

ACCESS DENIED: Godard Palestine Representation

by NIELS NIESSEN

Abstract: Can cinema testify to the political injustices of its historical moment? Departing from a close reading of Jean-Luc Godard's *Film socialisme* (2010), and in particular the film's representation of Palestine, the following article argues that this question connects Godard's early work, through his video period, to his recent engagement with digital technologies.

Godard's 2010 *Film socialisme* carries the crisis of representation into the digital age. In doing so, the film forms a response toward the director's preceding feature *Notre musique* (2004). In *Notre musique*, we at one point see Godard, played by himself, lecturing at the European Literary Encounters conference in Sarajevo. At the end of this lecture, which is entitled "Shot/Reverse-Shot," a Bosnian woman, via an interpreter, asks Godard: "Monsieur Godard, que pensez-vous, est-ce que les nouvelles petites caméras numériques pourront sauver le cinéma?" ("Mister Godard, what do you think, will the new small digital cameras be able to save cinema?"). The film's diegetic answer, a long close-up of a silent Godard against the background of uncomfortable laughter and the sound of people leaving the room, is less telling than it appears. Godard, through his films and in interviews, has proclaimed "the death of cinema" numerous times and for many different reasons. Yet the stance he ultimately formulates in and through *Notre musique* in response to the question of whether the digital turn has perhaps come accompanied with renewed hope for cinema's future, remains ambiguous. While Godard, right before leaving Sarajevo, is sitting in an airport cafeteria, he is approached by a group of conference attendees. "De la part d'Olga," says one of the students as she hands the director a burned DVD, "c'est le film qu'elle a fait avec la petite caméra" ("From Olga, it's the film she made with the small camera"). Godard is visibly pleased, Olga (Nade Dieu) being a young Israeli with whom Godard has had a brief encounter earlier in the film. In the next sequence we encounter the filmmaker at home, suggestively tending his garden. While watering his flowers he receives the news about Olga's death, upon which the film cuts to the young woman's path to paradise. The title of her film? *Notre musique*. This information can be

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Figure 1. *Notre musique's* film-within-a-film, created by the character Olga (Nade Dieu), is also called *Notre musique*, a fact that the viewer can glean only at home, by pausing the image and reading the title on Olga's DVD case (Avventura Films, 2004).

gleaned only by the viewer watching Godard's own *Notre musique* at home in digital format, as she or he must pause the film and examine the DVD case in Godard's hands (Figure 1).

By implicitly presenting Olga's digitally recorded testimony as an answer to the Bosnian woman's question, *Notre musique* seems to suggest that the only way the question of cinema's future can be addressed is through cinema itself. It is also along these lines, as an answer to the question of cinema's position in and in relation to the digital age, that I understand *Film socialisme*, the director's

first film that was entirely shot, edited, and produced in digital video. What is cinema made of, or what could it be made of? What spaces can it venture into, and which ones is it denied access to? And can digital technologies, the advance of which has so often been said to imply the medium's death, save cinema? Can they help the audiovisual language of cinema to express the problems specific to the digital age? In posing these questions in relation to Godard's work, it is important to remember the director's 1995 statement that cinema died the moment it failed to testify to the Holocaust. Moreover, in Godard's logic, cinema not only died in the face of Auschwitz but also died and continues to do so in the face of Vietnam, Bosnia, and Palestine. At first glance, Palestine occupies a central role in *Film socialisme*. But does it really? In this article I argue that it is through the film's implicit endeavor to represent the nonrepresentability of the suffering of the Palestinian people that *Film socialisme* runs up against its own self-imposed limits. Once again, Godard raises the question of the extent to which the digital age has brought about new modes of agency for practices considered cinematic, and once again he avoids answering this question. In bringing to light this performative silence, my article suggests that Godard's oeuvre shares a certain aporia that is inherent to critiques of representation as they have become paradigmatic to the tradition of French poststructuralist theory. My article takes Godard as one of the main theorists of this critique. To the extent that film-philosophical texts such as *The Carabineers* (*Les Carabiniers*, 1963), *Here and Elsewhere* (*Ici et ailleurs*, 1976), and *Notre musique* help us to understand *Film socialisme's* struggle to express the digital age, and in particular the ongoing injustices done to the Palestinians, they will figure among critiques of representation formulated by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

Things (Like That) Cinema Is Made Of. In order to expose this central theoretical thread connecting Godard's early work, through his video period to his digital turn, I first explore his multifaceted engagement in *Film socialisme* with the question, what is cinema now? *Film socialisme* confronts the viewer with a phenomenal plenitude of images and sounds, starting with the opening credits, which run so fast that one can only



Figure 2. In Godard's *Film socialisme*, Florine (Marine Battaglia) refuses to interrupt her reading of Balzac's *Illusions perdues* in order to serve her customers (Vega Film, 2010).

catch bits and pieces of the listings of “TEXTOS” (“. . . J. DERRIDA . . . O. BISMARCK . . .”), and “VIDEOS” (“VIAGGIO IN ITALIA . . . ОКТЯБРЬ . . .”). The film ends with a black screen that lasts for fifteen seconds or so, and that constitutes the exclamation mark behind the already-capitalized message on the last title screen: “NO COMMENT.” Between these bookends, Godard's crystalline symphony in three movements contains the following: a pixilated cruise ship disco with speakers blasting; Alain Badiou lecturing on the same cruise ship in front of an empty auditorium; Patti Smith; “a-l-i-s-s-a” spelled in hieroglyphs; a golden watch without hands; a Godard heroine without “contrat de travail” working at a gas station somewhere in France, refusing to interrupt her reading of *Illusions perdues* in order to serve German customers, and saying she will kill you if you mock Balzac (Figure 2); a llama and a donkey at the same gas station; teenagers demanding real answers from their parents to the big questions of life; “AUDIOS” by A. Part and L. Beethoven; the Odessa steps then and now (plus owl); an FC Barcelona game crosscut with older art; Greece (announced as “HELL AS” and “ΕΛΛΑΣ,” and pronounced as “hélas”); five seconds of footage presumably shot in Palestine; sardonic laughter; silence; and much more.

Most remarkable, though, are the subtitles in pidgin English, referred to by the film's DVD as “Navajo English.” For example, “Si vous vous moquez de Balzac, je vous Tue” becomes “fun of Balzac kill you” (including the extra spaces, which I omit hereafter; the spelling and punctuation of the dialogue in French I base on the film's dialogue book).¹ And that is actually one of the more complete translations, as most of the subtitles, if there are any at all, are less helpful in understanding the film's dialogue than even an extremely basic knowledge of French. Some other examples: “Miao c'est comme ça que les anciens égyptiens appelaient leur chat” becomes “Egyptians name

1 Jean-Luc Godard, *Film socialisme: dialogues avec visages auteurs* (Paris: POL, 2010).

cats.” And the snippet of Badiou’s lecture on Husserl is, in fact quite accurately, reduced to “geometry as origin / return to geometry / ourselves partof [*sic*] geometry.”²

Film socialisme’s particular subtitling strategy can be understood on three different levels: as a reflection on the practice of subtitling; as part of the cinematic image; and as related to the film’s diegesis, a synopsis of which I weave through my discussion of the subtitles. I start with this last aspect. By overtly falling short of the usual task of subtitles—to make intelligible a film’s dialogue for a “foreign” audience—the sparse and fragmented subtitles of Godard’s film can be seen in light of one of the film’s main thematic concerns: communication and the failure thereof. It is in this light that Godard’s naming of the English of his subtitles as “Navajo English” has to be understood. Navajo is the language spoken by the Navajo people in the southwestern United States, and as such it is associated with the depiction of Native Americans in the Western genre. Navajo was also employed as a code language by the American army in World War II. World War II is present throughout Godard’s potpourri of true and false legends. The United States, however, remains almost entirely absent from the film, except for a still from John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956), a one-dollar bill, and three title cards in English laying down the law: “NO COMMENT,” “ACCESS DENIED,” and an FBI copyright warning.

The film’s first movement is titled “DES CHOSES COMME ÇA” (“THINGS LIKE THAT”) and is set on a cruise ship sailing the Mediterranean. In reality, the ship on which this movement was filmed was the *Costa Concordia*, which struck a rock near the coast of the Tuscan island of Giglio less than two years after the appearance of *Film socialisme*. In the film, this ship is surrounded by an ocean as black and slick as oil, and the vessel takes on the appearance of a Babylonian anti-ark. The ship’s passengers communicate at cross-purposes, and hardly any of them are fleshed out as characters. They merely function as ventriloquists of statements about grand themes such as the circulation of gold (“British left Israel / gold Bankof Palestine”), processes of signification (“compare incomparable”), the miscommunication between groups of people (“nolove any people / French Northamerican / German Jew Black”).

Upon closer analysis, however, all the main characters in the first movement are connected by one of several variations on a legend. This central gold-of-Moscow legend can be reconstructed on the basis of snippets of dialogue, though probably not during one’s first viewing of the film. In the legend’s original version, the gold of Moscow consisted of the reserves of the Spanish bank, which were shipped from Carthage to Odessa in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War. In *Film socialisme*’s reworking of this legend, the place and year of departure have been changed to Barcelona and 1940, while many of the legend’s other components are incorporated with other stories revolving around World War II. In Godard’s main variation on the “gold of Moscow,”

2 In an interview, Godard talks about Badiou’s lecture, which was actually given on the *Costa Concordia* on which the first movement was shot: “Badiou’s lecture didn’t interest the tourists on the cruise ship. We had announced that there would be a lecture on Husserl but nobody came. When we took Badiou to this empty room, he was very pleased. He said: ‘Finally, I speak in front of nobody’” (“Le droit d’auteur? Un auteur n’a que des devoirs” [interview with Jean-Luc Godard, Cannes 2010, *Les Inrocks* (blog), May 18, 2010, <http://blogs.lesinrocks.com/cannes2010/2010/05/18/le-droit-dauteur-un-auteur-na-que-des-devoirs-jean-luc-godard/>]). All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted.

one-third of the gold is stolen on the way to Odessa, and another third disappears between Odessa and Moscow. Many of the characters in the film's first movement are therefore not ordinary tourists but "gold runners" who spy on and circle around one another, either because they are after the gold (the Russian Major Kamenskaïa) or because they may know more about its disappearance (Herr Obersturmbannführer Otto Goldberg). Other characters, including a Mossad agent and two Palestinian travelers, are connected through yet another variation on the original legend, namely the story of the theft of the Palestinian gold. More generally, as Arthur Mas and Martial Pisani point out in their impressive piecing together of the puzzle of citations that is *Film socialisme*, the various gold legends running through the first movement and the film in its entirety may be interpreted through Fernand Braudel's 1946 "Monnaies et civilisations: de l'or du Soudan à l'argent d'Amérique," which is cited at the beginning of *Film socialisme*'s third movement. With this article, Braudel demonstrated the crucial role that the possession and theft of gold played in the rise and decline of national powers. "In this perspective," Mas and Pisani argue, "the journey of the gold from the bank of Spain is only the end of a history that begins in the 16th century, and that the filmmaker transforms into the founding tale of the 20th. 'This is the rhythm of the chapters of world history. The cadence of fabulous metals': the final words of Braudel's essay could also serve as the conclusion to *Film socialisme*."³ Gold also forms one of the film's binding elements in other ways. There is the recurring Egyptian golden watch without hands.



Figure 3. Alissa's necklace is part of a motif of gold objects running through *Film socialisme* (Vega Film, 2010).

And there is Alissa's golden necklace that Ludo (Quentin Grosset) takes an interest in but that he, so she tells him, should not talk about to anybody ("Mann soll das niemand sagen / Le silence est d'or") (Figure 3).

While Alissa (Agatha Couture) is speaking to Ludo, her words are almost entirely swallowed up by the roar of the ocean. In other scenes, the dialogue is rendered almost, but not quite, inaudible by the ambient noise of television or radio sets. As is the case in many of Godard's films, the soundtrack leads a life of its own. In *Film socialisme* it even leads a double existence: in large parts of the film the two stereo channels are completely distinct. From this perspective, the subtitles operate as a third "audio" track, adding to the cacophony of voices rather than negotiating them. Fortunately for the nonnative French speaker, these factors complicating the first movement's comprehensibility are partly offset by the fact that also most of the characters are not native speakers of French.

3 Arthur Mas and Martial Pisani, "Film socialisme," *Independencia*, June 1, 2010, http://independencia.fr/indp/10_FILM_SOCIALISME_JLG.html.

The second movement's dialogue is also relatively easy to follow, as it often takes the form of declamations. This movement, "QUO VADIS EUROPA," centers around a family-run gas station in the Savoie region. When a regional television crew arrives and one of the women asks Florine (Marine Battaglia), the oldest of the family's two children, whether "Garage Martin c'est ici," the girl does not respond, as she refuses to speak "à ceux qui utilisent le verbe 'être'" ("donot speak tothose / using to be"; Figure 2). Florine is reading Balzac's *Illusions perdues*; she and her younger brother Lucien (Gulliver Hecq) are named after two protagonists in this novel.⁴ Standing next to Florine is a llama on a very short leash. The television crew is there to interview her father, who is running in the cantonal elections. At the end of the second movement, however, it is Florine and Lucien who are running for office. "Autrefois, dans la Résistance, pas loin de Toulouse," the intertitles state, "il y avait un petit réseau qui faisait partie du mouvement 'Combat' / 'famille Martin'" ("once the Resistance / small group"). Like the first movement's remixing of the gold-of-Moscow legend, with the tale of resistance surrounding "famille Martin" *Film socialisme* again mashes up multiple legends, which as Mas and Pisani point out, are the histories of two resistance networks active during World War II.⁵ In the context of the legend that is *Film socialisme*, the gas station is thus presented as an arc for humanity surrounded by a hostile ocean of lost illusions—lost illusions about Europe, about solidarity, and perhaps about political cinema.

"NOS HUMANITÉS," to conclude this attempt at a synopsis, is the title of the third movement, a film-essay reminiscent of Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998) containing all kinds of footage from the five Mediterranean cradles of Europe, plus Odessa. The tone of this final movement is even more melancholic than the two preceding it: the Greek marriage of tragedy and democracy; garbage heaps in the streets of Naples; and the owl of Minerva staring straight into the camera with the Odessa steps visible in the background, no longer the backdrop for revolution and political cinema but for cruise-ship tourism. Godard's film ends where it all started, where the legend of the gold started, at least in the film's own version of this legend: Barcelona, a city located in a country "où ne manquent pas en ce moment les occasions de mourir" ("Spain this moment / no lack opportunities / to die"). "Alissa," Ludo's voice calls against the backdrop of street protests. "Alissa." A girl screaming. Something is being exchanged right in front of the camera. Gun shots. A girl hides behind her camera. "DES CHOSES C-O-M-M-E," a title card spells in red and white and to the rhythm of more gunshots. Alissa's golden necklace drops on a table.

The second way *Film socialisme's* subtitles can be understood is as a critique of the practice of subtitling itself. Subtitles "offer a way into worlds outside of ourselves,"

4 The names Alissa and Ludo are references to characters in André Gide's *La porte étroite* (1909).

5 Two of them are Famille Martin, an organization in the Colmar area whose mission was to help prisoners of war and deserters to cross the Swiss border, and Libérer et Fédérer, which was operating in Toulouse. "One sees," Mas and Pisani conclude, "how, on the basis of a collage that unites two resistance movements, the film weaves a hyphen in between the big political battles that occupy Europe from the arrival to power of Mussolini to the decolonization and the European construction, passing through the Spanish war and the Resistance. A hyphen that is also called 'socialism.'" Mas and Pisani, "*Film socialisme*."

Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour write in an edited volume on the theme.⁶ In the same volume there is an interview with Claire Denis. Responding to the question of why in a particular scene in her 2002 *Vendredi soir* (*Friday Night*) the subtitles make comprehensible dialogue that is hardly audible, she responds: “I was actually against that. I asked the guy who did the subtitles if we could perhaps print them with one letter missing or one word missing. . . . And he said that that doesn’t exist in subtitles. Either we have subtitles or we don’t have subtitles.”⁷

Sometimes subtitles translate too much. They do so when they render intelligible to the “foreign” viewer parts of dialogue that are difficult or even impossible to understand for the “native” viewer. In such a situation the “native” listener’s own comprehension barrier is made “inaudible.” Such a barrier can have various causes. It can be fully intrinsic to the film’s text, for example when dialogue is subsumed or partly subsumed by other sounds or noises. The difficulty for a viewer to follow his or her “own” language may occur when dialogue is spoken in dialect. For that reason, dialects are often subtitled, as if they were foreign languages. And subtitles arguably translate too much when they allow the viewer to understand dialogue in a multilanguage film in which the protagonists themselves fail to understand the languages spoken.

More often subtitles are accused of translating too little, the discrepancy between original and translation often finding its origin in the limitations inherent to the medium of subtitles: screen space and viewers’ reading speed. The main alternative to subtitles is dubbing, but certainly among Anglophone art-house cinephiles the consensus is that, as one of the protagonists in Godard’s *Masculin/Féminin* (1966) puts it, “doubler, c’est se faire avoir,” prudishly subtitled as “we get duped when it’s dubbed.”⁸ Yet the argument that subtitles leave the original soundtrack intact, whereas dubbing interferes with it, does not always apply. As Mark Betz points out in his *Beyond the Subtitle*, the lead roles in films like Luchino Visconti’s *The Leopard* (*Il gattopardo*, 1963) and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *1900* (1976) were played by actors from different countries who each spoke either their own language (Robert de Niro, Donald Sutherland) or Italian (Alain Delon). Only in postproduction was synchronized sound added, often in the form of different soundtracks catering to the domestic markets of each coproducing partner.⁹ This leads Betz to argue that “art film viewers” who insist on watching such films—which were shot without sound, with subtitles and the dialogue dubbed into Italian—are, in fact, subjecting themselves to two “added idiosyncrasies”: the subtitles, which require the viewer’s eyes to take over a task usually performed by the ears, and the fact that many of the major characters’ lips are not in sync with the dialogue heard.¹⁰

6 Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour, introduction to *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*, ed. Egoyan and Balfour (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 30.

7 Claire Denis, “Outside Myself,” interview with Atom Egoyan, in Egoyan and Balfour, eds., *Subtitles*, 69–78, 75.

8 In a similar vein, in *Le gai savoir* (1969) Émile (Jean-Pierre Léaud) proposes a terrorist attack in a cinema in Rome precisely for the Italian habit of not screening films in their “version originale.”

9 Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 84–85.

10 *Ibid.*, 87.

Betz's observations make us wonder to what extent the Navajo English subtitles of *Film socialisme* may be considered part of the film itself. At its premiere at the 2010 Cannes film festival *Film socialisme* was screened with these subtitles, but in France it was released without them. On the film's DVD release (so far only in Region 2), the Navajo English subtitles are optional.¹¹ Nevertheless, because they are an artistic statement in themselves, the subtitles may be considered part of what I call the film's plot space and arguably, therefore, the film is more "complete" with them than without them. By "plot space" I understand the space the moving image occupies, both as physical object (patterns of light on a screen) and as representation. The plot space is the two-dimensional, rectangular surface that is the frame and simultaneously the illusion of the three-dimensional scene that this surface creates through mediation of viewers' vision. If the image projected or screened does not create the illusion of depth, as is the case with *Film socialisme*'s title cards, then the plot space equals the frame. If the moving image is a moving sound-image, then the plot space's first dimension, its surface, also includes the soundtrack (understood as sound waves emitted by the speakers), while its second dimension, the scene, also includes sound (music, dialogue, noise) insofar as the latter contributes to the illusion of three-dimensional space.

Normally, subtitles lie "on top" of the image and thereby cover part of the plot space that they mediate for the viewer. In the case of *Film socialisme*, however, Godard draws the subtitles into the plot space. In addition, to the extent that the subtitles foreground their own failure, for example through the unequal spacing between the words, they even take on an iconic quality. The subtitles thus present themselves as a manifestation of one of the central desires running through Godard's oeuvre: to expand the things cinema's plot space is made of, to expand the things that make it art. In the case of *Film socialisme*, many of these things originate in the function and malfunction of digital-image recording and sound recording technologies: image delay, pixelation, stop-motion video, oversaturated color that gives the films digital surface the appearance of a fauvist painting, and transformation of the ocean wind into percussion by the microphone of a cheap digital camera. This aesthetic expansion leads Alain Bergala to state in *Cahiers du cinéma* that with *Film socialisme* Godard continues to grasp "in the contemporary moment images and sounds of which nobody before him had had the idea of turning . . . into material for creation. . . . He constructs the real of today, as he has always done, on the basis of that which has not yet entered the domain of the perceptible and the intelligible."¹²

This claim that Godard's film is the first cinematic manifestation to turn the digital process, including its glitches, into creative matter, is a little exaggerated. Yet the idea that *Film socialisme*, like the rest of Godard's oeuvre, seeks to challenge the limitations of what we can perceive and express is beyond doubt. And like much of Godard's earlier work, the film does so in the face of cinema's death, of its many deaths.

The Deaths of Cinema. Godard has often flirted with the "death of cinema." An early example is in *Weekend* (1967), when to its "fin" title card the film adds "de cinéma."

11 On the Internet, copies of the film also circulate with more complete subtitles in English and Spanish.

12 Alain Bergala, "Retour sur terre," *Cahiers du cinéma* (December 2010), 21.

Or in *King Lear* (1987), when the film's protagonist states, "We're in a time now when movies, and more generally art, have been lost, do not exist. And must somehow be reinvented." The one death is not the same as the other. In "The Death(s) of Cinema according to Godard," Michael Witt distinguishes four different ideas of the death of cinema running through Godard's oeuvre.

The first death is the suppression of silent cinema by the talkie. "Cinema stopped in the 1920s with silent film," Witt cites Godard as saying.¹³ The second death is the one cinema was struck by when it failed to testify to the Holocaust. In a 1995 interview Godard states that cinema "ended the moment the concentration camps were not filmed. . . . Six million people were killed or gassed, principally Jews, and the cinema was not there."¹⁴ How should one interpret this claim? As Georges Didi-Hubermann points out in *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Godard not only knew that some still and moving images of the camps existed; he had even used them in *Ici et ailleurs* and *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, and he would use them in *Notre musique* and *Film socialisme*. One may therefore infer that for Godard, cinema, in order to be a living art, needs to consist of more than the mere movement of images on a screen. The reason that in Godard's eyes cinema failed to film the camps is, Didi-Hubermann writes, "because filming alone does not suffice to make cinema. Because, according to Godard, no one was able to *make a montage* (that is, to *show* in order to *understand*) of the existing shots, the documents of history."¹⁵ "Champs et contre-champs," shot and counter-shot: it sounds simple, but as Godard himself explains in his lecture in *Notre musique*, it is precisely in the face of injustice, when cinema matters most, that the countershot is not simple at all and sometimes even proves impossible. At such moments of failure cinema dies. As Witt argues, this second death of cinema forms the recurring theme of Godard's later work and finds its expression in films such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *Forever Mozart* (1996), as well as in *Film socialisme*.

The third death is the one that was called for by the filmmakers of '68, who desired "the jettisoning of cinema as a reactionary cultural form and purveyor of sanitized bourgeois myths and clichés."¹⁶ This is the kind of death proclaimed at the end of *Weekend*, regardless of the question of whether this diegetic statement coincides with the view of its author.

Cinema's fourth and final death is a more gradual process, as it is the one that has accompanied the supposed degradation of visual culture with the emergence of television. This degradation has been said to manifest itself in developments such as declining movie-theater attendance and the flattening impact that the proliferation of televisual images has been accused of exercising on the general quality of moving images produced, as well as on people's diminishing receptivity for these images. Throughout his oeuvre, Godard's relation to television has been ambivalent. He has both engaged with the medium and taken a polemical stance against it, most explicitly

13 Michael Witt, "The Death(s) of Cinema according to Godard," *Screen* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 333.

14 Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 140.

15 *Ibid.*, 141.

16 Witt, "Death(s) of Cinema," 335.

in the 1970s in his video collaborations with Anne-Marie Miéville (*Ici et ailleurs; Comment ça va?* [*How Is It Going?*], 1978). According to Witt, it is precisely this ambivalence that led Godard to embody the televisual era: “Godard’s entire *oeuvre* is above all profoundly *televisual* (against television, marked by television, engaging with television).”¹⁷ To this one could add that from the moment of the diegetic inclusion of a television set in *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman Is a Woman*, 1961), Godard has simultaneously battled against and contributed to cinema’s death by television, on the one hand positioning cinema and television as mutually exclusive and on the other hand incessantly searching for ever-new ways to challenge that opposition.

To the extent that these four different ideas of cinema’s death can be separated from one another at all, I am most interested in the second and fourth deaths, or more precisely in the variations on them with which *Film socialisme* engages. The way *Film socialisme* enacts this engagement simultaneously answers and fails to answer the question that is implicit in the challenge that Godard, through *Notre musique*, poses to his diegetic double: “Est-ce que les nouvelles petites caméras numériques pourront sauver le cinéma?” Translated into the multifaceted idea of cinema’s death, this question becomes something like the following: Can cinema’s striving to fulfill its duty to testify to the crimes of our present-day world, and to become itself an intervention into that world that goes beyond the making visible of the invisible, be furthered by certain digital modes of image production? And in addition to this, do digital technologies themselves not pose a threat to cinema’s “life” in ways that go beyond the medium’s death by television?

Before turning to the way *Film socialisme* addresses, and at the same time foregrounds itself as incapable of addressing this question, let us first look at the many levels on which Godard’s film responds to the lure of the digital. That lure has been extensively theorized in Film Studies as cinema’s definitive call to death. The idea, that the advent of digital technologies has been accompanied by the death of cinema, finds its most eloquent expression in D. N. Rodowick’s *The Virtual Life of Film*. For Rodowick, at issue is not so much the question of whether cinema is dead but of when it died. Moving-image scholars, Rodowick argues, find themselves caught between “the questions ‘What *was* cinema?’ and ‘What will digital cinema *become*?’”¹⁸ Rodowick believes that this path to virtual existence is expressed by *Éloge de l’amour* (*In Praise of Love*, 2001), “perhaps Godard’s last exercise in medium specificity.” The film was partly shot in black-and-white 35mm and partly in color-saturated video. According to Rodowick, to attend a theatrical screening of *Éloge de l’amour* is to witness a simultaneous eulogy and elegy for cinema: “While the black-and-white scenes suggest a present that may be passing out of existence—the disappearance of film as a medium—the color sequences may never again achieve their impressionistic vibrancy and luminosity when and if these video images are no longer presentable through 35mm projection.”¹⁹

Although I am sympathetic to Rodowick’s reading of *Éloge de l’amour*, the framework which he discusses this film is challenged by *Film socialisme*, as well as by this film’s

17 Ibid., 345.

18 D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 84.

19 Ibid., 90.

production, promotion, and distribution history. *Film socialisme*, too, performs an exercise in medium specificity. The film is a heterogeneous mixture of digital-image formats. Its material was recorded over the course of four years by four cameramen: Jean-Paul Battaglia, Fabrice Aragno, Paul Grivas, and Godard himself. The four, with Godard's name first, are equally credited in the opening titles under the header "LOGOS."²⁰ They used all kinds of digital cameras, including professional high-definition cameras, camcorders, and cell phones. The film also includes footage from Internet videos, classic films, and direct-to-DVD films.

Before the film opened in French movie theaters on May 19, 2010, it was made available through its distribution company Wild Bunch's video-on-demand platform FilmoTV. Beginning thirty minutes after the film's official Cannes premiere on May 17 in the "Un certain regard" section—an event Godard was unable to attend—and continuing until midnight the next day, the French Internet user could download the film for seven euros.²¹ Originally Godard had even planned to post the entire film on YouTube, as a statement against the "Creation and Internet" copyright law that the French parliament passed in 2009.²² Such a statement certainly would have been in line with the film's ethos: toward the end of *Film socialisme*, and directly after hinting at Alissa's murder by showing her necklace, the film shows an FBI warning of the sort that appears when one inserts a DVD in a player ("Any commercial use or duplication . . ."). While we hear Ludo calling out Alissa's name, this warning dissolves into a title card citing Pascal: "QUAND LA LOI N'EST PAS JUSTE LA JUSTICE PASSE AVANT LA LOI" ("law unfair / justice first"). Ironically, a similar copyright warning in French is not absent from *Film socialisme*'s own commercial DVD.

Ultimately, Godard did not put the film on YouTube, instead agreeing to the video-on-demand compromise proposed by Wild Bunch.²³ What was posted on YouTube were six trailers, the last five of them in fact showing the entire film, fast-forwarded into videos of which the lengths vary from about one to about four minutes. Although it remains unclear whether these last five trailers are the work of Godard and his team, they may be read as alluding to the film's own play with variations on an original. The first trailer is more conventional and was certainly made by Godard.²⁴ As far as its theatrical release is concerned, in France the film has been screened both digitally and in 35mm. As Jean-Philippe Tirel from Wild Bunch explains in conversation with *Cahiers du cinéma*, Godard's original plan was to distribute only digital copies of the

20 In an interview, Godard states: "In terms of production [the film] is very atypical. We filmed it with four people: Battaglia, Arragno, Grivas and I equally. We all went our separate ways and brought back images. Grivas went to Egypt on his own and returned with hours of footage. . . . We gave ourselves a lot of time." "Le droit d'auteur? Un auteur n'a que des devoirs," *Les Inrocks* (blog), May 18, 2010, <http://blogs.lesinrocks.com/cannes2010/2010/05/18/le-droit-dauteur-un-auteur-na-que-des-devoirs-jean-luc-godard/>.

21 About three hundred people made use of this offer.

22 This highly controversial "Loi Création et Internet," which is also referred to as the "Loi HADOPI" (Haute Autorité pour la diffusion des oeuvres et la protection des droits sur internet), gives Internet service providers the power to block the Internet access of those who have been accused three times of illegal file sharing.

23 Héléne Zylberait, "Le business de *Socialisme*," *Cahiers du cinéma* (July–August 2010), 62.

24 "Film Socialisme JL Godard Trailer 2," BadLieutenantD, YouTube, March 27, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK4yLgJ3>.

film. However, this turned out to be impossible, particularly because some art-house cinemas lacked the necessary projection equipment.²⁵

Film socialisme thus seems to inscribe itself in the digital age in all ways imaginable. The film does so in the sense of being an object that is or has been produced, distributed, advertised, and projected by means of digital technologies. It does so at the level of its plot space, which ostensibly foregrounds itself as being made out of all kinds of digital stuff. And it does so at the level of its diegesis, by overtly reflecting on the scope of cinema in the digital age. For example, at one point in the second movement, Florine thinks out loud while in conversation with her mother: “Eh bien mère on entre dans une époque avec le numérique où pour des raisons différentes l’humanité sera confrontée à des problèmes pas laisser le luxe de s’exprimer” (“age digital technology / humanity problems / not allow luxury / expressing oneself”). To what extent can Florine’s statement be read as representative of *Film socialisme*’s own intervention into or stance toward the world? Of course, with Godard, who has confronted the question of representation consistently, one should resist the desire to take images and statements at face value, let alone to cite them outside of the contexts in which they appear. To do so would be to miss out on the fact that in Godard’s films all images and statements are potential clichés, linguistic or visual commodities whose use-value has worn out and that hence do not really reveal or express anything. As Gilles Deleuze argues in *Cinema 1*, this crisis of representation is precisely the problem that Godard’s films keep expressing: “If images have become clichés,” Deleuze writes, “internally as well as externally, how can an Image be extracted from all these clichés, ‘just an image,’ an autonomous mental image?”²⁶

And yet, sometimes in Godard’s films, statements (and images are statements, too) really mean what they mean. Some examples we have already encountered: the “fin de cinéma” at the end of *Weekend*, or Godard’s reflections on shot and countershot in *Notre musique*. Other examples of diegetic statements that may be taken as reflecting the overarching political interventions of the films in which they appear—and that simultaneously speak to the issues raised by *Film socialisme*—include the following: In *Tout va bien* (1972), Jacques, a director of commercial films, expresses his desire to find “des nouvelles formes pour des nouveaux contenus” (“new forms for new contents”); in *A Letter to Jane: An Investigation about a Still* (Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972), Godard states that “film = editing of ‘I see,’” and later he says that there is “no reverse shot possible” of Jane Fonda’s expression in the picture taken of her Vietnam visit; in *Made in USA* (1966), Paula says she has the impression “de naviguer dans un film de Walt Disney, mais joué par Humphrey Bogart” (“of living in a Walt Disney film, but where I’m played by Humphrey Bogart”).

25 Zylberait, “Business de *Socialisme*,” 62. Tirel also speaks about Godard’s distribution plans for his next film: “Godard would love to distribute the film differently, by having traveling projections, by going from town to town. We simply responded that if he is willing to travel and accompany the film, we would pack it.” This is a distribution strategy reminiscent of Dziga Vertov’s agit-train shows that took place during the Russian Civil War. It remains to be seen whether this plan will be carried out, because at the time of this article’s publication Godard is working on a film shot in 3D, titled *Adieu au langage* (“Jean-Luc Godard: L’opacité de l’existence,” *Hors-champs* [France Culture radio broadcast, September 12, 2011]).

26 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 1986), 219.

Jacques Rancière writes in *The Future of the Image* that this last statement forms “an exemplary deduction: the absence of any relationship between the associated elements sufficed to vouch for the political character of the association.”²⁷ That is indeed what Paula seems to be saying and what *Made in USA* seems to be doing. Yet that was in 1966. More than forty years later, however, a mere clash of elements no longer suffices to save cinema from a premature death. To perform this salvation, one needs, once again, to find new forms for new contents. That is at least one of the things that *Film socialisme* seems to be saying through the character of Florine. So what precisely are the problems that have become increasingly difficult to express in the digital age? And what does *Film socialisme* leave unexpressed? At least one answer to this question is made obvious by the film itself: Palestine, a territory, an idea, and an idea of a territory.

Crisis of Representation, or “ACCESS DENIED.”

Le peuple juif rejoint la fiction, le peuple palestinien le documentaire.
(The Jews become the stuff of fiction, the Palestinians, of documentary.)

—Godard, in *Notre musique*

Before turning to *Film socialisme*'s struggle with the representation of Palestine, it is instructive to first briefly look at the Palestine embodied by and represented in *Ici et ailleurs* (1976), a film about a failed film, or more precisely, a video about a failed film. *Ici et ailleurs*, which Godard codirected with Anne-Marie Miéville, constitutes a critical reflection on the earlier unfinished project *Jusqu'à la victoire* (*Until Victory*), a project that was carried out by the Dziga Vertov group, which included Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin. *Jusqu'à la victoire* had been commissioned by and made in collaboration with a group of militants from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Most of these militants, however, were murdered in September 1970 by the Jordanian army. For this and other reasons, the Dziga Vertov group was disbanded in 1973, after which Godard and Miéville used the existing footage to make another film. “En 1970 ce film s'appelait *Victoire*,” Miéville says in *Ici et ailleurs*. “En 1975 il s'appelle *Ici et ailleurs*. *Ici*, une famille française qui régarde la télé. *Ailleurs*, des images de la révolution Palestinienne” (“In 1970 this film was called *Victory*. In 1975 it is called *Here and Elsewhere*. *Here*, a French family watching TV. *Elsewhere*, images of the Palestinian revolution”). Godard and Miéville's film seeks to render visible the gap between Western people's consumption of representations and the reality behind these representations. It is an attempt to represent the *et* that connects and separates *ici* and *ailleurs*, as is emphasized by the recurring shots of a three-dimensional carved *ET*. In *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media*, Rodowick interprets this *et* as the irrational interval through which *Ici et ailleurs* holds together two moments, namely 1970 and 1974.²⁸ “In their incommensurability,” Rodowick writes, “the images of *Ici et ailleurs* return in ever

27 Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), 61.

28 D. N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 197–198.

more differentiated series that interrogate the mass media's crowding out of both the memory and actuality of revolutionary struggle."²⁹

Rodowick's discussion of *Ici et ailleurs* is part of an argument about Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema* books. Rodowick draws a convincing parallel between the shift from movement-image to time-image—the respective subtitles of Deleuze's books—and the emergence of poststructuralist theory in France. Pointing out that French filmmakers dominate in *Cinema 2*, Rodowick addresses the question of why contemporary French cinema became a privileged site for a meditation on time: “Only in France was this experimentation *philosophically* possible. From *The Order of Things* to *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, there runs a Nietzschean thread that passes between philosophy, film theory, and film practice as an extraordinary examination of time and history both in philosophy and in cinema.”³⁰

According to Deleuze, the shift in French cinema from movement to time took place in the late 1950s,³¹ but the French turn, and specifically that of Foucault and Deleuze to Nietzsche, occurred in the 1960s. Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (*Nietzsche et la philosophie*) first appeared in 1962, and Foucault's *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*) four years later. More generally, I would add that this turn in French thought is also one from representation to expression. In *Cinema 2*, the turn is especially evident in the discussion of the crystal image, arguably the type of time-image that expresses time most directly: “It is time, that we *see in the crystal*,” Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2*, “the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos.”³²

Although Deleuze makes clear from the outset that his project “is not a history of the cinema” but “an attempt at the classification of images and signs,”³³ he does historicize the shift in the types of images cinema produces: “around 1948, Italy; about 1958 France; about 1968 Germany.”³⁴ To think through the French strand of this shift, we need to follow Rodowick's example and turn to Foucault, and especially to the latter's theory of modernity. Even though cinema, because of its technological nature, is an inherently modern medium, Deleuze's argument in the *Cinema* books seems to be that as an aesthetic practice cinema became modern only after its transition from movement to time. I am using the adjective *modern* here in the way Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, conceptualizes it in relation to the transition between the classical and the modern episteme. An episteme is the substratum of the way the visible (“les choses”) is linked to the utterable (“les mots”). In Foucault's argument, this epistemic shift, which

29 Ibid., 199.

30 Ibid., 187–188.

31 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 215.

32 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 79. Deleuze also writes: “The crystal is expression. Expression moves from the mirror to the seed” (72). This passage resonates strongly with one from *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, the other place that Deleuze's expressive turn finds its clearest formulation: “Expressionist philosophy brings with it two traditional metaphors: that of a mirror which reflects or reflects upon an image, and that of a seed which ‘expresses’ the tree as a whole.” Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 80. Remarkably, Spinoza's name is almost entirely absent from *Cinema 2*.

33 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, xix.

34 Ibid., 215.

he locates at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is marked by a crisis of representation. Under the classical episteme, man's primary mode of knowledge production was driven by the classification of things into tables from which man himself remained absent. In contrast, the modern episteme reveals the human subject in his or her finitude, "a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but [the limitation of man's] own existence as fact."³⁵ Ultimately, *The Order of Things* presents itself as a manifestation of the desire to reach beyond this all-too-human finitude and to confront the unthought that Foucault describes as man's "double." It is a dangerous expedition, because as we know from doppelgänger legends, to literally encounter oneself means to stare into the face of death. This death of man is precisely what Foucault, in the wake of Nietzsche, heralds. After all, "man" for Foucault is only a recent invention, one that emerges at the transition between the classical and the modern episteme. This modern episteme, which originated about a century and a half ago, is, Foucault predicts in 1966, nearing its end, and man's face, "drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," is about to be engulfed by the waves of time, the latter understood as—to paraphrase Deleuze—all-devouring Cronos and not measured Chronos.³⁶

Now, if we follow Rodowick's parallel between the passage from movement to time in the cinema, on the one hand, and a similar passage in French theory, on the other, and if we at the same time understand this latter passage as one that moves from representation to expression, then the crisis of representation that Foucault locates at the beginning of the nineteenth century is reiterated by a crisis of representation in French philosophy, cinema, and politics in the 1960s. This account of cinema's passage to modernity is pretty much in line with the way that Deleuze himself presents the transition between movement-image and time-image. "Just as happened a very long time ago in philosophy," Deleuze writes in *Cinema 1*, in post-World War II cinema "a reversal has happened in the movement-time relationship."³⁷ This is a reversal that, as Gregory Flaxman argues, corresponds to the more general emergence of the new episteme brought about by the flourishing of audiovisual culture since 1945.³⁸

One of the earliest and most poignant reflections on cinema's reiteration of the crisis of representation is Godard's 1963 *Les Carabiniers* (based on a script by Roberto Rossellini). *Les Carabiniers* is a film about war, representation, and the representation of war in film. In the beginning of the film, Ulysse and Michel-Ange still firmly believe in an ideal in which individual images, signs, and names have a direct referent in reality. They enlist themselves in the name of the king, and it is the name of the king that guarantees that they will be duly compensated for their heroic deeds once the king has won the war. Until then, they must content themselves with images, literally. The protagonists bring home piles of postcards corresponding to categories of things, which "naturellement" can be divided into subcategories. Monuments, antiquity: the

35 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 315.

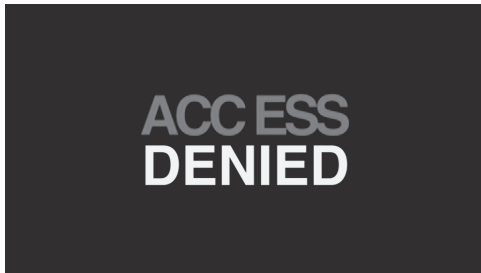
36 *Ibid.*, 387.

37 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, xi.

38 Gregory Flaxman, introduction to *The Brain Is the Screen*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25.

pyramids, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. Means of transport, rail transport: diesel engine, BB-9003, and so on for seven more minutes. Representations: that is what Ulysse and Michel-Ange have fought for, plus the firm belief in the authority that ensures that these representations are connected to the things themselves. Also in *Les Carabiniers* are images of war waged by and in the name of the king, at some moments intercut with World War II footage. Often, the images are gruesome, because, as Ulysse puts it before signing up to fight, “la guerre, c’est pas drôle” (“war is no fun”). Moreover, in itself *Les Carabiniers* may be seen as a reference to Jean Renoir’s *La grande illusion* (1937).³⁹ Not included in *Les Carabiniers*, which through its equal treatment of Rembrandts and advertisements self-consciously inscribes itself into an episteme in which every image has become a potential object of artistic representation, are images from Vietnam, an exclusion that makes this war film all the more a film about Vietnam.

In parallel with *Les Carabiniers*, *Film socialisme* is structured around a logic that refrains from showing the “visible evidence” that forms its absent core. Let us therefore take a closer look at *Film socialisme*’s attempt to represent the supposed impossibility of representing Palestinian reality. The first Palestine sequence, announced as such by a title card, starts with a black-and-white photograph. As we learned earlier, this photograph represents the Bay of Haifa and was taken not long after Daguerre’s 1839 invention of the daguerreotype. The sequence cuts to a hand-colored photograph showing a tree. Cut to a black frame, followed by a detail of a Northern Renaissance painting of a blindfolded and bound red-bearded man. Then a title card that reads



Figures 4 and 5. *Film socialisme*’s representation of the impossibility of representing Palestine (Vega Film, 2010).

“ACCESS DENIED,” the first word in red, the second in white (Figure 4). Footage of the cruise ship, now seen from the coast, for about five seconds (Figure 5), followed by a title card stating “ODESSA.” The entire sequence lasts about eighteen seconds and is completely without sound.

The second Palestine sequence lasts almost three-and-a-half minutes and is announced by a dissonant piano chord and a title card bearing both the Hebrew and the Arabic words for Palestine, the former in red superimposed on the latter in white. In the first shot we see and hear a man’s hands operating the shutter of a daguerreotype-like camera that is directed toward the

39 This interpretation of *Les Carabiniers* as a reference to *La grande illusion* is further supported by Godard’s dedication of his film to the other *grand seigneur* of the French realist tradition, Jean Vigo.

spectator. The piano chord sounds again. A voice-over says: “C’est en 1839 que la Palestine accueille son premier photographe / La quadrature du cercle était trouvée avec la fameuse métaphore $X + 3 = 1$ qu’Einstein chercha toute sa vie / Clarum per obscurius” (“1839 Palestine / first photographer / square circle / $x + 3 = 1$ metaphor”). Next we see a color photograph of a procession of blindfolded and handcuffed Arab men being dragged forward by a soldier, followed by footage of the ocean, shot from the coast from behind barbed wire (Figure 6). This footage is taken from Jean-Daniel Pollet’s 1963 *Méditerranée*. Some other notable elements in this sequence are a photograph of Hitler and an apocalyptic collage of superimposed moving and still footage in which we, perhaps, also discern the earlier daguerreotype of Haifa. “Nous te ferons des colliers d’or” (from Song of Solomon). Still photographs of bloodied hands. “Et le deuxième ange répandit sa coupe sur la mer” (Apocalypse 16:1, “second angel / over the sea”). “Roman Jakobson démontre pendant l’hiver 1942–43 qu’il est impossible de dissocier le son du sens” (“winter 42–43 / Roman Jakobson / impossible separate / sound and meaning”). “Que lorsque les dissonances sont annoncées par une note commune” (“successful dissonance / common note”). Trapeze artists fly through the air against the backdrop of an azure ocean (footage taken from Agnès Varda’s *The Beaches of Agnès* [*Les Plages d’Agnès*, 2008]). They keep flying, like *Film socialisme* itself, in stop motion now, in a series of stills (Figure 7). On the left-hand



Figures 6 and 7. *Film socialisme*'s second Palestine sequence incorporates footage from Jean-Daniel Pollet's *Méditerranée* (top) and Agnès Varda's *Les Plages d'Agnès* (bottom) into a visually and sonically dissonant montage of images and sounds (Vega Film, 2010).

side sings Joan Baez, “Und sagt wo die Soldaten sind / Wo sind sie geblieben” (from the German version of “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?”). Cut to a black screen, to a print showing the sacrifice of Isaac, to an unstable montage sequence of a single photograph of a sheep (perhaps Dolly, the most individualized and photographed sheep that ever lived), to footage of a field full of sheep that we recognize as taken from *Weekend*. With Baez still singing on the left, the voice-over now speaks from the right: “Isaac demanda à son père / Je vois le feu je vois le couteau / Mais je ne vois pas l’agneau” (“Isaac asked father / see the fire / see the knife / donot see lamb”). “TERRE CONTRE CIEL,” the film’s first title card in green, white, and blue—colors associated with Islam and Islamic militant struggles. “Abraham lui répondit / Dieu saura le voir pour l’holocauste” (“Abraham said / God will do”). The same dissonant piano chord. Footage from concentration camps, within which are hidden the words *jouif* and *musulman* (a juxtaposition Godard also makes in *Ici et ailleurs* and in *Notre musique*). Barely

audible is the same clicking of the daguerreotype camera. A Byzantine icon. Chaplin playing the violin. The dissonant chord fading away but still present. A flickering still from *The Searchers* showing a group of Navajo kids. “Palestine” (the voice-over). A fighter jet taking off. “KISS ME STUPID,” blue, white, green.⁴⁰ Footage green like poison of a crocodile chasing a bird. “ODESSA.”

To some degree my interpretation of these two sequences, as well as the parallels between them, is already implicit in my attempt at a transcription of them, in my selection of things to focus on and things to leave out, as well as in my descriptions. For example, my rendering of the second sequence puts much emphasis on, and thereby makes visible, the repeated dissonance in both sound and image, thereby implicitly formulating my view of the place of Palestine within the film. Second, many of the elements that I single out (“colliers d’or,” the still from *The Searchers*, the footage from the camps) resonate directly with elements I focused on in my earlier discussions of other parts of the film: the gold legends and Alissa’s necklace; the film’s inclusion, through its Navajo subtitles, of its exclusion of America; and the death of cinema.

Nevertheless, one element in *Film socialisme*’s answer to the question of how to represent Palestine needs to be brought out further: the “footage of the cruise ship, now seen from the coast, for about five seconds.” The film’s suggestion is, of course, that this ship seen in the distance is the same as the one that functions as the film’s setting in the first movement. The suggestion is also that these five seconds represent a Palestinian counterperspective on the melting pot of legends that is this ship, a “reverse shot” to which our access remains denied, even though the quest for the Palestinian gold is part of the braid of legends. From within the context of the film, it remains impossible to determine whether the ship appearing in this footage is indeed the one we find ourselves on in the first movement. Nor can we determine whether this footage was actually shot in Gaza. What we can determine, though, is that *Film socialisme* creates a strong parallel between this capture of a Palestinian perspective and the ocean view through barbed wire from *Méditerranée*, which in the context of Pollet’s film represents an unspecified Mediterranean location. This barbed-wire footage in turn sets up a parallel between the World War II concentration camps and the forces confining the freedom of the Palestinian population, just as the second sequence juxtaposes one holocaust with the other. Access denied.

But whose access and access to what? And which forces are denying access here? Some obvious answers come to mind: the ship’s access to Palestine, which the film suggests is denied by Israel and indirectly by the powers supporting it. Palestinians’ access to the world, to the freedom embodied by the ocean, and to the idea of freedom embodied by the ship. Access denied also to the film itself and to its ability to represent Palestine. But what exactly is the film denied access to, and what is it denying itself access to? Whether or not the footage of the ship was actually shot on Palestinian soil, itself a contested term, the point is that it could have been filmed there. There are, after all, films being made in Palestine. If “ACCESS DENIED” refers to the fact, true or not (which is irrelevant), that *Film socialisme*’s own makers were denied access to Palestine,

40 As becomes clear from *Film socialisme*’s dialogue book, these words refer to Billy Wilder’s 1964 film.

then this statement implies that the inclusion of footage shot in Palestine was actually not that important. Otherwise they would have found ways around this denial. So let's assume that this five seconds of footage was actually filmed in Gaza. To what, then, does the film's—and thus the viewers'—access remain denied? Precisely what aspect of Palestine remains unrepresented in and by *Film socialisme*, and why?

To answer these questions, it is instructive to once more recall the question about “small digital cameras” Godard asks himself through *Notre musique* and then, with this question and the film's answers in mind, to look briefly at a humanitarian, citizen-journalism project in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, formerly called Shooting Back and now simply called the Camera Distribution Project. This project was initiated by the Israeli nongovernmental organization B'Tselem, which calls itself “the Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.” Since 2007 B'Tselem has distributed small cameras to Palestinians in high-conflict areas, with the goal “of bringing the reality of their lives under occupation to the attention of the Israeli and international public, exposing and seeking redress for violations of human rights.”⁴¹ More than one hundred cameras have been distributed, and the videos made with them have been posted on the Internet. Some of the videos have also been aired on Israeli and international television, or have been used as supporting evidence in court cases.⁴² In a report published in 2008 in the *Guardian*, B'Tselem researcher Diala Shamas explains the reasons behind Shooting Back:

The project started as response to the need to gather evidence. We were constantly filing complaints to no avail on the basis of lack of evidence. . . . Now we are going back and forth with our videocassettes to [Israeli] police station[s] begging them to press rewind, freeze . . . it is the bulk of our work. The value of the footage is not only evidential. . . . We quickly realized the media value of this footage. It is maybe an overstatement but we started bridging this gap between what was happening in the occupied Palestinian territories and what the Israeli public can see. There was a conspiracy of silence surrounding settler violence in particular. This footage is shocking to Israelis.⁴³

One of the videos released by B'Tselem that drew international attention to Shooting Back (even though this video was officially not made as part of the project) was recorded by a seventeen-year-old woman in July 2008 in the village of Ni'ilin, near Ramallah. The video shows a handcuffed and blindfolded Palestinian man who, while being held by an Israeli soldier, is shot in his foot with a rubber bullet fired by another soldier. Following the airing of the video by international media, the Israeli army opened an investigation.⁴⁴

41 “B'Tselem's Camera Project,” http://www.btselem.org/english/video/CDP_Background.asp (accessed March 15, 2011).

42 Ibid.

43 Peter Beaumont, “Palestinians Capture Violence of Israeli Occupation on Video,” *Guardian*, July 30, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/30/israelandthepalestinians>.

44 Ibid. For the video, see B'Tselem, “Soldier Fires ‘Rubber’ Bullet at Handcuffed, Blindfolded Palestinian, 2008,” July 2008, http://www.btselem.org/english/video/20080707_Niilin_Shooting.asp.

Is this video a form of cinema? Yes, if one extends the opening statement of Jean Renoir's biography that "everything that moves on the screen is cinema" to moving images that are displayed rather than projected.⁴⁵ No, if one employs a more narrow definition of the medium, for example by understanding it as an art of montage. Considered from the second perspective, this video, given the context in which it was shot, distributed, and presented, remains strictly footage—a document that has a direct, indexical link to the actual historical occurrence of the events it shows. This footage would become cinematic material only if it were presented as such, as part of an edited sequence, whether documentary or nondocumentary. For example, *Film socialisme*, which is neither a documentary nor a fiction film, could have included this or comparable footage, but it explicitly refrains from doing so. It includes still photographs testifying to the crimes committed against Palestinians by Israelis. It includes silent footage likely shot on Palestinian soil. And it shows footage of the camps. But *Film socialisme* does not include what, according to its own logic, would constitute the combination of these three inclusions, namely moving images or sound-images of atrocities committed against Palestinians by Israelis that are not fundamentally different from those committed against Jews during World War II.

Through this explicit noninclusion, *Film socialisme* tacitly sets up a strict distinction between two economies of moving images. This is a distinction that subsumes the conventional distinction between fiction and documentary images and, in doing so, engages with the citation from *Notre musique* that functions as this section's epigraph. The first economy of moving images, and especially of moving sound-images, is one in which every sound-image obtains expressive value only in relation to other sound-images; that is to say, to an extent this sound-image is part of a montage. This is the economy in which *Film socialisme* inscribes itself. The second economy is one in which certain sound-images partly escape this first economy, because they are, or can be, potentially treated as being directly connected to the historical reality they represent, and therefore hold the potential to intervene in real social relations. It is important to emphasize that this radical divide between two types of representational materials in turn bases itself on a division between moving images and still images. (And by "still images," I mean footage of still images.) By including photographs but not moving footage of the reality to which it seeks to testify, *Film socialisme* ascribes to moving footage a potential agentival quality that photographs apparently do not have, or have less of. Important here is also the role of sound, or the absence thereof. The still images lack synchronized sound by definition, and the footage of the Palestinian view on the cruise ship is also silent. The film thus seems to contain no sound recorded or represented as being recorded in Palestine.

We can now conclude that what *Film socialisme* denies itself access to is moving images and sound-images that directly document what the film seeks to express about our digital age. If *Film socialisme* were to transgress this self-imposed barrier, it would, the film suggests, risk destroying the agency or potential agency that is the use-value of such footage—footage that by virtue of not being included is represented as real. In other words, had the film linked such footage to the footage it does show, in the

45 Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 11.

hope that a time-image would emerge from within the interstices between these ontologically different kinds of footage, *Film socialisme* would, at least by its own logic, also expose this agentival representation to the risk of becoming a cliché, of becoming a representation of agency.

By erasing this barrier, the film would moreover destroy the idea of cinema it now expresses. This idea, *Film socialisme* responds to *Notre musique*, can indeed be materialized in the form of images produced by small digital cameras, yet not in the way the Bosnian woman meant. At the same time, the woman's question and Florine's reflection are manifestations of the respective films' inability to adequately respond to the dilemma for which these young women function as ventriloquists. Having revealed *Film socialisme*'s silent tactics of representation, we therefore need to raise the question of how revealing these tactics are themselves. What aspect of Palestine or of the representation of Palestine that we were not already familiar with does *Film socialisme* express? The answer to this question is similar to the one the diegetic Godard gives in response to the question posed to him in *Notre musique*: " " ("NO COMMENT"). Rather than dealing with Palestine or with Western subjects' perception of Palestine, *Film socialisme* deals with an idea of Palestine. It really does not matter where the footage representing a Palestinian counterperspective was actually shot. In fact, what the film expresses about Palestine it could have also expressed about Bosnia, or Vietnam: ACCESS DENIED. The fact that the film foregrounds its own aporia, its impossibility of representation, and in doing so foregrounds itself as an aporia, does not prevent it from being an aporia—in much the same way that so many of Hitchcock's films' reflections on the male gaze still employ the male gaze.

Film socialisme can therefore be said to carry into the digital age the crisis of representation that Godard cinematographically theorized with *Les Carabiniers*, much in the same way that *Le Gai savoir*, which is Godard's contribution to the Nietzschean turn, and *Ici et ailleurs*, carried this same crisis into the age of television and video. Yet it is exactly by forming the embodied persistence of this crisis that the film at least partly contradicts Florine's hesitant statement that we enter into a new age with "the digital". It becomes clear that this statement cannot be taken fully as reflecting the film's own intervention into the world. The reason is that with this and similar statements, including her feisty defense of Balzac, Florine, like Olga, risks becoming a caricature of the resisting subject. She becomes a Godard heroine, whose presence in the film obscures rather than illuminates the fact that there exist people, including women of her age, who really act out their desire to counter the injustices they encounter in their daily lives, for example by shooting digital videos of these injustices. Whatever such videos imply for cinema's future, they are among the indexical representations of our historical moment. They are so not because of the mere fact that their virtual materiality makes them even more clonable than sheep, but because the existence of the representations they offer is largely contingent on the historical moment of which these technologies are part.

In sum, however compelling *Film socialisme* may be as an experiment in medium specificity, by engaging with digital modes of moving-image production merely at the level of form, the film presents the viewer with old wine in new bottles, to use a cliché. Despite cinema's many deaths and despite an increased cacophony of images and

sounds, during the forty-seven years that separate *Les Carabiniers* from *Film socialisme*, not much has changed on a fundamental level. Not only does the question of representation—and more specifically the question of how to express human oppression and exploitation—remain unanswered by both of these films, but also, along with *Ici et ailleurs* and *Notre musique*, *Les Carabiniers* and *Film socialisme* make this question into an explicit part of their subject matter. By invoking the same question over and over again, these films seek to contain the images by which they are haunted—whether they show these images or not—as if trying to temporarily avert cinema’s death. In one of its other connotations, this death is precisely cinema’s inability to provide a satisfying account of the injustices of which these omitted—yet technically possible—images are implicitly represented as being the immediate traces. This self-reflexive flight forward is the driving force behind these films’ potential, and perhaps behind Godard’s oeuvre at large, to reinvent cinema in the face of crisis, to find cinema elsewhere, in new spaces, in new things. Yet this flight forward also forms a trap, one in which there is always the risk that a film’s utterance of the question that it embodies really is its only answer to this question. This is a silence that leaves much to be answered by Godard’s next film.

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I thank Rembert Hueser, Alice Lovejoy, and Adair Rounthwaite.