

A non-bourgeois analysis of tout va bien

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Jose Alvarez English 2 David Lau A Non-Bourgeois Analysis of Tout Va Bien In the 21st century modern cinematic film industry an audience is enabled to experience a wide array of films beholding an eminently developed Hollywood perspective. Hollywood blockbusters assuredly dominate the United States film industry for various reasons. The general population absorbing modern Hollywood movies may manage to argue that the highly advanced state of the art techniques that blockbuster films utilize in order to enhance and flourish their big screen cinemas are the ideal justifications of their success.

Such film techniques can vary widely from exquisite execution of state of the art animation, proficient synchronization of movie scores and progressive character augmentation just to name a few. These Hollywood methods tend to be harmonized collectively and conglomeratized for the constantly recycled concept of progressive plot development. Although many filmmakers have effectively exploited similar progressive concepts for years, it has also inspired other filmmakers to create inverted juxtapositional styled films.

The collaborative film *Tout Va Bien* by the Dziga Vertov Group which consists of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin is an exemplification of such a counter Hollywood style film. Brian Henderson a film critic and writer of “Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style,” characterized Godard’s approach on certain films as “non-bourgeois” for various reasons. Henderson’s essential point was concerned with Godard’s camera style, yet there is also other demonstrations of Godard’s non-bourgeois approach to filmmaking.

Additional elements outside of camera style range from political topics, adoption of Brechtian mechanisms and the use of other deviant aesthetic filmmaking devices. When considering Henderson's term "non-bourgeois," its primary and essential definition is when filmmakers develop anti-illusionary and authentically realistic films. Godard's films from 1967 onwards had this anti-illusionary perspective because of multiple reasons. The first reason to consider in regards to Godard's non-bourgeois approach stemmed from student protests that broke out in France during the May of 1968. According to Collin

MacCabe, writer of *Postscript to May 1968* "French students occupied the administrative offices of the University of the Sorbonne in protest against planned government reforms of the university" (MacCabe 19.) This modest student protest progressively gained support and cooperation from hundreds of thousands of workers. It eventually turned into a massive revolt that brought the French economy to a temporary halt and almost collapsed France's government of the time. The repercussions of these events had a sizeable impact on Godard since it conveyed his proceeding films to become more political.

Godard not only politicized his work by subject matter but more dominantly by the aesthetic process of "creating a film politically." Godard utilized various aesthetic strategies to express his political intentions. One specific approach that embodied the non-bourgeois political aspect in *Tout Va Bien* was the camera style. Henderson described this camera style as a "slow tracking shot that moves purely laterally-usually in one direction...over a scene that does not itself move, or strictly speaking, that does not move in

any relation to the camera's movement. According to Henderson this unique camera style enhances an anti-illusionary perspective due to its flatness and avoidance of depth. Two big scenes from Tout Va Bien that make use of this aesthetic approach are the final supermarket scene and the Barbie house styled factory set during the strike. A secondary non-bourgeois political device that Godard and Gorin utilized in Tout Va Bien was Brechtian distancing. This method which was adopted from Bertolt Brecht is when actors actively express and represent themselves as actors, therefore estranging and distancing the audience.

The purpose of this device intends to ruin illusion and inform the audience that the movie is an aesthetic work of art and not a real life situation. Another utilized device similar to Brechtian distancing was the conceptual approach of breaking the fourth wall. This concept, which was also adopted from Brecht, is the acknowledgement and interaction between the actors and the audience in order to raise awareness of fiction. One major way that Tout Va Bien broke the fourth wall was by having actors look and talk straight into the camera.

The scenes that utilized this concept exceedingly well were the ones which showcased one-sided interviews such as the ones with Jacques the filmmaker, the union representative, the Salumi factory boss and a female worker. A third aspect that made Tout Va Bien a non-bourgeois style film was its editing style. Godard and Gorin progressed their scenes strangely and often left the viewer open-ended towards the ultimate meaning. It seems that they intended to lead their audience vaguely by placing subtle hints of the film's direction and leaving it open for the audience to interpret.

The editing of the scenes really demanded activation from the audience since they usually had clever little inferences towards the filmmakers aesthetic intentions. One scene that really presented this unconventional editing style was when the boss needed to urinate. Due to factory workers blocking access to restrooms, the boss eventually broke a window inside of his own office in order to urinate out of it. A few scenes later however, the same window in the boss's office is no longer broken.

An earlier scene that also displayed this grotesque editing style had the camera locked on Susan while a conversation between Jacques and the boss was being heard. Susan eventually joined the conversation auditorially but you could not visually see her mouth moving with the pronunciation of the words. Lastly, of the reasons that Tout Va Bien is considered to be non-bourgeois is the political subject matter. Many classical Hollywood films hardly touch on political content but Tout Va Bien's central plot revolved around the concept of class struggle.

Conversations of class struggle were established throughout the film from various political perspectives ranging from that of the workers, the boss and the union representative. From the workers perspective many of them politicized about the negative aspects of their job, such as exhaustion, injuries and bad wages. In the boss's perspective his political argument criticized that class struggle had become irrelevant and that Marxist philosophies were long gone. In the final political perspective, the union representative stated his agreement with the workers opinions but disapproved of their approach in starting the wildcat strike.

Analyzing *Tout Va Bien* from a non-bourgeois perspective, it was undoubtedly created in antagonism of Hollywood cinema. Many of the ways the film was directed and edited embraced deviance from what classical Hollywood films would consider norms. Everything from using political topics to presenting some of the film in non-chronological order contributed to the non-bourgeois perspective. This approach is quite possibly a conscious critique towards classical cinema since it juxtaposes Hollywood culture and exposes its artificiality.

It emphasizes self-reflexive interpretation to draw out activation from its audience and promotes didacticism, which often lacks in Hollywood films. *Tout Va Bien* is fundamentally embedded with political arguments against Hollywood cinema, capitalism and class structure. It may very well be that the film was ultimately created to inform and stimulate activism. Works Cited Henderson, Brian, "Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style." *Film Theory and Criticism* MacCabe, Colin, "Postscript to May 1968." *English 2 Reader* Spring 2012: 19-22.