

Acropolis Cinema and Los Angeles Filmforum  
present



June 12, 2018 ~ 8:00pm ~ Downtown Independent

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Made following the discovery of amateur footage shot in China in 1966 during the first and most radical stage of the Cultural Revolution, *In the Intense Now* speaks to the fleeting nature of moments of great intensity. Scenes of China are set alongside archival images of the events of 1968 in France, Czechoslovakia, and, to a lesser extent, Brazil. In keeping with the tradition of the film-essay, they serve to investigate how the people who took part in those events continued onward after passions had cooled. The footage, all of it archival, not only reveals the state of mind of those filmed—joy, enchantment, fear, disappointment, dismay—but also sheds light on the relationship between a document and its political context. What can one say of Paris, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, or Beijing by looking at the images of the period? Why did each of these cities produce a specific sort of record?

Narrated in first person, the film reflects on that which is revealed by four sets of images: footage of the French students' uprising in May of 1968; the images captured by amateurs during the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of the same year, when forces led by the Soviet Union put an end to the Prague Spring; shots of the funerals of students, workers, and police officers killed during the events of 1968 in the cities of Paris, Lyon, Prague, and Rio de Janeiro; and the scenes that a tourist—the director's mother—filmed in China in 1966, the year of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. (Icarus) — *Presented as part of the Los Angeles Filmforum series "1968: Visions of Possibilities."*

127 min // Brazil // 2017

## A Strange Autumn João Moreira Salles Discusses *In the Intense Now*

*The following article was originally published by MUBI Notebook, May 16, 2018*

**NOTEBOOK:** Over the last 50 years we've witnessed May '68 through a lauded set of images—one being the graffiti slogan 'under the paving stones – the beach,' which *In the Intense Now* states was actually developed by two advertising agency executives. What motivated you to re-examine the period's familiar images and moments?

**JOÃO MOREIRA SALLES:** There's this sentence at the beginning of the film: "We don't always know what we're filming." It is respectfully borrowed from Chris Marker, who says it in *A Grin Without a Cat* [1977]. Filmmakers like him, or Harun Farocki, never took images at face value. Their work set the path for those who, like me, like the idea of interrogating footage. The notion of investigating what's happening behind the surface, around the edges, and in the background of images appeals to me. If you do it rigorously, familiar and tired images become new again. You begin to see what was there all along, and yet hidden from your eyes. This unveiling of meaning is a procedure that I would apply to any material, be it archival footage of a political event or a banal scene in a home movie. In this sense, 1968 is quite incidental. What drove me to images of the period was the discovery of footage my mother brought back from China in 1966. From there, political and biographical reasons led me quite naturally to May in France, which, in turn, led me to August in Prague.

**NOTEBOOK:** The film contains archival footage from several countries, so it would be great to hear more about the process of compiling all of it, and how such an undertaking informed the structure of the film, including how you found your mother's movies of Beijing 40 years after they were shot.

**SALLES:** I found my mother's movies while editing my previous film, *Santiago* [2007]. At the time, I was looking for home movies of when I was a child, and in a box, full of Super-8 rolls of birthdays,

vacations, and that sort of thing, I saw these two 16mm cans. I knew about the trip but not about the images. They stuck in my mind, and a couple of years later I came across the account my mother wrote about the trip. When these words and images came together, I decided to make the film. The first stage was to read about the period. At the same time my mother was in China, young French Maoists were making pilgrimages to the country, activists who, two years later, would take part in the events of May. So quite naturally I began to read their memoirs. As I read them, I took notes of key moments I wanted to *see*, and that's when the search for images begin. I hired an extraordinary researcher and fed him with lists of things I wanted him to get hold of. When I began the editing, I had about 50% of the images that ended up in the film. The rest was found during the process of piecing the film together. Antonio Venâncio, the researcher, tapped into more than 30 different archives in 10 countries. It's important to note that the film came about in the editing room, not before. There was no script. It's almost as if the film is the residue of the work: as you work, you sweat, and the film is that sweat.

**NOTEBOOK:** You devote some time to two unattributed amateur film reels depicting Prague's occupation in 1968. Their unknown authorship makes them radically different to the various images concerning figureheads like Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Jean-Paul Sartre. By focusing on these two reels and calling other representations into question, you are rightly challenging the pre-established hierarchy of images regarding political events. You could easily have fallen into the trap of devoting too much time to Cohn-Bendit, but you didn't! Could you tell me more about how you decided to balance the film's various topics?

**SALLES:** This relates back to your first question. In democratic societies, political events are public affairs, in the sense that they are *open* to all who want to see them. In these circumstances, it is expected that cameras will seek out the charismatic actors, those who are leading the events and who are not shy in stating their goals. The situation is very different in places where the public sphere is being demolished. It's interesting to think about the relationship between images and the regimes that beget them. To put it another way, how does one film in a democracy, in an authoritarian regime, or in a totalitarian State? We don't have to pay much attention to the archival footage of Paris and Prague to notice a striking difference between them. May in Paris is filmed up close, the camera next to the subjects, usually with a wide lens that doesn't shake. The images of Prague are almost the complete opposite. The events are filmed at a distance by an unstable handheld camera, mounted with a telephoto lens that takes shelter behind a window frame or a curtain. The reason is simple: risk and non-risk; danger in one instance, relative safety in another. In France those who were on the streets can be named, as can those behind the camera. This is just another way of saying that in France events are *public*. In Prague, a city being invaded by armies from four different countries, it is precisely the public sphere that is being destroyed. What follows is a retreat into the private domain—a solitary, anonymous person with a camera in his or her hands, hiding behind a curtain. Much can be said about political context just by scrutinizing elements of any given image: framing, lens, stability, the duration of the take. Again, Chris Marker and Harun Farocki are the two main influences here.

**NOTEBOOK:** You end the film with the Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* [1895] and name the second chapter after it. This is a document which, despite being integral to cinema's birth, invites discussion of workers' rights when shown in this context...

SALLES: There's this extraordinary clip from *The Return to Work at the Wonder Factory* [*La reprise du travail aux Usines Wonder*, Institut des hautes études Cinématographiques Student Collective, 1968] in the middle of the film, which, for me, represents the end of May like no other document of the period. It's June 1968 and the strikes that paralyzed France in the previous weeks are over. A worker is forced to go back to the factory. She cries in desperation. She believed in the promises of May—that life could be lived differently, that work could be organized in another way, and now it's all over and the old life resumes. Work at that factory is dirty, unwholesome, repetitive, mind-numbing. It is the opposite of life. This sequence ends the first chapter of the film, which is titled *Back to the Factory* (the second chapter is titled *Leaving the Factory*). The Lumières' film shows something completely different. Workers are leaving the factory, and where do you go when you leave work? You go to your family, to your friends, to your dog; you go to the bar, you eat, you

dance, you make love. So, when the factory doors open, you go towards life. In this sense, this scene represents the promises of May quite well. Something to be wished for, a world of possibilities. But of course, nothing is as simple as that, for the Lumière brothers owned the factory. They are the ones determining when life happens for their workers. As a friend pointed out, the scene can be seen as being shot by a security camera. This ambiguity makes the sequence all the more interesting. Another reason why *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* ends my film is that it is the first scene in the history of the medium. In the *Intense Now* is a film made with other people's films—this idea of film that begets films—and therefore could not exist if it weren't for the people who took out their cameras and went out to bear witness to what was happening around them. *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory's* appearance is an homage to them and to cinema.

**NOTEBOOK:** Lastly, let's discuss Romain Goupil's *Half a Life*, as you state that it's your favorite film concerning May '68 and show a few clips from it in *In the Intense Now*. Like your film, it practices a critical distance from the events of May '68 and involves a personal perspective. Can you remember how you first saw it?

**SALLES:** It was given to me by my great friend Eduardo Coutinho, perhaps the person who most influenced me as a documentary filmmaker. It was part of a DVD box set published in Portugal containing films about 1968. This was years ago, long before I thought to do a project on 1968. It is a wonderful film about friendship and what time does to us, the melancholy of it. The scenes at the beginning depicting the dawn of the protagonist's political engagement in the mid-60s are pure happiness and mischief. The combination of joy and rebellion, so typical of May '68, is already there. I like the film because it shows the dangers of nostalgia, which I believe is the real trap. Nostalgia is a reactionary passion—it negates the future in the name of an idealized past that it wants to return to. Those who fall into the trap are bound to despair. ♦

### **Coming Soon to Acropolis:**

-*Mrs. Hyde* (dir. Serge Bozon)—June 27, Downtown Independent



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