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GUERRILLA BATHES AT NOON: REVOLUTIONARY POETICS OR THE POETICS OF ANACHRONISM

LOUIS ARMAND

*Rediscovering poetry may become indistinguishable from reinventing
revolution...*

—Situationist International

Gorilla Bathes at Noon is the title of a 1993 film by Yugoslav director, Dušan Makavejev, which began as a ficto-documentary about the Berlin Wall but was overtaken by historical events. By the time Makavejev was able to begin production in 1991, the Yugoslav civil war had already begun, and *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* transformed, belatedly, into a film about a Russian army major, Victor Borisovich (the fictional child of two characters from the Soviet propaganda epic *The Fall of Berlin* [1949]) who is “deserted” by his unit and left behind in Berlin after the Wall is torn down. The film comes two decades after Makavejev’s chief statements about revolution, *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), which caused him to go into exile, and *Sweet Movie* (1974), a film that remains controversial today. Each of these films is an explicit critique of state socialism and the Western free market it was posed against during the Cold War. A series of films made in exile, including *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985), shot in Australia, addresses the same ideological conflict from within the cultural-mythological framework of the West. His last full-length film, *Hole in the Soul* (1994), is a pseudo-biographical documentary examining the post-Cold War transition from ideological divide to commodified universal, and what we might call the “end” of a certain possibility of militant cinema accompanied by a turn towards a mode of “critique” driven largely by a retrospective force. That is to say, driven by something like a revolutionary nostalgia that has not learnt to reinvent itself and is constantly obliged to grapple with its own fictionality.

This crisis of fictionality is the major focal-point of *Gorilla Baths at Noon*, coupled to Fukuyama’s claim that the end of the Cold War exposed what he calls the *end of history*. “What we may be witnessing,” Fukuyama wrote in 1989, “is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period

of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (1992, xi).

History and ideology are here transferred from the domain of the real to that of the fantastic—which they've always inhabited in any case. But this fantastic element remains troubling for Fukuyama liberal view of the political perfectability of man and the notion of ideological evolution; a term which, in its proper sense, implies contingency and disjunction, rather than the hegemonic rationale implied by Fukuyama.

In Makavejev's film, the persistence of the Soviet presence after the fall of the Berlin Wall describes a type of historical revenant. An uncanniness to mirror the ideological pseudo-reality of the Cold War propaganda machines which came before it. Whatever naïve belief there might once have been in a critical breakthrough from the inauthentic character of Cold War virtual-real to some more authentic world of liberated individuality is exposed as simply one more in a seemingly endless chain of rhetorical gestures, like Coca-Cola's "real thing." German reunification itself becomes a trope for a newly homogenised pseudo-real—its pseudo character made explicit by the material traces of what it seeks to sublimate or over-code. In this way, the anachronism of the Russian officer's uniform worn by Makavejev's protagonist doubles the anachronism represented by the giant statue of Lenin in East Berlin, in what is now United Nations Square, whose demolition is the dramatic centre-piece of Makavejev's film.

But the anachronism of Lenin's statue isn't itself an objective reality but merely the product of changed hegemonic structures at play. A phallus in whose decapitation a psychosexual drama of power is to be played out; has already been played out. It is worth keeping in mind, too, that during the shooting of *Gorilla Bathes at Noon*, large demonstrations were staged both for and *against* the statue's demolition. "Hands of History," the banners proclaimed. It is of course obvious that the "post-ideological" spectacle of the new German government, enacted in the statue's demolition, masked a parallel ideological normalisation which has recently come to complete itself in the rehabilitation of this very same monument for exhibition purposes (the repatriation of the Marxist revolution as historical artefact), at the same time as we are witnessing the demolition of sections of the preserved Berlin Wall, reinvented as a symbol of resistance (I refer to the recent attempts to bulldoze the East Side Gallery, with its iconic mural depicting Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker kissing), to serve the interests not of individual liberty but of the real-estate lobby.

We need not look far to see how such a rehabilitation has come to effect criticism itself—a recurrent theme in Makavejev's work, but nowhere more explicit than in his final works, centred as they are upon the lost force of revolt, dissidence, aesthetic militancy, and the realisation that (as Debord argued already in 1959) "cinema, too, has to be destroyed," just as the old symbols of revolution must be destroyed. Destroyed and no longer bespoke;

no conservation of the exhausted “avant-garde” forms, like some prudential heritage trust. To evoke a rather old dialectical gesture, what is here nominally called “revolution” must be destroyed in order to be reinvented. But this reinvention itself is under contest and also must be reinvented.

We are of course familiar with this as a problem of poetics. Of the so-called *poetic-turn*. And we are also familiar, particularly from the work of Godard and Makavejev, that what we have so far been calling cinema is synonymous with a certain idea of “poetry.” This certainly was the view of the radical Dutch film-maker, Menno ter Braak, who in his 1926 “Cinema Militans” manifesto defined cinema as “an eccentric form of poetry: the poetry of the eternal mistake” (1992, 10). This anachronism of the “eternal mistake” points us also to a specific understanding of what “destruction” means in the classical tropes of reinvention. In his own “Cinema Militans” lecture of 1989, given before the fall of the Berlin Wall in November of that year, Makavejev argues for the need “to dissociate subversion from destruction” as it is conventionally understood (1992, 58). Subversion is not understood as a lesser undertaking. Rather, subversion is the *trope* of an ongoing reinvention, hinged upon the “eternal mistake” that refuses correction. Between Debord and Makavejev, the classic relation of destruction to reinvention is, in a sense, itself subverted, since in the first instance “destruction” is always visited upon aesthetic forms by those forces of normalisation that seek to expropriate and exploit them: subversion is the destruction of this destruction.

This is not intended as a rhetorical nicety. The revolutionary character of this undertaking is very real. For Makavejev, it represents the sole basis for a future of cinema. And this future, we shall see, is very much vested in cinema’s subversive relationship to a certain *rationality of its time*. It is this subversion that Alain Badiou, reflecting on Godard, terms “la seconde modernité cinématographique” (2010, 101). Like Godard, we are expected to understand cinematography here as not strictly “film,” but as a conception of *writing*, of the graphic trace. Lumière’s cinematograph, Godard reminds us, was a machine for writing with images; a notion echoed in Alexandre Austruc’s well-known phrase “caméra-stylo,” the camera-pen. And it is no accident that Godard, Makavejev and others, proceeding back to Eisenstein’s close engagement with the “physiological palpability”¹ of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, should perceive cinema’s modernity as partaking directly in the modernist revolution of the word.

Poetic in structure, writerly in form, cinema is upheld here as a universal trope of reinvention; against the generic institutionalisation of a “culture industry.” Indeed, it was Eisenstein’s contention that cinema encompassed the holistic sense of possibility innate to the arts in general; a possibility caused only to diminish within the institutional framework of official cultures, defining the arts in separation from one another. It was for this reason he rejected the idea of Joyce as a writer of literature and considered

¹Eisenstein (1949, 6).

him rather as a maker of cinema. And just as Pound insisted upon the vitality of the epic form in an age of diminished possibilities – the epic being, in Pound’s conception, a “poem with history in it” – so too Godard, in a post-Cold War age of likewise perceived diminished possibilities, regards cinema as a “museum of the real”; that it is “the century’s metaphor” (Godard and Ishaghpour 2005, 87). History, the discourse of the real, manifests here not in terms of a *realism*, but as anachronism, the “eternal error” that situates a cinematic poïesis always *en retard* while also being *in advance* of itself. So that, as Makavejev argues, “the filmic is what, in the film, cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where...metalanguage ceases” (1992, 58).

Makavejev’s “filmic” and Badiou’s “modernité cinématographique” point in two distinct, though mutually implied, directions. The latter, with its explicit invocation to a modernity, harks back to the modernist “revolution of the word” as a revolt against “language gone stiff and dead” – what Gertrude Stein called “associative language, used from unthinking habit” (Dydo 1993, 2). Like the later Joyce, Stein’s poetic announced a refusal to “subordinate all elements to a compositional centre.” Instead, she “patterned sensation into composition with each letter, syllable and word, each space and line” (Dydo 1993, 2). In a study ostensibly of Godard, Colin McCabe writes similarly of Joyce, arguing that “*Finnegans Wake* takes the whole of history and language for its subject and uses montage as its basic creative principle, but a montage which operates within the individual word” (2003, 315).

Modernité cinématographique, then, is in some fundamental sense vested in the poetics of the word, or rather the graphic mark, no longer purely a “signifier” but rather an “image,” constitutive of its own *reality*. And this brings us to Makavejev’s “filmic,” in part an echo of André Bazin’s famous thesis about the ontology of the photographic image. That is to say, that in a cinema that is not merely an established set of conventions, it is the operations of the image, the *poetics* of the image, and not some external *depicted* reality that constitutes its “meaning.” No metalanguage. Presentability is thus in a sense subverted, but from within, as a condition of the filmic, not as a subordinate state of affairs brought about by the filmic. This would be another sense in which subversion is dissociated from destruction, for Makavejev, since it is not a question of the filmic *destroying* presentability, but rather of its exposure of the fictional status of presentability. Just as in Stein and Joyce, the revolution of the word is not a destruction of language, but the subversion of a mimetic ideology that conceals its own fictionality and promotes itself as the sole conduit of the real. It is rather language effecting a material reality, or we might say *non-fictionality*, for which the mimetic register constitutes a pervasive fantasy – what Debord calls *spectacle*.

In a relatively obscure document, published anonymously in the January 1963 issue (#8) of the *Internationale Situationniste* – entitled “All the King’s Men” – Debord sets out a thesis for the revolutionary potential of poetry. This thesis echoes the Situationist position on cinema, and the two terms – poetry and cinema – may be considered in Debord’s writing as more or less

synonymous. Just as Godard regards cinema as something into which “everything can be put,” Debord’s neo-poetism regards “poetry” as “nothing other than liberated language, language recovering its richness, language which breaks its rigid significations and simultaneously embraces words, music, cries, gestures, painting, mathematics, facts, acts. Poetry,” he argues, “thus depends on the greatest wealth of possibilities in living and changing life...” (Debord, Trocchi, and Vaneigem 1981, 115). Moreover, “poetry must be understood as immediate communication within reality and as real alteration of this reality.”

Poetism, wrote Karel Teige in his 1924 manifesto, “is, above all, a way of life” (1999, 70). Positioned against “tendentious ideological verse with its ‘contents and plot,’” Poetism declares itself “not literature” (1999, 68). Teige’s Poetism is closely identified with “the new cinematography,” as a multifaceted engagement with the full range of contemporary “invention,” from traffic lights to avionics and radio. Like Debord, Teige’s open conception of poetics is born of a scepticism of aesthetic institutions and a culture industry concerned not with invention but rather the normalisation of cultural commodities. It is no accident that “All the King’s Men” — one of the very few documents explicitly concerning “poetry” with which Debord’s name is associated — begins with a critique of the relationship between language and institutional authority. “The problem of language,” Debord writes, “is at the heart of all struggles between the forces striving to abolish present alienation and those striving to maintain it” (Debord, Trocchi, and Vaneigem 1981, 114). The revolutionary potential of poetry, for Debord, lies precisely in its relation to invention, drawn in part from the ancient meaning of the term *poiēsis*, to make, to bring into being. For Debord, invention has the additional implication of *insubordination*. To understand the revolutionary potential of poetry, is on the one hand to recognise that “words coexist with power” while at the same time understanding “the phenomenon of the insubordination of words, their desertion, their open resistance, which is manifest in all modern writing, as a symptom of the general revolutionary crisis of society” (1981, 114).

We see in Debord that it is the *condition* of language which articulates reality, and not its “contents or plot.” A reality that is subversive of an “informational” ideology; a reality *at odds* with the prevailing power, which, as Debord says, forces words “in a manner of speaking...to carry a pass, determines their place in the production process (where some of them conspicuously work overtime) and gives them their paycheque” (1981, 114). Exceeding these forms of control, poetry “denounces all unilateral ‘communication,’ whether in the old form of *art* or in the modern form of *informationalism*”; becoming “more and more...the antimatter of consumer society” (1981, 115). Like Fukuyama’s “end of history,” though not in the sense Fukuyama intended it, power in this equation represents a “no future.” It is the closure of invention; the systematic commodification of all modes of “communication.” “Power,” says Debord, “lives off stolen goods. It creates nothing.” And yet it is this relation to power that gives poetry its critical impetus; an impetus stemming

from that ancient quarrel of philosophy and poetry famously evoked by Plato in the *Republic*, in which the stakes of this confrontation, between poetry and power (the polis), are made immense. The fate of politics, as Badiou notes, is linked by Plato to the fate of poetry—and from this singular gesture of exclusion stems also a certain irrationality in the history of reason, the system of knowledge, and the discourse of power.

This well-known sleight of hand by which Plato founds his ideal polis resonates still in our own time. It encompasses *on the one hand* the institutionalising of art and the domestication of poetry within “officially tolerated” culture, by which its subversive potential is negated and, *on the other hand*, the ongoing “falsification of what exists,” as Debord says, by “information.” What stands out in Debord’s argument is that it is firstly necessary to rediscover poetry in the sphere of “everyday life” separate from what he calls “the inverted remains of the history of poetry, transformed into...poetic monument” (1981, 117). “Rediscovering poetry,” he writes, may in fact become “inseparable from rediscovering revolution” (1981, 115); that revolution, too, has become domesticated, reduced to a type of monumentalism—like the Berlin Lenin monument in Makavejev’s film: the fetish objects of what Debord calls “the retarded reactionaries of some neoversification.” Debord and Makavejev both call instead for a mode of *perversion* (*perversification*).

In *Gorilla Bathes at Noon*, a staging of this *perverse* is given in a scene between the Russian officer Viktor Borisovic and his mistress, who appears to him in a dream as a transgendered Lenin, with beard and leather cap—a Freudian, phantasmagoric doubling of the Lenin monument, exposing the erotic mass fantasy by which the ideological “falsification of what exists” is mediated. This Lenin, in whom the phallic trope of power is slyly perverted, even knits Viktor Borisovic a sock. Later Borisovic will be encouraged to perform a little psychic surgery to remove the bullet lodged in Lenin’s brain; the cause of a terrible migraine—the migraine of history, we might say—that is only relieved when the monumental head of the statue in United Nations Square is hoisted away by a de-construction crew.

Elsewhere in *Gorilla Bathes at Noon*, a similar critical-perversion is directed at the mythologizing of Stalin, through use of found footage from the propaganda film, *The Fall of Berlin*, interspliced in “vivid Sovcolor”²; a film which in turn was based on Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. Makavejev practices a type of Situationist *détournement* by overdubbing a key scene of *The Fall of Berlin* with parts of the sound track from Riefenstahl’s film, in which parading SA and SS call out their places of origin as they pass: in the Soviet version it is the units of the Red Army who do so, parading past the captured Reichstag. In Montage the defeated Germans surrender their standards, which are heaped up in a pile: and it is at this point Makavejev dubs in Riefenstahl’s text, forecasting the eventual “defeat” and collapse of the Soviet Union in its turn.

²San Francisco Film Festival (1993).

The mirroring of *The Fall of Berlin* and the fall of the Berlin Wall – and likewise Soviet state socialism and the fascist aestheticisation of power – produces a potent critique, which Makavejev elsewhere develops in *Sweet Movie* and *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism*. Like Debord, Makavejev's treatment is occasioned by a certain *tropology*, or *détournement* – here, the critical appropriation and transformation of the ideological “image” and the exposure of its phantasmagoric character. Makavejev doesn't attempt this simply as an ironic gesture to poke fun at socialism or travesty the pseudo-real of the Cold War era. There are of course risks involved, easily disavowed if we do not wish to recognise them, capable of either reinforcing or threatening the fabricated reality in which “power” consists. It is an adventure which Debord describes as “difficult, dangerous and never guaranteed...almost impossible” (Debord, Trocchi, and Vaneigem 1981, 115). And what it defines is nothing less than a revolutionary *poetics*.

In “All the King's Men” a distinction is established between the “history of poetry” and the “poetry of history”; the former signalling a “running away” from the latter, which is elided with “the history of everyday life and its possible liberation; the history of each individual life and its liberation” versus “spectacular history.” Thus “poetry,” for Debord, “means nothing less than simultaneously and inseparably creating events and their language” (1981, 115). This distinction treads a fine line, one which hesitates on the verge of its own fictionality as the depiction of a state-of-affairs, even a state *in flux*. For just as in the films of Godard and Makavejev, it is not the mode of representation that is at stake, or the real status of its object, but rather its ontological condition. We are not speaking of *poetry about* some so-called present-state-of-affairs – a poetry *about* revolution, dressed up as some form of neo-avantgardism, overrun by “adolescent guerrilla armies of specialised humanoids” as Burroughs says³ – but a poetics whose constitutive reality is itself a state-of-affairs, one in which the present is encompassed and brought into being *against* the reifications of a technocratic, pseudo-modernity.

Debord insists on this point. Adopting a position opposed to that of the Surrealists, he argues: “It is a matter not of putting poetry at the service of revolution, but rather of putting revolution at the service of poetry” – a distinction, he adds, that “cannot be understood if one clings to the old conception of revolution or of poetry” (1981, 116). Such “old conceptions” are merely the pap of “neolliterates...created by the modern spectacle” (1981, 117). The insubordination of language means that “revolution” in this sense is not programmatic, orientated towards the construction of one or another utopian reality. It is rather the on-going construction of a fluid critical framework. A mode of articulation that is at once *objectless* (it is instead a generalisable poetics) and constitutive of its own *non-fictionality* (it creates “events and their language” and so underwrites, rather than depicts, “everyday life”).

³Burroughs (1971, cover blurb).

The consequence of this is encapsulated in Debord's re-thinking of the "old conceptions" of poetry, as "poetry without poems if necessary"; and leads to the qualification: "poetry necessarily without poems" (1981, 115). A formulation echoed, perhaps unintentionally, in Charles Bernstein's definition of poetics as "poetry by other means," and which may be figured as a triangulation between three terms:

POIËSIS $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ R(E)EVOLUTION

$\nwarrow \nearrow$

$\searrow \swarrow$

PERVERSION

This apparent self-negation (the traversed duality of poetics and history) is really a refusal of a certain *fictional* status, adverting to the fact that whatever, within the institution of literature, etc., can be presented as "poetry" is already a fictionalisation of its revolutionary potential. Just as an institutional avant-garde is a contradiction in terms. Obviously this demands adherence to a conception of poetics that is not only multifaceted but demanding of the highest stakes. Even in the deflationary form of a "Personism."

Poetics, as we all know, centres upon the *turn*, the *trope*. It is perhaps for this reason that we can easily elide terms like *poiësis* and *détournement*. However else we may conceive of this sense of a *turn*, according to whatever orientation, we understand that, in "poetics," it describes not a relation to some object (it is not a *mimēsis*), but rather a condition of language, irrespective of how we impose upon it. And in this consists its subversive character. Because while the *turn* avails us of a relation to some hypothetical object, to some futurity, it alone manifests its objectivity. By *détourning* the process of domestication in language, the poetic transfigures, reinvents. The poetic turn is a type of *perpetuum mobile*. A revolutionary machine. A cinematograph. A writing-in-motion.

Subversion not irrationalism. If by irrational we mean a systematic alienation from linguistic potential; normalisation by abstraction. In Marx's critique of the industrialisation of labour, the individual is in fact a *product* of alienation,⁴ just as, in Debord, a certain type of individualism is the product of the *spectacle*. For Debord, however, it is a question of *détourning* the forces of alienation in order to expose the spectacular character of

⁴Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (1857-61).

the so-called real and recover a means of access to unregularised forms of linguistic (and other species of socio-political) potential. A “poetic” logic posits a means of subverting the informatic character of a “language of the real world,” employed to maintain a type of perceptual *status quo*. What is potentially radical in Debord’s thinking is that the logic of *as if* is always bound to a poetics, that the objecthood of all discourse is at root *tropic*, and that within the discourse of power itself resides the revolutionary potential for its subversion.

In *Gorilla Bathes at Noon*, Makavejev gives us the figure of the *actor*, who in the final scene holds up his Russian major’s uniform in front of the camera on a coathanger. It is no longer a film actor (Svetozar Cvetkovic) pretending to be a Russian officer, but simply a uniform. And this is what the actor communicates to us, from outside the frame, both directly and by means of his absence from the picture. The obvious anti-naturalism of the preceding film resolves into this theatre of facticity precisely on the basis of something that cannot be presented: the *thing itself* revealed not simply as an “empty sign,” but as an empty sign whose “emptiness” is adverted. This *thing itself* is of course a species of *commodity*, whose rationale bound up with the figure of the actor; a figure of substitution and deferral, of access to desire, of the compulsion to repeat, of the return of a certain repressed – which is a form of alienation recycled into objects. The actor performs a type of irrational pragmatism that structures the real into a set of actions that simultaneously emphasise its fictional status so as to bolster the actor-subject’s sense of his own authenticity. And he’s right, since (paradoxically) the actor is precisely a *figure*, a poetic trope, and in this drama of alienation it is the *figure* that constitutes the only kind of *non-fictionality*.

What does this mean?

I would like to propose that *non-fictionality* designates that which is beyond or before any hypothesis; which is outside hypothesis’ reach. Which is to say, that which cannot be *represented* within the speculative framework of an *as if*, nor within that of an *avantgardism* seeking to lay claim over some future retrospective view of its own history, by asserting some idea of the future. In his sometimes controversial 1974 essay, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger warns that “an art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticise it” (1984, 50). While historically avant-gardes have harboured socially transformative aspirations – in just the way Debord speaks of acting upon everyday life – the merging of a poetics with a factography of the world at large, by way of a type of axiomatic *mimēsis*, merely substitutes its own recycled artefacts for the work of “invention.” An *as if* that advances itself into the world programmatically.

Such an art becomes that paradoxical figure of a guardian of an historical fiction posed in the guise of the new, which has been reduced to a signature obsolescence *in perpetuity*, being thus the mark of the commodity; whose availability to the projective wish of the consumerised mass mind seeks to neutralise any real subversive potential (other than by way of unselfconscious

parody). The Berlin statue of Lenin is a perfect example of this, in the way in which Makavejev exposes the relation of myth to subjective desire: the psychosexual character of Lenin monumentalised is paralleled by the mute monumentality of the figure of Stalin in those scenes from *The Fall of Berlin*, in which—like Hitler in Leni Riefensthal's *Triumph of the Will*—descends from the sky, emerging from a shining silver aeroplane in pristine white uniform, framed monumentally by the camera, his bearing extremely mannered, remaining mute throughout, surrounded by a sea of awe-struck worshippers. The scene is entirely fictional: Stalin never flew to Berlin, and certainly not on the day of the capture of the Reichstag.

Two types of “marriage” is going on here, in the Soviet psyche: one in which Stalin stands as the antithesis of Hitler (and thus Communism of Nazism); the other, more “historically” orientated, between Stalin and Lenin; one carefully orchestrated by the Kremlin, in which the Father of the Revolution and the Saviour of the Revolution are consubstantiated. It paved the way for a large scale industry in the manufacture of *Stalin* monuments throughout the Soviet sphere, including the largest of all such monuments, unveiled in Prague in 1955 and measuring 15.5 metres high: locally referred to as “Stalin and the Bread Line.” At the time it was the largest group statue in Europe. After Krushev's denunciations, the monument was demolished in 1962, with no “end of history” yet in sight. But as if in confirmation of Fukuyama's thesis that postmodernism is the masterstroke of capitalism, thirty-four years later an 11-metre tall statue of Michael Jackson was temporarily erected in its place, as a promotional stunt for his European “HIStory” tour. Here, in case we miss Makavejev's point, revolutionary monumentalism merges seamlessly with commodification. The one does not so much expropriate the other, as to anticipate it, in an anachronistic gesture of a post-modernism before the fact. In *The Fall of Berlin*, Stalin is already Michael Jackson, pop-icon in whiteface, waving mutely for the cameras and the adoring crowd.

When Krushev delivered his famous speech of February 1956, shocking the world with his condemnation and criminalisation of Stalinism, he made pointed reference to the cult of personality for which *The Fall of Berlin* was a vehicle, and its abstracted iconography of power redolent of Peter the Great:

Let us recall the film, *The Fall of Berlin*. Here only Stalin acts. He issues orders in a hall in which there are many empty chairs... Where is the military command? Where is the politburo? Where is the government? What are they doing, and with what are they engaged? There is nothing about them in the film. Stalin acts for everybody, he does not reckon with anyone. He asks no one for advice. Everything is shown to the people in this false light? Why? To surround Stalin with glory—contrary to the facts of historical truth.⁵

⁵Krushev (1956). This speech was delivered to a closed session, and though copies leaked almost immediately, the official text was only published in 1989.

Even negativised, the myth of power and its monumentalisation—as the mass-reified form of the commodity—is a vehicle of an originary fictionalisation, capable of integrating virtually anything into its “consensual illusion.” History, like the Freudian unconscious, cedes to a timelessness from which a welter of forms are extruded by way of collective *and* individuated, desire. Nothing, here, is ever decisive; nothing can be declared or held to account that cannot be reinvented (Stalin for Lenin, Kruschchev for Stalin and so on): not even the “end of History.” Wherever discourse addresses itself to a dogmatic objectification, the logic of the commodity prevails. It is the form *par excellence* of an *as if* upon which those hegemonic structures of social reality devolve. It is the crisis of the *fictional* within the dimension of the real.

This is the lesson we are given.

The question remains one of articulation. How are we to distinguish the *fictional* from the action of a *poiësis*; of a (re)invention that eschews the presentation of a given *idea* but rather seeks, by way of a movement of language, to manifest the conditions for thinking and acting *critically*?

Perhaps this is too much to expect, since the one is always open to simulation by the other. Nevertheless, whatever the expropriative potential vested in the commodity, it still stands in an inverse relation to the potential for invention: the capacity to interject into the world elements of the *unprecedented*. It is this anachronistic movement, of what does not belong in a given time and is unrepresentable within its logical apparatus while nevertheless transforming it, that drives history—even beyond the “end of history.” And it is here that we find ourselves in the realm of the non-fictional. In whatever way the fictive may normalise perturbations in its object-field, its devolution upon “content and plot” (however arbitrarily)—its basic socio-economic narratives—remains directed by an underlying crisis: the crisis of an incommensurability between a world-historical hypothesis and the ideological forms of its “realisation.” Here the contour of anachronism defines a two-fold relation, towards the poetic, on the one hand, and the commodity, on the other; a relation which is internally traversed by way of a *détournement*. (The first concerns the critical potential of an object *as* an articulation of *poiësis*: the anachronistic character of Duchamp’s *Fountain*, for example, as performing a critique of the institutional logic of art. The second concerns the anachronistic character of the institutional aesthetic object as *neo-avant-garde*, which articulates a critique of the commodity, anachronism’s *Doppelgänger*.)

The commodity is always surrounded by a type of detritus. Just as Berlin in Makavejev’s film is a type of detritus of commodification whose temporary locus is the Lenin monument. State Socialism in this respect is no different from Western capitalism. Just as the history of poetry is littered with detritus, monuments to a certain permissive megalomania. Permissive in that it beckons investment in the idea of its own timeliness: that we may each be *of the moment*. (“Coke is Life!” as the advert says. Why not “Poetry is Life!”? It’s the same thing.) And that we can be of the moment, so to speak, *eternally*. In the pristine looking glass of the commodity; forever desirable,

forever young, like a Warhol silkscreen. ("Coke is Life!" and thus the precursor of every possible future, which is in truth No FUTURE. Since in every possible future, Coke will still be *Life*.)

Here we have that reactionary totalism in which the so-called revolutionary and status quo intermingle. And today nothing is more commonplace in poetry than that institutionalised neo-avantgardism of nostalgic, imitative forms, whose objects loudly proclaim – within the proscribed annexes of the culture industry – their revolutionary status; and they *are*, of course, but only insofar as they perpetuate the revolving door of "literary" commodification.

But if poetry is to be revolutionary, it must assume a risk. Above all it must risk itself. ("Poetry without poems if necessary.") And if we expect to be shown what the non-fictional in language looks like, we must admit to disappointment. A revolutionary poetics has no identifiable "model." The very idea of the "model" has had to be reinvented. ("Poetry necessarily without poems.") Its *antecedence* is that of a dynamic, one which cannot be reduced to an array of "poetic objects." Past monuments, Ozymandias-like; aggrandised bits of cultural detritus. Such objects would be merely sites of disavowal, until they, too, are reinvented: no longer monuments, but "revolutions."

Perhaps we might think of a "revolutionary poetics" as that which verges upon, but does not yield to, a condition "like" the subjunctive in grammar: it operates in a tropic movement that does not seek resolution, is without an object-correlative, and remains that productive anachronism, that *poiësis*, that "perpetual inventory" as Rauschenberg says, that constitutes its own temporality, and its own "end."

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