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Impasse of David Bordwell's Model of Film Study

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Impasse of David Bordwell's Model of Film Study

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Abstract

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The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate the way in which David Bordwell's model of film study and his consequential proposition for understanding art cinema are insufficient for engaging art films and films in general in terms of the political. David Bordwell's article "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice," published in 1979, has been tremendously influential for how the category of art cinema has been conceptualized within film scholarship. He is one of the defining figures for the discipline of film studies. Throughout the eighties and nineties he embarked on the project of restructuring the discipline proposing an approach he defined as empirical investigation that would be capable of dealing with the numerous and diverse phenomena from film history. Today, his books "Film Art: An Introduction" and "Film History: An Introduction" are mandatory textbooks for undergraduate film studies across the United States. I've tried to overcome Bordwell's formalist approach in order to create the conditions of possibility for thinking about film in a way that will allow for the recognition of multiplicity and complexity of relations between films and worlds in which they were created. In the first chapter I demonstrate how Bordwell's reading of Sergei Eisenstein theoretical positions throughout 1920's is predicated upon the erasure of political aspect of Eisenstein's thought. In the second chapter, I discern what constitutes Bordwell's model of film study that relies on the severance of object of its study from the world. In order to do this I use Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" and Althusser's "On the Materialist Dialectic". I conclude the chapter with a proposition of how to understand the intention of the knowledge produced by his process of production of knowledge. In the third chapter I engage the character and limitations of Bordwell's formalist proposition to understand art cinema in relation to Steve Neale's notion of art cinema as institution.

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Introduction

The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate the way in which David Bordwell's model of film study and his consequential proposition for understanding art cinema are insufficient for engaging art films and films in general in terms of the political. David Bordwell's article "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice,"¹ first published in 1979, has been tremendously influential for how the category of art cinema has been conceptualized within film scholarship. It set one of the dominant trajectories that scholarship has followed and still follows today. Further on, David Bordwell is one of the defining figures for the discipline of film studies. Throughout the eighties and nineties he embarked on the project of restructuring the discipline of film studies he perceived as being dominated by the "Grand Theory" "top-down" approach. He confronted it with something he termed a mid-level theory approach, an approach of a "bottom-up" empirical investigation that would be capable of dealing with the numerous and diverse phenomena from film history. He termed this project Historical Poetics, and with it he laid down the conceptual foundation for organizing and structuring the discipline in a systematic and rigorous way. His books "Film Art: An Introduction" and "Film History: An Introduction" became mandatory text books for undergraduate film studies across the United States. With his prolific output he became one of the most prominent figures in the discipline. Through his work in the field of film criticism he asserted his influence on the discourse of popular film criticism. As somebody who prior to starting graduate Film

¹ David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice", in Fowler Catherine (ed.) *The European Cinema Reader*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 94-102.

and Media studies wrote regularly as a film critic, I found in Bordwell's systematically organized thought proper tools for escaping tendencies towards arbitrary interpretations that dominated the discourse of criticism as I perceived it. He allowed me to talk about form, style, narrative conventions and particular visual devices, as they were evident, there in the film itself. My writing itself seemed more scientific.

With this thesis, and in general, throughout my graduate studies so far, I have tried to come to a position from which I can understand films in the way they are related to the world they belong to. What can the nature of this relation tell me about both films and world? Throughout this process of coming to a position I became aware of my own experience of coming to and being positioned in a certain way. So it is not that I am, as a person who engages films on a daily basis, only being conditioned by cinematic representations which I encounter, I have been positioned, as an international student from Serbia, by the circulation of media, commodities and humans characteristic of global world. Thinking about cinema also encompasses thinking about my own position in the world I belong to. I came to have a belief that if one of the characteristics of the contemporary global neoliberal world is its incomprehensibility, art cinema, as a mongrel body of films that simultaneously engages local and global, can be conceived of as the site where the unthinkable of contemporary world becomes visually and experientially manifest. Thinking about cinema through Bordwell's static analytical categories doesn't allow for this comprehension, that is, his model of film study doesn't perceive this relation between the world and cinema, and the one who is establishing this relation, as intrinsic and crucial to their existence.

Moving images of art cinema offer representations of particular ways of being in the world that are specific to local contexts. However, the materiality of art cinema's exhibition practices embodied in film festivals, art house theaters and art galleries engenders, again, particular ways of being that are expressions of global connectivity. Rosalind Galt's and Karl Schoonover's proposition to understand art cinema as the category of a 'mongrel' identity resonates strongly with me². Conceptualizing art cinema in terms of impurity, in the way it perverts categories and disrupts taxonomies, the ones Bordwell proposes for example, led me to interrogate the basic theoretical frameworks and conceptual underpinnings that define it.

This idea of impurity brings to the fore the general conceptions that underpin theoretical work performed on film, as well as the character of knowledge that emerges as the product of this work. It confronts us with an understanding that a film cannot be accounted for outside of the system of concepts through which it is introduced into the sphere of knowledge. In order to think about film, it is unavoidable to think about the conditions of possibility of the thought itself. That is to say one needs to account for the way thought is organized, structured and conditioned by the sphere of knowledge within which realms it moves, roams and wanders, that which define and limit its existence.

² Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: Impurity of Art Cinema" in Galt and Schoonover (ed.) *Global Art Cinema, New Theories and Histories* (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press:2010), 3-27.

Throughout the thesis I've tried to overcome Bordwell's approach, his categories and the way my thought has been defined by them. I did this in order to create the conditions of possibility for a different way of thinking about film, one that will allow for the recognition of multiplicity and complexity of relations between films and worlds in which they were created. In the first chapter I demonstrate, in the case of Bordwell's reading of Sergei Eisenstein theoretical positions throughout 1920's, to what degree, political aspect of Eisenstein's thought has been erased from his account. In the second chapter, I discern what constitutes Bordwell's model of film study that is predicated on the severance of object of its study from the world. In order to do this I use Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" and Althusser's "On the Materialist Dialectic". I conclude the chapter with a proposition of how to understand the intention of the knowledge produced by his process of production of knowledge. In the third chapter I engage the character and limitations of Bordwell's formalist proposition to understand art cinema in relation to Steve Neale's notion of art cinema as institution.

By the end (and this end in a sense comes now, since I am writing this introduction at the end of my writing process), I believe I've come to position from which, in my further academic and critical work, I can engage conception of art cinema that steps outside formal, 'scientific' and empirical thought about film.

Chapter I

The Nature of Eisenstein's Project in the Twenties

Introduction

I will outline Eisenstein's theory of cinema in the third decade of the XX century in order to recognize it as a political project inseparably connected to the historical moment of emergence of the post-revolutionary Soviet society. In order to do that I will focus on the role the concepts of effect and audience had in his writings from that period, and how they helped him define his own film practice. I will also offer a detailed reading of the opening sequence of *October* where I will discern the specificity of its cinematic discourse as a result of particular nature of Eisenstein's project.

In the end I will juxtapose Eisenstein's film theory in the silent era to David Bordwell's reading of it, in order to demonstrate to what degree Bordwell's reading is predicated upon erasure of political aspect from Eisenstein's theory. This erasure is dependent upon model of film study that has as one of its foundational principles separation of its object of study from the historical moment, or the world it emerged from. In the following chapter I will engage this model by understanding its underlying processes.

Eisenstein's Idea of Cinema in the Twenties

To comprehend Eisenstein's idea of cinema we need to understand it as firmly embedded within the manifold dynamics that determined the historical conjuncture in which he directed his films and wrote about them. I believe that the concepts of effect and audience could be discerned as pivotal for understanding Eisenstein's project in the twenties. The term “project” is used here to encompass both his theory and practice, because I see them as intricately intertwined in an effort to achieve the form and idea of cinema most suitable for the demands of new Soviet society. They also changed as the demands shifted. I will outline how the concepts of efficiency and audience have been formulated and reformulated in his writing during the course of production and reception of his three films *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin*, and *October*, which I believe can help us grasp how the historical dynamics shaped his project. At the end I will offer the close examination of the cinematic discourse of *October*, which presents the terminal point of his project in the twenties - it stands at the point right before the institution of Stalin's Five Year Plan and consequential new cultural policy, that in a sense prevented the realization of his big project of adaptation of Carl Marx's *Capital* for which *October* provided the conceptual foundation.

The “attraction” is the concept with which Eisenstein entered the field of cinema, and as such presents direct connection with his previous work in the theater. Formulated in the context of cinema, it referenced two things. First, it was the articulation of the

opposition to naturalism, 'illusory depictions' and 'transparency', the formulation of the artwork that operated as “a static 'reflection' of a particular event... in the sense of the unravelling of psychological problems where the attraction is the theme itself, existing and taking effect outside the particular action, but topical enough.”³ These are the characteristics that were attributed to the narrative conventions set by Hollywood films, the style of filmmaking that was considered naturalistic, with continuity editing perceived as a guarantee for the transparency of mode of production of film's effects and meanings. Miriam Hansen notices that the transition from “ the sophisticated mise-en-scene cinema of the Czarist era” to “Soviet montage aesthetics... was mediated, to a significant degree, by the impact of Hollywood.”⁴ So, in an effort to establish the different mode of film practice that would directly oppose the one associated with capitalism and bourgeoisie, the attraction provided Eisenstein with a method to formulate the idea of cinema whose the theme and events depicted directly correspond to the way in which it engages its audience – its effect. The attraction here defines the inner dynamic of the artwork in relation to the way that its effect is constructed. It enables the distinction of the two forms of art, one that is enclosed in itself, whose form does not correspond to the content, (because form is hidden, rendered transparent), and the other one, that embraces its striving toward creating the effect. The attraction is supposed to organize the event so that the effect stems directly from it. It provides Eisenstein with a way to surpass a distinction between a form and content.

³ Sergei Eisenstein, “The Montage of Attractions” in Taylor, Richard, (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader*, (London: BFI, 1998), 30-31.

⁴ Miriam Hansen , “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism” in *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999) 61.

“The attraction has nothing in common with ... the trick... In so far as the trick is absolute and complete within itself it means the direct opposite of the attraction, which is based exclusively on something relative, the reactions of the audience.”⁵ This introduces the attraction's second aspect. The attraction embodies the possibility to organize the mediation of the artwork between the represented or depicted events and a spectator in the most direct manner - to unite form and content for the purpose of the most forceful effect. It stands for something that has been Eisenstein's preoccupation throughout his career - attracting the spectator's attention. Both of these levels are inextricably connected, so that artwork should be organized in a sense to achieve the greatest degree of efficiency. Jacques Aumont comments that “this question of the spectator, and more broadly, of the ideological efficacy of art, is far from being specific to Eisenstein. Indeed it is one of the great dominant ideas of the whole immediate post-revolutionary period, in the form of agitprop (a double notion of agitation and propaganda, developed by Trotsky, among others – perhaps more than by Lenin)”⁶

Ontologically speaking, for Eisenstein, film takes its definite form in the mind of the spectator and it achieves that through the help of the concept of effect. The effect on the spectator is the crucial component of a film, since cinema cannot be conceptualized apart from a clear and important role it has in the building of the new society. In order to

⁵ Eisenstein, *The Eisenstein Reader*; *ibid.*, 30.

⁶ Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1987 (1979), 44.

establish “a new form of film phenomenon as the consequence of a new kind of social command”⁷, he believes it is essential to approach the question of the appropriateness of the particular form in relation to its efficiency in impacting the audience in the desired way. It is worth noting the consistency apparent in Eisenstein's attitude that cinema is, and should be, in the first place, considered as a powerful tool. “The first thing to remember is that there is, or rather should be, no cinema other than agit cinema.”⁸ How to approach film differently in the society where it was proclaimed to be the most important of all arts? Quoting Eisenstein from the forties still saying that cinema needs to be understood as a tool for influencing and reeducating people, Aumont comments: “Tirelessly, and no doubt with greatest sincerity, Eisenstein reaffirms the submission of all artistic activity to a final goal – the building of socialism. The conception of cinema he defends is unambiguously utilitarian.”⁹

I will try to discern how this question of effecting the audience has changed throughout his career through the way he approached the notion of audience. He has always seen the audience as film's basic material, but his approach, as well as the understanding of it, have been reworked and reformulated in numerous instances. In respect to his films in the twenties, through the approaches to audience in relation to notion of efficacy we can discern how his conceptualization of the idea of cinema and film form have been developed. In the first instance he adopted Bekhterev's studies of

⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, “The Problem of Materialist Approach to Form” in Taylor, Richard, (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader*, (London: BFI, 1998), 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹ Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, *ibid.*, 49.

reflexology, trying to formulate the idea that particular action and reaction, through the concept of stimuli could be tied together in a cause and effect chain, in a way of producing definite reflexes in a spectator. Later on he will broaden his understanding of the audience with the implementation of the idea of class consciousness.

While evaluating the search for a properly devised formal method in *Strike*, Eisenstein says: “Revolutionary form is the product of correctly ascertained technical methods for the concretisation of a new attitude and approach to objects and phenomena – of new class ideology.”¹⁰ This can only be achieved through an absolute consideration of the true conception of the work of art, which “is first and foremost a tractor ploughing over the audience's psyche in a particular class context.”¹¹ So, the director's task must be understood in the terms of “snatching fragments from our surroundings according to a conscious and predetermined plan calculated to launch them at the audience in appropriate combination, to subjugate it to the appropriate association with the obvious final ideological motivation.”¹² So, the 'events' clearly need to be chosen carefully, as to befittingly suit the preestablished conception of effect. If the prerequisite of film is to achieve the 'final ideological' goal, then the effect with which that will be achieved is of chief concern, and what is depicted, or represented, is secondary to it. In surpassing the distinction between a form and content, both are to be subsumed under the idea of utility. “The revolutionary quality of *The Strike* was exemplified by the fact that it took its

¹⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, “The Problem of Materialist Approach to Form” in Taylor, Richard, (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader*, (London: BFI, 1998), 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 56.

renewing principle not from the ranks of 'artistic phenomena' but from those that are directly utilitarian.”¹³ Those phenomena he locates in the sphere of “heavy industry, factory production and the forms of manufacturing processes.”¹⁴ In the society were one of dominant paradigms was the construction of that same society, where this industrial/productive sphere defined the whole revolutionary ideology, it is only appropriate that cinema will participate as well, and will be constructed and contextualized in the same way.

Eisenstein was taken aback by the differences in the reactions to *Strike*. When showed to the working class audience the final sequence did not elicit the response he was aiming for. It seems as one might have to create a separate and distinct work of propaganda for each member of possible audience.

What became important for Eisenstein was the question of the nature audience, or public. For Nesbet this “attention to audience reaction was very much in spirit of Lenin's 1920 'Directives Concerning the Work of Agitational-Instructional Trains and Steamboats', in which he ordered, among other things, that officials 'Pay attention to the necessity of painstaking selection of films and the calculation of the action of each film on the public during its projection.”¹⁵ As Jacques Aumont recognizes “it is with references to the Marxist class analysis that such a knowledge of the public (the real

¹³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵ Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures, Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking*, (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003) , 51.

public?) is determined and, therefore, that a film is calculated.”¹⁶ Eisenstein then formulated his interests not through particular spectator as much as through the notion of an audience, defining his final aim to be the production of class consciousness (klassovost). The idea that the dispersed and exploited working classes of capitalism need to come to the realization of themselves as a class and as a social force was foundational for his own understanding of *Battleship Potemkin*. Nesbet notices that “Battleship Potemkin hopes to embody the coming-to-consciousness of the Russian masses.”¹⁷ In the case of Potemkin, the idea of utility is being reconceived in respect to the changed understanding of the audience. Also the effect is organized differently, as well as the form.

Pondering about the general reactions on *Potemkin* Eisenstein expresses interesting understanding of the state of class consciousness of Soviet public. For most viewers the end of the film awoke the curiosity about where did the ship went. The fact that the tsarist ship did not open fire on Potemkin for them seems normal and not striking in any way. It is the idea of the wandering ship that caught their attention. For Eisenstein it says something about the consciousness of the public – what was inconceivable at the time, in 1905, now seems completely normal, “very average”. He concludes that what is evident is the progress of class consciousness.

Explaining the form and methods used in Potemkin, Eisenstein draws a direct

¹⁶ Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, ibid., 46.

¹⁷ Nesbet, *Savage Junctures*, ibid., 54.

parallel with Lenin's NEP (New Economic Policy). He says it is the NEP tactic in art. In terms of the form he characterizes NEP as an achievement of a particular effect by the method that is its logical opposite, "moving towards socialism by trading."¹⁸ So what is at work in *Battleship Potemkin* are the bourgeois methods of passive art, only used not for their accustomed purpose, "suspension of reality and other pacifying effects"¹⁹ but reassembled, 'business fashion', for new purposes. In the context of achieving the efficiency, always the primary goal, he justifies his use of the mists evoking reflexology believing that the blow on the head and softness of the pale blue light art both the 'stimulants'. It is essential to use this tool to "exacerbate a current conflict rather than distracting audiences from it. The bourgeoisie is a great expert in smoothing over the critical questions of the present day."²⁰ So, in *Battleship Potemkin*, the pathos is directed toward the renewal in the spirit of the class struggle. The pathos is thus the form of the active, class motivated recognition rather than simply an emotional experience. With the help of the reflexology and the marxist idea of class consciousness, the pathos is organized as to articulate a form of the tendentiousness with the agitational and ideological purpose. It is the politico-ideological consideration of the form for achieving the highest degree of efficiency.

¹⁸ Sergei Eisenstein, "Constanta (Whither the Battleship Potemkin)", in Taylor, Richard, (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader*, (London: BFI, 1998), 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

October

In an attempt to situate *October* in the landscape of post-revolutionary cinema in 1928, Eisenstein wrote:

“But: slaves of the machine are becoming masters of the machine. Slaves of raw material are becoming exploiters of raw material. If in the preceding period the material prevailed, the object replaced 'soul and mood', then the next stage will replace the presentation of a phenomenon (material, object) by a *conclusion* based on the phenomenon and a *judgment* on the material, given concrete form in finished concepts. Cinema is ready to begin operating through the abstract word that leads to a concrete *concept*.”²¹

We see here Eisenstein engrossed by the progress of Soviet society. It is as if the injustices of the previous, known, capitalist world have been corrected, and the new society is ready to jump into the unknown, into the uncharted territories of the new, just, social organizations. It is ready to jettison all the vestiges of old world. The cinema is right there by its side. “The period of the 'free market' in cinema is coming to an end.”²²

In a letter to a friend, Moussinac, he said:

“I think I'm ready to overturn my entire system. Thematically as well as formally...This cinematography will be genetically ideological, for its substance will be the screening of ...begriff (concept). But there is no absolute begriff. They are always 'classical' (from the world 'class' and not 'classicism').”²³

James Goodwin recognizes that “in his 1928 essay 'Our October', Eisenstein

²¹ Sergei Eisenstein, “Our *October*: Beyond the Played and the Non-Played”, in Taylor, Richard, (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader*, (London: BFI, 1998), 76.

²² Eisenstein, *The Eisenstein Reader*, *ibid.*, 77.

²³ Moussinac, Leon, *Sergei Eisenstein*, (New York: Crown, 1970), 27-29., quoted in Goodwin, James, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 83-84.

refers to a historical break...within his own film work.”²⁴ Eisenstein tried to properly articulate this new reformulated understanding of cinema with what he termed ‘intellectual montage’ and what he interchangeably referred to as ‘intellectual attraction’. In essence, it encompassed idea that through juxtaposition of images of movement, on the frame-to-frame level, in a form of purely optical effect, the representation of movement with a clear psychological effect on the spectator would be created. This combinations of images would have an emotional impact, and they would engender psychological associations. At least as “the result of an absolute liberation of the action from its determination by time and space,”²⁵ a spectator would come to understand of what she is seeing as a concept, pure idea.²⁶ Again, at work is notion that the film is formulated in the mind of the spectator. That is achieved through particular use of the ‘raw material’, events that are chosen to be depicted, and in the case of *October* the nature of this content is clearly political/ideological – the history of Revolution is foundational narrative for the new Soviet state. The specific formulation of a film form, through the very rapid editing, as Aumont notices,

“reaffirms that intellectual and emotional effects cannot be separated. In effect, it is a part of the actual definition of intellectual montage to make some provision for the emotion of the spectator (in the terms of its effect)... Eisenstein will not rest until he has proved that this ‘emotionality’... in reality, ‘it works’, very powerfully, as, for example, during the screenings of *October*: the spectator not only understands the meaning, he is also moved – he laughs and applauds.”²⁷

²⁴ Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, *ibid.*, 82.

²⁵ Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, *ibid.*, 158.

²⁶ This is Aumont's proposition of successive features of intellectual monatge; Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, 157-158.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

The degree of the spectator's involvement is now much higher, because the film discards the established notion of narrative with characters, story world (diegesis) and easy to follow progression of the story. The film is articulated only through succession of images that need to be effective and forceful, as well as understandable enough to create associations in the spectators mind. This time, it is as if the film speaks directly to the spectator, and the spectator is the one who has to make sense of it. What becomes of crucial importance here is the character of the 'content' (events represented) and how the spectator is suppose relate to it. Aumont notices that “intellectual montage is clearly aimed at producing meanings stripped of all ambiguity (ideologically and semantically),”²⁸ that is to say, the nature of filmic text has a direct intention that needs to correspond to a particular audience. In this sense the question of audience becomes essential one. The only audience that can properly correspond to *October*, and the audience for which the film can truly make sense, is the audience of the Soviet state in the late twenties. That is the audience that presumably shared the class consciousness Eisenstein counted on in the construction of this film.

This once more reaffirms Eisenstein's idea of cinema as firmly grounded in a particular historical conjuncture. What follows is a close reading of the opening of *October*.²⁹ I will offer a detailed account how, in the instance of the *October*, Eisenstein's cinematic discourse is now ultimately constructed as to completely inscribe

²⁸ Ibid., 159.

²⁹ This analysis is similar to Ropars Marie Caire, “The Overture of October”, *Enclitic* 2.2, (Fall 1978), 50-72.

the position of spectator in its text (film in this way begins to operate as an openly discursive category), but it is not any spectator that the film is addressing. The spectator of *October* is not conceptualized as universal category of 'a spectator'. It entails the idea of 'the spectator' as historical category, clearly situated in the particular historical conjuncture.

In the opening shots of *October*, a spectator is confronted with a gargantuan statue. From the dark background, with the help of a strong key light coming from beneath, emerges the bronze figure of the ruler. Throughout the sequence, the camera moves further from the statue with each new shot. The cuts are on the axis and the shots are rapidly edited. The shared dominant is the low angle of the shot. First, we are confronted with the head. The square jaw, beard, unrelenting gaze into the distance, and the crown. The position of the camera and the light create the dramatic effect. The statue (or just the head in the first shot) is not just a plain statue. The referent, indexical sign (statue as a statue), through the filmic articulation, (camera position, lighting, duration of the shot) becomes the highly imposing cinematic sign. The first shot directly asks from the spectator to take the position (in a sense that every film is always only “asking”, in as much as the spectator is always the role a person can assume or can easily decline to assume). If one concedes to watch, the film enforces the particular position – the one, literally, from the below. The statue is rendered as menacing and we are assuming the position of being oppressed by repressive regime that the monolithic statue symbolizes. The succession of shots reinforces this dynamic. After the head with crown we are confronted with the close-up of hand with regal scepter, the shot of the hand with the orb,

a wide shot of, first the torso, and then the whole figure; the angle perspective is dramatically lower with each succeeding shot. It ends with shots of eagles (another regal insignia) and the inscription on the postament which celebrates the “Sovereign, Our Great Lord, Emperor Aleksandr Aleksandrovich.” Cinematic image is uncomplicated in its organization, in a manner that will enable the most forceful effect on the spectator. In that sense it is emphatically unidirectional.

The next shoot introduces the images of crowd charging ahead, through what seems to be a platform of low and numerous flights of stairs on which the statue resides. It is as if they are rushing toward the statue. Of this crowd, one woman has already mounted the base of the statue. Ladders and ropes are thrown over the different parts of the statue. The camera maintains the low angle position, enabling continuity with previous sequence of shots, as well as the implied position of the spectator. But what we are seeing now is of a different nature. The image represents people mounting on and in a sense overcoming the statue. The shots of strung ropes are then intercut with a cheering crowd of soldiers waving their rifles. As camera pans over the rifles they dissolve into the numerous scythes. An intertitle declares “February.” We are back to the state. This time there are no ropes and no people on it, but never the less statue starts to crumble. It seems as if it collapses on its own. The head falls first, then the hand with scepter and the hand with the orb. The action is repeated from different positions, with overlapping editing, and the low angle now emphasizes the fall. Because of the depth (height) of the shot, as well as the overlaps, the fall seems prolonged. The sensation of crumbling becomes more profoundly felt. The raised and waving rifles and scythes are intercut, the

intertitles say “To all! To all! To all!”, and the shots of celebration proceed. The frenetic editing in conjunction with emphasized movement within the each of the individual shots, as well as their simple and easily discernible content, do not allow to the spectator to feel anything but the excitement and enthusiasm.

What is at work here is a peculiar cause-and-effect succession of events. There are three different diegetic spaces. The space that the statue occupies is at first formulated as an abstract black background and that remains its dominant trait throughout the sequence. However, in several interspersed shots we see a square and contours of buildings surrounding the statue. The buildings are churches with prominently displayed crosses. Through the signifiers of monarchy, the space of the statue is articulated as a purified domain of autocratic power. The second space is already implied in the articulation of the previous one. It is a space occupied by the position from which we are confronted with the monolithic statute in the first place. That is the position from the below, the position of the oppressed one. As it is the position of the camera, it is also a perspective imposed on the spectator. The space itself, once visually introduced and articulated, is defined through movement, action and direction. What is presumed to be the base of the statue is overflowed by the mass that is about to bring the statue to a collapse. It is only through editing, juxtaposition of the images, that we presume this space is the base, since the statue is not within the frames. The representation of that space is short lived – it is seen in four short shots and its total duration is nine seconds.³⁰ Now, there are no low angle

³⁰ The version of the film used in this analysis is 112 minute version. At this moment four versions of the film can be found in the circulation ranging from 95 to 142 minutes. Imdb page of October (Ten Days

shots; the camera is on the similar level with the flow of the people. The spectator is put in the position to participate in the excitement of the frenetic movement of the mass. This space operates as an instantiation of the one only indicated in previous part of the sequence through the camera position. Now, the space of the spectator is visualized. Once realized, this space is immediately reconfigured as a combative modality that enables endangering, usurping and eventually destroying of the space of the statue. The spectator is thus entangled in the activity of dethroning. Immediately after the four shots, we see the people entering the space of statue in an effort to dismantle it. They will redefine it first with the strings of ropes. The second space functions as an introductory ground for the activity of the mass that will penetrate the space of the statue and bring the statue to a destruction.

I want to emphasize that the masses only commence, and not actually perform, the destruction of the statue. Because in the end shots of this opening sequence, the statue crumbles on its own. Gone are the ropes previously strained around it and the people who previously mounted it. There is no direct relation between the first and the last part of the sequence. There is no continuity of action, there is no consistency in presence of characters (or the character – the mass). How should we understand this? Can something in between these parts help us elucidate the relation in question (and character of this peculiar film diegesis)? The third space in this sequence, the space of the rifles and scythes, is introduced in the climactic moment when ropes around the statute have been

strung, and it seems as if they will just tear it apart. So in the moment of anticipation of the victory over the symbol of oppressive monarchy, we are introduced to the cheering crowd of the soldiers. Quickly, crowd is superseded just by countless rifles, in a form of metonymy, and rifles are joined by scythes, through the use of dissolve. In the pivotal moment the intertitle “February” emerges. It is directly after this that the moment of crumbling of the statue we described comes. Thus, the connotative meaning of the described succession of shots can be read as this – the uprising of the people, and uniting of soldiers and peasants, lead to February revolution, monarchy fell apart, collapsed on its own, as from the weight of the events themselves. If we are to perform this reading, we are to acknowledge the associative nature of the cinematic diegesis of this film. This is also the only way to make sense of the sequence. The sequence of cinematic images is organized in such effective manner (rapid editing, movement, striking imagery) that we have to succumb to its call to celebrate the empowerment that is brought upon by the dethroning of the monarch. On one hand there is this direct form of address, unequivocal call for the spectator to participate in triumphant moment, but on the other, there is the instance of exclusion at work. To properly understand the meaning of the sequence we have to be able to discern, first the significance of the statue and its subsequent demise, as well as the connection between the rifles and scythes. I will argue that exactly this prerequisite familiarity with the connotative meanings of the images is crucial for the understanding of *October* as an atypical example of the cinematic form.

The nature of cinematic discourse of *October* is a peculiar one. It is highly uncommon for feature-length pictures of the period, as well as for films throughout the

history of cinema until today. This uncommonness entails, first and foremost, a degree of difficulty in reading the narrative and following the film. However, the emphatic forcefulness of the image operates as to inscribe the position of the spectator in its own articulation.

I believe that *October* is an example of the specific film that is constantly referring to its own historical moment. It does so through its dependence on the consciousness of its intended audience. By inscribing the (position of) spectator directly in the text, the audience is rendered an integral, organizing principle of the film. The degree to which it actually depends on the state of consciousness is, of course, almost impossible to determine, as is the state of consciousness itself, but what I discern here as of the utmost importance is the striving towards formulating the idea of cinema and the structure of film around the notion of (a particular) consciousness of the audience. Since the film does not rely on 'realistic' discourse, it does not operate as "a static 'reflection' of a particular event,"³¹ and what is demanded from the spectator is a constant participation in the production of meaning. This is not the cinema that hides its discourse, constructs it as seamless and unapparent, this is a cinema that tries to go even a step further - it offers a model of discourse that is always and constantly in the process of construction. It contributes to the raising of the class consciousness because it relies on it, that is to say, it recognizes it as particular and then engages it as such. Exactly that characteristic is what marks, and guarantees, the formulation of cinema that resolutely corresponds to and

³¹ Eisenstein, *The Eisenstein Reader*, *ibid.*, 30.

addresses its historical conjuncture, in a form of addressing, demanding and offering the active positioning of its audience. And that is a very particular audience. This is not a cinema that is 'universal' in its intent, it does not speak, nor corresponds to everyone and anyone. It speaks to the particular 'class consciousness', one completely determined by the specific historical moment. For the conclusion I want to quote what Eisenstein said in his response to the reception of Battleship Potemkin:

“There is one thing we have no right to do and that is to make generalisations. The current phase of audience reaction determines our methods of influence: what it reacts to. Without this *there can be no influential art and certainly no art with maximum influence.*”³²

Bordwell and Eisenstein

Bordwell’s reading of Eisenstein’s theory frames his concerns only in terms of formalism and reflexology. I will offer examples in what manner Bordwell's introduction and situation of Eisenstein into the canon of Historical Poetics, at its foundation, divests Eisenstein's project from any direct and overt political connotations, and thus rejects understanding of cinema as intricately entrenched in its historical conjuncture which is something the whole of Eisenstein's project, during the twenties, stands for, as I believe I have shown.

In “The Cinema of Eisenstein” David Bordwell devotes the chapter “Seizing the

³² Ibid.,62.

Spectator” to Eisenstein's theory in the silent era.³³ This is how he introduces its main traits:

“Eisenstein links cinema to widely varied intellectual disciplines and doctrines. He finds insights in the history of the arts (Western and Eastern), psychology, historical materialism, anthropology, and linguistics....At another extreme, Eisenstein's theoretical writings launch forays into the fine points of film form and style. He wants to know how to stage an action or move the possible ways in which sound can interact with the image...Characteristically Eisenstein's early poetics of cinema oscillates between these two tendencies. Sometimes he exposes a detailed technical problem and then borrows ideas from adjacent disciplines in order to resolve it...At their best, the writings lay bare the intricacies of some directorial problem in cinema while connecting it with broader issues of film practice and of artistic creation in general.”³⁴

Later on, Bordwell discerns that Eisenstein's chief point, one that will follow him throughout his career, is that “every artistic decision is to be guided by how the film will affect the spectator.”³⁵ While he goes on, in great length, with listing which 'intellectual disciplines and doctrines' Eisenstein links this cinematic problem to only at one moment he mentions how Eisenstein was confident that “these effects will lead the perceiver to absorb the political theme.”³⁶ Soon after he concludes, “If spectatorial impact is the end, formal organization becomes the means.”³⁷ In any instance, Bordwell doesn't acknowledge that creating the effect on audience and seizing the spectator were not the ends in itself, that they had a clear purpose to render the film a more forceful political and ideological tool. He also omits to include in his account how Eisenstein conceptualized

³³ David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 111-138.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

the audience, and in which way he perceived cinema and his films to be intricately embedded in the texture of the post-revolutionary Soviet society.

In Bordwell's analysis, Eisenstein is only interested in how to arouse the emotional and later the intellectual responses from the spectator. Eisenstein's ideas thus emerge as a purely formalistic concerns, and his "theory becomes not a quest for an essence of the medium but a reflection on concrete problems... an empirical poetics of cinema."³⁸

What Bordwell puts forward here is an idea of cinema that is not, in any instance, embedded in the historical context from which it emerged, but a concept that is strongly disconnected from it. What is at work here is an effort on Bordwell's part to construct the object of film studies, an idea of cinema, and produce knowledge about it, in a manner that precludes the possibility of engaging film in terms of the political. Since film and thought about film are severed from the world within which they emerged, it is impossible to think about the relation between the two. As I demonstrated, this relation between film and the society in which it was produced and for which it was produced were essential for Eisenstein's theory and practice.

³⁸ Ibid., 138.

Chapter II

Historical Poetics and Bordwell's Model of Basic Research into Cinema

In this chapter I will investigate the character of David Bordwell's project of Historical Poetics in relation to conceptions of modern science and production of knowledge put forth by Heidegger and Althusser. In the previous chapter I demonstrated the manner in which, and to what degree, Bordwell's project encompassed the erasure of the political aspect from thinking about film. I did this by juxtaposing Eisenstein's film theory of 1920s with Bordwell's account of it.

I will now discern how this erasure is performed in the organization of his approach. I will analyze its foundational analytical conceptions, propositions and the movement of its scientific procedure. Using Heidegger's proposition for understanding metaphysics of modern science I will investigate how a ground plan, projected sphere and movement of research method are organized and put into relation in case of the Historical Poetics. I will do this in order to understand in which way Historical Poetics as a scientific model introduce into scientific process and construct film as an object of study. After that I will engage Althusser's notion of science and theoretical practice to apprehend the work this model and its analytical categories perform on the film, its object of study.

The intention of my analysis is to situate the conditions of possibility of this erasure in separation of film, as the object of study, from the world in which it is produced, and organization of the scientific procedure that is predicated on this separation. This procedure is engendered through certain analytical tools that in the work on their object of study perform the process of separation. Further on, through the knowledge they produce they disseminate perspective and understanding that cannot see and account for the particularity of film's embedment in the world, or social totality, from which it emerged.

The end result of this process is the production of knowledge about film that precludes the possibility for thinking about film in terms of political. In the succeeding chapter I will engage the potentials and limitations of this film study model, and its analytical categories, in respect to the conception of art cinema, since Bordwell's conceptualization of the category is seminal for the scholarly field of inquiry.

In order to better understand Bordwell's project I will occasionally bring into the conversation the attitudes and perspectives pervading the discourse of political modernism. Term political modernism was first used by Sylvia Harvey in her book "May '68 and Film Culture".³⁹ It refers to body of film theory that emerged as a reaction to a failed revolution in 68. Their predominant intention was to understand in which way film works as a sort of social machine that produces ideological subjects. Their intention was

³⁹ Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, (London: BFI, 1978)

to stage film as a site of struggle against the dominant bourgeois ideology. The core theorists belong to Paris film circles grouped around journals *Cahier du Cinema* and *Cinethique*. Their work was shortly after translated and further developed by English theorist predominantly writing for journal *Screen*. D.N Rodowick will later on provide more substantial analysis of what he terms a discourse of political modernism. This will help me situated Historical Poetics within context of contemporaneous tendencies within film studies and film theory. Elucidating this positionality is important in as much as Bordwell himself defines his project in opposition to the discourse of political modernism. The positions of political modernism will be used in the arguing that follows only in as much they help elucidate attitudes, perspectives and intentions of Bordwell's project. However, Bordwell's attack on them will not be a focus of my inquiries.

Separateness of the Object:

Heidegger's Conception of Modern Science and Object of Study of Bordwell's Historical Poetics

Heidegger proposes in his "The Age of the World Picture"⁴⁰ the understanding of metaphysics of science, what constitutes its realm of operation, and operations that allow for its perpetuation, moving forward of the science. The realm itself assumes a

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, (New York; Harper and Row, 1977), 115-54.

delineation of particular way of existence, being, in a way that it establishes its limits and its own sphere defined by the particular laws. There are several aspects of this realm, and they work in order to establish, affirm and enable further existence of the realm. For Heidegger those are ground plan, projected sphere, research, method and object of science. I will explain these concepts shortly.

While laying the conceptual and methodological foundations for his model of basic research into cinema⁴¹, Bordwell perceives Historical Poetics, or Neoformalism as a dominant trend within it, to be, in approach and spirit, “closer to certain scientific practices”⁴², as opposed to theory driven film study. This model of study is grounded in a systematic research around clearly defined problems and questions. It tries to “reason out possible answers, rejecting and refining them and weighing the comparative advantages of competing explanatory frameworks.”⁴³ It is a rigorous “inquiry that respects the reciprocal claims of conceptual coherence and empirical adequacy.”⁴⁴

I will use Heidegger in order to discern the particularity of Bordwell’s object of study. I will engage the question of object at first, as it emerges within the field of modern science. Subsequently I will focus on the question of method, and the analytical

⁴¹ David Bordwell, “Historical Poetics of Cinema”, in R. Barton Palmer (ed.) *The Cinematic Text*, (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 369-398.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 391.

tools it relies on, but only to return the object and the way it allows for, limits, creates or cancels the possibility of the directions of film study that relies on the same object.

Modern science constructs its object of investigation in a manner that limits it apart from the world it belongs to, that is it severs it from it. The essence of modern science Heidegger locates in research. Neither for ancient Greeks nor in the Middle Ages was science defined by exactness. In order to comprehend the essence of modern science he claims “we must first free ourselves from the habit of comparing the new science with the old solely in terms of degree, from the point of view of progress.”⁴⁵ For both “(the) understanding of the essence of body and place and of the relation between the two rests upon a different interpretation of beings and hence conditions a correspondingly different kind of seeing and questioning of natural events.”⁴⁶ It was with Descartes that a particular essence of being and its relation to natural events came to be defined in relation to exactness and certitude. Heidegger recognizes that Descartes belongs to the same tradition of philosophy as Greeks in that he asks the same question What is it to be? It is in his answer that the fundamental change of the position is engendered. “Descartes’s interpretation of what it is to be and of truth first creates the presupposition underlying the possibility of a theory of knowledge or a metaphysics of knowledge.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture”, *ibid.*, 117-118.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

It is this theory of knowledge that establishes the conditions of possibility and subtends the understanding of being and the world, their relation and the knowledge as one form of that relation. The foundation of Descartes's theory of knowledge is the cogito argument, or the idea that thinking defines being. Thinking defines the being in as much as it is the only thing that can be established with certainty. It is here where exactness emerges as prerequisite, condition of possibility of knowing. Exactness becomes that which defines the scientific procedure. For Heidegger "knowing establishes itself as a *procedure* within some realm of what is."⁴⁸ (emphasis mine) The concept of procedure he defines through notions of a fixed ground plan, and a projection of this ground plan into the sphere within the realm of what is.

"For every procedure already requires an open sphere in which it moves... This is accomplished through the projection within some realm of what is – in nature, for example – of a fixed ground plan of natural events. The projection sketches out in advance the manner in which the knowing procedure must bind itself and adhere to the sphere opened up. This binding adherence is the rigor of research. Through the projecting of the ground plan and the prescribing of rigor, procedure makes secure for itself its sphere of objects within the realm of Being."⁴⁹

A ground plan fixes a set of natural events, it distinguishes them as separate from the whole with which they are intricately interrelated, and it severs them from the set of relations that constitute the whole. Since the rigor of research demands a security of and adherence to object-sphere within which the procedure will move, any event that will become the focus of research needs to conform to a ground plan and demands of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 118.

procedure. An event that needs to become an object of study will become visible as an event only through the projection of a ground plan and the degree to which it complies with the character of the projection. It is in this sense that an object of study, in order to become legible as within the sphere of projection of ground plan, which we can also term a field of knowledge, is being severed from the world it belongs to, and especially if that field of knowledge is not organized as to comprehend the way the two are inseparably connected (that is both interchangeably inform each other). In other words, a becoming of an object of study is predicated on objects separation from that which it is a part of.

In political modernism what is evident is an intention to conceive an object, through particular scientific or more properly theoretical procedure, in order to understand its relation to world, and to perceive it as capable of effecting that world. For Jean-Louis Comolli it is not only that film should be understood as social machine, but that “a society is only such in that it is driven by representation. If the social machine manufactures representations, it also manufactures itself from representations – the latter operative at once as means, matter and condition of sociality.”⁵⁰ This frames the form of inquiry into film in a way that film as object of study is highly intertwined with the world, society it belongs to. Roland Barthes provided the foundation for the investigation of the processes of signification for film theory through his work on the connotative and denotative meanings of visual images, understanding photographic message to be “the

⁵⁰ Jean Louis Comolli, “Machines of the Visible”, in De Laurentis, Teresa, Heath, Stephen, (ed.) *The Cinematic Apparatus*, (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1980), 121.

most social of institutions”.⁵¹ Laura Mulvey will investigate films in order to understand “where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have molded him.”⁵²

It is evident here that the Bordwell’s intention of study is quite different from that of most prominent theorists of political modernism. If the intention is articulated and enacted through particular analytic tools that constitute the scientific procedure, and we already established that procedure is what allows for, organizes, and circumscribes the object of study I will try to understand the relation established and operating between object and this intention.

Work Performed in Production of Knowledge:

Althusser’s Concept of Knowledge and Bordwell’s Veiling of Construction of His Object of Study

In order to properly distinguish difference between the two approaches to studying films as well as consequences it has on the character of knowledge that emerges throughout the process I will use Althusser’s theorization of knowledge, production of

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message”, in *The Responsibility of Forms*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 20.

⁵² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, in Rosen, Philip (ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 198.

knowledge and theoretical practice. It is in the way Althusser theorizes the work performed by science that can provide a more complex account of how intention of the two different scientific procedures becomes inscribed in the object in respect to its relation to the world.

In his discussion of proper Marxist philosophy and the way it engendered a rupture with the ideological philosophy, that is Hegelian idealism, Althusser will propose a theorization of processes of production of knowledge, as well as a notion of knowledge itself, in order to define it as a theoretical practice.⁵³ In ontological terms, in Althusser's reading, being and thought are identical for Hegel. Marx's intervention within the sphere of philosophy he thus locates in the break that allows for recognition of the different orders of existence of the two, "of the process of thought and the process of being, of the concrete 'in thought' and the 'real' concrete"⁵⁴. This allows for the understanding of the particularity of the field of knowledge, position of the specific problem within it and concepts necessary for recognizing and posing the problem. Through making a clear distinction between a practical state and a theoretical, speculative, realm he is able to distinguish the concept of knowledge in order to "fill in a 'gap' between theory and practice"⁵⁵. A field of knowledge is always that of thought, but it is intricately related with a sphere of practical. It is in this way that we can understand the different characters of the knowledge produced by political modernism and historical poetics through the

⁵³ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (New York: Verso, 2005), 161-218.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

particularity of its relation to the world, or to put it differently, the relation between their own theory and practice, the thought-in-concrete and ‘real’ concrete. This how Althusser understands the connection between theory and practice:

“By *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of ‘production’)...By theory, in this respect, I shall mean a *specific form of practice*, itself belonging to the complex unity of the ‘social practice’ of a determinate human society. Theoretical practice falls within the general definition of practice. It works on a raw material (representations, concepts, facts) which it is given by other practices, whether ‘empirical’, ‘technical’ or ‘ideological’.”⁵⁶

Thus the raw material of science, or theoretical practice, is always pre-established. It is a form of abstraction that has been previously elaborated.⁵⁷ Relying on Marx, Althusser makes a clear distinction here between thought and object. An object always exists outside of thought, and we engage it through abstraction. Only as a product of thinking, through transformation of the abstractions to concepts, knowledge emerges. For Marx, as Althusser claims, perceptions and images are forms of abstractions, and for the latter they are only recognitions of an object.⁵⁸ Thus, it is important to make a distinction between recognition and knowledge of an object. This distinction will be clearer if we apprehend Althusser’s gesture towards proposing precise terminology and thinking of the distinction through this terminology.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 166-167.

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, (London : NLB, 1976), 190.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 191-192.

He distinguishes three levels of generality at play in the process of production of knowledge. It is the knowledge of an object that science produces. Althusser terms it Generality III. The raw material of science, the previously elaborated abstraction is Generality I. Since “a science never works on an existence whose essence is pure immediacy and singularity”⁵⁹, this is a generality that is a Generality III of previous science, or its previous stages of same science. The Generality I and III never have the same essence, their relation is that of transformation, and this is a transformation that takes a form of theoretical practice, or of production of knowledge, and Althusser emphasizes “it all takes place ‘within knowledge’ ”.⁶⁰ The Generality II is a corpus of concepts that constitute the particular ‘theory’ of science and that are put to work in order to engender the transformation. It is a transformation of abstract into concrete, but concrete-in-thought, not concrete-in-reality. Confusing the two Generalities denies the reality of process that produces knowledge, the reality of science itself and the work it performs.

If we relate back this with Heidegger’s argument, an understanding emerges that an object of study is always being constructed by the sphere within which study itself moves, that is by the process of production of knowledge. This is the perspective through which I want to apprehend some of the Bordwell’s fundamental propositions.

⁵⁹ Althusser, *For Marx*, *ibid.* 183-184.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

For Bordwell, Historical Poetics and Neoformalism are models of scientific study that aim for “the discovery of facts about films.”⁶¹ Their highest goal is “letting the facts speak for themselves. Neoformalism presumes that one cannot discover factual answers to questions about films’ construction without carefully *devising analytical concepts* appropriate to these questions.”⁶² Throughout the analyses conducted since the inception of the model, several analytical concepts emerged as highly useful for studying films. Those are “stylistic and narrative devices (e.g. the cut or the motif) and systems (e.g., spatial continuity or narrative causality) within which they achieve various functions.”⁶³ Consequentially, most of the analysis performed by neoformalist poetics will look for those devices in films, the way they have been deployed and organized in larger systems, and potentially try to understand what functions they perform. To put in different terms through these analytical concepts Bordwell will construct his object of study. In the case of art cinema (which will be the focus of next chapter), Bordwell will discern the patterns of deployment of several characteristic devices and systems across the body of films. Accordingly, he will propose conceptualization of art cinema as a specific mode of cinematic practice. The underlying assumption that will allow him to make such claim is the understanding of its specificity as a deviation from the norm. The norm is, of course, epitomized by Classical Hollywood Cinema. Thus, the art cinema will always be a category that as the other naturalizes the discerned conventions of Hollywood films.

⁶¹ Bordwell, “Historical Poetics of Cinema”, *ibid.*, 379.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 379.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 382.

By not recognizing the work his analytical concepts are performing on his object (film or body of films), he can make a claim that he is discovering ‘facts about films’. However these facts that he perceives in films are traces and imprints of his analytical concepts, that is, of his methodology. For Heidegger, one of the important traits of modern science is “making secure of the precedence of methodology over whatever is (nature or history), which at any given time becomes objective in research.”⁶⁴ It is only through not acknowledging its own imprint on that which it sets out to investigate that can allow for Historical Poetics to claim the factuality of its object of inquiry to which, supposedly, it calibrates its own approach accordingly.

His proposition for conceptualizing art cinema thus relies on veiling the work that analytical concepts and methodology to which they belong perform on the object.

I established previously that Bordwell’s object of study, that is a film, is characterized by its separation from the world to which it belongs. By making “an appeal to intersubjectively accepted data” in terms of this object of study, he is naturalizing this separation – rendering it as a fact. Veiling the work performed by the process of production of knowledge works to further enforce this naturalization. In addition, it also removes the scientific process itself from the social and institutional dynamics within which it is embedded. As we previously seen, this is quite different from the openly acknowledged attitudes and perspectives articulated in some of the seminal texts of

⁶⁴ Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture”, *Ibid.*, 125.

political modernism. The question we can now ask what is the consequence of a scientific procedure operating in Historical Poetics?

Form of Knowledge as a Consequence of the Object of Science Separated From Historical Reality

Althusser asserts that ‘theory’ is a set of concepts in particular relation, and it reflects the results of its own theoretical practice.⁶⁵ Bordwell’s concepts related in such a way as to separate its object from reality, reflect the results of such a theoretical/scientific practice – they produce a knowledge of this object, that can never be contribute to understanding of its relation with the world it belongs to, and more importantly, can never be thought of in terms of political, that is as participating in the way how we imagine organization of human society, and human relations within that society. The only result of this knowledge is directed, in a sense of creating the conditions of possibility for appraising and lauding the mastery of art works. This is how he defines aspirations of his model for film study:

“Neoformalist poetics has been especially interested in how, against a background conventions, a film or a director’s work stands out. Kristen Thompson has been concerned to demonstrate how the works of Eisenstein, Ozu, Tati, Godard, Renoir, and others provide not wayward deviations from norms but rather systematic innovations in thematic, stylistic, and narrative construction.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Althusser, *For Marx*, *ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁶ Bordwell, “Historical Poetics of Cinema”, *ibid.*, 382.

In his account of Pierre Macherey's contribution to the theory of materiality of art proposed by Althusser, Warren Montag will make this observation in regard to criticism that prevents the possibility of reading how society is being, through distortion, reflected in an art work:

“The most primitive form of criticism, according to Macherey, is that which treats literature as an object of consumption and which sees as its primary task the instruction of the reader in the best techniques for enjoying or ‘appreciating’ the object that is given to them.”⁶⁷

The object is in that way, according to Montag, accepted as given, and that is where criticism falls “into the most naive kind of empiricism.”⁶⁸

So Bordwell's form of film study absolutely abolishes the potential of engagement with films in terms of political. It in foundation reconstructs conception of the object, film, to put forth the idea of film severed from historical reality it belongs to. Empiricism, claim for the availability of unproblematic truth within the object works to conceal the process of abstraction, and the process of production of knowledge that is put to work. The end effect is conceptual commodification of cinema.

⁶⁷ Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

Chapter III

Approaches in Conceptualizing the Category of Art Cinema

Contemporary global art cinema encompasses films from completely different geographical spaces, manifold cultural, societal and economic structures, it entails diverse conceptions of what constitutes a film and cinema as such, and thus it engenders diverse spectatorial practices, expectations and reactions. Under the banner of art cinema we could include films as *Two Days and One Night* (Brothers Dardenne, 2014), *Holy Motors* (Leos Carax, 2012), *Norte, The End of History* (Lav Diaz, 2013) *Vic + Flo Saw the Bear* (Denis Coté, 2013), *Oslo, August 31st* (Joachim Trier, 2011), *A Separation* (Asghar Farhadi, 2011), *Tilva Ros* (Nikola Lezaic, 2010) just to name a few recent examples. These films provide examples of distinct organizations of cinematic representations, disparate thematic preoccupations, and the diverse conditions of production. Yet, all of these films circulate same organized spaces of film festivals, film magazines, on-line blogs and publications. They are all brought together to engage in the exchange of ideas, attitudes, perspectives, revolving around similar presumptions defined by this shared common space. The emergence and existence of this shared space came to be defined by the increasingly rapid circulation of media, commodities, humans and capital that characterizes the contemporary global landscape. My intention is to investigate how the category of art cinema has permeated the scholarly discourse, and to what degree the way it has been conceptualized allows us to understand complexity of its

relation to this global landscape which constitutes the basic material conditions of its distribution, exhibition and reception. I will engage the two dominant approaches that informed the scholarly discourse and investigate to what degree these approaches allow for thinking about this relation.

The understanding of art cinema as oppositional to classical Hollywood constitutes a conceptual underpinning of the category. This understanding is indebted to the propositions put forward by Steve Neale in “Art Cinema as Institution”⁶⁹ and David Bordwell in “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice”⁷⁰. These two articles, more than thirty years after their publication, still resonate with how the category is conceptualized within the academic discourse. Mark Betz recognizes that since Bordwell and Neale art cinema scholarship has predominantly followed two trajectories. In the first case, following Bordwell, numerous scholars have engaged in the analysis of formal textual structures focusing either on particular films or individual directors most recognizably connected with art cinema. In the other case, Neale's analysis of the process of institutionalization of art cinema in three European countries (France, Germany and Italy) was followed by investigations of the emergence and establishment of different national cinemas across the globe. However, Betz also points that apart from the formal analysis and the analysis of industrial/institutional context, there has been a lack of theoretical debate around the category of art cinema.⁷¹ “Art cinema is thus both present and absent in

⁶⁹ Steve Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution”, in *Screen*, vol. 22, no.1, 1981, 11-39.

⁷⁰ David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice”, in Fowler Catherine (ed.) *The European Cinema Reader*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 94-102.

⁷¹ Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13-15.

academic film studies, and this presence and absence has developed historically through a schism between theory and history.”⁷² In an attempt to confront this schism I will address the question of theoretical propositions which set out the contours of the discourse within which the category has been conceptualized. Starting with the aforementioned two articles that introduced the concept into the scholarly discourse, I will subsequently analyze two recent articles, Eleftheria Thanuli's “ 'Art Cinema' Narration: Breaking Down the Wayward Paradigm”⁷³ and David Andrews' “Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies”⁷⁴ as the present-day efforts that try to theoretically engage and reconfigure the propositions put forward by Neale and Bordwell.

In their introduction to the recent anthology “Global Art Cinema”⁷⁵, Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover have recognized impurity as one of the defining characters of the category of art cinema. They argue that significance of art cinema lies exactly in this impurity, in a way it operates in perversion of categories and disruption of taxonomies as such. They propose that “perhaps, instead of trying to enforce a taxonomic principle, we should focus on the nature of art cinema’s instability.”⁷⁶ Directing scholarly attention towards this instability, the mechanisms of the processes of categorization can be

⁷² Ibid., 15.

⁷³ Eleftheria Thanouli, “ 'Art Cinema' Narration: Breaking Down the Wayward Paradigm”, in *Scope 14*, (June 2009).

⁷⁴ David Andrews, “Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies” in *Scope 18*, (October 2010).

⁷⁵ Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, “Introduction: Impurity of Art Cinema” in Galt and Schoonover (ed.) *Global Art Cinema, New Theories and Histories* (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press: 2010), 3-27.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6.

rendered visible more thoroughly. It helps bring forth what the existing propositions rely on, as well as to what potential critical readings the category lends itself to.

Thus, I will approach the categorizations of art cinema proposed by Bordwell and Neale, and later developed by Thanouli and Andrews, by questioning how art cinema's instability elucidates intentions, contours and thus limitations of their theoretical propositions. I will outline their conceptual underpinnings in order to discern potentials of propositions to engage the contemporary historical moment that gives rise to these films. My goal is to come to a position to overcome the limitations of these approaches, in a sense that the limitations are present as they brought about the schism Betz emphasizes, and to create the possibility to think about art films in order to see them as directly engaged with their historical moment.

Neale's Institution of Art Cinema

As the title of his article suggest, Steve Neale proposes to understand art cinema as an institution⁷⁷. He acknowledges that art films have specific textual characteristics and sees their purpose in performing the 'function of differentiation'. He claims that:

“The precise nature of these (textual) features has varied historically and geographically, as it were, since it derives in part from another, simultaneous function that these features perform: that of differentiating

⁷⁷ Steve Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution”, in *Screen*, vol. 22, no.1, 1981

the text or texts in question from the texts produced by Hollywood. Hence they change in accordance with which features of Hollywood films are perceived or conceived as dominant or as basically characteristic at any one point in time.”⁷⁸

He distinguishes that narrative elements are being deployed to bring forth the different conception of film, and this is supposed to give rise to the film system that exists and operates in opposition to Hollywood. For Neale, this system is should be understood as the institution of art cinema. Through the concept of institution Neale recognizes the significance of art cinema as the strategy of European countries to establish and promote their own national film industry and culture. At the same time they are countering American dominance in European markets. It is the function of differentiation that allows for this strategy.

“ (I)n competing with Hollywood for a share in the market, or in seeking a space of its own within it, the films produced by a specific national film industry will have in any case to differentiate themselves from those produced by Hollywood. One way of doing so is to turn to high art and to the cultural traditions specific to the country involved.”⁷⁹

The cinema has been generally understood, in an academic context—to a great degree influenced by the fact that film studies sprung out of literature departments—as mirroring the tendencies dominant in the novelistic form. Hence, art cinema has been connected with realist and modernist novels contrary to Hollywood films that were associated with the genres of popular fiction. This classification lays ground to Neale's

⁷⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14.-15.

recognition of art cinema's adherence to what he terms two different 'ideologies of Art', that of realism and that of modernism. In realism:

“(T)he features in question are those of location shooting, the absence of stars, a non-systematic laxity in the inscription of the codes involved in articulating spatial and temporal continuities. These features overall connote realism and function as the positive marks of Art both insofar as certain definitions and discourses of Art involve an ideology of realism and insofar as they simply contrast with features marking Hollywood film at this time.”⁸⁰

On the other hand, as an emblematic figure of modernism, Antonioni's films feature “an extreme de-dramatization coupled, as a corollary, with a lack of spatio-temporal intensity, a problematisation of character motivation and a re-balancing of the weight of attention accorded to human figure on the one hand and landscape and décor on the other.”⁸¹ Both of the features operate against Hollywood norms, and as the first invokes the ideology of realism, the second relies on “the other primary ideology of Art, the Romantic view that Art is subjective expression.”⁸²

This distinction between the realist and modernist impulses has been crucial for the paradoxes inherent to the category of art cinema. It is a consequence of Neale's grouping together such a different figures as Bertolluci, Chabrol, Bergman, Dreyer, Resnais, Goddard, Antonioni, Fellini, Visconti and Truffaut. This grouping neglects diverse historical conjunctures and cultural impulses that provided the impetus for numerous films signed by these directors, as well as the situation when both of the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁸¹ Ibid., 14.

⁸² Ibid., 14.

impulses are present within the same film. Galt and Schoonover also address the issue of contradictory realist and modernist impulses.⁸³ Art films grounded in realism “take as a moral prerogative the representation of the underrepresented ...Realism's claim to make visible what otherwise goes unseen meshes with art cinema's attempt to represent the forbidden or unspeakable.”⁸⁴ On the other hand “the art film extends its modernist tendencies in its privileging of internal conflicts, self-reflexivity, extradiegetic gestures, and duration over empiricist models of knowledge and pleasure.”⁸⁵ If both of these tendencies are present in most of the art films, never allowing for the articulation of pure modernism or realism, it brings into focus the inadequacies of these historical and stylistic terms, and demands for the differently conceived engagement with the question “of the place of art cinema within a larger history of cinema's shifting function and place in the world.”⁸⁶ However, this inadequacy allows us to recognize Neale's necessity to conflate these terms so he could come to the term 'Ideology of Art'. This provides a perspective to understanding the pressure and the necessity to account for and theoretically address the existent tendencies present in the large corpus of European films in England in early 1980s.

For Neale, coming up with the category of art cinema as institution allows for recognition of the same material conditions of the production of these film which constitute one part of this institution. 'Ideology of art', in the way it exists within this

⁸³ Galt and Schoonover, *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

institution, operates in order to allow the reproduction of the existing conditions of production. This is how Neale explains the impetus for unifying such a variety of art films:

“Equally, however, that variety is contained both by the economic infrastructure of Art Cinema, its basis in commodity-dominated modes of production, distribution and exhibition, and by the repetitions that tend to mark cultural discourses in general and the discourses of high art and culture in particular...Even where the marks of enunciation themselves are heterogeneous, they tend to be unified and stabilised within the space of an institution which reads and locates them in homogenous way (each mark serving equally as the sign of the author) and which mobilises that meaning in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition (the mark of the author is used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product).”⁸⁷

The process of categorization enables Neale to discern the myth of Art, as a self-sufficient, unquestionable paragon or a guarantee of absolute value in terms of human accomplishment. Neale stresses that this myth of Art operates in a way to guide numerous analysis and discussions about films and artworks that exhaust themselves in confirmation that something is or is not art. The discourse around art films has been dominated by the questions about the complexity, effectiveness and beauty of director's (artist) personal vision (the main preoccupation of auteur approach), the complexity, mastery over and again the beauty of film form (adherents of pure Art as self-sufficient paradigm), and the strength of universal values promoted by a film (again Art as bastion of universal values and achievements of humanity). This is how 'myth of art' instigates the particular discourse that emerges around art films and perpetuates institution of art cinema. This is the manner in which the discourse also precludes numerous other

⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

questions of the relation between the film/artwork and the world it represents.

In this respect, Neale's attempt can be understood as an effort to dismantle these propositions, by providing the explication how “to varying degrees Art Cinema functions and has always functioned in terms of a conception of film as commodity”⁸⁸ and how, as well, “authorship serves partly as a means by which to avoid coming to terms with the concept of film as a social practice”⁸⁹ Finally, situating Neale's own theoretical account within its historical moment elucidates that his purpose is to engage in the contemporaneous debate concerning the practices and politics of British state funded production of art films. For Neale thus, theoretical discourse, the one within which he proposes the category of art cinema, operates itself as a site for political struggle.

Bordwell, the Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice

Similarly to Neale, David Bordwell's “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice”⁹⁰ proposes account of art cinema as the category that stands in opposition to Hollywood. The dominant narrative cinema of classical Hollywood is defined by cause-effect logic and corollary, organization of narrative space and time as a representation of cause-effect

⁸⁸ Neale, *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁰ David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice”, in Fowler Catherine (ed.) *The European Cinema Reader*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2002).

chain. This narrative “projects its action through psychologically-defined, goal oriented characters.”⁹¹ Stylistic features operate in order to advance the narrative, and a spectator engages with a classical film through questions of verisimilitude, generic appropriateness, and compositional unity. In order to propose the understanding of art cinema as a coherent type of film narration in opposition to the classical one, Bordwell defines it as “a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures.”⁹² He stresses the coherency of the category:

“... whereas stylistic devices and thematic motifs may differ from director to director, the overall functions of style and theme remain remarkably constant in the art cinema as a whole. The narrative and stylistic principles of the films constitute a logically coherent mode of cinematic discourse.”⁹³

Similarly to Neale, Bordwell distinguishes the consistency in the function of style and theme.

For Bordwell, realism and authorial expressivity are the motivating principles of art cinema narratives, and they work against the cause-effect linkage of events. The definition of realism is grounded in “‘realistic’ – that is, psychologically complex characters.”⁹⁴ As opposed to the characters in the classical narrative who are goal-oriented, the ones in art films have no clear desires and goals. They may wander around, question themselves about their position and motives, they “slide passively from one

⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

⁹² Ibid., 94.

⁹³ Ibid., 95.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

situation to another.”⁹⁵ Thus, the thematic of 'la condition humaine' in the shape of judgment on the modern life emerges as the consequence of a particular formal, narrative organization. “The art cinema is less concerned with action than reaction; it is a cinema of psychological effects in search of their causes.”⁹⁶ The characters seem to embody, by bearing it on their shoulders, the malaise of the contemporary world. Though, simultaneously, they are in the process of engaging in the analysis of it, Bordwell notices: “yet there is seldom analysis at the level of groups or institutions; in the art cinema, social forces become significant insofar as they impinge upon the psychologically sensitive individual.”⁹⁷ Following these highly emotional states of the characters, its narrative organization of space and time is committed not only to objective but subjective verisimilitude as well.

Additionally, in art films “the author becomes the formal component...the textual force 'who' communicates (what is the film saying?) and 'who' expresses (what is the artist’s personal vision?). Lacking identifiable stars and familiar genres, the art cinema uses a concept of authorship to unify the text.”⁹⁸ Bordwell notices that a small industry comprised of film festivals, journals, career retrospectives and film education functions in order to secure the reading of the film as the work of expressive individual. So a potential ideal viewer of art film, the way Bordwell understands it, is always a competent one, who is not expecting the narrative determined by cause and effect, but by 'stylistic

⁹⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 97.

signatures in the narrative', marks of enunciation of an author – technical touches, obsessive motifs and the ways in which a particular film contributes to director's oeuvre.

These clear marks of enunciation create a contradiction in a film's narrative structure and its relationship to its spectator's expectations and activities, the one formed around the elements of realism (objective and subjective verisimilitude) and expressionism (of the author). The device of ambiguity solves this contradiction. For the spectator, the deviations from the norm on which art film resides, are positioned as either realism or authorial commentary. Once engaged in the process of reading, or interpreting, the spectator will seek first for the realistic motivation and then for the authorial. According to Bordwell, "ideally, the film hesitates, suggesting character subjectivity, life's untidiness, and author's vision."⁹⁹ In this way a film insists on 'maximum ambiguity', opens up reading of its potential meanings, and instigates the play of thematic interpretation. This concept of ambiguity can be understood as Bordwell's attempt to account for the paradoxes of the of art cinema, something that Galt and Schoonover will later try to conceptualize as impurity of the category. He analyzes films in terms of coherency and unity: "Realism and authorial expressivity, then, will be the means whereby the art films unifies itself."¹⁰⁰ Recognizing this coherency is enabled by the category's referential nature, which is Bordwell foundational conceptual gesture. Thus, art films' narrative features function only in opposition to classical Hollywood cinema. "The art film is nonclassical in that it foregrounds deviations from the classical

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 98.

norm.”¹⁰¹ Bound by the complex formal structures, defined only as a reaction to the classical norms, art films can never be conceived outside of those structures. In Bordwell's account, art films can emerge only as quintessentially apolitical. They are not conceptualized and analyzed in order to understand how is it that they engage their contemporary historical moment. This relation is being excluded in favor of the relation to the forms and structures through which they become discerned and recognized as art films. Thus, Bordwell structuralist proposition cancels the possibility to apprehend art films as political.

In order to shed additional light on the consequences of Bordwell's approach, in the way it permeates contemporary academic discourse, I will engage with Thanouli's text which takes his taxonomical inclinations to, in a certain sense, its logical extremes. This will render more visible the intentions and effects of the formalist approach proposed and offered by the former and practiced by the latter.

Thanouli's Correctional Critique of Bordwell

Directly engaging with Bordwell's article, in “ 'Art Cinema' Narration: Breaking Down the Wayward Paradigm”¹⁰² Thanouli aims to “underlie a number of weaknesses

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰² Eleftheria Thanouli, “ 'Art Cinema' Narration: Breaking Down the Wayward Paradigm”, in *Scope 14*, (June 2009).

that undermine the applicability of art cinema as a cohesive paradigm of narration”¹⁰³.

Her aim is to provide the foundation for “rigorous academic work” on art cinema. In several instances she emphasizes and defines her position as scholar who strives to conduct “clear and consistent conceptual scrutiny”.

Thanouli points to the contradictions and inconsistencies in Bordwell's account, comparing his greater film poetics with those of art cinema. She accuses him of confusing the concept of art cinema as a mode of narration and its concept as an institution. How film narratives are constructed should not be conflated, or, even worse, equated, with how those films are produced, distributed and received. The task of a true historical poetics (the term with which Bordwell labeled his formalist approach/project) should be exclusively focused on the questions of form and style. Thanouli, thus, defines herself as a formalist. For her, the question of form should never be directed back to the society and history that initially helped generate that form. She finds the same confusion of the concepts of mode of narration and of institution to translate and cause inconsistencies in Bordwell's closer classification of narrative elements of art cinema. What Thanouli proposes is a more rigorous bottom-up approach that would enable a substantial formal taxonomy of contemporary 'film cues' within the scope of constantly expanding cinematic practices in order to recognize them as “historical formations that are open to constant reworking and change.”¹⁰⁴ However, these 'historical formations' have nothing to do with material conditions of production, exhibition or reception that

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

allowed for the cinematic practices to emerge as such. In this instance, Thanouli's formalism emphatically relies on severing films from their material realities.

David Andrews, Art Cinema as Institution, Redux

As the title of his article indicates, “Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies”¹⁰⁵ David Andrews proposes re-evaluation and expansion of Neale's argument for understanding art cinema as institution. Andrews' text starts as a response to Thanouli's questioning of the sufficiency of the term art cinema as a narrative category. Though Thanouli might seem to come to conclusion that the category has become so diluted over the years that it might have become useless, Andrews stress how this applies only to art cinema as a narrative category as opposed to an institutional category. He goes on to suggest that Bordwell's proposition 'was never sensible'. In this way he puts Thanouli's criticism of Bordwell (which was predominantly corrective in its attitude) in the service of completely discrediting and jettisoning the idea of art cinema as a mode of narrative, in order to support Neale's proposition exclusively. “'Art cinema' makes little sense as a term that implies static or even *coherent* narrative forms.”¹⁰⁶ For Andrews, Neale's proposition is able to account for numerous occurrences and examples of art cinema that are not bound by historical period of post-WWII Europe,

¹⁰⁵ David Andrews, “Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies” in *Scope 18*, (October 2008).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

to which Bordwell's account is restricted. Art cinema as institution can be useful in engaging with the diversity the category encompasses. However, Andrew's basic assumption comes off as unsubstantiated in a sense that he terms is at as category "whose cultural and institutional status has been universally sought."¹⁰⁷ What is it that this universality entails? I will proceed with the analysis of the Andrews' text and come back to the question of universality later on.

Andrews stipulates that his goal is to update Neale by providing the investigation of the institutions Neale did not cover. Neale focused mostly on the production and glossed over the distribution and exhibition. Furthermore, since the beginning of the eighties, the art-house and festival circuit grew extensively, along with the institution of the discipline of film studies. These three areas constitute the focus of Andrews' interest. In the effort to regain the share of local European markets, art cinema was geared towards a niche high end segment of the market and against the mass market dominated by Hollywood product. Different national policies were introduced for supporting local European productions, with incentives in the form of subsidies. As one form of product differentiation both the arthouse and the festival circuit became "devoted to the reverential exhibition of art films." Both advance the sense that art films are of greater cultural significance than rest of the products on the market, and are thus quite justifiably awarded as such. Andrews stresses the importance of how cultural capital circulates the institution of the film festival, that is, in more general terms, institution of art cinema.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1.

The award functions as the testimony of artistic merit of the film, which in the operations of sale agents and distributors translates to financial capital. “To justify this atmosphere, festivals have had to speak the language of the absolute, the unquestionable. Thus, they have increasingly adopted an air of bogus religiosity that makes their film judgments seem "impervious to rational criteria or secondary elaborations" “¹⁰⁸

Thus, situating the film festivals as an institution highly entrenched in the commodity exchange, but trying to represent its mechanisms of operation as guided by more lofty principles, for which Art stands as an umbrella term, Andrews is following closely direction taken by Neale. “The festival is, then, art cinema's central institution, the one that best captures the naked contradictions of a commercial genre whose marketability is structured by rituals that testify to its anti-commercial purity.”¹⁰⁹ Important shifts in festival politics took place at Cannes in 1972, when the festival abandoned national selection committees, and started heavily investing in auteur figures and not national cinemas. Other festivals soon followed this policy. “By stressing "the auteur" and other signs of universalism, film festivals could better facilitate the international flow of cultural and economic capital on which they depended.”¹¹⁰

Further on, Andrews stresses the importance of the interdependence between the emergence of film studies and the rise to prominence of the film author. Today, the auteur

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁹ Andrews, Ibid.,9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

is still a prominent figure in popular forums formulated around cinema, like the “mainstream world of movie reviews, trade presses, and Internet blogs.”¹¹¹ The influences of and the overlap with academic forums (peer-reviewed journals, university presses, and professional conferences), provide the popular forums with a sense of legitimacy, and also operate in order to further stabilize the concept of auteur. Though academic discourse has been critical of the concept of the auteur, in a looser context, one firmly embedded in cinephilia, it still relies on it. And since cinephilia relies on categories of art cinema and authorship, those categories still continue to circulate the general attitudes about film and cinema.

Andrews' argument is most problematic when accounting for this fact. He situates the persistence, and to a degree, the domination of the auteur in numerous popular discourses around cinema in the fact that “auteurism turned out to be a fully human attitude that only grew more stable despite the criticism.”¹¹² The dismantling of the authorship within academia he perceives as an imperative of humanities scholars to counter popular beliefs and produce innovative articles that “experiment with inaccessible ideas.” So those overlapping forums that are somewhere in between strictly academic peer-reviewed journals and popular trade press, provide a space for academics to indulge their cinephiliac impulses, because “scholars are humans, and auteurism appeals to them as such.”¹¹³ Here is where the notion of universality becomes

¹¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹¹² Ibid., 13.

¹¹³ Ibid., 13.

important again for Andrews' proposition. By introducing the concept of a "universal" category, he steps outside the 'institutional framework' he adopts from Neale. As opposed to the idea of social construct, as one institution is, he suggests that the auteur is connected to the idea of innate, universal characteristics of human condition, conception whose philosophical conditions of possibility can be found in Cartesian transcendental subjectivity. Thus instead of foregrounding materiality, or material conditions of exhibition, distribution and reception, as he was hitherto, he frames his arguments within the transcendental purview. This is, to a degree a surprising shift from materialistic to universalistic perspective on the part of Andrews.

What this means is that Andrews abandons the direction his project pursued till that moment, and instead of engaging with ideology and politics of the concept of auteur, he promotes it as the essentialist category that in itself provides (functions as) explication for different phenomena within cinema. Along the same lines he concludes that art cinema, as well as auteurism, is indisputably existent and necessary category, because it is something inherent to us as humans. This is where the contradiction within Andrews' argument becomes apparent, because the universalizing transcendental principle is exactly the crucial operating principle of the ideology of Art, which Neale, and Andrews himself, to a point, were trying to render visible as such and dismantle.

As both of the recent essays demonstrate, following the theoretical trajectories set out by Neale and Bordwell leads either to more rigorous taxonomical tendencies that

completely exclude historical, political or social aspects of films existence, material realities it is embedded in, or towards conflation of materialist and essentialist perspectives which eventually again lead to the separation of films and worlds they belong to. The schism that Mark Betz discerns between history and theory on art cinema within academic discourse now can be understood as impossibility of engaging contemporary existence of global art cinema along the lines proposed by founding theoretical conceptualizations of the term. Or if we are to follow Neale, theorizing contemporary art cinema must find its impetus in opening up the possibilities of engaging contemporary historical moment, which is what his text does.

Instead of the Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to come to terms with the basic conceptual underpinnings that determine the production of knowledge in respect to contemporary art films. To be more specific, I've tried to discern and sketch out the conceptual conditions of possibility that position and determine my own scholarly engagement with the question how to understand art films as the potential site for politically thinking the contemporary world.

I've tried to recognize and confront in my writing the dominant perspective that came to define my own position and attitude towards art films and cinema in general. David Bordwell was a highly influential voice for how I comprehended and wrote about films prior to starting my academic journey. When I was writing as a film critic, Bordwell provided me with a set of firm criteria through which I could gauge and filter my own experience of watching and thinking about films. Coming into the Emory's Film and Media Studies MA Program, Bordwell continued exerting the similar influence being a prominent figure in the different course curriculums. However, in conjunction with other perspectives within the discipline, as well more proper philosophical positions I became familiar with throughout the seminars outside the department, his attitudes emerged as highly problematic to me. As I clearly started to define my interests in terms of political, I came to realize Bordwell's perspective as framing a relation between the world and films in a particular manner, in a manner that actually noticeably limits the potentials for comprehending that relation. Thus, this thesis can be understood as way of coming to

terms with these limitations in order to overcome them.

The limitations of Bordwellian perspective, highly reliant upon the formalist readings of the films, emerge quite apparent in this text itself. Upon rereading the text, I've noticed one salient feature. On the numerous occasions I invoke and emphasize the importance of complexity of relations between film/cinema and the world. However, throughout the text I fail to move on with and think further about this relation. It seems I remain fixed on this syntagm, incapable to articulate in which ways this relation becomes manifest, and in which manner within the discipline of film studies I can think about it. This acknowledgment, this symptom, serves as a confirmation that work I performed in the thesis was necessary. Now I can embark upon further academic inquiries that will allow me to engage and think this issue of relation between film and the world it belongs to.

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