

one~~x~~one
Filmmakers Journal

FREE



A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

CHIM CHIMENY, CHIM CHIM CHER-OO

Welcome to the sixth issue of One+One Filmmakers Journal

“To put it in a nutshell: we have to be bold enough to have an idea. A great idea. We have to convince ourselves that there is nothing ridiculous or criminal about an idea”

Alain Badiou¹

“He is sentenced to six years for wanting to make a film. A film he hasn’t even made. Six years in prison on an idea for a film.”

Rafi Pitts, talking about Jafar Panahi²

Ideas are great and powerful things. A great idea can have far reaching effects. In December 2010, Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi was imprisoned for 6 years and banned from making films for the next twenty, simply for having an idea. Panahi certainly isn’t afraid to defend great ideas in the face of danger (a risk he took in his film *The Circle* which challenged Iran’s treatment of women). He stands as one of the great testaments for filmmakers who aspire to ideas. The charge of “assembly and colluding with the intention to commit crimes against the country’s national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic” is clearly an attempt to suppress ideas and Panahi knows it. In his final statement before being sentenced he declared:

“You are putting on trial not just me, but Iranian social, humanist and artistic cinema – a cinema in which there is no absolutely good or absolutely evil person, a cinema that is not in the service of power or wealth, a cinema that does not condone or condemn anyone ... a cinema that is inspired by [addressing] social malaise and ultimately reaches out to humanity.”³

This issue is dedicated to all those who take up the eternal struggle for great ideas, those who risk death and imprisonment to use cinema for the service of justice and equality. This issue is dedicated to a cinema that serves neither wealth, nor power; but a cinema against social malaise, that reaches out to humanity. This issue is dedicated to the eternal revolution.

To sign the petition against Jafar Panahi’s imprisonment please visit:
<http://www.petitiononline.com/FJP2310/petition.html>

Bradley Tuck

¹ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, Verso: London. p.66

² — Rafi Pitts, Iranian filmmaker- from an open letter to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Quoted at <http://cinfoundation.org/white-meadows/> (sourced on 12/3/11 14:00)

³ Quoted in Hamid Dabashi, ‘Jafar Panahi’s reward for bringing cinematic glory to Iran? Jail’ *The Guardian*, Friday 24 December 2010 (see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/24/jafar-panahi-film-iran-prison-banned>)

Contents

04

Just a Spoonful of Sugar...
Dialectics of Work and Play in
Walt Disney’s *Mary Poppins*

Bradley Tuck

15

Another (Communist) Planet
Zeitgeist and the Venus Project

James Marcus Tucker

25

Imperfect Cinema: DiY Punk, Micro-
Cinema and Participation

Allister Gall & Dan Paolantonio

33

EXPLODING CINEMA

An interview with Duncan Reekie

Daniel Fawcett

40

Revolutions in Progress:

A film Challenge.

One+One

Issue 06

Published 01.04.11

Cover image: Luke Dacey

Design: Benoit Schmit, www.buenito.com

Image Editor: Melanie Hay

Editors: Daniel Fawcett, James Marcus Tucker, Bradley Tuck

Search Facebook for One+One: Filmmakers Journal or tweet us @OnePlusOneUk

Email: info@filmmakersjournal.co.uk

One+One has been produced collaboratively by a group of Brighton-based filmmakers, with internationally based contributors and writers and is a not-for-profit project. HTML and pdf versions of this journal and back issues are available at www.filmmakersjournal.co.uk

Just a Spoonful of Sugar...

Dialectics of Work and Play in Walt Disney's Mary Poppins

Bradley Tuck

*Hike! Ugh! Hike! Ugh! Hike! Ugh! Hike!
When other folks have gone to bed
We slave until we're almost dead
We're happy-hearted roustabouts*

The Roustabout Song in Dumbo

Just whistle while you work

Whistle While you Work in Snow White

*We dig dig dig dig dig dig dig in a mine
the whole day through
To dig dig dig dig dig dig dig is what
we like to do*

Heigh Ho in Snow White

*In every job that must be done
There is an element of fun
You find the fun and snap!
The job's a game*

A Spoonful of Sugar in Mary Poppins

*Now, as the ladder of life 'as been strung
You might think a sweep's on the bot-
tommost rung
Though I spends me time in the ashes
and smoke
In this 'ole wide world there's no 'appier
bloke*

*Chim chiminey
Chim chiminey
Chim chim cher-ee!
A sweep is as lucky
As lucky can be*

Chim chim cher-ee! in Mary Poppins

In Disney's anti-Nazi propaganda cartoon, *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943), Donald Duck wakes up in Nazi Germany where he is forced to continually salute the fuehrer, even while he works 48 hours a day on an assembly line. There is no let up for poor Donald, work dominates and alienates him. Overworked Donald is driven crazy; his world becomes a surreal cacophony of Nazi iconography. Donald wakes up to discover that he is in America; he runs over and embraces the miniature statue of liberty on his windowsill. Nazi Germany pushes the protestant work ethic to its extreme. *There is no room to whistle while you work* here; work is nothing but a tiring, alienating experience. The lines "Arbeit macht frei" or "work will set you free" is entirely perverse in Nazi Germany. Whatever truth resides in the formula, the Nazi reality is quite the contrary.

How about over the other side of the Atlantic? What sort of alternative would Donald face under the dominance of his rich Uncle Scrooge? Throughout the early Disney films the theme of work is continually addressed. Disney films constantly explore the possibility of transforming work into play. Work must be transformed, as if by magic, into a game. Pleasure in work can be found in a host of Disney characters (as exemplified in the quotes above). Here, work is largely a positive thing; pro-



Still from *Mary Poppins*

vided you know how to do it well, it can be spiffing good fun-diddily-fun fun!

It would be wrong, however, to assume that all Disney films have a single message: they don't! If *Snow White* and *Mary Poppins* seem to promote finding pleasure in work, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in *Fantasia* (1940) and *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) are exceptions to this rule. In *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Micky Mouse attempts to seize the production process itself, transforming his miserable alienating servitude into a magical enchanting spectacle, but he fails and must face the wrath of the sorcerer when he returns. Maybe Micky had failed to learn the transformative power of the whistle; instead he had attempted to harness the power of magic (as if it were technology) in order to overcome work itself¹. In a par-

allel vain, yet contrary conclusion, Merlin in *The Sword in the Stone* uses magic to overcome work. When Walt is expected to wash huge amount of dishes, Merlin sets his magic to work and the plates leap into the air. "But I am supposed to do it..." exclaims Walt. "No one will know the difference son, who cares as long as the work gets done" says Merlin paving the way for work free ethics of beatnik bears (*The Jungle Book*, 1967) and care-free cats (*The Aristocats*, 1970). Work is not so much transformed into play, but eliminated altogether. If there is not necessarily one clear message that runs throughout these films, there is however a theme: the relationship between work and play. It is with this revelation that we should pay a visit to number 17, Cherry Tree Lane...

Tension and Unrest in the Banks Household.

It is 1910 and a storm is brewing in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Banks. Tension and unrest is bubbling away under the surface of the Banks family, although they are far too uptight to notice it. For this bourgeois family is run in accordance with the principles of “Tradition, discipline and rule”, they have no time to show how they really feel. At least that is how Mr. Banks would like it. Mr. Banks, a banker by trade, believes in banking so much that he wishes to run his home in the exact same way (with precision, consistency and as little emotion as possible.) Mrs. Banks is a defender of woman’s rights and has a somewhat more relaxed attitude. Yet in both characters there is a kind of bourgeois solipsism, or in Mary Poppins’ words, an inability to “see past the end of their nose.” George Banks is the prime example of this; his consciousness is conditioned almost completely by the ideology of banking and he appears unable to comprehend any perspective outside his own. His family is therefore treated in a formal and emotionless manner. When the admiral comments on the weather saying, “Bit chancy, I’d say. The wind’s coming up and the glass is falling.” Banks simply replies “Good, good, good”. Banks only has ears for banking and is unable to register any threat of impending crises outside of finance. His consciousness is merely directed to the forward march of capital. Slavoj Žižek seems to encapsulate this capitalist consciousness.

“All one has to do here is to compare the reaction to the financial meltdown of September 2008 with the Copenhagen conference of 2009: save the planet from global warming (alternatively: save the

AIDS patients, save those dying for lack of funds for expensive treatments and operations, save the starving children, and so on) –all this can wait a little bit, but the call “Save the banks!” is an unconditional imperative which demands and receives immediate action.”²

In Mr. Banks’ outlook, everything else can wait (even, maybe, if the threat is the entire destruction of life on earth); all that matters is the *practical, level-headedness* of capital!

Mrs. Banks, however, fares only a little better. A defender of women’s rights she may be, but her feminism is also shortsighted. Keeping ‘The cause’ out of the sight of Mr. Banks (knowing how much it infuriates him) she relies upon female nannies and servants to look after the children. She is so dedicated to the cause that she is unable to perceive her own complicity in the subjugation of the women who work for her, not to mention the children who invariably go unnoticed by both parents. The limitation to their approach is reflected in their criteria for nannies. After the most recent nanny has lost the children and quit, Mrs. Banks says to Mr. Banks “I’m sorry, dear, but when I chose Katie Nanna I thought she would be firm with the children. She looked so solemn and cross.” George banks replies “Wini-fred, never confuse efficiency with a liver complaint” What both parents seem to have failed to notice is that rather than it being the case that the nannies have not been strict enough, instead they have been too strict, never really getting the children on their side or thinking on the children’s level. What is needed it a kind, tolerant, nanny with a cheery disposition. Enter Mary Poppins.³



Still from *Mary Poppins*

Mary Poppins (or How to Tidy the Nursery)

Mary Poppins, practically perfect in everyway, descends from the heavens to preach the message of *work as play*. She becomes a nanny for the Banks family and is introduced to Jane and Michael Banks (the children). She sets to work getting the children to tidy the nursery. This is not a mere task, but a lesson. Here, Mary Poppins teaches the child how to transform work into a game. It is a strikingly different work ethic to the stern formalities of their prudent father. For Mary Poppins “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.” One should learn to enjoy work, to transform it into fun via the power of imagination. Of course, it is hard here not to think of Lars Von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* in which Selma, a Czech immigrant in America, is rapidly going blind and working as many hours a day as she can to pay for an operation for her son as the blindness is hereditary and he is likely

to suffer the same fate. Yet the factory work itself is incredibly alienating and in order to get through, she makes a Disneyan move; she imagines she is in a musical. Here the work ethic of Mary Poppins is put into practice: Don’t just accept the drudgery of your working condition, instead turn it into a game! Thus the clatter, crash and clack of heavy machinery become the soundtrack for a work-time fantasy.

A Trip to the Bank

In Balzac, an artist tries to marry into a bourgeois family; he carelessly remarks that money is there to be spent—since it is round, it must roll. The father of the family, reacting with the deepest mistrust, replies: ‘*If it is round for prodigals, it is flat for economical people who pile it up.*’ *The opposite approaches of the bohemian and the rentier (by the end of the tale they have comfortably fused) converge in images of the concrete pleasures of money. Both are thinking of the*

ways in which hands unconsciously encircle coins, a physical sensation. One man high-spiritedly lets them roll loose, the other deliberately stacks them on top

“ Michael is driven by a childlike communism where all social customs and hierarchies are reduced to equivalence ”

of each other, with greedy precision. The spendthrift and the miser both feel the coins between their fingers.

Joachim Kalka - Money as we Knew It?⁴

The children are not the only people that Mary Poppins wants to educate. Mary Poppins manipulates Mr. Banks into taking the children to the bank. He, believing it to be his own idea, declares it to be a “capital idea, a perfect medicine for all this slipshod, sugary female thinking they get around here all day long.” The children, excited that their father is going to show them attention, do not interpret the trip in quite the same way as him. For them it is an opportunity to see the city and all the sights. The city bifurcates: for the Banker, the city is the site of business and commerce, for the children the city is a space for “seeing sights”, for seeing things with no obvious practical purpose that excite and enthrall them; sites of aesthetic curiosities and fun. Throughout the film these two perspectives are forced into dialectal conflict. Mary Poppins, no doubt, fuels this conflict when she points out to the children one of Mr. Bank’s many blindspots: the little old bird woman selling bags of crumbs to feed the birds. To their father, the miser, this is a waist of money, and simply passes him by. Their father

has no time for charity and abhors the waste of money, thus the old lady selling her wares means nothing to him. For the children, she becomes the focal point: the very centre of the city. For the father the bank is the centre of the city, for the children it is the little old bird lady. This doubling of the city draws their coins in different directions. For the father, money is for investing and therefore

money should be deposited in the bank, whilst for the children it is the capacity to buy a particular pleasurable experience: ‘feeding the birds’. When Michael asks to use this tuppence to feed the birds, his father replies “Michael, I will not permit you to throw your money away. When we get to the bank I will show you what can be done with your tuppence and I think you’ll find it extremely interesting.” On arrival at the bank a further doubling of perspectives takes place. Mr. Banks introduces his children to the chairman of the bank, the elder Mr. Dawes as “a giant in the world of finance”. Michael is puzzled by the father’s description and asks himself aloud “A giant?” The father perceiving the world in terms of capital and status sees in the elder Mr. Dawes a giant. Michael, by contrast, does not perceive this class differentiation, he sees only a hunched wizened old man. If for the father sees the banker dressed up in all his class paraphernalia, Michael sees that the emperor is naked; he is simply a human being like you and I. In this sense, Michael is unable to perceive the unconditional imperative that motivates his father: capital. Rather Michael is driven by a childlike communism where all social customs and hierarchies are reduced to equivalence. These two perspectives come to a head, the

children are not persuaded by the opportunities of investment and want to feed the birds; the bankers want to invest. Here the fathers’ solipsistic consciousness is put to the test. Being unable to see beyond the end of his nose he cannot empathise with his own children and has no way of reassuring and communicating with them. As a consequence, this split of perspective turns into a conflict. A scuffle breaks out which frightens the customers into withdrawing all their savings from the bank. A run on the bank ensues. A mere father-son conflict over a tuppence turns into a crisis of capitalism itself. Mr. Banks, unable to manage his own domestic conflicts, manages to muddle his home life with his work and in the process loses his own children, who, frightened and confused, run out of the bank. His whole frame of reference is capital and economic calculability and thus he is unable to perceive the very needs of his own children. Things go full circle and now the father is placed in the same place as the nannies he earlier scorned. Meanwhile the children are thrust into the dark underside of London’s financial capitalism: the slums. Here the reality that remains hidden in the two perspectives of London (the sight seer and the miser) is revealed: the brutal, miserable life of the excluded.

The Lucky Chimney Sweep

The children are lost in London and with this disorientation, the secure idyllic magical London disappears and, maybe for the first time in the film, there is a genuine sense of danger. From a dog’s bark to an old lady who appears ready to sell the children into slavery, the film takes an unsettling turn. We are faced with a London without the security of money or the safe distance of the sightseer. However, this is



Still from Mary Poppins

a Walt Disney picture and brutal confrontations with reality are not their inclination. We do not remain in this brutal reality for long. It is as if an alternative vision of poverty is needed, one which is less dark and haunting. The figure of Bert, the chimney sweep, easily fits the bill; he is more a middle class fantasy of what the working classes are like than a real pauper. Bert appears offering a safety net, which momentarily disappeared. In this pinnacle scene Bert makes a speech that reveals the film’s overall work ethic.

“You know, begging your pardon, but the one my heart goes out to is your father. There he is in that cold, heartless bank day after day, hemmed in by mounds of cold, heartless money. I don’t like to see any living thing caged up. [...] They make cages in all sizes and shapes, you know. Bank-shaped some of ‘em, carpets and all.”

It is not the Chimney sweeps and the poor that are the real exploited, but the bankers and wealthy, those weighed down by money. The chimney sweeps, free from the chains of money, can leap across the skyline singing and dancing: they are the truly liberated! They know that just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down and they can do the most

Still from *Mary Poppins*

horrible jobs, because they know that just a little song will help turn the job into a game. Thus, in the world of *Mary Poppins* the worker and the poor are the truly liberated. In contrast the banker doesn't have such privilege and is weighed down by money and respectability. In light of this it is worth bearing in mind Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's account of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*. When sailing home, Odysseus must pass the Sirens whose lure "remains overpowering. No one who hears their song can escape."

"[Odysseus] knows only two possibilities of escape. One he prescribes to his comrade when faced with the beautiful. He plugs their ears with wax and orders them to row with all their might. Anyone who wishes to survive must not listen to the temptation of the irrecoverable, and is unable to listen only if he is unable to hear. Society has always made sure that this was the case. Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore

anything which lies to one side. The urge toward distraction must be grimly sublimated in redoubled exertions. Thus the workers are made practical. The other possibility Odysseus chooses for himself, the landowner, who has others to work for him. He listens, but does so while bound helplessly to the mast, and the stronger the allurements grow the more tightly he has himself bound, just as later the bourgeois denied themselves happiness the closer it drew to them with the increase in their own power. What he hears has no consequences for him; he can signal to his men to untie him only by movements of his head, but it is too late. His comrades, who themselves cannot hear, know only of the danger of the song, not of its beauty, and leave him tied to the mast to save both him and themselves. They reproduce the life of the oppressor as a part of their own, while he cannot step outside his social role. The bonds by which he has irrevocably fettered himself to praxis at the same time keep the Sirens at a distance from praxis:

their lure is neutralised as a mere object of contemplation, as art. The fettered man listens to a concert, as immobilized as audiences later, and his enthusiastic call for liberation goes unheard as applause."⁵

In the above account, the worker and the bourgeois are both trapped. The bourgeois are consigned to their social role, they have become masters of their own bondage, which only the worker could liberate them from. Yet the worker is oppressed and unable to perceive the beauty that lies beyond their situation, they must simply keep their heads looking forward and row. However in the Poppinsian universe we are only given half of this equation. The bourgeois are bound by their social roles and they must deny themselves happiness, yet the worker does not have his ears plugged at all. Quite the contrary, the chimney sweeps are the liberated; they have the music already playing in their ears. In the Poppinsian universe utopia has come early, the workers do not need liberating from capitalism and as such no actual social reform is needed. However horrible the conditions of a chimney sweep's life is, the "sweep is as lucky as lucky can be."

Bankers who Fly Kites

In *Mary Poppins* the truly "oppressed" is the capitalist and the middle class family. They are the ones who have to learn to lighten up, have fun and go fly a kite. Thus *Mary Poppins* does change the social condition of work and co-ordinates of the bourgeois family, but in a way that leaves the lives of the workers the same. Work is supplemented with leisure (flying a kite); parents come to understand the needs of children and everyone comes to understand the need for a bit of fun. Even the banker comes to understand the Poppin-

sian alchemy (the transformation of the job into a game). Mr. Banks' new found sense of humour not only earns him his job back, but a promotion. The age of remorse is over and the capitalists learn their lesson. What lesson have they learnt? Instead of learning the problems of "the speculation of hedge funds, derivative markets and an economic system based on consumption and debt"⁶, they learnt to have a bit of humour. Capitalism is not overthrown, a run on the bank cannot stop the forward march of capital; instead it acquires a human face. The turn to the tolerant fun-loving family is accompanied by a return to the market and anti-authoritarian fun becomes the order of the day. Here we see a perfect example of Žižek's account of postmodern tolerance. He contrasts two fathers, the first the "good old fashioned totalitarian father", the second the "tolerant postmodern father". It is Sunday afternoon and you have to visit your grandmother, Žižek points out that the "good old fashioned totalitarian father will tell you "listen I don't care how you feel you have to go to your grandmother and behave appropriately." Here the child is able to kick and scream and resistance remains possible. However, the "so-called tolerant postmodern father" uses a different tactic.

What he will tell you is the following - "You know how much your grandmother loves you. But nonetheless you should only visit her if you really want to." Now every child who is not an idiot, and they are not idiots, knows that this apparent free choice secretly contains a much stronger order, not only do you have to visit your grandmother, but you have to like it. That is one example of how tolerance, choice and so on can conceal a much stronger order."⁷

Not only does the fate of the workers not improve, but it is also dressed up in garb that quells any resistance and strug-

gle. Mr. Banks becomes the happy-hearted banker issuing fines and re-mortgaging houses, just as David Cameron becomes the *new Tory* implementing drastic welfare cuts and austerity with the language of participation, democracy and the big society. Justice and equality are abandoned in the name of freedom, fun and participation. Throughout Europe, the failure to challenge capital has required placing the burden on the workers (and the public generally). The irresponsibility and greed of the banker and the structural problems of capitalism are increasingly re-interpreted as “too much public spending”, thus acquitting the banker and placing blame and burden on the people. As a result, the public, not the banks and the commerce, are being made to shoulder the costs. Rather than seeking alternative solutions, our one-dimensional discourse does nothing to challenge the hermeneutic of neo-liberalism, which serves only one interest: capital. Yet such measures are unpopular and must therefore dress themselves in rhetorical niceties. From the workplace to parliament, misery and toil appears as play, participation and choice.

The strange irony may be that the more that play is introduced into work the more the worker becomes trapped under work's spell. As Sven Lütticken notes, “Play demands active involvement, not passive submission”⁸. Those elements appearing to offer more participation and more playtime at work, may in fact disguise its opposite: the transformation of the worker into an all-singing, all-dancing chimney sweep. The more we are given the illusion of our own choice, the less we feel that we can complain and in turn the more we become compliant in the system that enslaves us. Because “emphasis on creativity and playfulness is perfect for le-

gitimising ever-increasing in-equality in a stationary or shrinking economy”⁹ the idea of work as play increasingly becomes its opposite and a genuine liberation within work remains unachieved.

What differentiates the overworked Donald Duck in *Der Fuehrer's Face* and the Chimney sweeps in *Mary Poppins* is that the Chimney sweeps have learnt to accept their servitude. *Mary Poppins* conducts the perverse chimera of treating the workers as free when they obviously aren't. True freedom cannot be found by simply whistling while you work. In this respect the happy hearted roustabouts in *Dumbo* who “slave until they are almost dead” are the possible flip side to the chimney sweeps who step in time. Work itself remains a tortuous grind, but must be layered with a sweet sugary coating, something to keep the workers happy and distracted as their conditions worsen.

Mary Poppins II: The Chimney Sweeps' Revolution

Disney often has a tendency to give unsatisfactory endings. Cinderella must escape servitude by marrying into wealth; *Dumbo* must escape discrimination by becoming a star. Society itself never changes; some people just get lucky. *Mary Poppins* is no exception. Yet it is hard not to notice the lost potential in *Mary Poppins*. Not only is there a substantial critique of bourgeois society, but also the energy of the chimney sweeps seems to present us with a misplaced revolutionary fire; this energy builds throughout the chimney sweep section of the film and, in the process, distinctions and hierarchies erode. After leaping across the rooftops, the chimney sweeps descend down into the Banks' household still leaping and dancing. In moving from their assigned



Still from *Mary Poppins*

zone on the chimney tops to the family house the chimney sweeps transgress a boundary that keeps the workers at a ‘safe distance’ from the bourgeois private sphere. Yet the workers appear not to acknowledge this boundary and leap and dance all around the floor. Just as Michael is unable to comprehend how a wizened old man could be a giant, so too, do the chimney sweeps seem unable to comprehend the public/private distinction that keeps them at a safe distance. In the process further social categories disintegrate. First the maid is incorporated into the jig. Her first reaction is shock, “Ow!” she exclaims, but the “Ow!” is simply incorporated into the song, as the chimney sweeps sing “Ow, step in time”. She is incorporated into the dance and soon her cries of “Ow!” transform into some form of enjoyment. Nor does Mrs. Banks' return put a stop to this transgression; she too is quickly incorporated into the dance when the chimney sweeps call “Votes for women, step in time.” Her first reaction is

“Oh, no, really, not at the moment.” but this soon transforms into a determined passionate call, “Votes for women!”, and she joins the chimney sweep's dance. It is as if the chimney sweeps dance is a revolutionary fever, which rips through the house acquiring momentum and broadening its base as it goes. Here a more radical conception of work becomes possible. Instead of seeing the Chimney sweeps as glorifying work as it exists, we could imagine this revolutionary fever fueling a kind of work that would overcome the conditions of work as they exist: the work of the revolutionary. If the work/play dichotomy is to be truly overcome it will require more than learning how to whistle. For Adorno, the positive side of work “lies in the telology that work potentially makes work superfluous”. In the same document Horkheimer adds “A shaft of light from the telos falls onto labour. Basically, people are too short-sighted. They misinterpret the light that falls on labour from ultimate goals. Instead, they take labour qua la-

bour as the telos and hence see their personal work success as that purpose. [...] A shaft of light from the telos falls on the means to achieve it. It is just as if instead of worshipping their lover they worship the house in which she dwells. [...] The shaft of light must be reflected back by an act of resistance.”¹⁰ Work contains the means for overcoming of work and the path to human flourishing; this is the genuine purpose of work. But work is fetishised and drained of its true meaning. To combat this, the telos must be reflected back, not by supplementing work with play but via resistance and struggle for work as a drive towards a genuine purpose.

What if this was the missed possibility of *Mary Poppins*? It is in this respect that we should imagine an alternative *Mary Poppins*, a sequel maybe, where *Mary Poppins* is blown into the future, returning to empower the chimney sweeps, who, clasping their little red (*Mary Poppins*) books, join her in the social struggle and a long march to liberation, thus setting into motion a genuine synthesis of work and play.

1 In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels makes a remark that hints at an alternative reading of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. “Modern bourgeois society,” they write “with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.” In light of this we may propose an alternative reading of the scene. The sorcerer, his apprentice and the brooms can be read as referring to three separate sections of society: the feudal landowner, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie seek to liberate themselves from the feudal system and conjure up the magical spell which is modern industrial capitalism. The bourgeoisie are liberated from the daily grind by the proletariat, who work to ensure the bourgeoisie's freedom. Yet in conjuring up modern industrial capitalism, they lose control of capital itself, a process of valorisation and devalorisation takes hold and capital takes on a character of its own. The bourgeoisie become unable to take control of the world they brought into being. In this situation the industrial worker that the bourgeoisie brought about, becomes a revolutionary worker and rises up against them.

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*. Verso: London. p. 334

3 It should be noted that *Mary Poppins* is a rather different Nanny in the PL. Travers books. Rather than having a cheery disposition, *Mary Poppins* is generally stern; always cross, as well as being vain and easily offended. These character traits *almost* seem to disappear in the film. Whilst the book tends to be a collection of separate short adventures, Disney attempted to weave them into a unifying story. It is here that the ‘work as play’ theme comes to prominence. The trip to the bank and Mrs. Banks' joining the suffragettes are also invention of the film. Overall the film tended to politicize aspects of the book, not the other way around.

4 Joachim Kalka, *Money as we Knew It?* *New Left Review* 2/60. November-December 2009. p. 65

5 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (See http://www.sup.org/html/book_pages/0804736324/Chapter%201.pdf, sourced on January 2011)

6 Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek ‘Introduction: The Idea of communism’ in Douzinas and Žižek ed. *The Idea of Communism*, Verso: London. p.vii

7 See the Astra Taylor film, *Zizek!* ICA Films. 26:52

8 Sven Lütticken, *Playtimes*, *New Left Review*, 2/66. November-December 2010. p.136

9 Sven Lütticken, *Playtimes*, *New Left Review*, 2/66. November-December 2010. p.138

10 — Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer -Towards a New Manifesto? *New Left Review*. 2/65. Sept/Oct 2010. p.35

Another (Communist) Planet

Zeitgeist and the Venus Project

James Marcus Tucker



Zeitgeist: Moving Forward Poster

In the Reagan era play, *Other People's Money* by Jerry Sterner, a soulless banker destroys the livelihoods of thousands of men by buying up an ageing wire and cable manufacturing company on Long Island. Where the struggling, but determined company founder and owner sees history, tradition, family and livelihoods, the banker sees dollar bills. It is a timely (late 1980's) warning about the social consequences of heartless capitalism. Or more to the point, the inhuman cost of the immoral monetary system. The banker, Lawrence “Larry the Liquidator” Garfield, even proudly states as much – claiming

that he loves money, partly due to the fact that it doesn't care what you do. Capitalism is a game, and if a few thousand people have to lose, then so be it. In a last ditch effort to save his own skin, the periled company's manager goes behind the back of the company owner and tries to do a deal with Larry that would help him win the support of the shareholders and in return, secure himself a nice lump sum when the company collapses and he ultimately loses his job. He tells the audience guiltily, “everybody has to look after themselves”. Larry has no such guilt, he is a true Marxian style commodity fetishist.

His mantra is "Make as much as you can. For as long as you can. Whoever has the most when he dies, WINS." The big lesson however is that whilst Larry the Liquidator's actions are morally dubious at best, it doesn't mean of course, that he is acting illegally. Larry is acting within the system - albeit pushing it to its logical conclusion: human suffering.

It is easy to view Larry as a two-dimensional "bad guy" - a kind of pantomime villain. He is certainly portrayed as such. Yet, when we look to our recent financial crisis, and the current unpopularity of bankers on Wall Street and in the City, we can see that for many, such pantomime villains really do exist. It is easy to cry "wankers" at the men in suits, shuffling numbers around, producing nothing whilst making money off of money. It makes us feel better. They are, in Slavoj Žižek's term, a "toxic subject" to be scapegoated for society's ills - you know, like immigrants, teenage mothers or anyone else the Daily Mail wishes to hate that particular day. But then, we must recognise, as we do with Larry the Liquidator that the bankers were simply working within a system and taking it to its logical conclusion. When money no longer represents true value and is no longer linked to resources, it can be made out of thin air and huge profits can be made from nothing. To keep the system safe, "state socialism-in-reverse" is administered in the form of a bail-out when the over inflated bubble bursts; a safety-net that the poorest in society could only dream about and the system creaks along, altered, bruised, but ultimately unchanged.

Beyond the paradigm?

Between 2007 and 2011, a series of films emerged on the internet which sought to envision a world that existed beyond

the economic and social reality we find ourselves in. The documentary films, each produced by Peter Joseph, *Zeitgeist* (2007), *Zeitgeist: Addendum* (2008) and *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* (2011) have spawned an internet based "activist movement" known as the Zeitgeist Movement and become internet phenomenons. The first film in particular for its controversial and much criticised (and debunked by counter arguments on YouTube videos) views on the historical validity of Christianity, its claim (made by many others also) that 9/11 was perpetrated not by radical Islamists, but by the US government, and its argument that the monetary system (particularly as seen in the US and its Federal Reserve) was a fraudulent system designed, like religion, to keep people separate, afraid and slavish. The sequels continue its investigation into the brokenness of the monetary system and offer a vision of an alternative system it calls a "resource based economy" focussed upon sustainability (something unimaginable in a profit driven, necessarily waste producing economy). The films draw on an American based organisation known as the Venus Project for its ideas of an alternative society. The Venus Project can best be described by quoting its Wikipedia page:

According to (Futurist Jacque Fresco), poverty, crime, corruption and war are the result of scarcity created by the present world's profit-based economic system. He theorizes that the profit motive also stifles the progress of socially beneficial technology. Fresco claims that the progression of technology, if it were carried on independently of its profitability, would make more resources available to more people by producing an abundance of products and materials. This new-found abundance of

*resources would, according to Fresco, reduce the human tendency toward individualism, corruption, and greed, and instead rely on people helping each other.*¹

Zeitgeist: Moving Forward was released in January this year on DVD, in selected theatres and on the internet for free streaming and it is this film I wish to focus upon primarily in this essay. But it is important to at least consider the first film *Zeitgeist* in more detail because it is with this film that the movement became widespread and caught the attention of the world at large. It is perhaps a shame that Peter Joseph decided to create his first documentary in such an expository, propagandistic and agitprop manner. For the movement's ultimate aim - that of persuading the world to rid itself of its unsustainable, unfair and poverty inducing system, is at risk of being forever tarnished by the first film's questionable standards and practices of production. The film makes absolutely no recourse to even-handedness in its attack on the validity of Jesus' existence. Instead

“ it is at risk of forever being tarnished by questionable standards and practices of production ”

of crafting an argument from scholarly sources or expert interviews, we hear Peter Joseph's voice-over set to cartoon imagery illustrating the point he makes. The dots it tries to join are often strained in the extreme - for example, in trying to persuade us that the ancient worship of the Sun morphed itself into the worship of Jesus the "Son of God", it tries to draw a homophonic link between "Son" and "Sun". Yet this fails to take into account that this link could not be drawn

in the original language of the Greeks or Hebrews. The very real questions which can, and should be raised about the validity to Biblical "truth" are washed away in sensational and easily attested claims, swift editing, pacy music and flashing graphics. As much as one may wish to agree with Peter Joseph, and find the film's desire to make the viewer question assumed truths worthy of applause, it is impossible not to regret his methods and questionable source material. The claims it makes about 9/11 - primarily that international bankers were behind the terrorist attacks in New York to create fear and a social climate amenable to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are nothing new - the internet documentary film *Loose Change* and its reedits/sequels have made the same (watered down with each edit) claims since 2005. Again, the very real problems, mysteries and political scandals surrounding the events that day and in the following "War on Terror" years are ignored for sensational fear mongering about the hidden illuminate supposedly hell-bent on creating a one-world government.

A full blown dedication to conspiracy theory seems to be the first film's prime intent. As with all conspiracy theories, it ultimately relies on the viewers desire to feel as if they are being let in on a secret - and is found in good company along with moon landings, JFK and aliens amongst us. For me, it is a shame because what *Zeitgeist* ends up being is so much more worthy than its conspiracy roots. Perhaps Peter Joseph was unaware at first that his film would be followed by more traditional forms of documentary story-telling in less conspiratorial sequels that would be more focussed on the mon-

etary system and the Venus Project's concepts. Or perhaps he was making his bold statements in the hope that people would be moved to anger by a general "man behind the curtain" threat, and thus more open to the idea that society was sick and needed to change. His thinking would seem to be: Destroy everything they think they know about the world (or at least major cultural parts of it), then they can be prepared to entertain an alternative.

By its third instalment, *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward*, Peter Joseph utilises a more interactive documentary approach – interviewing notable and accredited thinkers, including scientists (such as Robert Sapolsky from Stanford University), physicians, university professors and philosophers. His ultimate desire is yet again to persuade the viewer of something they may not have considered. But unlike the near impossible to verify claims found in the first film – such as Jesus' twelve disciples not being human but representing the twelve signs of the zodiac – here Joseph has hard evidence and real examples to back up his claims. Right from the beginning, the system as we know it begins to crumble under Joseph's findings.

Products of our environment

In an effort to show how human beings are not innately predetermined by their genes the film begins with scientist Robert Sapolsky describing the nature vs. nurture debate as a "false dichotomy." He states that "it is virtually impossible to understand how biology works, outside the context of environment." We are shown that it is neither nature nor nurture that shapes human behaviour but both are linked contributory factors. The interviewees' state that even with genetic predispositions to diseases, the expression and manifestation of disease is largely

determined by environmental stressors. One study discussed, showed that newly born babies are more likely to die if they are not touched and another posits that if babies are not subjected to light within the first few years of birth, their eyes will not develop the ability to see. Humans, it seems, are products of their environment. Environmentally, certain things must happen, and certain things shouldn't, if a child is to develop healthily (physically and emotionally). If we develop within a world where resources are scarce, where inequality is high and our human dignity is not assumed – then criminal behaviour as a means to survive is endemic, social levels of health are lower and the standard of living as a whole is negatively affected.

To add more stress to this point (and to show these findings are not exclusive to handpicked scientists for the film), in a recent BBC TV lecture entitled *Justice: Fairness and the Big Society*, Harvard University Professor Michael Sandel highlighted how in countries such as Denmark and Germany, social mobility was higher than in countries such as the UK and in the USA that have less equal societies. It seemed as if higher levels of inequality within the system meant it was harder and less likely for people to move up and out of their lower income group (so much for the American Dream!) In similar findings, a section of *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* produces graphs with a mean average line highlighting how in less equal societies, the health socioeconomic gradient becomes steeper – even in countries with universal health-care. How can this be so? The simple and everyday reality of stress associated with poverty it seems, plays a large part in the health determination of an individual. But for society as a whole too, the findings presented from equalitytrust.org.uk are



The Venus Project, courtesy www.thevenusproject.com

striking – graphs present steep gradients representing how in less equal societies, life expectancy decreases, drug abuse is higher, mental illness is more common, social capital (the ability of people to trust each other) is lower, average educational scores are lower, homicide rates are higher, rates of imprisonment are higher – the list of negatively affected symptoms goes on and on in less equal societies, including obesity and infant mortality.

The monetary system

Human inequality across the globe is seen as a product of the monetary system. Naomi Klein has already done some wonderful work exposing the hidden out-of-sight consequence of our branded consumer culture: slave-labour. But in *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* the human consequences of this inequality is highlighted by referencing the plight of AIDS victims in

Africa and contrasting it with the relative wellness of people with HIV in the west who have a virtually normal life expectancy thanks to access to new anti-retroviral drugs. The problems are not born from the lack of available drugs, but by the system which demands a certain level of income to afford them. The film makes a stark claim, but one I agree with. It is not HIV that is killing over 1 million people a year in Africa – it is the socio-economic system which denies them treatment – plain and simple.

The idea that capitalism creates a balance through an "invisible hand of God" – in the words of philosopher and economist Adam Smith – is shown to be unrealistic. This idea that the market somehow, religiously causes equilibrium in fact makes the system, in effect, God itself. Joseph explains that the beginning of this system was at least based upon tangible goods –

the supply and demand of desired material objects. From the film: “Adam Smith never fathomed that the most profitable economic sector on the planet would eventually be in the arena of financial trading – or so called ‘investment’ – where money itself is simply gained by the movement of other money, in an arbitrary game which holds zero productive merit to society”. In our society money is treated as a commodity in and of itself! Just ask Larry the Liquidator. This profit interest has separated from any form of life value. We use GDP as an indicator of health – but GDP is just a money sequence, an economic extraction – and has no connection to the reality of human happiness or need fulfilment. For example, in the USA, health care spending was 17.3% of GDP in 2009 (\$2.5 trillion spent), creating a positive effect upon this economic measure – i.e. lots of services offered / money spent = higher GDP. But of course, what does spending on health care really represent but the money being spent on illness treatment? The USA’s GDP (market value of its entire goods and services) being so highly saturated with products to treat illness could not be seen, surely, as the sign of a healthy society.

“ the top 1% own 40% of the planet’s wealth ”

Much time is spent discussing the flawed and arbitrary logic of the money supply, debt, inflation and interest. We are shown how there is no profit without problem solving – hence, no profit without problems. Crime (the private prison system), war (weapons trade) and sickness (health care) keep our economic system going along with consumption which is

fundamentally wasteful and unsustainable. We are told that to make the most sustainable, efficient products would be mathematically impossible if the manufacturer is to be competitive. This reality can be seen by simply visiting the mountains of landfills spreading across the world. This wastefulness is not necessary however – most of the discarded material is primarily due to the breakdown of smaller parts within larger goods. For example, a chip inside your computer, a LED panel behind your TV etc. In an efficient conservative society where the world’s finite resources are considered, these parts could be fixed to extend the life of the good. However, *Zeitgeist* tells us that efficiency, sustainability and preservation are enemies of our economic system.

Along with this unsustainability, we are reminded how 18,000 children a day die from starvation, how global poverty rates have doubled since the 1970s and that the top 1% own more than 40% of the planet’s wealth.

A solution?

Simply, the Venus Project. Unfortunately, *Zeitgeist* offers us no idea on how we can attain this new earth. We are told that a moneyless society built with sustainability, technology and human equality in mind could rise from the ground up, if we were beginning anew. But as to how we create it after thou-

sands of years of civilization, we are left clueless. What this new earth looks like, however, is quite specific – from the types of technology we use to the methods of power production, farming and the shape and layout of the city. The computer created designs show sci-fi looking buildings surrounded by acres of green space, all neatly and cleanly laid – there is not a hair

out of place, a dish left to be washed! In the Venus Project’s civilization, such social problems created by money and inequality do not materialise. In answer to

“ money, it seems, is not the incentive we so easily assumed it is ”

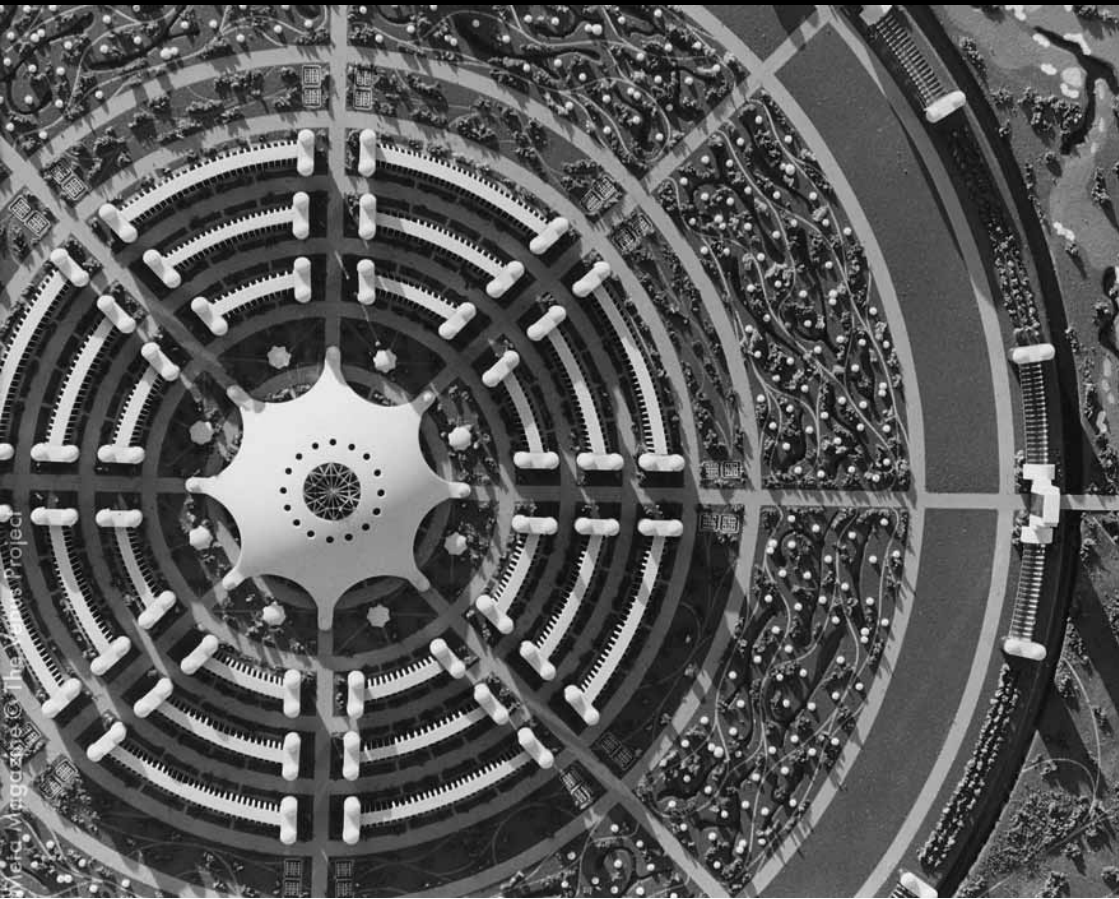
the cynics concern over jobs – well, as most jobs would be obsolete as technology overtakes, most people will not need jobs. The jobs that remain necessary will be filled by volunteers because such jobs will be essential to the continuation of a society that works so well for all people. It does sound a little unrealistic, goes the objection. What about simply lazy people? Again, *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* informs us, laziness is environmental – not innate. Just like inequality, it is a product of our current system, and it is easy to understand this point. In a system that leaves people behind, and one finds oneself with scarce options (for example, sitting on the couch or working at McDonald’s 12 hours a day for minimum wage), laziness becomes a very real, very appealing option. The motivation to do something does not reside with profit alone. To anchor this point, Joseph reminds us that children are probably the most active and inquisitive of humans. They are not motivated by money, greedy or lazy. The need to make money as adults takes over from this desire to create, and we become slaves to the profit drive.

In regards to profit motive, some interesting information has become available from the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. A study held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gave a group of students a

set of challenges – memorising, word puzzles, spatial puzzles etc. Students were incentivised with different rewards – being offered low, through medium, to high monetary amounts for success. Contrary to all expected outcomes, where the task demanded even the smallest amount of cognitive skill, the promise of a larger reward led to poorer performance.

The research was funded by the Federal Reserve Bank, so could not have been expected (by cynics) to be biased towards an anti-profit outcome. This test has been duplicated numerous times using higher levels of rewards – such as with workers in rural India – with the same outcome. Money, it seems, is not the incentive we have so easily assumed it is. But even more, when a task requires complicated and creative conceptual thinking, large monetary incentives actually reduce the capacity for people to succeed. When money is taken out of the equation, so that people are concentrating on the work itself, and not on the money they will achieve from the task, challenge and mastery, along with the desire to make a contribution are the reasons people seem to continually behave outside of economic expectations of human behaviour.²

The point *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* makes, and makes incredibly well is that everything we think we know about humans is because as humans, we exist in THIS system. Every problem thrown up against the idea that we can work together for a common good relies on examples from human behaviour in THIS system. If a totally reworked system was to magically appear when we wake up tomorrow, I have every confidence that so many of the worlds ills could be wiped away, that human laziness could be replaced with a moneyless and



The Venus Project, courtesy www.thevenusproject.com

profit exempt desire to work. But how do we get there? What physical and social revolution needs to happen, and who do we have to persuade in order to change it?

The subtitle of the final film "Moving Forward" is perhaps misinforming. The second film in the trilogy *Zeitgeist: Addendum*, like its successor, detailed the catastrophic and unsustainable monetary system, and highlighted the merits of the Venus Project. I saw it at a screening in Brighton not long after its release. The experience was enlightening primarily because of the arguments it raised in the post-screening discussion. It seemed the (largely academic and left-leaning) audience were onside

with the film's general premise and sharing in the anger from its attack on the monetary system, its revelation about the USA's economically driven involvement in South American coups and calls for certain product boycotts, but were at odds over the merits and realities of the Venus Project. So it was with excitement I viewed the very promising "Moving Forward" finale. I was expecting, perhaps, a how-to approach for transformation. Instead, we get more information on the ills of the current system, and the perceived merits of the Venus Project - notably, to the exclusion of other ideas or projects. The Venus Project's own website does go into more detail, however,

about how such a society can be realised, and the steps they are taking already to experiment with their ideas.

I did appreciate the second film's commitment to the concept of interdependence. The film perceived the Earth as a singular living organism and, like the first film, played to the audience's emotions by asking us to consider the human being as a part of the whole, distracted by dimensional distinctions (religion, politics, race, wealth etc.) above our common, universal concerns as humans. This idea was beautifully highlighted for me in a segment of the Canadian documentary film *Examined Life* (2008) by Astra Taylor. Philosopher Judith Butler walks through the streets of San Francisco with disability activist and painter Sunaura Taylor discussing disability. They decide to go into a clothing store where Taylor, physically handicapped, navigates her way through the physical actions of trying on and buying a sweater. Afterwards, Butler raises the very point that "help" - often looked down upon in our individualistic society - is something we all need, considered disabled or not. We are an interdependent species that cannot exist without the "help" or abilities of others. Butler asks rhetorically "Do we or do we not live in a world where we help each other...assist each other with basic needs?" *Zeitgeist* would argue the case that under the current system, the answer is no - or at least not if it's to the detriment of that system.

Rebranded Future

Zeitgeist: Moving Forward takes great pains to argue that it exists beyond the current political paradigm. They say the future it proposes goes beyond left or right. But here is Karl Marx in *The German Ideology* (1845):

"In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic."

If the paradigm it aims to raise beyond is the historically dominant polarity, then its claim is technically correct. Yet one feels that Joseph does protest too much. *Zeitgeist*, perhaps unknowingly, is waving the little red book for pure Communism - a stateless, classless society where people exist free from alienations and inequality. To quote from Alain Badiou's *Communist Hypothesis*:

*"'Communist' means, first, that the logic of class...is not inevitable; it can be overcome...a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour. The private appropriation of massive fortunes and their transmission by inheritance will disappear. The existence of a coercive state, separate from civil society, will no longer appear a necessity: a long process of reorganization based on a free association of producers will see it withering away."*³

Perhaps in Joseph's desire to escape the trappings of the (incorrect) label "socialist" (nothing less than an insult in his homeland) he denies the roots of his film's ideology. These roots can be found neither in the realm of totalitarian Statism in any of its various historical guises (Leninism, Maoism, Stalinism etc), nor socialism, which, to quote Negri, is "nothing other than one of the forms taken by capitalist management

of the economy and of power¹⁴. It is however a form of (arguably) unrealised Communism as Marx envisaged, whether Joseph likes it or not. It was the idea of Communism after all, that saw the withering away of the State. The role the State has to play in the transition towards such a society from the standpoint of capitalism has been, of course, contested and fought over by thinkers engaged in emancipatory politics since Marx, and this battle ground is probably not one that *Zeitgeist* wishes to engage its populist audience with. With such “leftist” associations, the historical roots of the Venus Project and *Zeitgeist* movement could never be admitted if the ideas that drive them are to be palatable for a western (and specifically American) audience. The Venus Project and *Zeitgeist* do indeed reach for an alternative to so much of our ancestors (and our own) lived social experience – but it does so mostly by repackaging and rebranding an old, failed to (yet) materialise idea for the 21st Century.

Whether successful in fermenting a realised revolution or not, we can at least be thankful for The Venus Project, this movement and its documentaries’ existence. They remain, for now, as ideas and possibilities. As we have seen with the revolutions and civil unrest in the Arab world recently, the internet as a tool for social consciousness, awareness and activism is enabling information and ideas to be shared at a rate impossible to have comprehended even 10 years ago. *Zeitgeist* rests, for the moment within this sphere – consciousness-raising.

I was discussing The Venus Project with my boyfriend in public yesterday, and somebody nearby looked up and said “The Venus Project? Oh yes I saw it on *Zeitgeist*...but it wouldn’t work. Without prisons or laws, what do you do with bad people?” It was interesting to recognise how such views on human nature and defeatist attitudes on the path to human emancipation can stop people before they even begin to dream. So in response I wish to quote Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the aforementioned RSA. In his speech entitled *21st Century Enlightenment*, he says “Creative people who want to make a difference have a million and one opportunities and distractions. To engage them means an ethic that is intolerant to negativity, rigid thinking and self promotion, and instead keeps them constantly in touch with the words of the anthropologist Margaret Mead – never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

For more information on the *Zeitgeist* Movement and the three films, see www.zeitgeistmovie.com

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Venus_Project Sourced 16-03-2011

2 Findings from the The RSA.org See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjJc&sns=tw>

3 Badiou, A., The Communist Hypothesis, <http://newleftreview.org/?view=2705>

4 Negri, A., and Guattari, F., *Communists like Us*, Autonomedia, 1985, Page 167

Imperfect Cinema: DiY Punk, Micro-Cinema and Participation

Allister Gall & Dan Paolantonio

‘In the realm of artistic life, there are more spectators now than at any other moment in history. This is the first stage in the abolition of “elites.” The task currently at hand is to find out if the conditions which will enable spectators to transform themselves into agents – not merely more active spectators, but genuine co-authors – are beginning to exist. The task at hand is to ask ourselves whether art is really an activity restricted to specialists, whether it is, through extra-human design, the option of a chosen few or a possibility for everyone.’

Julio Garcia Espinosa.

Jacques Ranciere has noted a primary political concern is the lack of recognition by those dominated in society. He considers the responsibility of one who has an influence, is not to talk on behalf of the masses, but rather to use their privileged position to facilitate the self-expression of new voices by opening up potential for new dialogues and the sharing of knowledge. The central political act of Imperfect Cinema is aesthetic, in that it produces a re-arrangement of a social order, where new voices and bodies previously unseen can be heard in a participatory context outside of the academicised-experimental and

capitalist-consumerist mainstreams of film culture. Imperfect Cinema’s aim is to create a democratic and sustainable underground Cinema with the central aim of providing a venue for participatory activity outside of the aforementioned enclaves of contemporary film culture.

We take inspiration from Espinosa’s essay, quoted above and first published in English in the now defunct British film magazine *Afterimage* in 1971, and Ranciere’s fundamental theoretical framework: *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Far more than just academic research, our aim is to create a dialectic venue for participatory activity in which the problems of both exclusivity and sustainability in mainstream film culture can be explored and discussed. As Dr Duncan Reekie of *The Exploding Cinema* has observed, the experimental & short-form film has for too long been the preserve of an academicised elite, or alternatively viewed as the *juvenile* ‘stepping stone’ to the *mature* feature film, a more easily commercially exploitable commodity. This is an incredibly revealing observation as it draws attention not only to the abundant inequalities & enclaves existent within these mainstreams of film culture, but also to a value system which

Coming Soon! Imperfect Cinema 2



The Lo-Fi Issue!

Join Dan Flipside for an evening of
super-8 film, chat, music & more!
Also featuring new preview screenings
the open reel and prizes galore

With Special Guest Nicholas Bullen
(Founder Member of Napalm Death,
Sonic Artist Extraordinaire
& Super-8 Afficianado!)

Imperfect Cinema 2
Friday 1st April 2011



Imperfect Cinema 2 poster

hierarchically positions short-form as 'less than.' Our aim is to find new means of exploring and articulating these problems, by bringing together a tactile network of film activists, and by adopting trans-disciplinarity as a means of critically reframing the experimental & short form film. Of course, issues of sustainability have arguably become part of the zeitgeist, but this issue is not only economic and environmental, it is also social. Positioning practice, criticality and form in a hierarchy

which is potentially inaccessible to most does not bode well for either the sustainability of our art form, or for its chances of discovering new territories of thought and practice. Added to these concerns is an imaging industry which has become reliant on obsolescence, where the functional life of technology is far greater than its operational use. Just think how many television sets you have been told represent the latest in the televisual home viewing experience in the past decade alone. Where do

they go when the new one arrives? For the film artist the concern is also one of paints and brushes. Sometimes we paint with Ektachrome and a Nizo brush, sometimes with an Alexa & binary. Of course what Arri won't tell you is the fact that one is not 'better' than another, just different. In the age of obsolescence, the work of the film artist is problematised by technological redundancy, we are in danger of losing our brushes and paints as the detritus of this economic model. This provides us with a unique opportunity to become activists; to activate a dialogue through practice where the very use of that which has been cast aside by the new, might find new life and new context. For Imperfect Cinema the act of making is both a political and necessarily dialectic act, with which we can explore, confront, concur or criticise these and other issues existent in film culture and beyond.

DiY Punk as Methodology

Imperfect Cinema employs a DiY punk methodology to produce, disseminate and socialise a popular radical film practice. We outlined key aspects of this methodological approach in a paper which was delivered at the Radical British Screens Symposium, which argued for a shifting of the contextual lens through which 'punk' is to be understood in relation to our Imperfect Cinema project, away from the numerous coffee table tomes & hip ephemera of the first wave and towards the comparatively underground DiY and anarcho-punk movements. In contextualising DiY punk's relationship to cinema we are able to activate key methodo-

logical techniques of this subculture to describe, position, interrogate, disseminate and socialize a dialogue which addresses key issues of concern to contemporary film culture.

Julio Garcia Espinosa's 1969 Third Cinema manifesto 'For an Imperfect Cinema' called for filmmaking to become not an elitist art, but to be made by the masses and not for the masses. '...our future filmmakers, will themselves be scientists, sociologists, physicians, economists, agricultural engineers, etc., without of course ceasing to be filmmakers.' Building on Espinosa's call to end exclusivity, this research aims to mobilise a film community by valourising and celebrating non-virtuosity, contextualising amateurism as the *enthusiastic pursuit of an objective*, (rather than as the inferior / juvenile version of 'professional' which for this project is contextualized as *engaging in a given activity as a source of livelihood or as a career*), not to reject out of hand the notion of 'professionalism' but to problematise the hierarchical framing and valuing of results. Espinosa states, 'a future imperfect cinema is 'the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results.' He goes

“ celebrating non-virtuosity, contextualising amateurism as the enthusiastic pursuit of an objective ”

on to say 'Imperfect Cinema is no longer interested in quality of technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle', making a distinct comment on the narrow confines of industrialised production value systems.

No Wave Cinema

There is a distinct historical precedent for the convergence between punk and cinema. Termed No Wave, New Cinema, (or 'Punk Cinema' by Macdonald and Kerekes) these 1970s filmmakers in New York paralleled Punks energy, iconography, and aggressive DiY aesthetic. They converged popular culture with experimental/art house cinema, with the intention to critique and screen work outside of traditional models and exhibition spaces. Rather than a cohesive group, they embodied a diverse and fragmented collection of individuals, empowered by the collaborative DiY punk ethos. Musicians made and acted in films, music venues became cinemas, documentary and fiction was blurred, and amateur technologies were re-appropriated, harnessing their radical potential to both upset and provide aesthetic separation from the alienating production values of commercial cinema. No Wave filmmakers rejected the heavily-theorised enclaves of the structuralist movement, paralleling punk music's answer to bloated self-indulgence of 1970s mainstream rock. They found new spaces to show and distribute their work, screening films in drive-ins, rock clubs, and even prisons. They embodied a radical collective sensibility: they acted in each other's films, wrote scores, and encouraged others to do the same. However the development of our Imperfect Cinema's own 'scene' should not be viewed as a revisionist imitation of the No Wave Cinema movement. Indeed, like any reactionary phenomenon, No Wave should be framed within its historical context, especially as many of its then subversive techniques have been appropriated by mainstream film culture. For example, a great deal of their output was pastiche: a binary of lowbrow and highbrow tastes united by an aggressive punk rock attitude. To simply

mimic this aesthetic would today be an impotent exercise as it is found in abundance in the political vacuum of the multiplex. Imperfect Cinema is dedicated to exploring a new and more relevant political aesthetic and to the harnessing of trans-disciplinary dialogues to address the real world problems of exclusivity and sustainability existent in mainstreams film culture.

Micro Cinema and the (Re) Distribution of the Sensible:

Imperfect Cinema has thus far produced four events. The Imperfect Cinema Launch event, which was an introduction to the aims and objectives of the project, the Imperfect Cinema 1 event which was the first of our manifestoed provocations and the subsequent Imperfect Cinema 1 Screening event in which the responses to the manifestoed provocations were screened and discussed. The latest was called the Imperfect 'free' cinema event, which was free of restrictions, manifestoed and screened all films under three minutes. Every event features a manifesto which serves to situate the context of the event and act as a provocation to action, a fanzine style periodical which provides further context to each project and which also provides an open tactile vehicle for the collective to further share ideas and opinions, and a special event, (which has thus far taken the form of contributions by guest speakers and preview screenings of film's of particular relevance to the project). Each event also contains an 'Open Reel' section, which continuing DiY Punks egalitarian dialectic is a space in which the collective are able to screen work which has been not been specifically produced in response to one of the manifestoed provocations. Central to our framing of the project up to now has been



At the Imperfect Cinema 1 event

creation of a venue for what Ranciere describes as '*forms of participation in a common world*' (Ranciere 2006: 85). Ranciere says we need to upset the social order for equality so that new voices can be heard: '*Equality is fundamental and absent, timely and untimely, always up to the initiative of individuals and groups who...take the risk of verifying their equality, or inventing individual and collective forms for its verification*' (Ranciere in Biesta: 2010).

Imperfect Cinema has adopted easily understood cultural frameworks of reference to abstract ideas in order to facilitate aesthetic ownership. For example the manifesto of Imperfect Cinema 1 framed the three-minute film thus '*The Ramones only needed three minutes, so do you.*' This statement works in a number of ways, firstly it references the punk egalitarian axiom: *here are three chords: now start a band*, but also serves to re-frame the short film by its comparison with the duration of a punk song. Just as these were not viewed as being juvenile versions

of more lengthy progressive rock songs, but as distinctly different forms, so short-form films can also be viewed as being distinctly different rather than inferior to the more commercially exploitable 'professionalised' format, the feature film. The tactile distribution of work produced in response to the Imperfect Cinema 1 manifesto will be on an ecodisc DVD which will include all the films screened, taking inspiration from the Crass Collective and their Bullshit Detector compilation series (1981-1984). Bullshit detector was a portmanteau of underground activity which although comprised of crudely recorded demos by previously anonymous bands, nevertheless provided an important vinyl snapshot of participatory activity, which is also the aim of our DVD compilation. In this sense, the Imperfect Cinema films themselves can be seen as not only aesthetic objects – but moreover can be used as a record of tactile participation. Highlighting this connectivity, Duncan Reekie, the co-founder of Exploding Cinema, was

our first guest speaker, sharing his knowledge, films and research, and creating the potential for new networks and future activity within underground circuits.

Future Imperfect: The (Re) appropriation of the sensible

When considering issues of sustainability in contemporary film culture, how might the adoption of a trans-disciplinary approach to the theorization of practice help address this real world problem? More specifically can a dialectic convergence between DiY Punk and a popular radical film practice provide a venue for this discussion of this issue? Both DiY punk and Film practice rely upon the vehicular aspect of media technologies to facilitate the description and dissemination of 'information.' Just as punk was empowered by the re-appropriation of amateur and juvenile technologies (to describe and disseminate its dissatisfaction with the alienating production values and self-absorption of mainstream rock music), might a popular radical film practice find similar means to express dissatisfaction with similarly alienating aspects of mainstream film culture outlined earlier in this article?

When considering the trajectory of the imperfect cinema project we aimed to address key 'real world problems' existent in mainstream film culture, by visiting distinct areas in sequentially themed micro cinema events and to empower our collective with new and democratic means of understanding, interacting with and commenting on these issues. As Stacy Thompson suggests in his essay 'Punk Cinema' (2005: 21) *'punk textuality cuts across many different cultural forms, including music, style, the printed word and cinema'* (Thompson 2004: 3), although he actually only considers a

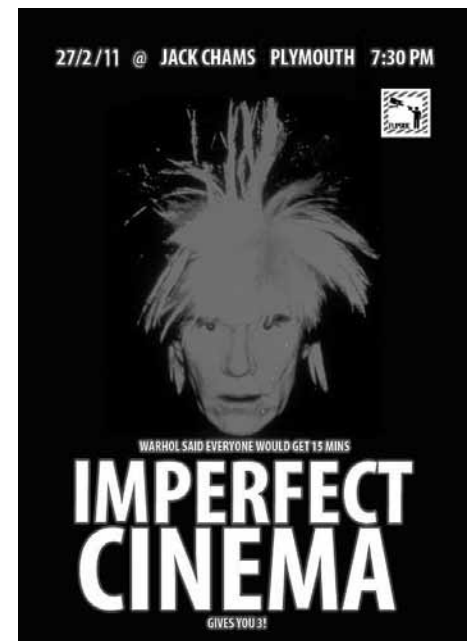
film to be 'punk' when encompassing an *'ethical aesthetic.'* This, it could be argued, is an acknowledgement not only of the bricolage, reflexivity and risk which characterise punks mediated audio-visual aesthetic, but also of its resourcefulness in forging new context. In their 2009 paper 'Obsolescence: Uncovering Values in Technology Use' Jina Huh, Mark S. Ackerman describe the unsustainability of a technology industry which is increasingly reliant upon 'planned obsolescence.' Indeed during the course of their discussion they make direct reference to a trend which is termed the 'disposable technology paradigm' which ascribes concern to contemporary patterns of technology use, where usage lifespan is much shorter than functional lifespan. As Huh and Ackerman point out, a technology industry which is then built upon planned obsolescence is by nature then unsustainable. In fact one might go as far as suggesting that it relies on unsustainability. When considering the 'global problem' that this ecologically unsustainable pattern of usage presents, how might one directly address this issue in a film practice? Indeed, as Huh & Ackerman suggest, could the notion that obsolescent technology is worthless be challenged by harnessing its potential for comment on the very real ecological problem which the disposable technology paradigm presents? Could the audio-visual aesthetics of economically 'redundant' technologies be re-contextualised as having transgressive potential, by harnessing their associations with juvenility, amateurism and nostalgia? Just as the reactionary (de-) evolution of a set of 'professionalised' production values resulted in the extreme low-fidelity aural aesthetic of the Norwegian Black Metal underground, could a similarly positioned audio-visual

production value system re-arrange the industrialized / professionalized social order by using the detritus of the disposable technology paradigm?

Stacy Thompson (2004) suggests that: '(W)hen punk passes into film, it demands of film that it offer up material traces of its production, that it open itself up to its audience as an "open" text by pointing out how it came to be.' From this perspective could the crude black and white low-fidelity images of a Fisher Price Pixelvision toy video camera, or the horizontal jitter and focal imprecision of super-8 cameras actually provide thematically potent apparatus for the audio-visual detournement of the high definition digital technologies which represent the current techno-philic pinnacle of the industrialized tele-visual experience?

The second themed Imperfect Cinema event on ('Imperfect Cinema 2' April 1st 2011) will explore the possibilities offered by both 'redundant' and lo-fidelity technologies in developing a re-contextualised audio visual aesthetic which is not only necessarily vehicular, but which also can be understood as a political comment on issues of sustainability and hierarchical inequality within contemporary film culture. In this respect the imperfection deemed 'inferior' by contemporary image-making industries can be harnessed to new and exciting political potential.

Imperfect Cinema seeks to utilize the methodological devices and techniques of DiY Punk and employ where possible easily understood cultural references as a tool to describe, position, interrogate and socialize key issues of concern existent within contemporary film culture and to popularize amongst our collective the notion of dialogue and synthesis between these. In considering how this fundamen-





Imperfect Cinema screen grabs

tal aspect of our project, might be underlined, we have decided to lay the theoretical foundation of Imperfect Cinema 2 by exploring and discussing various qualities of a similarly positioned and equally politicized low fidelity aural aesthetic so that new synergetic insights might be drawn from the confluence of the two. To this end Imperfect Cinema 2 will launched with a live discussion between renowned sonic artist and multi-instrumentalist Nicholas Bullen and ourselves, which will be centred around his development of an extreme genre of hardcore punk music known as grindcore. This format will not only enable the underlining of the trans-disciplinary nature of this project, but will also again serve to democratise this primary research by activating it with all attendees able to contribute and form open

dialogues between the stage and the floor.

We hope that this article has served to briefly outline various ways that micro cinema, participation DIY punk has both informed and enabled the Imperfect Cinema project. We chose to focus around selected areas which have been central to the development of the project, and to illustrate how the convergence and dialogues between DiY Punk and a Radical Film Practice has enabled & empowered our research to dialectically address the problems of exclusivity and sustainability existent in mainstream film culture.

If you would like to submit a film for Imperfect Cinema, come to one of our events or get involved please visit our webpage at www.imperfectcinema.com

EXPLODING CINEMA

An interview with Duncan Reekie
Daniel Fawcett

The biggest obstacle for the independent filmmaker was once raising the money to make a film but times have most certainly changed, there is more access to filmmaking tools than ever before and the costs are minimal; anyone with the will can get their hands on a camera and editing software and make a film. This is proven and the evidence is there in that more independent films are being made now than ever before. But in this time of the democratising of the medium a new challenge has emerged and that is getting your film seen by an audience. The internet is the obvious platform and goes hand in hand with the developments that have allowed us to make films without money but I believe that there is still a need for live film screenings. Whilst the feedback and comment functions on the internet are invaluable tools for filmmakers, they could hardly eliminate the need for public



Duncan Reekie

screenings in the same way that digital developments in production have created accessibility to filmmaking. So what are the options for public screenings for the independent filmmaker? Most cinemas, even the so-called independ-

ent ones, will not even look at your film unless it is being represented by a distributor. Festivals are, of course, a great place to start but most charge large submission fees and from talking to people in the know I have found that

some often don't watch films fully unless they have some motivation to. So that leaves us with two other options. One is to organise your own screenings, but this of course can cost a lot of money if you are to do more than one or two. The other is to submit to an independent screening event but then you are faced with the fact that even though your film is more likely to be watched it still may not be selected because of the tastes of the curator of the event. So imagine a screening event where

if you submit your film it is guaranteed to be shown, such an event exists, it is called Exploding Cinema.

The following interview is with Duncen Reekie who is one of the founding members of Exploding Cinema collective which is now in its 20th year.

Q What is Exploding Cinema?

Exploding cinema is the name of a collective of filmmakers and film impresarios, but it's also the name of a regular open access screening of short films, experimental films, underground films, no budget, DIY, documentaries, drama, anything we are given. Essentially what



Exploding Cinema event

we do is show every film that is given to us in the order that it is given to us. We try and be as open access, non-profit and democratic as possible. So anyone can join the collective, anyone can get involved in running the events, anyone can show a film. All the equipment is common ownership. We rotate all jobs and tasks within the collective so everybody gets a chance to do whatever they want. It's just ridiculously democratic.

Q How did the collective come about?

The impetus originally for the founding of the group was at that time in 1991 at the end of the 80's [...] it

was very very difficult to get a screening for your film, there were very few places that were showing short films and the places that were showing short film were very heavily curated, and the curation depended on a lot of institutional factors, the scene was essentially controlled by various funding agencies and institutions like the Arts Council and the BFI.

Q So they would only show films they funded?

Yes, once they funded your film it was in their interest then that your film should be distributed, it should have screenings, it should go to festivals, and then you would be selected

for various things, so you kind of got into the system. If you didn't get in at the funding stage then you were fucked. There was nowhere to show, you would have to organise your own screenings.

Q What about the London Film-makers Co-op?

The Film-makers Co-op at that point which was the major nexus of experimental film in London, or in Britain [...] was kind of locked in to this faction of various groups that were trying to control it. Partially because it was the only career route, I mean experimental filmmaking as a career is a non-starter really, there is no career.

Because what had happened was, in my opinion anyway, at that point, the monopoly of the state institutions had removed all kind of objective critical discussion because there were too many vested interests, you know, if somebody was lorded as some kind of an eminent and successful filmmaker and they had been funded ten times or something like this and then you went to the screening and you were like, this is fucking rubbish, there was no way that you could say that, [...] and the reply was, [...] these films are difficult films, they are meant to be difficult films and if you don't like them then it's simply because

you are not a part of the culture, or you don't have the academic training, or you are misunderstanding the radical objective of these films because they are actually meant to be tedious. I was personally like, fuck them, let them come and show their films at a pub with a room full of real people and let's see how they go down - so it was to create a critical forum.

Q Can you describe what an exploding cinema event would have been like at the beginning?

Well the first shows at that point were in the work's canteen and were mostly films by the collective and by friends of the collec-

tive, and one of the things that started to happen was that we were showing our films and we didn't have enough, so we were forced to make films within a fortnight and this kind of changed the nature of what we were showing. [...] We started off by showing these films that we'd worked on for years which were like our precious little gems, very polished and then we started having to go in to this manic production every fortnight, having to produce new stuff and this changed the nature of what we were doing and then the whole became a lot more alive at that point, so we would have either live music playing, people playing instruments, and then from that we had people doing live voice-overs.

So the original screenings were very kind of incestuous I guess because it was mostly films from people in the collective or friends of the collective. Then very quickly more people started to come because they heard about it and that it was such a great night. Another thing we discovered quite early on was that if you had a kind of convivial atmosphere where people are talking and eating and drinking and even leaving and com-

ing back then you could show twenty films and they didn't have to watch the films that they weren't interested in, you got a much better convivial atmosphere, it was a better night out, people really enjoyed it, and that became a part of our philosophy as well. So you could show twenty films and if somebody only liked three films that was fine, they may be the best three films that they have seen in their life but there is still another fifteen that they didn't watch properly because they weren't interested but that's alright.

Q One of the things that seems important to Exploding Cinema is that the filmmakers are able to present their films to an audience without being censored and the audience can judge them for themselves. But last night there weren't any of the filmmakers there and I also felt that the films shown wouldn't have benefited by having the filmmaker there as there wasn't really much to say about them - they weren't really what I would call "underground" or "experimental" films. They were mostly like the kind of films that you would see on YouTube - peoples

first attempts at filming something. I wonder how you feel about this when the films are of poor quality, do you see it as just one of the risk you take?

Well, yeah, I think it is. It's just a risk you take that if you have an open screening like that then you may get no experimental work whatsoever, you may get no underground work whatsoever or you may get a whole program of technically sound student work. There's nothing you can do about that really, last night I think there wasn't really any outstanding underground or experimental work there, I don't think, but that's not always true at another show you may have predominately experimental work.

Q Do you think maybe the ultimate open access screening would be if somehow you could make your screenings free? How do you feel about the idea that someone might come along and pay £5 and not like any of the films?

Well, we have done free shows in the past but I am for paying because it is to do with the model as well. It's to do with the fact that you're saying well you can

make money, you don't need funding, you can make money but as long as you're ploughing it back in to the organisation. I mean if it's free then how are you going to hire the hall.

Q I am just thinking that maybe that would be taking the whole thing to the full extreme, maybe there was a time when at the start of Exploding Cinema when people would have been objectionable to the idea that you could make this thing for limited money, now I think it is possible to do things for no money and people may think it extreme to operate without any relationship to money, to me it seems like the natural next step for it to go...

I'm wary of that, I am wary of the free thing because... I'll tell you why, the radical film culture of the 70's and 80's, the experimental filmmakers then and the independent filmmakers then, part of their radicalism or so called radicalism was that they had this kind of simplistic conflation of capitalism and trade, they were like capitalism is wrong therefore trade is wrong, therefore making money is wrong because its capitalism. It's a very naive and silly conflation



Exploding cinema poster

and people would say to us that you're a radical utopian organisation, why are you charging people money? But its bullshit, because what it did was, that attitude, that conflation, put them in the hands of the funders because you need money to run this, so how are you going to run it if you're not going to make people pay? All right, so how are you going to do it? Well maybe we'll get some

money from the Arts Council and you sold your soul to the Arts Council. And we were like; we were not making that mistake so I would be against that.

Q You've mentioned that you are anti-funding, could you explain more what you mean by that and why?

The reasons come initially in the foundations of Exploding Cinema.



Exploding cinema poster

The reasons were very practical and came out of the experience of the collective which was that myself and my friends realised by talking to other filmmakers that a lot of filmmakers were spending their time applying for funding, that had become their major aesthetic activity. Applying for funding, filling out funding forms, doing treatments for funding forms it had

become almost like a replacement for the filmmaking process and so with that insight you start thinking and looking at the whole funding thing. [...] At a fundamental level my problem with funding is about the very nature of culture [...], who makes culture? Is culture going to be made by training experts? Is that what it's about? Is that what you believe, do you believe

that culture is in some way like the health system that you need to train experts and these experts will then go in to some kind of elite professional industry, and that industry will then provide culture for the people? Or do you believe that culture should be made by people? By themselves and that culture should come from their experience and come out of their access to technology and their own sort of environments? So it depends on what model you believe in.

When you have funding what happens is that the funders want you to behave like a proper organisation. They want staff and then within staff they want hierarchy, they want a manager and they want an accountant and they bring in all that shit and you've got to have a board of directors. And it costs money as well, to do all that, so they give you money but then you find you need more money to conform to their idea of what an organisation is. Same with the filmmaking, they may give you money to make a film but then you have to pay everybody union rates and you have to abide by all the

laws and structures and that costs more money so they've given you money to do the things that they want you to do. And the other thing about funding of course is that its compromise. There's corporate funding sure, you look at the Tate's funding; BP, Hanjin Shipping you know, various other criminal organisations as far as I'm concerned. And then just state funding in itself, this state as you know is still involved in illegal occupations of various nations.

Q I think that when it comes down to it there is very little funding that is available that would come without compromise. If someone was to say "here's some funding, do what you want", end of story, would that be OK?

The thing is even if a funder comes to you and they say there are no strings attached to this whatsoever, we are going to give you some money and you can do whatever you like, well that is impossible, because there is always one string and that string is that they get to say they funded you. They get to say they funded you. They say we are a successful fund-



Exploding cinema poster

ing organisation and we are necessary because we funded these people. They have a reason to exist, you are giving them a reason to exist which is the worst compromise of all because who are they these people? They are the experts? In what?

Q So that would be reinforcing the very thing that you are opposed to? Yes, Exactly

Q What's next for exploding cinema?

We have our birthday coming up in October. It will be the 20th birthday of Exploding Cinema so we plan to do some huge extravaganza! A big Halloween show and I am trying to get together a book just on the Exploding Cinema and related groups from the 90's so hopefully that will be published around then as well.

Revolutions in Progress: A Film Challenge

The **One+One** team

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias”

Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*

The term utopia was developed by Sir Thomas More, a play on words between “no-place” and “good-place”. It captures the eternal nature of ideas that can emerge again and again throughout history and which are never reducible to human particularities, nor to reality as it is. Dreams of the good always exceed their historical placing. Thus they demand critical and dynamic thought, never a simple acceptance of the status quo or any idea of an end of history. Utopia may never be reached, but this is what gives it its revolutionary potential. It is always a critical impulse. The utopian idea appears as an imperative whose demands again and again call us to action. Since the dawn of man utopian ideas and revolutionary action has punctured human existence, albeit intermitted with reactionary and conservative breaks where utopian dreams would appear to fade for all eternity. Yet these intermissions have almost always been short lived. Badiou, for example, describes how the revolutionary period

from the French Revolution and the Paris Commune [1792 to 1871] and the period between the Bolshevik revolution and the radical politics of the 60s and 70s [1917 to 1976] was intermitted with a 40 year period of reappraisal where revolutionary politics appeared to come to an end¹. In this period, a vanguard group of artists and intellectuals had to experiment, address issues brought up by the failings of the previous revolutionary period and prepare for the next one. Within the intermissions between revolutionary periods we find not only the reactionary backlash, but also intellectuals, artists and activists rethinking ideas, reformulating and preparing the way for the next period. History is never-ending.

Today we find ourselves in another such intermission, Capitalism, with all its gross inequalities, is here to stay, or so we are told by figures of nearly every political camp. Even a huge financial crisis can't stop the forward march of the neo-liberal agenda. Yet something else hangs in the air. A revolutionary fire is beginning to burn in the people's hearts. In North America and Europe drastic austerity measures are introducing a new generation to revolution, the Arab world, likewise, is witnessing incredible revolutionary upheaval aimed at ending tyranny and South America has been experimenting with populist socialist movements driving towards a different

economic model. Meanwhile, intellectuals and writers as diverse as Badiou, Žižek, Negri, the invisible committee and Harvey have been inventing innovative paths beyond meagre reformism, while inspiring a whole new generation. Technology is equally causing the word “revolution” to resurface. Just as the radical spirit of the 60s was occasioned by the birth of the TV and Popular media, so, the world asks, what will be the effect of the internet, social media and the digital camcorder? Yet for many of us what remains lacking is not the revolutionary vigour, but an idea. We know there is a need for change, we just don't know how to think about it. Without an idea, each revolutionary cry is easily subsumed into the neo-conservative demand for (capitalist) freedom and (parliamentary) democracy, and the cries for genuine emancipatory justice go unheard. It is hard not to miss the chasm that opens up between mere change and a genuine revolution. One changes the world, but leaves the core problematic the same, the other addresses the problematic at its core and pushes it towards a genuine resolution. Or as Žižek wrote on the recent events in Egypt:

“After Mubarak sent the army against the protesters, the choice became clear: either a cosmetic change in which something changes so that everything stays the same, or a true break.”²

If we are to succeed we must not only have a revolution, but genuine revolution grounded in a genuine idea. A revolution without ideas is mere mindless violence, an order which replaces itself with another order. Yet we must not simply sore off into flights of fantasy that a genuine revolution is around the corner, or that the system as

it is, is okay. We must face the unpleasant facts, problems and dilemmas left to us by the previous epoch, without resigning ourselves to the world as it is with all its horrific injustice and inequality. This is the difficult task that any inventor/experimenter of culture faces today.

We call for thinkers, activists, artists, filmmakers and people more generally to share with us their visions through the medium of film. We want you to help us envisage a culture for the future and a way of resisting and

“the utopian idea appears as an imperative whose demands again and again call us to action”

struggling against current modes of domination. Thus for One+One, revolution not only means political and social upheaval, but the clavering out of a new revolutionary culture in terms of form, process, style and content. Cinema has constantly been drawn into revolutions and experienced its own internal revolution. For some cinema has served as a tool to comment, educate and transform the world, whereas others have revolutionised cinema itself, developing methods, styles and approaches which change the whole course of cinema or developing ways to make cinema more accessible, democratic and participatory. Cinema and social change have constantly intertwined.

Only by grasping the idea and not merely the form of revolution can we hope to affect a genuine change. When Godard made his film *‘Sympathy For the Devil’* (or as he would have preferred it called: One plus One) he was largely in the sway of such a cultural upheaval and re-evaluation. The film was a revolution in process as

much as it was in content. The film layered imagery, music and quoted text to capture the sense of a revolution in progress: a never ending revolution whose results will always remain undecided.

With these questions in mind, One+One is setting a challenge to its readers. We have teamed up with the London Underground Film Festival and are inviting you to submit your own short films which deal with the theme "Revolutions in Progress". This theme can be interpreted in any way you wish, but there are just a few rules:

- The film is to be both a mix of drama and documentary – in homage to the great "revolution" film *Sympathy for the Devil / One plus One*.
- At least 50% of the movies dialogue/voice over (if any) must be quoted from somewhere else.
- Copyrighted music can be used, yet filmmakers risk having their videos removed from YouTube.
- Maximum of 10 minutes
- The films need to be uploaded to YouTube and be titled "One+One Revolutions in Progress: YOUR FILM TITLE" and the link sent to One+One Filmmakers Journal, preferably by email submissions@filmmakersjournal.co.uk

The London Underground Film Festival and One+One will pick their favourite 8 films to be shown at the Festival in December, and One+One will put these films onto their own YouTube channel and website.

To get you thinking about the kind of film you can make, we ask you to consider a world/worlds that could be, or that you would like to see. You could criticise the world as it is. You could look at possibilities for revolution, highlight a revolution taking place, that has taken place, or you would like to see take place. You can question the very concept of revolution itself.

The deadline is November 1st 2011.

1 Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, *New Left Review* 2/49, January-February 2008

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Why fear the Arab revolutionary spirit? The western liberal reaction to the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia frequently shows hypocrisy and cynicism*, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 1st February 2011. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/01/egypt-tunisia-revolt>)

To accompany Bradley Tuck's vision of an "alternative Mary Poppins" in his article, we asked designers to submit a *Mary Poppins* One+One cover image in the style of a communist poster. We had a very high standard of responses. Four in particular stood out. Thank you to all the illustrators who got involved.



Luke Dacey l_dacey@hotmail.co.uk



Caz Church www.cazish.blogspot.com



Ester Sands www.estersands.tumblr.com



Suki Rai sukirai.tumblr.com

One+One is a self-published independent journal with a team of writers who are active participants in a non-profit, non-commercial venture. We are self-funded and write for the love of our subject rather than for personal financial gain.

We encourage a wide variety of articles whether autobiographical, journalistic, historical, philosophical, socio-political or whether they are manifestos or interviews. However the perspective of the filmmaker or the critical re-invention of film, as a theme, is of central importance. All articles should cover at least one of the topics listed below.

- Critical examinations of filmmaking; its craft, process or social context. This may concern either independent self-financed filmmaking or the film industry and film-funding.
- Social issues in films.
- Film as part of a "Revolutions in Progress"
- Underrated or under-acknowledged filmmakers or acknowledged filmmakers who have radically and experimentally broken boundaries in some way.

We are looking for proposals, from writers, filmmakers and theorists who are interested in breaking new ground, in unique discussions and challenges.

The word count is negotiable but we usually look for articles under 3000 words.

A 300-word proposal should be sent before an essay idea is finalised.

Send proposals to submissions@filmmakersjournal.co.uk. Further information on submissions can be viewed at <http://filmmakersjournal.co.uk/submissions.php> and the journal can be viewed on our website <http://filmmakersjournal.co.uk>.



INFINITY FOODS

Natural & Organic Foods

25 North Road, Brighton

infinityfoodsretail.co.uk

buenito

visual communication & creative thinking

www.buenito.com