

Cinétracts

Ciné-Tracts [1968] AKA: Cinétracts (3-4 minutes each)

"Actually, if I have a secret ambition, it is to be put in charge of the French newsreel services. All my films have been reports on the state of the nation; they are newsreel documents, treated in a personal manner perhaps, but in terms of contemporary actuality...When people ask me why I talk –or have my characters talk – about Vietnam...I refer the questioner to his own newspaper. It's all there. And it's all mixed up. This is why I am so attracted by television. A televised newspaper made up of carefully prepared documents would be extraordinary...This is why, rather than speak of cinema and television, I prefer to use the more general terms of images and sounds."¹

--Godard in 'L'Avant-Scene du Cinema 70', May 1967.

"But a still photograph cut into a film acts like the curse on Lot's wife."

--Rudolf Arnheim 'Film as Art'

The *Ciné-Tracts* [1968] project was undertaken by a number of French directors as a means of taking direct revolutionary action during and after the events of May 1968.² Contributions were made by Godard, Chris Marker,³ Alain Resnais and others during this period. Each of the *Ciné-Tracts* consists of 100 feet of 16mm black and white silent film shot at 24 FPS, equalling a projection-time of 2 minutes and 50 seconds.⁴ The films were made available for purchase at the production cost, which at the time was fifty francs.

¹ Godard, 'One Should Put Everything into a Film'. In Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*. Eds., Tom Milne and Jean Narboni. (New York and London: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 239.

² Although unverified, the project is likely to have been conceived by Chris Marker and the S.L.O.N. Groupe after the events at Cannes in May of 1968. Godard had previously contributed *Caméra-Oeil* to Marker's *Loin du Viêt Nam (Far from Vietnam)* project in 1967.

³ Marker is possibly one of the foremost proponents of using the photographic image within cinema. Both *La Jetee* [1964] and *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* [1966] use photographs extensively.

⁴ Some of the Ciné-Tracts break with this format and reach four minutes in length. See Yosefa Loshitzky, *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci*. (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1995), p. 268. Also David Sterritt, ed., *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p. xxv.

As part of the prescription for the making of the films, the director was to self-produce, self-edit, be the cinematographer, ensuring that each film was shot in one day. Godard had undergone a series of encounters on the barricades during the 'Langlois Affair' in February of 1968,⁵ and during May was seen actively involved in labour marches, photographing the riots in the Latin Quarter. He also took time to shoot some material at the University of Paris campus at Nanterre.⁶

Due to the anonymous approach of the directors involved in the *Ciné-Tracts* project and the unification between the directors, no credits are given in any of the *Ciné-Tracts* to identify who made them. This use of anonymity extends to the way each film is numbered. The number of each *Ciné-Tract* is allocated by where the contribution falls within the total number completed by the group. For example, Godard's contributions available for viewing at the British Film Institute are numbered 001, 004, 7, 9, 16, 018, 019 and 23.⁷

Julia Lesage notes that many of the *Ciné-Tracts* exhibit signs of Godard's direct involvement, such as Godard's distinctive handwriting on the intertitles or directly upon the images themselves.⁸ Although these signs of Godard's authorship might be attributable to work he had done for other contributors to the *Ciné-Tracts* project, it would appear to be unlikely given the project's prescriptive nature.

Winston-Dixon states that part of the prescription involved in the making of the *Ciné-Tracts* was that each of the films was supposed to be edited entirely in camera. Given that Godard's *Ciné-Tracts* are entirely comprised of still images, and frequently make use of intertitles, it is understandable that this method may have sped up the process of recording the films. If Winston-Dixon's information is correct, the amount of preparation that this method must have involved is readily apparent. The process of editing within the

⁵ The 'Langlois Affair' was an important moment preceding the May events with a number of French and international film directors becoming directly involved in the fate of Henri Langlois' position as head of the Cinémathèque Française. See Glenn Myrent and Georges P. Langlois, *Henri Langlois: First Citizen of Cinema* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). Also Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 14-16.

⁶ Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 103. For an image of Godard shooting the *Ciné-Tracts* in May, see the Appendix. Figure. 2.

⁷ The potential that other Godard contributions to the *Ciné-Tracts* project is possible. I have not been able to determine the exact number made by the group.

⁸ Julia Lesage, *Jean-Luc Godard: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), pp. 93-94.

camera would have entailed an enormous amount of storyboarding given that the *Ciné-Tracts* use hundreds of still images, frequently repeated between the films.⁹

The *Ciné-Tracts* were distributed outside of the commercial system of distribution. Owing to the modestly successful private distribution and availability within France, the project succeeded in reaching audiences interested in the shared ideals of workers and students in the May revolt.

The eight Godard *Ciné-Tracts* available at the British Film Institute were shot in May and June of 1968 with screenings also taking place over those two months. They were made for a predominantly French audience, and were screened in French "student assemblies, factories on strike and political action committees in May [and June] 1968."¹⁰ However, the films were also screened in England at the New Arts Lab,¹¹ and the National Film Theatre, with limited screenings on the festival circuit, notably in Venice and New York.

Although the textual inscriptions used within the *Ciné-Tracts* are in French, and there does not appear to have been a subtitled translation into English made available, Godard's montage reveals a great deal of information that would not be lost on an English-speaking audience.

It should be noted that international distribution of the *Ciné-Tracts* was most likely an after-thought that can be attributed to overseas interest in the directors involved in the project, as opposed to the content of the films. By 1968, both Chris Marker and Godard were internationally known on the festival circuit¹²; while Godard and Truffaut's disruption of the Cannes Film Festival that year had also been highly publicised.¹³

⁹ Winston Dixon, p. 103.

¹⁰ Winston Dixon, p. 103.

¹¹ Winston Dixon writes that *Loi du Viêt-nam* [1967] (including Godard's contribution to the project *Caméra-Oeil* or *Camera Eye*) was screened in the summer of 1968 at the New Arts Lab. It is likely that Godard's *Ciné-Tracts* were also shown at this time. See Winston Dixon, p. 85.

¹² For a detailed analysis of Godard's films and their screenings in the U.S. throughout the 1960's and 1970's see Craig Fischer, 'Films Lost in the Cosmos: Godard and New York Distribution and Exhibition (1961-1973)', *Spectator*, 18 (1998), 47-66.

¹³ See Penelope Houston, 'Cannes 68', *Sight and Sound*, 37 (1968), 115-117. The article provides a somewhat tongue-in-cheek look at the happenings on May 18. Godard got into a "tussle" with Polanski "about who or who wasn't a Stalinist," which is ironic considering Godard got into a fight with Polanski's old room-mate Quarrier later in the year (see *One Plus One*). Truffaut apparently got into a knock down "scuffle" as well (reportedly his fifth that year). See also Gilles Jacob, 'The 400 Blows of Francois Truffaut', *Sight and Sound*, 37 (1968), 190-191.

The purpose of the *Ciné-Tracts*, as with most of Godard's 1968 film projects, was to offer a critically alternative source of 'news' or information in contrast to the commercially offered mediums available. Although the prescriptive nature of the films, their limitation of budget and the limitations introduced by their use of silence, technically confines what can be achieved by the project, the amount of 'alternative' documentary information contained in the *Ciné-Tracts*, subverts the state controlled media information. The state censorship of the media throughout the events of May necessitated communication along different lines than had existed before. With the *Ciné-Tracts*, Godard was able to provide one avenue of contact and information to various cadres that formed throughout the May revolt. By creating a form of agit-prop for specific audiences, the *Ciné-Tracts* provided a means of encouraging the revolutionary momentum begun in Nanterre earlier in the year.

As part of the 1998 Viennale Film Festival's recognition of the events of 1968 on cinema, Jonathan Rosenbaum contributed some of his memory of this time.

It's also worth adding that during the week's run of *La Chinoise* that started at New York's Kips Bay Theater on April 3, I and many friends of mine went to see it more than once. Some of these friends were attending Columbia University at the time, and when that college campus was taken over by students a short time later, I couldn't help but think that Godard's film had inspired and influenced their militancy. Maybe part of this was wishful thinking, but maybe not: word of mouth travelled more quickly in those days--faster than the New York Times, faster even than television--because there was less media to compete with. *Not that the media didn't exist, but it was believed in much less by people of my generation; all one had to do was read --or, on television, see--the reports of the demonstrations we participated in, against the Vietnam war and on behalf of civil rights, in order to understand that the truth of what happened was available only from fellow demonstrators and other members of the counter culture, not from the "official" channels.* And the same thing was true when it came to finding out about movies: the David Denbys and the Eugene Archers of 1968 were not the authorities one had to turn to.¹⁴ (Italics mine)

¹⁴ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'My Filmgoing in 1968: An Exploration', *That Magic Moment: 1968 and the Cinema* (1998). Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.viennale.or.at/1998/magic/rosenbe.htm>> (version no longer available).

Le Gai Savoir [1968] had used images from advertising sources illustrating 8mm Cine-equipment, suggesting the means of communicating through the cinematic medium were being opened to a greater number of individuals. There is a form of implicit homage to the industrialisation or production of photographic and Cine-equipment within Godard's *Ciné-Tracts*. The widespread availability of filmmaking equipment to consumers and institutions in the late 1960's allowed a reappropriation of the means to record and distribute visual communication outside the confines of a conventional or commercialised media system.

That is not to say the *Ciné-Tracts* are some form of celebration of the democratising of technology, but they do hint at the function new technology can serve as a catalyst for a public revolution of images. Although the 16mm format was frequently a choice for professional filmmakers, it is used in its most basic form in the *Ciné-Tracts* project. Given that the *Ciné-Tracts* did not use sound, the most basic of equipment could be utilised to screen the films. In particular, the format was relatively easy to duplicate and disseminate throughout institutions such as the Universities; and due to the portability of the equipment needed to project the films, it is imagined the University 16mm projectors were 'borrowed' to allow the *Ciné-Tracts* to be screened within the factories where strike action was taking place.

The overwhelming amount of historical data about meetings that took place within the confines of the university and factories undergoing strike action, suggests that these places were not just chosen because they were under siege by the state, but were geographic places that provided the technology to distribute communications and organise plans of action.¹⁵

Winston-Dixon points out that this sort of filmmaking would have been done on video tape today, but video technology was in its infancy in 1968 making it difficult and impractical to use for the *Ciné-Tracts* project. Godard had tried to experiment with video technology as early as 1967 when filming *La Chinoise*¹⁶. However, shooting the *Ciné-Tracts* in this format would have destroyed their political purpose. Shooting with video

Publication (in German) available from Internet WWW Page, at URL:
<<http://www.viennale.or.at/english/shop/index.html>> (version current at 7 October 2000).

¹⁵ See *Grands soirs et petits matins: Mai 68 au Quartier Latin*, dir. William Klein, 1978.

¹⁶ Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 133.

would contradict the objectives of the project, which could only be achieved through the maximisation of distribution to those the films were trying to encourage. Video technology was only accessible to a very few, such as television stations--one of the media avenues the films were attempting to undermine--and the means of screening 16mm were at the disposal of both students and workers who were the target audience *creating* the revolution. In her examination of film culture in May 1968, Sylvia Harvey points out

A film projected in a factory is a rather different phenomenon from a film projected in a cinema, and the former was seen as part of an attempt at breaking down the 'normal' relationship that exists in capitalist society between the audience-consumer and the spectacle-product. The emphasis on new locations for screenings indicated the beginning of a realisation that it was not enough simply to change the content of films, but that the whole socio-economic structure in which they operated had also to be changed. Film as a consumer product was seen as an intrinsically non-revolutionary phenomenon, and to simply use the film content to show a condition of misery, of contestation or of struggle was regarded as an inadequate, an incomplete solution.¹⁷

The *Ciné-Tracts* demonstrate Godard's desire to contribute revolutionary 'tools' in an openly political way. In an interview with Kent E. Carroll in 1970, Godard stated that there had been an enormous change in his attitude towards his role as a filmmaker during this period.

I was a bourgeois filmmaker and then a progressive filmmaker and then no longer a filmmaker, but just a worker in the movies.¹⁸

Without the necessity to address the cinematic material to a 'larger public,' the target audience is confined to the militants Godard wants to encourage to pursue revolutionary goals. If Godard's aim is the production of smaller films for smaller audiences, the *Ciné-*

¹⁷ Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Kent E. Carroll, 'Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group'. In *Focus on Godard*. Ed., Royal S. Brown, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1972), pp. 51-52. This statement also highlights Godard's alignment with the ideas proposed by the *Lef* group. See Richard Sherwood, 'Documents from *Lef*', *Screen*, 12 (1971/2), 27.

Tracts also demonstrate his ability to enter a non-commercial sphere, albeit in a limited way.

Due to their relatively limited means of distribution, the *Ciné-Tracts*, and later projects such as *Un Film Comme les Autres* [1968], also represent a turning point in Godard's aims in relation to spectatorship. In this respect, the films are the precursor of the problems Godard would face with the films made in the post-1968 Dziga-Vertov period.¹⁹

Each of Godard's Cinétract films opens with either simple machine produced type, or what is recognisably Godard's hand-written script that is either white on black or black on white with a title reading 'Cinétract' and its attendant number. Individually, the films illustrate Godard's political concerns with the May movement, and provide ample illustration of the social divisions that were created. The majority of images are representative of both sides in the revolutionary struggle of May. For example, the pro-Gaullists are frequently pictured opposite their anti-Gaullist counterparts. By manipulating the binary oppositions, Godard is able to reveal the tensions between opposing sides in the revolt, but he is also able to exacerbate them.

For example, the *Ciné-Tracts* creates a very clear-cut depiction of the pro-Gaullist members of French society. Footage shot in the Latin Quarter is contrasted with the Pro-Gaullist marches in the Champs Elysees. The images Godard selects of these marches include the Arc de Triomphe as a prominent and potent symbol of the older generation. Men in bowler hats with their wives in twin-sets and pearls look on in disgust at the younger generation. City officials in Tri-Colour sashes look on in earnestness as they march with pro-Gaullist banners down the Champs Elysees. The C.R.S.²⁰ celebrate the violence inflicted on the students and workers by slapping each other on the back. Each of these images contributes to what Godard hopes is the galvanising of the spectator with the ideological aims of the demonstrators.

Using montage, Godard creates sequences that contrast young with old and bourgeois with revolutionary. These sequences cut from the youthful protestors to the older onlookers who disapprovingly watch the confrontation between police and protestor. This

¹⁹ Claire Johnston and Jan Dawson contributed an interesting article about contemporary alternative developments for independent filmmakers and exhibitors in 'Declarations of Independence', *Sight and Sound*, 39 (1969/70), 28-30.

²⁰ C.R.S. Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité: National Riot Squad

can also be interpreted as a call to the spectator for direct revolutionary action, by its indictment of those who watch and are not participating in the revolution. Scenes such as this also enforce the idea that the revolution is an active force that is presently happening, thus creating a sense of urgency or immediacy to the images.

In general terms, Godard's *Ciné-Tracts* also explore the uses of photography, photojournalism and the relationship the still image has to news reportage and the understanding of events. This is usually achieved by textually inscribing an image to reflect revolutionary ideology or contrasting binary images that give a politically sardonic satirical allusion. For example, in *Ciné-Tract 018*

A series of shots that produce a montage of individual faces in CU shouting.

Faces of smiling C.R.S. police marching. Camera pans²¹ left revealing the enormity of the phalanx, and revealing citizens on the curbside clapping them on.

Intertitle [Pen on Paper]: "Vive La Police!"

LS of crowd receding into background. Camera pans left over image to reveal people in CU laughing.

Intertitle: "Les Brave Gens Avec Nous!"/The Brave People With Us!

MCU of bourgeois man in dinner suit with bow tie and military-styled moustache stroking chin.

CU Elderly man wearing a black beret with determined/concerned face.

MCU Middle-aged men in uniform black suit jackets, white shirts and black ties.

MCU Younger man in almost identical dress,

Image of marching women holding the Tri-Colour flag. Camera pans right over the marching figures to linger on a shot of a woman whose dress and style emulates Jacqueline Kennedy.

Intertitle: "Et Assez De Violence!"/ And Enough Of Violence.

CU Hands holding sign "Assez De Violence"

MCU of man who is holding sign, panning down to reveal sign.

Intertitle: "Compris?"/ Understood?

The butt of a rifle in MCU positioned diagonally across frame. C.R.S. in background with one member who has his face averted.

Intertitle: "Nous Protestations"/ Our Protest/Pleas.

²¹ Frequently Godard uses pans over the still images to give feelings of action or movement.

Godard frequently uses *mise-en-scène* within the *Ciné-Tracts* to depict action and movement. Using the borders of the frame, Godard contrives images of the C.R.S. as robotic figures that have a similar and equally humorous functionality to Sennett's Keystone Cops. They're frequently shot running diagonally from one corner of the frame to the other with no readily apparent purpose. The majority of the time they are depicted as faceless automatons, or inhuman masked oppressors – helmeted and goggled, they are devoid of human identity.

However, Godard also manages to shamelessly satirise the C.R.S. by capturing them with their batons in obvious Freudian poses. In contrast to the humorous depiction of the C.R.S., Godard frequently illustrates the brutality of the violence that the C.R.S. were capable of inflicting. By contrasting the comic images of the C.R.S. with the acts of violence, the intensity of the effect upon the spectator increases their sympathy or support for the demonstrators.

One particular shot of a demonstrator bleeding as he is being beaten also shows his girlfriend looking directly into the camera seeking help. By the juxtaposition of the comic with the dramatic images, Godard is able to effect a greater impact upon the audience, and create a sense of outrage.

A great deal of the footage used within Godard's *Ciné-Tracts* steps outside the prescription of the filmmaker's own recording of events. Using images from other sources of information lends the films an appearance of a bricolage of material almost bordering the aleatory. For example, Godard includes Edouard Boubat's photograph '*Plutot la vie,*' [1968] an internationally published image that became recognised as one of the seminal photographic depictions of the May 1968 events.²²

Many iconic pop-cultural images of the 60's circulating today are represented in the *Ciné-Tracts*. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the first shot of *Ciné-Tract 23* is of Che Guevara. Guevara, whose image has possibly lasted the longest as the 60's iconic embodiment of revolutionary youth and spirit, is still found battling it out with St. Exupery's 'Little Prince' in Paris tourist shops today.²³ However the image of Guevara also

²² As of May 1999, Boubat's image is a 'picture-postcard' for tourists in most Paris tourist shops.

²³ Michael Harder, *Michael Harder Photography - CUBA - Alberto "Korda" Gutierrez*. Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.pix.dk/korda2.htm>> (version current at 7 October 2000). Korda's image of Guevara has been used largely for advertising purpose in recent years for 'Revolutionary' cachet. Leica are

assigns a far more serious implication to the May revolt. As with the images of Vietnam, Godard broadens the meaning of the May events into a global revolution of which France is a part by destroying the conservative perception of the May events as a 'national moment of unrest'.

This war of icons is in part the inspiration for Godard's 'cold war' attack on the French establishment. In his 1964 book '*Understanding Media*,' Marshall McLuhan reveals the ideological use of images and their purpose within the cold war by the State. Recent evidence from media sources have suggested, for example, one of the pivotal moments in the cold war was the internationally televised national parade of the USSR's nuclear capabilities during the 1960's. In fact, the USSR had nowhere near the nuclear arsenal that was suggested by the television images that were broadcast. All of the 'missiles' shown were empty casings, due to the Russian military not having perfected the technology to create such a weapon. However, the effect of having shown what 'appeared' to be a nuclear arsenal was incontrovertible to the western media.

Using the space programme as an example of image over substance, McLuhan expressed the opinion that it was immaterial whether or not a US or USSR based space programme made it to the moon first. The image that corroborated it however was worth a great ideological victory.²⁴

Even ideological warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proceeded by persuading individuals to adopt new points of view, one at a time. Electric persuasion by photo and movie and TV works, instead, by dunking entire populations in new imagery.²⁵

By repeating images that have become familiar to the audience from media sources, and reinscribing their meanings, Godard is able to remake the meaning of the image to reflect a different ideological discourse. Through directly annotating the image, or by the use of montage, Godard confronts the spectator and encourages them to take direct

currently using Korda's image of Guevara for their 2000 'Totally Revolutionary' advertising campaign. Korda is currently suing Vodka manufacturer 'Smirnoff' for wrongfully appropriating the image. CNN.com. *Vodka ad featuring famed photo of 'Che' Guevara sparks furor*. Internet WWW Page, at URL: <<http://www.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/americas/08/09/cuba.chequevara.ap/index.html>> (version current at 7 October 2000).

²⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 338.

²⁵ McLuhan, p. 339.

revolutionary action. In another way, by critically examining the devices the commercial media use, Godard attempts to reformulate or transform the original image into one that concurs with the ideological aims of the May revolt. For example, Godard often depicts text used as image.

Protestors hold newspaper headlines aloft to show their solidarity with the message²⁶, or to illustrate their objection to what the headlines say. For example, *Ciné-Tract 7* uses familiar images of De Gaulle and Franco, merging the images so that their visages appear indistinguishable.

By using 'ready-made' still images, Godard is able to emulate the print medium, but is also able to use the images from outside sources giving them movement. Largely using the camera for panning and zooming, the *Ciné-Tracts* includes only one use of what could conventionally be called a 'cinematic sequence'. The sequence of images shows a protestor throwing an object at the C.R.S. and illustrates a staccato-like movement of the protestor picking up the object, running forward and throwing it.

Significantly, the images may either have been derived from cine-footage, achieving the effect by dropping alternate frames, or have been taken with a motorised still camera, reinforcing Godard's challenge to the print medium.²⁷ In *Ciné-Tract 001*, Godard deflates the effects of the violence committed by the C.R.S. into a dangerous children's game of catch. After positioning a C.R.S. guard on the left hand side of the frame throwing an object off-screen to the right, Godard cuts to an image of a protestor on the right hand side of the frame throwing an object back into left off-screen space.

The textual inscriptions on the images frequently use inclusive language such as "us," "we," or "our". There is no doubt that Godard not only wants to include himself as an active participant in this 'dialogue' he wishes to establish with the spectator, but he also wants to provide guidance and ask questions as to what a revolutionary is—drawing a line where passivity is to be excluded, and action with solidarity is the only way forward.

²⁶ One protestor holds an edition of the newspaper 'Action' that bears the headline "De Gaulle: Assassin Assassin Assassin"

²⁷ As far as I've been able to ascertain, most commercially available SLR's in 1968, such as the Nikon F, were capable of up to 4 frames per second with Mirror Lock Up, which is easily capable of capturing the sequence.

By contrasting the image with the text, Godard expects the play between the two to engage the viewer and catalyse the spectator into revolutionary action, as opposed to what Godard obviously perceives as a normal submissive or passive watching of moving images. For example,

An image of naked lovers with the script reading 'sentiments d'amour'/feelings of love.
A poster advertising *La Chinoise* [1968], Godard inscribes the image with 'Dans Notre Ambition'/ In our ambition.

Two soldiers with a rocket launcher inscribed with 'De Revolution Naire'/ From the revolution born.'

4. An oil painting depicting a road in front of an abstract house inscribed with 'Nous Tacherons D'Avancer'/We must advance.'

In many respects, the importance of the *Ciné-Tracts* project, as a whole, is their documenting of the May revolt from an alternative perspective. However, Godard's *Ciné-Tracts* undermine any conventional 'serving' of the documentation of events, and instead, try and pull the viewer into a dialogue with the material. The intertitles in particular pose a number of questions that Godard phrases with sardonic sarcasm. It should be noted that Godard uses approximately two question marks throughout all of the textual signifiers in the eight *Ciné-Tracts*. This would suggest to the spectator that they should regard the textual material as rhetorical. By using this technique, Godard reinforces the exclusivity of the audience that the *Ciné-Tracts* was created for.

One of the means to counteract the effect the state media has had upon moving images from the May revolt is Godard's attempt to reappropriate the original power of the images by guiding the spectator to alternate readings through the textual signifiers. By reappropriating the images with renewed textual meanings, Godard is able to subvert images used by the media, reformulating them into revolutionary texts. As has been suggested, the language employed by the *Ciné-Tracts* is inclusive, and Godard goes to great lengths to position the revolutionary struggle in a much wider sphere of influence than the national level.

Using the Vietnam conflict as a contemporary reference, Godard also refers to an earlier historical struggle by including images of Franco and merging them with the face of De Gaulle within the *Ciné-Tracts*. The inclusion of the images of Franco attempts to raise a

revolutionary consciousness that has its generational historical precedent rooted in an earlier struggle which aroused revolutionary sympathy.

Writing on the effectiveness of the Spanish Civil War in politicising his generation, Louis Althusser illustrates the significance of the war in its transformation of class awareness.

It surprised us just as we entered the world, and turned us students of bourgeois or petit bourgeois origin into men advised of the existence of classes, of their struggles and aims. From the evidence it forced on us we drew the only possible conclusion, and rallied to the political organisation of the working class, the Communist Party.²⁸

To the spectator the majority of the footage used throughout the *Ciné-Tracts* appears to be executed in a clinical, almost mathematical way. Generally, each of the shots appears on the screen for two or three seconds, giving the spectator sufficient time to comprehend the image and read the textual signifier Godard provides. However, this methodical style also exists where there are no textual signifiers to be read. This consistently measured filmmaking is not the usual style expected from Godard, although he had made intimations of using such a mathematically derived process throughout the year.²⁹

By using the same timing of each shot where there are no textual signifiers to be read, Godard accentuates the two dimensions of the source material. There are few shots that reveal different contrasting points of view to reveal a 3-dimensional space for the subjects to inhabit; and with only one example of what could be called a cinematic sequence that depicts subject movement, the figures within the *Ciné-Tracts* are immobilised in a 2-dimensional space.

²⁸ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 21.

²⁹ "At one time I'd wanted to film *Oh! Les Beaux Jours*. I never did - they wanted to use Madeleine Renaud; I wanted to use young actors. I'd have liked to -- I had a text, so all I'd have had to do is film it. I'd have done it all in one continuous travelling. We'd have started it as far back as we had to to get the last line, at the end of an hour and a half, in a close-up. It would have meant just some grade-school arithmetic." Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Bontemps, Comolli, Delahaye, and Narboni 'Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard', *Film Quarterly*, 22 (1968-9), 32. Godard had mentioned to Richard Roud that *One Plus One* was possibly going to be shot in "...ten eight-minute takes, unless of course he decided to do it in eight ten-minute takes instead." See Richard Roud, 'One Plus One', *Sight and Sound*, 37 (1968), 183.

By using text, Godard is able to contrast political tracts from different sources and contrast the written message with the photographic evidence. For example, Julia Lesage observes that one of the tracts reproduces a speech of De Gaulle's in the intertitles and uses images of students demonstrating to reveal the contradictions between De Gaulle's speech and the events as they happened.³⁰

The 2-dimensional political art used throughout the May revolt frequently used text as a means of 'Detournement'.³¹ Originally devised by Guy Debord and the Situationist International throughout the early 1960's, Detournement is the repossessing of an image for different ideological purposes than that for which it was created. Frequently this technique entailed placing text over the top of an image to subvert the original meaning.³² One of the more expansive uses of this method was employed by Debord in his 1973 film *La société du spectacle* [1973]. Frequently using montage and text as a means to criticise and reappropriate images and their textual meaning, Debord uses a method similar to Godard's own techniques.

However, Debord was highly critical of Godard, accusing him of being bourgeois; but also of plagiarising Situationist techniques without fully understanding them. It should however be noted that the use of the techniques Debord criticises Godard for are found in much earlier movements, such as the *Lef* group, the Lettrists and other avant-garde traditions that mixed politics and art.

The work of Isidore Isou and the collaborations between Breton, Trotsky and Rivera all play a part within this historical tradition of experimentation between politics, text and image.

As in *Le Gai Savoir*, Godard's interest in using formalist techniques for the *Ciné-Tracts* is evident. Godard even goes so far as to use some of the same images from the film. Just as the poster from *La Chinoise* is used, the 'folding in' of these still images and textual signifiers reflexively reinscribes Godard's earlier work and provides a signature of

³⁰ Lesage, p. 94.

³¹ Guy Debord, and Gil Wolman, *A User's Guide to Detournement*. Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.slip.net/~knabb/SI/detourn.htm>> (version current at 7 October 2000).

³² An excellent example is René Viénet's detournement of the bourgeois painting in the Sorbonne, which the revolutionary councils oddly concluded, was more of a 'desecration.' Viénet was asked to remove the text he inscribed. See René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1992), p. 51.

identification. They also furnish evidence of the Saussurean investigation of images that had concerned Godard's work from *La Chinoise* onwards. Although the majority of Saussurean theory had been confined within the field of linguistics during the early 1960's, it expanded into literary criticism in the latter part of the decade.

Developments within the field of linguistics obviously offered new tools for Godard's criticism of the social order.³³ With the emergence of Cultural Studies, and the work of Louis Althusser on Saussure's work in the late 1960's, it is not difficult to understand Godard's attraction to the new ideas emerging from literary discourse and to see their application in his 1968 work.³⁴

Tony Bennett's assertion that "...language constantly generates the illusion that it reflects reality instead of signifying it"³⁵ can be applied to encompass the language of mass media and visual communication. Godard's acute awareness of these ideas is clearly contained within the *Ciné-Tracts* and is representative of earlier themes that appeared in *Le Gai Savoir*. Godard had determined language to be the enemy and cited Noam Chomsky's work in *Le Gai Savoir*. Godard continues his analysis of language as the enemy in the *Ciné-Tracts*.

Although *Le Gai Savoir* illustrated a number of different textual methods of word play which culminated in Jean-Pierre Léaud's character Emile creating the word 'Misotodiman' (a mixture of the words method and sentiment), this kind of word creation, play, and fracturing of spelling has become a more advanced set of linguistic tools in Godard's *Ciné-Tracts*. Occasionally they are graphical representations which seem to take a cryptographic purpose or sometimes the textual inscriptions evidence serious intentions and sometimes not. These moments are representative of the lighter side of the *Ciné-Tracts* and Godard's 1968 work. As Richard Roud points out, who else but Godard would play with the word, 'analyse' transmogrifying it into 'anal'?³⁶

³³ Particularly within *Le Gai Savoir*, a great deal of attention is given to revealing book covers, which can be from any discipline from psychology to linguistics, and of course, Chomsky's work is prominently mentioned.

³⁴ Tony Bennett provides an excellent summary of Saussure's ideas in his discussion of Formalism and Marxism. See Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1979), pp. 4-6.

³⁵ Bennett, p. 5.

³⁶ Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 170.

For example, *Ciné-Tracts* 9 and 16 make great use of intertitles as a form of semiological play. Magnification of certain words, the crossing out of others, the accentuation of certain words by underscoring them multiple times, the drawing of frames to accentuate their message – all of this contributes to multiple meanings from the text or disorientating the information being imparted.

Sometimes a simple rearrangement of the words by breaking them up to give different meanings aids in disorientating the spectator. These techniques also provide the implication that there is a cautionary warning for the spectator to be guarded about the messages being given. By complicating the form of the messages, they cannot be passively read. In this respect, they come to represent Brechtian methods of alienation.

On a theoretical level, the *Ciné-Tracts* demonstrate a freshness of something new in film that was only seen in literature at that time. Godard was, and still is, regularly pressed by interviewers and critics alike for his controversial, and often quoted view that he is both a critic who directs film, and a director who films criticism. The form of cultural commentary found in the *Ciné-Tracts* is no exception to this idea that Godard has formulated about his work.

Roud maintains the *Ciné-Tracts* are influenced by the 'Left Bank' methodology in revealing "the whole book-layout aspect" of the work.³⁷ Although Roud's observations of this aspect of the films can be given some validity, the prescription of the project entails the use of silence, leaving textual modifiers as an essential means to communicate and subvert the material of the films. It could also be said that the textual signifiers hearken back to a much earlier time in the cinema, and reveal Godard's utilisation of techniques employed by earlier revolutionary movements. For example, there are a number of comparisons between Godard's textual signifiers and the Futurists' 'trans-sense' language. Moreover, there are also comparisons to be made with Vertov's filmmaking techniques and his use of textual signifiers.³⁸

One particular sequence in the *Ciné-Tracts* cuts from the image of the 'C.R.S. SS' symbol to the word 'Anarchy' spray painted on a wall. This shot then cuts to an image of a cartoonish characterisation of De Gaulle that has been drawn on a building wall where an

³⁷ Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 171.

³⁸ See: Dziga Vertov, 'Film Directors, A Revolution', *Screen*, 12 (1971/2), 52-58.

elderly couple inspect it. The cartoon image of De Gaulle was originally constructed by art school students for posters,³⁹ but the use of the image evolved and began to be used directly on buildings and walls in Paris during the May revolt. The image succeeds in belittling the political power of De Gaulle by reducing him to a cartoon figure, a militarist figure of fun, replete with kepe. However there is also a deeper meaning to this image. Firstly, the image's evolution into graffiti makes it public and available for all to see. Secondly, it represents the transition of an image from its original medium.

In particular, the use of graffiti in public spaces, and the messages it conveys become increasingly important throughout Godard's *Ciné-Tracts*. These public messages can be anything from the popular image during the May revolution that equated the C.R.S. with the SS, to aphorisms inciting revolutionary action. These images provide a different form of reportage of ideas and questions than the traditional media.

However, they are also representative of an inherent change in attitudes to the mediums available. If the state or private means of communicating revolutionary messages are unavailable or untrustworthy in their reporting of ideas or the 'truth', then graffiti is the only vehicle for taking revolutionary messages 'directly' to the public. The disposability of the print medium and the fleetingness of the televisual medium are therefore contested by the 'direct' image of protesting against media and state by using public spaces where the message of the May revolt is unavoidable.

Godard's 1968 work is predominantly concerned with both materialist and formalist inquiries in order to transparently or reflexively reveal the mechanics of both the media and his own filmmaking. This technique or process goes a step further with the *Ciné-Tracts*. It is not the revelation of art, per se, but the revelation of the art of the media.

By creating an individual form of anti-spectacle, Godard compromises the bourgeois message of the majority of media sources. For Godard to create a form of media that is 'straight' documentation or documentary in style would mean complicity with the ideologically dominant media sources. By creating the *Ciné-Tracts*, Godard provides a different ideological code that pejoratively reveals the operation of the mass media, and importantly, *how* it works.

³⁹ Burn Collective. *Paris 1968 - Table of Contents*. Internet WWW page at URL: <<http://burn.ucsd.edu/paristab.htm>> (version current at 7 October 2000).

This is not to say there are any 'man-behind-the-curtain' theories in evidence, but Godard strips the material of anything that might be passively ingested. Using the textual signifiers within the *Ciné-Tracts* reveals two seemingly contradictory ideas. Firstly, there is the question of skeletally revealing the techniques of communication the media use to seamlessly illustrate political perspectives. Secondly, there is a complicity in the use of similar techniques to those employed by the mass media to communicate its alternative political intent, albeit in contradistinction – by revealing the seams. If the *Ciné-Tracts'* methodology is thought of analogously (like the techniques employed in *Le Gai Savoir*), the *Ciné-Tracts* can be interpreted as Godard performing some form of autopsy on the media corpse.

Usually this is achieved by Godard's use of *mise-en-scène*. For example, frequently the spectator is shown what appears to be a portrait of an individual filling the frame. The camera then zooms out to reveal the person as part of several thousand people. Often these images are used to illustrate the cruelty of the C.R.S. and the bourgeois bystanders. *Ciné-Tract 9* reveals a student being beaten in the doorway of a building, later within the *Ciné-Tract*, the image is repeated, but the camera pulls back to reveal the student is being beaten by C.R.S. and bourgeois bystanders. The implications of these types of shot are obvious. The media is frequently not giving the spectator the total picture, and the spectator needs to be re-educated to see correctly.

In contrast to Godard's documenting of the events of May, William Klein's⁴⁰ documentary *Grands soirs et petits matins: Mai 68 au Quartier Latin* [1978] presents the May events in a conventional 'Cinema Verité' construction. Illustrating the employment of different forms of technology to aid the revolutionary cause, Klein shows the use of radio, telephone and public address technologies that helped enable the spread of ideas and communication that protestors relied upon for action. Protestors gather in the street around radios for information about Government decisions, speeches by De Gaulle and news of action taking place elsewhere in France. Organisers gather around tables in the Nanterre buildings, waiting for and making telephone calls, while printing leaflets on the university copier machines. Each of these instruments illustrates the significance of technology in aiding revolutionary goals.

⁴⁰ Like Godard, Klein was a contributor to Marker's *Loin du Viêt Nam* (*Far from Vietnam*) project in 1967.

Similarly, Godard repeatedly uses the image of one of these technological instruments—the megaphone—throughout the *Ciné-Tracts* as a symbol of communication and a technology of the voice.⁴¹ One sequence uses individual shots of a megaphone being aimed outwards toward each corner of the frame. In one shot, the depth of field in the image allows a figure with a megaphone to appear to be shouting directly into the ear of an individual. As a metaphor, the shot depicts a message of the strength of language, and the belief that the message of the revolution will succeed. However, it also reveals that the technology available is not only helping accomplish the aims of the revolution, but is in part responsible for its success up to the present time.

Godard's relationship with the still image appears to be contradictory (not to mention ironic, considering the number of commercial postcards where he is the central image) and illustrates his concerns, not only with the images created within cinema, but all images. In this respect, work such as the *Ciné-Tracts* provides a precursor to the work he has done in the last few years with the *Histoire du Cinéma* [1989-1997] project.⁴²

McLuhan suggests the advent of the photographic image provided the means "to make visual reports without syntax"⁴³ in effect displacing literary forms into headlines with the invention of the telegraph. In Susan Sontag's essays on photography, she illustrates their material nature; they are something to possess compared to the fleetingness of the cinematic experience. Godard's history of using still photographs pre-1968 is relatively extensive. One such usage was in a sequence in *Les Carabiniers* [1963], that satirically examined postcard images the two central characters bring home.

Although the *Ciné-Tracts* use a different model of narrative explanation in contrast to *Les Carabiniers*, the theme developed within the *Ciné-Tracts* answers and complements the critique *Les Carabiniers* established. If the images that 'Ulysee' and 'Michel-Ange' bring back from the war are a ridiculously 'objective' depiction of their adventures, Godard's

⁴¹ The use of the megaphone as an image of verbal communication carries over into Godard's intentions for the *One AM* project. One of the scenes under consideration was having an actor speak Eldridge Cleaver's dialogue into the street using a megaphone.

⁴² Talking to Prairie Miller about History and its significance to his work, Godard says, "Cinema is the only way for me to talk about history. It encompasses the history, at least of this century. Please do not put the mike too close, I'm allergic to it. History has usually started with words, but words are not as close to reality as images and sound together. Cinema, since it can be seen and screened, can make history visible, it reveals the history of this century. If you have an image, then you can ask a question." Godard, quoted in Prairie Miller, 'Forever Mozart', *Downtown Magazine*, Issue 348 (June 29, 1994).

⁴³ McLuhan, p. 190.

Ciné-Tracts attempt to rescue the subjectivity of images, and reappropriate them into a coherence for those who have lived through the struggle they see unfold before them on the screen. However, the exclusivity of using still images in the *Ciné-Tracts* reveals a greater economy of usage. Without the use of sound, the limitations of the films' length and the immediacy involved in their creation and distribution, the films eviscerate conventional narrative structures for a semiotic examination of the media using still images.

Discussing the use of photographs in *Les Carabiniers*, Sontag believes the acquisition of post-cards and photographs is a key representation of the modern in Godard's films, they are "the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood."⁴⁴ However, Sontag also alludes to the loss of power still photographs have when used within the cinematic medium. In essence, a photograph is created to be looked at for a duration of time that is at the will of the viewer. In contrast, the film medium removes this control or power from the spectator.

What the spectator sees is dictated by what the director has chosen to present and the spectator has no control over how long they will be allowed to view the image. By consciously adopting this precept, Godard strips the photographic image of its material 'static' power and uses the photographic images cinematically to break their 'bourgeois' coding. It is by their appropriation into the cinema, that they take on a revolutionary purpose. Textually inscribing their meanings, or using montage to create new equations, the corollary of this concept suggests an ideological equation. Due to its ability to be possessed materially, the still image has a bourgeois functionality within society, in contrast to, or at war with the cinema, which represents a revolutionary medium.

Richard Roud stated that one of the contributions to Godard's changing attitudes to film making in 1968 was, he believed, that Godard was discovering the personal was political. The thought could be extended to mean that Godard is searching for something much more profound – a total personal and political revolution.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 4.

⁴⁵ In response to the question if he was trying to change his audience, Godard responded "Well, I am trying to change the world. Yes." Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Gene Youngblood, 'Jean-Luc Godard: No Difference between Life and Cinema'. In Sterritt. ed., *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*. p. 49.

Ameliorating the anonymity that the prescription of the project entailed by the revealing of signs of authorship in the *Ciné-Tracts*, and Godard's willingness to directly identify himself with revolutionary struggles outside of his work, lends this some form of credibility. In an interview with Anne Wiazemsky in 1987, she suggests that some of Godard's revolutionary work may have stepped outside the parameters of his films.

Was he a terrorist? Oui. [...] Very feebly.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the published criticism of the *Ciné-Tracts* project is usually limited to briefly mentioning their existence. Colin MacCabe's exhaustive look at Godard from 1968 to 1980 *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, mentions the existence of the films once in a brief time capsule of Godard's work⁴⁷, but does not include them in the filmography. Yosefa Loshitzky's book *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci* gives an unusual seven line summary of the films, that appears to relegate them to material "made by Godard at home"⁴⁸. Royal S. Brown indicates the existence of the project in his chronology of Godard's career,⁴⁹ while Tom Milne's *Godard On Godard* does not even include the existence of the project.⁵⁰

The critical work on the *Ciné-Tracts* that does exist is unusually negative. A number of criticisms are directed against the *Ciné-Tracts* from critics such as Richard Roud, who was normally a great supporter of Godard's films in the United States. Incorrectly ascribing the chronology of the *Ciné-Tracts* and *Le Gai Savoir*, Roud believes the *Ciné-Tracts* fall victim to the 'acrostic/aphasiac manner' that was to be evidenced later in *Le Gai Savoir*, a project that had been completed *before* the *Ciné-Tracts*.

It is also significant, and perhaps unfortunate, that some of the more annoying aspects of the tracts one ascribes to Godard can be found in his later films, like *Le Gai Savoir*, where the acrostic/aphasiac manner reaches new—and perhaps irrelevant—heights.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Cinéma Cinémas: Jean-Luc Godard* Ministrie Des Affaires Etrangères, D.G.R.C.S.T.- Direction de l'Action Audiovisuelle Extérieure.CEDFI/MAE. 1984-1989.

⁴⁷ MacCabe, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Loshitzky, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Brown, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Godard, *Godard On Godard*, Tom Milne and Jean Narboni. eds., p. 286.

⁵¹ Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 171.

Or: The same is certainly true of that curious method of underlining single letters in a handwritten title which he developed in the *Ciné-Tracts*. Sometimes the underlined letters spell out a word; at other times they simply form chains of 'u's, 'n's 'i's and 'o's. Even if one does construe the word 'Union,' does it really help? In either case, the technique—or tic—is less than illuminating.⁵²

Roud seems to miss the possibilities of using this technique. By breaking words down into individual letters or phonemes, their spelling can take on otherwise unnoticed meanings. To use Roud's own example, the word 'Union' when broken down into its individual letters can accent possibilities in English, as well as French. U-N-I could merely be a phonetic joke on 'you and I' (that is, It takes you and I to make a union). Roud also misses the historical significance of using this technique to create new meanings or alienate the spectator from the image. One of the features of early Futurism was the use of 'trans-sense' language – a semi-comprehensible collation of nonsense words and neologisms – a play on words, their roots and suffixes.⁵³

Interestingly, Jonathan Rosenbaum contends that the pre 1968 work did more for galvanising the counterculture than either the *Ciné-Tracts* or *Un Film Comme les Autres [1968]*.

No one was quite sure, at least within my purview, but figuring out Godard's position was secondary at the time to learning what was happening. Unlike all the strictly agitational films made by Godard and others after May '68--starting with the *Ciné-Tracts* and *Un Film Comme les Autres*, which failed to galvanise the same energies--*La Chinoise* and *Weekend* were exciting first editions of global newspapers that were suddenly running off the presses and being devoured more for their excitement as reports than for their status as statements or as works of art (which they also were). Whether or not they were masterpieces was strictly secondary to their value as provocations..⁵⁴

⁵² Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 143.

⁵³ Richard Sherwood, 'Documents from *Lef*, *Screen*, 12 (1971/2), 25.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'My Filmgoing in 1968: An Exploration', *That Magic Moment: 1968 and the Cinema* (1998). Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.viennale.or.at/1998/magic/rosenbe.htm>> (version no longer available).

Publication (in German) available from Internet WWW Page, at URL:

<<http://www.viennale.or.at/english/shop/index.html>> (version current at 7 October 2000).

So why are the provocations of the pre-1968 films supposedly more effective? Most critics seem to be intolerant of the textual inscriptions used within Godard's films from this period. Roud seems to openly resent them as being 'irrelevant' in *Le Gai Savoir* and the *Ciné-Tracts*; and although it is not stated, part of Rosenbaum's criticism of *Ciné-Tracts* and *Un Film Comme les Autres* undoubtedly lies with the fact their content is targeted toward French audiences which reduces the accessibility of the films' content. The 'news' elements of both films affected the daily lives of French national audiences during the May events and confine the immediacy of their intent for that audience.

However, the obvious criticism of Godard's work during and after this period of course is Godard's overt change in direction in the representation of his films. An oversimplification, but changing from subtly politicised fiction to openly political non-fiction, and the rejection of his previously popular narrative style not only achieved its goal of alienating the spectator, it managed to alienate the critic as spectator as well.⁵⁵ However, it is these kinds of shifts in spectatorship that Godard is wanting to address with his films throughout 1968, and is representative of what would become of increased concern in Godard's work with the *Ciné-Tracts* and subsequent projects.

Like the earlier work in *Le Gai Savoir*, Godard draws the spectator's attention to the uses of the media image and provides an ideological critique. This new exploration and understanding can, in part, be attributed to the work of Walter Benjamin.⁵⁶ No image is statically fixed within its context or the boundaries of its medium forever. It can easily be manipulated in its meaning and correlated with other images or text for new meanings and messages. In this sense, the images are like a revolving kaleidoscope. The content is the same, but its shifts into other mediums or contexts present new compositions and ever changing data that can be produced in infinite ways.

The *Ciné-Tracts* are therefore significant not just for their alternative documenting of the events of May, but are testimony to Godard's investigation into the possibilities of ideological cinema, and understanding that without fixity, every image becomes a virtual image.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, there is not the scope to elaborate further on this very significant idea within the confines of this paper.

⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-244. Roud has noted that Godard's *Le Gai Savoir* had been influenced by Benjamin's work. In particular, the uncompleted 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' See: Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* p. 142.