Film's Distribution and 1968: Radical Aspirations

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Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi, eds. *1968 and Global Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018. 384 pages. $85.99 cloth. $31.99 paperback.

Christina Gerhardt and Marco Abel, eds. *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long 1968*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2019. 338 pages. $99.00 cloth. $24.99 paperback.

Two recent and formidable anthologies have collected writings on the "long '68" for its fifty-year anniversary, reframing our perspective on this historical placeholder and the era of cinema that it sutures together. Taken together, the essays in *1968 and Global Cinema* and *Celluloid Revolt* make a decisive shift away from reading discrete film texts, opting instead to analyze the networks through which these texts moved and, in the process, tracking not only how they were received but also who was able to access them (and how). In so doing, these texts offer a forceful foregrounding of moving images' circulation, asserting—in some essays more explicitly than others—that the logistics and politics of distribution are key to tracking the very nature of "the public" and its representations, which were being disputed onscreen and offscreen under the capacious historical banner of 1968.

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The shift in focus to circulation, logistics, distribution, and infrastructure precipitates several methodological gains, which are achieved through four primary analytical expansions. The first move is temporal. The year 1968 is posited here not as a discrete "postwar" event but rather as an integral long-term part of the Cold War. This reperiodization is an important intervention, producing different points of entry into national cinemas through their international networks, and reconfigures readers' orientation to histories we think we know by centering anticolonial struggles and, importantly, the heterogeneity of "lefts," or modes of leftist praxis, enacted in response to these struggles. In breaking the temporal boundary of 1968, the volumes thus, in a second methodological move, highlight the ways in which cinematic projects around 1968 were produced with the aim of establishing international networks of solidarity through the mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus—considered as an infrastructure—itself. From this perspective, a first world–third world binary breaks apart, opening space for reflection on the varied contexts of the so-called second world and the multiple forms of state socialism that emerged within it. For instance, in *1968 and Global Cinema* the position of the People's Republic of China in the leftist imaginary of the West is juxtaposed with the Chinese Communist Party's relation to radical politics in China (see Laurence Coderre's "Cultural Revolution Models on Film"), or, in a similar strategy, Evelyn Preuss's " 'You Say You Want a Revolution' " in *Celluloid Revolt* foregrounds the connection of East German DEFA productions to Third Cinema.

The breaking apart of periodization, then, opens up views onto the gaps in familiar histories and starts to build bridges—this "building bridges" is not only rhetorical but also quite material. Spatial histories are foregrounded. As the boundaries of the temporal "event" of "1968" become porous, so too do its geographic borders. A broad territorial scope is something to be expected in a volume on global cinema, but Gerhardt and Saljoughi's decisions in where to go, when to go there, and how to arrange the pieces of international history held together by the keywords "1968" and "Global Cinema" are energizing. Moving from New Waves to "aftershocks" allow the editors to ricochet back and forth in time, extending past 1968 proper in some moments (such as in Allyson Nadia Field's "Third Cinema in the First World") and returning to pre-1968 conditions in others (Rocco Giansante's "Before the Revolution"). These spatiotemporal movements remind readers that 1968—as both a rhetorical signpost and as a material context—happened at different times and in different ways. The "global" here is (re)imbued with some of its realpolitik implications, which

since 1968 have systematically been circumscribed by the neoliberal financial language of "globalization." Similarly, Gerhardt and Abel's choice in *Celluloid Revolt* to include the German Democratic Republic and Austria in the story of German (usually reduced to West German) screen cultures is bold. The volumes' respective appeals to think these myriad contexts together is a major move forward in reconsidering not only the aesthetic strategies and legacies of 1968 but also our critical and historiographic frame(s) for charting them.

This expanded geography underwrites the fourth methodological move shared across the volumes. Chapters in both collections devote new attention to distribution and the question of access, placing these alongside ongoing discussions of production and exhibition. The texts signpost discussions of state funding at nearly every turn, something of great importance when thinking across ideological boundaries that would stringently hold separate the integrated models of state socialism and the "open" market of liberal democracy. A reader quickly realizes, however, that such a division does not hold up; the relations between the state and markets, it turns out, were as capacious as the banner 1968. Thomas Elsaesser writes, for instance, that "the diversification and interpenetration that public funding and public accountability created for various sectors and organizations of film production" was crucial to the formation of new television-based genres in West Germany (132). And elsewhere, Kalani Michell's examination of Helmuth Costard's *Der kleine Godard* makes clear the significance of these frameworks of (state) funding and accountability, also in the West German context: "while a film about *Antragslogik* [funding application logic] might seem out of place in the wake of the sociopolitical turbulence of the long sixties, it is the object that brings together questions of historiography, institutional critique, [and] access to resources" (254).

A critique of infrastructural mechanisms of funding and distribution connects films across presumed ideological boundaries. This is not limited to the case of West and East Germany but is also true at the global scale. The festival circuit in particular emerges as a fraught site in this sense. The French New Wave directors' shutting down of the Cannes Film Festival in 1968, for instance, appears in two essays in Gerhardt and Soljoughi's collection (Peter Hames's "The Czechoslovak New Wave Revisited" and David Desser's "Oshima, Korea, and 1968"). In both cases, this act of solidarity stymied international dialogue: films from Japan and Czechoslovakia were unable to screen outside of their national contexts. The clarity with which readers can see the conflicting interests represented

in this festival strike has a destabilizing effect, begging the question as to what political film—and, by extension, solidarity—looks like. What publics are imagined to be held together "in solidarity" and how?

There are thus four interconnected rhetorical and material moves: temporal reperiodization, the centering of solidarity as an organizing principle, the porousness of geographic borders in distribution histories, and the primary role of infrastructural analysis in parsing the deeply political questions of aesthetic access. These moves, outlined in depth in the introduction to *1968 and Global Cinema*, undo simplistic categorizations, which have fragmented the stakes of—and the stakeholders involved in—the twin projects of 1968 and film's corresponding "radical aspiration."[1] They are echoed in the introduction to *Celluloid Revolt*, where Gerhardt and Abel write of 1968 that "*another possibility for living* emerged, became seeable, sensible, perceivable, as well as thinkable, shareable, and ultimately representable (in the cinema, for example)" (9). In their turn to the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, distribution—his "distribution of the sensible"—becomes as theoretically interwoven into film and 1968 as it is geopolitically and economically. If we want to understand the politics of 1968's aesthetic legacy, as these incisive anthologies suggest, we would do well to look at how films, like the sensible, were being distributed and redistributed.

Note

1. Phrase taken from the title of Annette Michelson's 1966 lecture "Film and the Radical Aspiration," reprinted in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, 440–22 (New York: Cooper Square, 2000).