

## The 1960s of the Others<sup>1</sup>

Dina IORDANOVA



Bata Zivojnovic in *Three* (Yugoslavia, dir. Aleksandar Petrovic, 1968).

At least two of my film acquaintances have made explicit claims that the most important developments in cinema happened in the 1960s. They have announced that they prefer watching films made during this decade. One of them, British scholar Geoffrey Nowell-Smith even wrote a book about the 1960s, *Making Waves* (2008). But while his focus is on French and Italian cinema and he declares Godard, Antonioni, and Buñuel to have been the greatest cineastes of the period, the other one, Cambodian director Rithy Panh, repeatedly indicated that his interest is mainly in what has been

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made in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and India. He also frequently references the 300 or so films made in Cambodia in the 1960s, the majority of which have been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge.

Like them, I also find the cinema of the 1960s most fascinating. I also believe that what was made during this decade remains of fundamental importance for everything that happens subsequently. If I were to point at specific films or directors, however, I may, once again, differ from the two friends whose preferences were mentioned.

We still grapple with a situation where Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's view is roughly equivalent to the view that dominates film historiography. Yet, the number of alternative voices – like Rithy Panh's -- is growing. The time has come to seek a more comprehensive account on the 1960s in film historiography, one that reaches farther and deeper.

In seeking for a suitable example to illustrate the shortcomings of the prevalent historiographic paradigm, I came across the short list of films that competed for the foreign language Oscar at the 37<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards in 1967. The prize went to the French *A MAN AND A WOMAN* by Claude Lelouch. Another four films were on the short list. Two of them -- Gillo Pontecorvo's *BATTLE OF ALGIERS* and Milos Forman's *LOVES OF A BLONDE* -- are better known today. The other two -- Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *PHARAOH*, and Aleksandar Petrovic's *THREE* -- are almost forgotten. I plan to zoom in on these five titles and speculate what factors may have led to the specific pattern in which some of these worthy films are still well known today whilst others are not. What is it that makes cinematic works gain or lose in importance over time? Isn't our present-day knowledge also representative of the specific limitations in the way in which film history is written?

First of all, the short list only contains films made in Europe: no India, East Asia, or Africa, and none of 'Third cinema' have made it to the shortlist – a major bias that is still replicated in key histories of cinema that claim to be comprehensive.

The winning film -- A MAN AND A WOMAN – could loosely be correlated to the Nouvelle Vague, so it may still make it through to some histories of cinema. However, besides its memorable musical score (by Francis Lai), very little of this relatively mainstream film remains known beyond France today -- other French films that never got an Oscar are in the focus of attention, and (great) actors such as Jean-Louis Trintignant and Anouk Aimée are not famous any longer. French cinema of the 1960s is still in the centre of historical knowledge, which evolves around other directors (Godard, Truffaut, Rivette, Rohmer, Chabrol) and actors (Belmondo, Moreau) and themes (e.g. youth discontent).

Of the short list, THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS is, perhaps, the most important film from today's point of view. It has endured over decades and it has shown its relevance all over again in various situations, most recently in the context of a raising terrorism wave: Pentagon officials are known to have been watching it in the aftermath of 9/11. It figures on the curriculum for film studies, international relations, post-colonial studies and so on, all over the world. It is not regarded as a specifically Italian film. Yet it is the key film for a trend that takes off in the 1960s – transnational political cinema, one that is not linked to a given national tradition but transcends borders and deals with relationships between groups within a troubled and changing international context. In that, THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS – like other masterpieces of Third Cinema -- does not belong to any singular national tradition; it has importance far beyond France, Italy and Algeria. Two years later another such film, Z (1969), wins in the foreign film category – another classic of political violence that cannot be pinned down to Greece or North Africa. Its director, Costa-Gavras, himself a transplanted migrant, would later make films set all over the world, from the Czech Republic to Chile. The development of this discourse takes a sub-strand in film historiography – one that tackles transnational political film and its cosmopolitan directors. However, it remains a question how to integrate this sub-strand into the mainstream study of film history, one which remains parochially linked to national traditions?

LOVES OF A BLONDE is a lyrical quirky film marked by the tongue-in-cheek humour, a feature that is hallmark of the Czech New Wave. It is due to this subtle humour that the Holocaust comedy SHOP ON THE MAIN STREET (1965), Jiri Menzel's sensitive CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS (1966) and Milos Forman's subsequent satire FIREMEN'S BALL (1967) have all been recognized at the foreign Oscars in the 1960s. Today, at least one film of the Czech New Wave features on the curriculum of serious programmes in film studies, so it is not that the trend has been forgotten. It is Vera Chytilova's DAISIES that is screened most often, perhaps in an attempt to compensate for the routine overlooking of female directors over the decades. An important factor that both highlights and obscures the importance of the Czech New Wave is that – unlike their French counterparts – most of its 'auteurs' emigrated: not only Forman, who became a major Hollywood player and went on to win two Oscars for best direction (ONE FLEW OVER CUCKOO'S NEST, 1975; AMADEUS, 1984), but also surrealist Jan Němec, as well as Ivan Passer, Elmar Klos and Ján Kadár, who all made important films in the West but never gained the visibility they had as Czechoslovak directors. Due to the change of countries, the narrative of these diasporic directors is somewhat lost – their creative trajectories are invisible within film histories that only follow developments within one national framework; if they appear in the narrative of the recipient national framework, it is only episodically and in a discrete manner that lacks continuity. In recent years – most notably with the efforts of those who have tried to offer models for the study of diasporic filmmaking beyond the axis of 'Paris stop over/Hollywood', like Hamid Naficy -- film historiography has made attempts to address some of these matters of transnational careers in principle, but these attempts are still regarded as alternative singular studies and have not become the norm. There is very little in mainstream historiography to make provision for the study of the transnational moves of talent, and even less where the moves have been in non-traditional dimensions, such as

within the East bloc, for example (e.g. Romanian Lucian Pintilie working in Yugoslavia), or from West to East (e.g. the career of American Jules Dassin in Greece).

PHARAOH by Jerzy Kawalerowicz is a fascinating and spectacular historical film that brings together the aesthetics of sword and sandal and the political philosophy of Machiavelli. Kawalerowicz (1922-2007) himself is a magisterial filmmaker who has mastered the genres of epics (PHARAOH), psychological drama (NIGHT TRAIN, 1959), and the philosophical treatise film (MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS, 1961). The fact that neither this amazing film nor its wonderful director are part of present-day textbook histories of cinema is due to another fault of conventional film historiography: Usually only one national director is recognized and discussed when it comes down to the cinemas of smaller countries, and this is true even for a film culture of the size of Poland (a country of over 35 million people). Even if they may have produced remarkable work, the directors who worked alongside Andrzej Wajda – the only recognized titan of Polish cinema -- are routinely left out of the picture. Leaving someone like Kawalerowicz out, however, is not only about the absence of the director's films from the catalogue of The Criterion Collection, even though this is already significant enough as it deprives the community of dedicated cinephiles from exposure to some outstanding films. If Kawalerowicz is not shown as one of the pillars in the cinema of the 1960s, there is no way to show how deeply his work has influenced the contemporary and subsequent non-Western cinema. Filmmakers in India, for example, not only knew but also copied his work – Satyajit Ray's NAYAK: THE HERO (1966), for example, looks and feels like an Indian re-make of Kawalerowicz's NIGHT TRAIN (1959). Looking at the classical Egyptian film AL-MUMMIA/ THE NIGHT OF COUNTING THE YEARS (Shadi Abdel Salam, 1969), one can also see the immediate influence of Kawalerowicz's MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS in mise-en-scene and narrative (no wonder, as the Egyptian director worked as set designer for PHARAOH, under the provision of a bilateral cultural exchange between Egypt and Poland in the mid-1960s). Such historical details are doomed to be lost, not only because of the fact that Wajda is the only Polish director of the period who figures in the historiographies of today, but also because most histories of cinema only recognise

the East-West exchanges and rarely pay attention to the collaborations that took place within the East or between non-aligned countries.

THREE, by Yugoslav Aleksandar Petrović, cannot even be seen today. Even though one more film by Petrović was nominated for the foreign Oscar in the very next year, the classical Romani saga I EVEN MET HAPPY GYPSIES (1967), both Petrović and the Yugoslav Black Wave, to which he belongs, are only known to a handful of specialists today. Most limitations of film historiography discussed above apply to this case – leaving out of sight what is not part of the West, the complex migrations, and the ‘one director per country’ practice. Mainstream historiography positions the French Nouvelle Vague as the norm and makes provision to include one more ‘new wave’ – and this is usually ‘the Czech’ one. Movements such as the Black Wave in Yugoslavia, or the remarkable contributions of the cinemas in Hungary, South Korea, or Egypt remain obscured. The Yugoslav Black Wave directors were as successful as the Czechs at international festivals in the 1960s -- at Cannes, Berlinale and Oberhausen, as well as at the foreign Oscars – but then most of them had to go into emigration, and the narrative became disrupted, as it did in the Czechoslovak case. It did not help that they migrated to Germany and France and stayed there rather than continue to the US, as Roman Polanski did. In addition, in the case of both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the federal structure dissolved, so in the newly emerging nationalist histories of cinema the directors are being claimed to be Slovaks, Czechs, Serbs, Croats and so on – rather than what they actually were, Yugoslav or Czechoslovak...). Under the ‘one director per country’ principle, it is only Dušan Makavejev of WR: MYSTERIES OF ORGANISM (1971) fame who is universally acknowledged. Directors like Petrović, Zivojin Pavlović or Želimir Žilnik may be hugely respected but little known. In addition, THREE belongs to the

‘partisan film’ genre, and it is a known fact that idiosyncratic genres rarely make it to the general annals of cinema ( the ‘Spaghetti Western’ is a notable exception).

All these examples are meant to expose the difficulties that traditional film historiography is faced with. Its overall reliance on textual analysis allows it to make persuasive statements when it is about films made in the West, but it is often at a loss when it comes down to films that represent non-Western traditions where it is essential to bring in the specificities of context and cultural sensibilities.

Every attempt to write a comprehensive history of cinema is a challenge to existing canons; it is an activity that involves choosing and, respectively, exclusion. As well as reconfiguration that would permit the incorporation of material that has previously been left out. A better historiography would need to be significantly more comprehensive and cast the net wider in regard to geography, gender, migrations, and genres.

When it comes down to the 1960s, the ‘new waves’ and ‘auteur’ paradigms have provided easy templates, and it is such tried and tested templates that are still widely in use. The ‘new wave’ paradigm is perennially there, effectively resulting in a situation where film traditions that did not evolve via ‘new waves’ remain overlooked. In my view, it would be important to go beyond this limiting approach and find ways to give appreciation of the cinema coming out of Asia and the countries of the so-called ‘Third World,’ and ensure that classics that may have sprung out in other contexts, such as Kim Ki-young’s *THE HOUSEMAID* (South Korea, 1960) or Ousmane Sembene’s *LA NOIRE DE...* (Senegal, 1966), are included on the roster alongside their much better known counterparts from France or the USA.

Likewise, the ‘auteurs’ paradigm is both facilitating and limiting. It makes it easy to frame the contributions of directors such as Bergman, Fellini, Tati, or Kurosawa. If one proposes alternative ‘auteur’ substitutes – for example, Miklós Jancsó, Andrei Tarkovsky, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Ritwik Ghatak, or Rattana Pestonji – one would encounter difficulties. Even a ‘new wave auteur’ such as Agnès Varda is not always included in the mainstream film historiography of the 1960s – a situation that is representative in the overall in regard to the traditionally overlooked group of female filmmakers. It is about time to ensure that the work of women is systematically included, too – and not only by making references to Věra Chytilová’s absurdist comedy *DAISIES* (1966) but to many more films of the 1960s, made by directors like Mai Zetterling or Lina Wertmüller; it is about time to give proper recognition to *THE ATTACHED BALLOON* (1967) by Bulgarian Binka Zhelyazkova, and discover her amazing feminist career.

One would also need to find a way to integrate popular cinema in official accounts that often push aside everything that is not arthouse and auteurist: the 1960s were, in fact, dominated by great advances in the most basic genres, like comedy or musical, and no study of the period would be complete without giving proper recognition to those whose genius was for popular cinema, such as Indian star Raj Kapoor, Greek pop icon Aiki Vougiouklaki, or the ‘Ugly King’ of Turkish cinema, Yılmaz Güney.

To balance the historiographical bias, it would help to keep in mind that cinema is transnational and that the ‘national cinema’ paradigm is nothing more but a singular dimension among a multitude of possible models. Countries that have produced important films in the 1960s – such as the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, or the GDR – no longer exist in their previous form, yet any attempt to tackle these glorious cinematic histories through the straitjacket of newly conceived national entities proves unviable. A transnational approach to film history could give a better acknowledgment to the migratory trajectories of directors and other creative contributors, as well as provide the tools for the



incorporation of non-traditional migrations (e.g. those of ‘Koryo’, Koreans who were displaced after the war, across the countries of Central Asia and the USSR, whose creative trajectories are only now rediscovered and reintroduced in a newly conceived more comprehensive history of Asian cinema). It would also be time – and with particular emphasis on the 1960s – to increase the historiographic profile of co-productions, the closer scrutiny of which will reveal fascinating patterns of cross-cultural collaborations. Such endeavour would show that even at the height of the Cold War cinematic co-production continued across the Iron Curtain. It will also integrate singular gems, such as *I AM CUBA*, a 1964 Soviet-Cuban production directed by Mikhail Kalatozov and shot by cinematographic genius Sergei Urusevsky.

Going beyond the national cinema narratives would permit to zoom in on cinemas that have evolved in the context of colonial, sub-national, and supranational concerns and interests – like the filmmaking traditions of Bengal or Tamil Nadu, or on the iceberg of global political filmmaking, of which we only register the tip in films such as *BATTLE OF ALGIERS* and *Z*.

A comprehensive history of cinema would need to map out the key patterns of international film distribution and look which films have travelled where and to what effect – similarly to what Franco Moretti’s work has done for comparative literature – and take into consideration specific geopolitical considerations as it is due to such factors that some films and cinematic traditions are known today whilst others are not. One would also need to find a way to acknowledge the key role played by film festivals – and in the 1960s some key players are Oberhausen, Leipzig and Carthage along with the much better-known trio of Cannes/Venice/Berlin. One must integrate a narrative on the important transnational influence of film schools: In the 1960s, many African, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Central Asian filmmakers were educated at film schools like FAMU in Prague or VGIK in Moscow, and yet we do not have any solid studies to show how this education trickled down in the themes and the style of films they made in subsequent decades in their respective countries.

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