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SO THEY GO AND BUY

Thoughts on Chilean and West German films of the early 1970s

When you did the "March of the Empty Pots", was your pot empty?

– No, to be honest, it wasn't.

(CONTRA LA RAZON Y POR LA FUERZA, Carlos Ortiz Tejeda, 1973)

I've never picked nuts and yet I eat them every day.

(TEILWEISE VON MIR – EIN VOLKSSTÜCK, Hellmuth Costard, 1973)

When I took Carlos Ortiz Tejeda's CONTRA LA RAZON Y POR LA FUERZA (1973) out of its grey film canister in November 2012, there was a red sticker on the centre of the 16mm reel with the date when the print had last been checked: May 30, 1986. The film had not been seen or projected in over 25 years– a long time, if not really an exception for the Arsenal archive. CONTRA LA RAZON Y POR LA FUERZA shows the events directly following the military coup in Chile on September 11, 1973: Santiago in a state of war, the national stadium transformed into a concentration camp. Despite his sympathy for the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America, Mexican Ortiz, together with a small team that took various detours to get to Chile and pretended to be television representatives, managed to capture the voices of both sides: those of the "people" deprived of an attempt at democratic socialism on the one hand and those of the right-wing military and the triumphant bourgeoisie on the other. "The villa districts in celebration, the working class areas in mourning", as Ortiz put it in the Forum information sheet for his film.¹

The 1970 election campaign, from which the Unidad Popular, a coalition of socialists, communists and smaller left-wing parties under the leadership of Salvador Allende, emerged victorious, had politicized Chilean filmmakers. The fact that the left wing lacked any means of communication capable of reaching the masses demanded swift action. Radio and television continued to be under the control of the bourgeois forces. The only

¹ Translated from the Forum information sheet number 39, International Forum of New Cinema, Berlin 1974.

area of the media in which the Unidad Popular held influence was film.² Film as a weapon for class struggle. Building on the socially critical Chilean cinema of the 1960s, which found international recognition and included films by Sergio Bravo, Aldo Francia, Miguel Littín, Helvio Soto, Alvaro Ramírez or Pedro Chaskel, a filmmaking system was established against all odds, comprising training, production as well as distribution.³ This development met an abrupt end with the Pinochet coup. Film prints were taken abroad to be saved, projects already begun such as Patricio Guzmán's *LA BATALLA DE CHILE* (1972–79) or Pablo de la Barra's *QUERIDOS COMPAÑEROS* (1973–78) were completed in exile. It was only in 1979 at the earliest that a new independent film and video culture emerged in tandem with the growing resistance to the regime.

About 30 feature films and documentaries produced in Chile between 1968 and 1973 can be found in the Arsenal collection, some subtitled in German, others also with internegatives. This collection of films, which is unique outside of Chile and also comprises many titles from the 1980s, testifies to the special relationship of the Arsenal and the Forum to Chilean cinema for which West Berlin, besides the festivals in Oberhausen and Leipzig, provided an important point of contact– before and after September 11, 1973..⁴ As part of a film series put on at the Goethe-Institut Santiago in 1999, which provided an overview of the cinema of the Unidad Popular for the first time since the end of the dictatorship, prints of several of the films shown there that belonged to Arsenal remained in Chile and were later passed on to the Cineteca Nacional. Although more and more material was rediscovered and preserved over the last years in Chile itself, the “return” of films initiated by Heiner Roß made an important contribution as far as analyzing and coming to terms with this phase in Chilean film history was concerned. This transaction also represents a thus far unique instance in the history of Arsenal.⁵

The most striking feature film of the Allende years is, in my opinion, Raúl Ruiz's *LA EXPROPIACIÓN* (1972), not least due to its bitter irony and virtuoso mix of stylistic

² Cf. Douglas Hübner and Edgardo Recabarren, *Das Kino der Unidad Popular*, in: *Kino und Kampf in Lateinamerika. Zur Theorie und Praxis politischen Kinos*, Peter B. Schumann (Ed.), Munich/Vienna 1976, pp. 41–67, p. 55.

³ Cf. Zuzana M. Pick, *Chilean Documentary: Continuity and Disjunction*, in: *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, Julianne Burton (Ed.), Pittsburgh 1990, pp. 109–130, p. 114.

⁴ The contact between West Berlin and Chile was largely sustained by Peter B. Schumann, journalist and long-term Latin American expert at the International Forum of New Cinema and the West German Short Film Festival as well as by Heiner Roß, the managing director of the Friends of the German Film Archive at the time.

⁵ Mónica Villarroel and Isabel Mardones' book *Señales contra el olvido. Cine chileno rescatado* (Santiago 2012) recounts for the first time how the Chilean films made between 1970 and 1973 were able to be saved in divided Germany – not just in relation to the role of Arsenal but also with respect to Studio Heynowski & Scheumann and DEFA.

devices. Shot over just four days and nights, the film explores the problem of land nationalization by the Corporación de la Reforma Agraria (CORA). "It is not a film that seeks to explain or portray the land reform program. The intention was far more to describe a crisis situation, a situation of many contradictions."⁶ Ruiz tells the story of a landowner who wants to preempt the confiscation of his land by handing over his estate to the workers voluntarily. The workers resist the plan however and end up killing the CORA functionary who has travelled there especially. Although the film remained practically unscreened in Chile at the time,⁷ Ruiz regarded the shoot itself, which involved local land workers, as already comprising a form of political film work: a exploration of the justified bottom up criticism of the representatives of the "people's government". The experimental documentary DESCOMEDIDOS Y CHASCONES (1973) by Carlos Flores Delpino is also dedicated to the complexity of social reality and stands out amongst Arsenal's Chile holdings in similar fashion to LA EXPROPIACIÓN. DESCOMEDIDOS Y CHASCONES uses equally unconventional means to create a portrait of Chilean youth at the start of the 1970s. Despite some montages that are critical of capitalism and satirical insertions, Flores' film does not indulge in any sort of indoctrinating agitation against the class society, but rather analyses the young people's different socializations and milieus: right and left wing, bourgeois and proletarian. When confronted with film footage of the activities of the other group, these young people reveal the dilemma relating to the cultural rigidity underpinning their respective experiences and views.

After the military coup rendered a theatrical release in Santiago impossible, DESCOMEDIDOS Y CHASCONES received its premiere at the 22nd International Film Week Mannheim in October 1973, where Hellmuth Costard's TEILWEISE VON MIR – EIN VOLKSSTÜCK (1973) won a special prize for best television film the same year.⁸ The nearly one-hour long film connects a series of multi-faceted statements and opinions on career,

⁶ Translated from Peter B. Schumann's Interview with Raúl Ruiz, in: Forum information sheet number 40, International Forum of New Cinema, Berlin 1974.

⁷ LA EXPROPIACIÓN was only finally completed in Paris and West Berlin after Ruiz fled to exile, and received its world premiere at Cannes in 1974. The only copies of the film in existence both in Chile and elsewhere are copies of a copy of a video scan of the Arsenal 16mm German subtitled print. This transfer was originally carried out by the BBC. "Pls take good care of the print. appreciate your offer to make a video cassette, format: vhs" was what Sylvia Andresen wrote in a telegram to London in June 1988. The Cinémathèque Suisse and the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique also hold film prints of LA EXPROPIACIÓN, each of which with French subtitles. While a YouTube video exists of the VHS version of the Arsenal print, the original negative is regarded as lost.

⁸ The only combined 16mm print of the film, which was shot on Super 8 and made in collaboration with Winfried Burtchel, Susanne Müller and Thomas Wittenburg, can be found at Arsenal. The recent transfer of the negative into the archive of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek serves as a way of preserving this material in the framework of Living Archive. This digitalization project in collaboration with Deutsche Kinemathek at least makes a small contribution to the appraisal Costard's body of film work has yet to receive.

economy, money, advertizing, people and technology, which Costard had 600 passers-by in such cities as Hamburg and Munich recite to form a sort of collective monologue on the state of Western consumer and labour society. Costard reflects upon questions of self-determination and participation in the modern world with his typical sense of humor and playful alienation, much as he had already done so with *DIE UNTERDRÜCKUNG DER FRAU IST VOR ALLEM AN DEM VERHALTEN DER FRAU SELBER ZU ERKENNEN* (1969). Costard shared the idea of an innovative political cinema with several West Berlin filmmakers in the orbit of the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb), who for their part mostly drew on fictional means whilst employing non-professional actors. Sometimes more essayistic and sometimes closer to documentaries, films such as Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki's *EINE SACHE, DIE SICH VERSTEHT* (1971), Helke Sander's *EINE PRÄMIE FÜR IRENE* (1971), Valeska Schöttle's *WER BRAUCHT WEN?* (1972) or Christian Ziewer's *LIEBE MUTTER, ES GEHT MIR GUT* (1971) are all concerned with creating an awareness for the difficult processes and strains linked to social and economic emancipation as well as for the day-to-day working situation of women. Another discovery in the Arsenal archive in this context is the three-part documentary *DER HAMBURGER AUFSTAND OKTOBER 1923. EINE WOCHENSCHAU, HERGESTELLT IN HAMBURG, MÄRZ BIS AUGUST 1971* (1971) by Klaus Wildenhahn in collaboration with Gisela Tuchtenhagen and Reiner Etz. In the film– also produced at dffb– Wildenhahn recalls the historic struggle of the working class, a history that can only be narrated “from bottom up”. He does so at precisely the moment when the workers’ movement, without which, for instance, the introduction of the social market economy to West Germany would have been unthinkable, is beginning to lose power.

Costard's last film to be completed in his lifetime is entitled *Das Wunder von Chile* (The Miracle of Chile). Produced together with Louis von Adelsheim, this television documentary from 1996 accompanies Doug Tompkins, founder of North Face and Esprit, over several months who after his pull out from the clothing business, has purchased huge areas of forest land in the south of Chile in order to preserve them as a nature reserve. Tompkins must defend his private project against many different forms of resistance, but is finally able to make it happen. The “Miracle of Chile” is usually used to refer to Augusto Pinochet's economic policies, which made Chile a prime example of neo-liberalism according to the Chicago School model. The idea of exerting minimal state influence on economic events while guaranteeing freely functioning markets was taken

on by Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s at the cost of social safeguards. Deregulating capital flows forms an essential part of neoliberal economics alongside reducing public expenditure quotas and privatizing public services. The prerequisites for allowing the profitability of capital to triumph over that of production– and thus also labour– include introducing flexibility to exchange rates and decoupling the international monetary system from the gold standard, a process officially sealed with the end of the Bretton Woods system in 1973. The effects of this “slow, but irreversible transition from commodity money to credit money”⁹ can be seen in the most recent crises in the global financial economy and the Eurozone. While Allende tried to implement the utopian vision of a socialist revolution under democratic conditions in Chile, the Western industrial nations, and the USA in particular, were setting the course for a radicalization of capitalism.

Relating individual films and film prints, the contexts in which they were created and their “life stories” both to one another and the present before the backdrop of social and economic change around 1973 is the goal and experiment being carried out by SO THEY GO AND BUY in the form of curated programs, a film-based lecture performance and a publication as part of the Living Archive project by Madhusree Dutta and Ines Schaber. In the process, a series of mental bridges linking Chile and Germany, then and now, and languages and images are created in more and less obvious fashion. The foundation and essence of archives in general and the Arsenal collection in particular are for me made manifest in the curatorial and artistic practice of putting historical materials into an associative relationship with one another: films as both the product and the producers of history which is never complete or concluded, and never only one history.

⁹ Translated from Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals*, Zurich 2012, p. 86.