore from the past.\textsuperscript{295} However, if these contemporary films deplore the disappearance of rural traditions, cultural diversity and collective memory, filmmakers emphasize the living residues that memory and narratives carry.

\textsuperscript{294} Michel De Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (University of California Press, 1988), 78.

Conclusion

Globalization has certainly promoted a renewed social, political, and as I have demonstrated in this study, ethical engagement on the part of French documentary filmmakers. While workers no longer embody the revolutionary aspirations of past militant projects, work remains more than ever a field of contestation and experimentations. The films analyzed, and, more generally, the ever-growing corpus of documentaries which has been alluded to throughout the dissertation, unanimously condemn neoliberalism as the totalitarian dictatorship of market economy over human beings in their everyday movements and social interactions. While such vilification of capitalism reflects the tone of social critiques against global capitalism, what distinguishes the films of the corpus from past political films lies in their focus on the subversive dimension of work more than on the workers. If waged labor is discarded as pure alienation, when resignified as the activity deliberately or creatively taken on by individuals, work is presented as a process of “subjectivization.” Jacques Rancière’s term, which I have used all along to express this idea of becoming subject, applies perfectly to documentary’s treatment of work in this context.

For Rancière, politics is also an aesthetic rupture, a redistribution of roles, of common representations of what the world looks like and who structures this knowledge. As they invest the unemployed, gleaners, and farmers, but also the act of choosing to be unemployed, of gleaning and of privileging small-scale farming over industrializing the land, filmmakers perform and participate in the political and aesthetic rupture that Rancière describes. Contemporary filmmakers, though, go one step further than what Rancière first conceptualized from the very project of workers’ emancipation and further than what their predecessors achieved
in the nineteen-sixties. For Rancière, politics starts when individuals who are confined within pre-determined activities and social spaces “take the time” to reclaim their equal status and active participation in the world.\(^{296}\) In his view, work has traditionally served as a space of confinement insofar as it takes away from workers’ time.

While Rancière, and militant cinema, located emancipation in the displacement of invisible lines that subjected workers to the permanent regimentation of work, the individuals filmed in this project are in different situations. The gleaners and the unemployed are either already outside of the space of work, or voluntarily choose to cross the line indefinitely. Therefore, their emancipation comes from the fact that they either make visible the productive interstices that run between the space of work, the space of society and the space of creative production or they radicalize the workers’ emancipation and do not take the time to work. Somehow, it is the consumer of late twentieth century whose emancipation resembles the most that of workers in previous decades. Normally maintained within the invisible space of consumerism, the consumer-filmmaker takes the time to wander around, make visible the social, human and economic processes which bring them endlessly renewed items and material fantasies. They therefore question the political and ethical implications of the system instead of buying into it eagerly and unknowingly. By opposing these three emancipated subjects to the alienated laborers of the neoliberal system, Pierre Carles, Agnès Varda, Luc Moullet, and Vincent Glenn engage in a creative politics of work. They also construct such politics outside of traditional class-based struggles, since both the unemployed, the gleaners, the consumers, on one side, and the waged laborers, on the other, come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

As for the presence of farmers in this corpus, it manifests a second movement in the redefinition of militancy both in contemporary social movements, such as *altermondialisme*, and

for documentary filmmaking. This movement marks the reactivation of a utopian cosmopolitan, humanist and universalist ethos that underlies what Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Zarifian, among others, refer to as the “mondialité” of humankind. Both define the term as the expression of a “becoming-world” and a “becoming-subject-in-the-world.” Zarifian’s definition of “mondialité,” which he contrasts with “mondialisation,” finds direct echoes in the politico-ethical projects characterizing altermondialist activism but also more independent interventions, like Jonathan Nossiter’s celebration of terroir as a transnational, universalist ethos.

“mondialité” includes all types of identities, perspectives, engagements, which choose to promote humankind as a concrete, solidary and emancipated entity, in the face of all the problems we must solve together. It is from this point of view that the concept of “world-community” […] seems to be most appropriate and more rigorous than that of “world-society.” We form a community before we become a society.²⁹⁷

If the ideal political Subject that the Proletariat embodied throughout most of the twentieth century appears to have been recently replaced by an equally idealistic becoming cosmo-polity, globalization has nonetheless encouraged documentary filmmakers to question the legacy of previous practitioners and to renew the capacities of the practice to engage with the world and mediate the emancipation of individual subjects. Contemporary French documentary has successfully integrated early political condemnations of exploitation and alienation within a broader ethical project which consists in laying the foundations for a sustainable world democracy and the affirmation of a post-national global community, increasingly referred to as our mondialité.


“‘mondialité’ est l’ensemble des appartenances, perspectives, engagements qui font le choix de promouvoir une humanité concrète solidaire et émancipée, face à l’ensemble des problèmes que nous devons, en commun, affronter. C’est de ce point de vue que le concept de “communauté-monde” […] nous semble plus approprié et rigoureux que celui de “société-monde.” Nous formons communauté, avant que de former société.” Translation is mine.
To echo Dominique Baqué’s faith in the capacity of documentary filmmaking to be the only true political form of art today, I will simply say that what most of the filmmakers introduced here share is the belief that “fostering thinking in order to reactivate politics […] is what […] summarize[s] the enormous task of documentaire engagé.” Thus, documentary no longer serves as the weapon of the Proletarian revolution, and beyond its affirmation of subjective emancipation and humanity against neoliberal dispossession, documentary more than ever asserts its role as an “intercessor” in the democratic probing of the economic management of the world.

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Filmography

Films analyzed


**Films mentioned**

1928 – *The Crowd* (King Vidor) – 98 mns. USA.

- *La zone* (George Lacombe) – 25 mns. 35 mm/BW. Prod. and Dist.: Tardif.

1931 – *A nous la liberté* (René Clair) – 104 mns. France.


1936 – *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin) – 87 mns. USA.


1944 – *Farrebique* (George Rouquier) – 90 mns. 35 mm/BW. Prod. and Dist.: Les Films Etienne Lallier, L’Ecran français.


1966 – *Brigitte et Brigitte* (Luc Moullet) – 71 mns. 35 mm/BW.

1968 – *Citroën-Nanterre* (Guy Devart and Edouard Hayem) – 63 mns. BW.

- *Cléon* (Alain Laguarda) – 27 mns. 16 mm/BW. Prod. and Dist.: Iskra.

- *Nantes-Sud Aviation* (Pierre-William Glenn and Michel Andrieu) – 30 mns. BW.


1972 – *Humain, trop humain* (Louis Malle) – 70 mns. 16 mm/Color.
  – *La nouvelle école des femmes* (Marcel Trillat and Jacques Krier)
1973 – *Jusqu’au bout* (Cinélutte) – 40 mns. 16 mm/BW. Prod. and Dist.: Collectif Cinélutte.
  – *Les Lip ou le gout du collectif* (Dominique Dubosc) – 60 mns. Betacam SP/BW. Prod. and Dist.: Kinofilm, INA.
  – *Garadrem lo Larzac* (Daniel Bloch, Pierre Haudiquet and Isabelle Lévy) – Prod. and Dist.: Copra Films.
  – *L’exil* (Michel Parmart and Marcel Trillat)
  – *Anatomie d’un rapport* (Luc Moullet) – 82 mns. BW.
  – *Chaix vivra* (Jean-Louis Lorenzi and Michel Carrié)
  – *Condamnés à réussir* (François Jacquemain and Claude Eveno) – 60 mns. 16 mm/BW. Prod. And Dist.: CID.
1977 – *Le Fond de l’air est rouge* (Chris Marker) – 230 mns. 16 mm and 35 mm/Color. Prod. and Dist.: Iskra, INA, Dovidis.
  – *La voix de son maître* (Nicolas Philibert and Gérard Mordillat) – 100 mns. 16 mm. Prod. and Dist.: Laura Productions/INA.
  – *Alertez les bébés* (Jean-Michel Carré) – 87 mns. 16 mm/Color. Prod. and Dist.: Les films du grain de sable.


1994 – *Les trottoirs de Paris* (Jean-Michel Carré)


– *Le monde entier regarde* (Emanuel Danas-Caillet)


– *Une journée dans la vie d'un pneu* (Dir. Richard Puech) – 80 mns.


– *La sociologie est un sport de combat* (Pierre Carles) – 140 mns. 35 mm/Color. Prod. and Dist.: C-P productions, VF Films productions.


– *Gêne(s)ration* (Dir. Alexis Mital Toledo) - 52 mns. DV Cam/ Color. Prod. and Dist.: Coup d'œil, ARTE France. France.


– *Un monde en fusion* (Julie Bertuccelli) – 53 mns. DVC Pro/Color. Prod. and Dist.: AMIP, ARTE France.

– *Vers un autre monde* (Jean-Christophe Victor)


– Un autre film est possible (Vincent Gaillard and Jérôme Polidor)


– Moi Sékou, mon exil, mon village, mon combat (Eric Mounier) – 2004. Prod. and Dist.: IRD Audiovisuel, ADAV.

– 8 Clos à Evian (Gilles Perret and Fabrice Ferrari) – 85 mns. DV Cam/Color. Prod. and Dist.: VLR Productions, La Vaka.


– La cauchemar de Darwin (Hubert Sauper) – 105 mns. France/Austria/Belgium. Color. Prod. and Dist.: Mille et une productions, Coop99 film produktions, Saga ilm.


– Alerte à Babylone (Jean Druon)

– La carotte et le bâton (Stéphane Arnoud)

– *Le prestige de la mort* (Luc Moullet) – 75 mns. Color.


– *Dominium Mundi* (Gérard Caillat) – 67 mns. Prod. and Dist.: Idéale audience, ARTE France.


– *Bulles, Krachs et rebonds* (Michel Kaptur)


2009 – *Garbage Dream* (Mai Iskander) – 79 mns. USA.

– *Sous les pavés, la terre* (Pablo Girault and Thierry Kruger)

– *Indices (de développement humain)* (Vincent Glenn) – 90 mns. Prod. and Dist.: Coopéative DHR.


2011 – *Notre poison quotidien* (Marie-Monique Robin) – 112 mns. HD Cam/Color. Prod. and Dist.: INA, ARTE France, YLE 1, RTBF Bruxelles, Télé Québec, RTA, Planet Green and Discovery Communications, TV Publica-Canal 7, TSR, RSI.
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