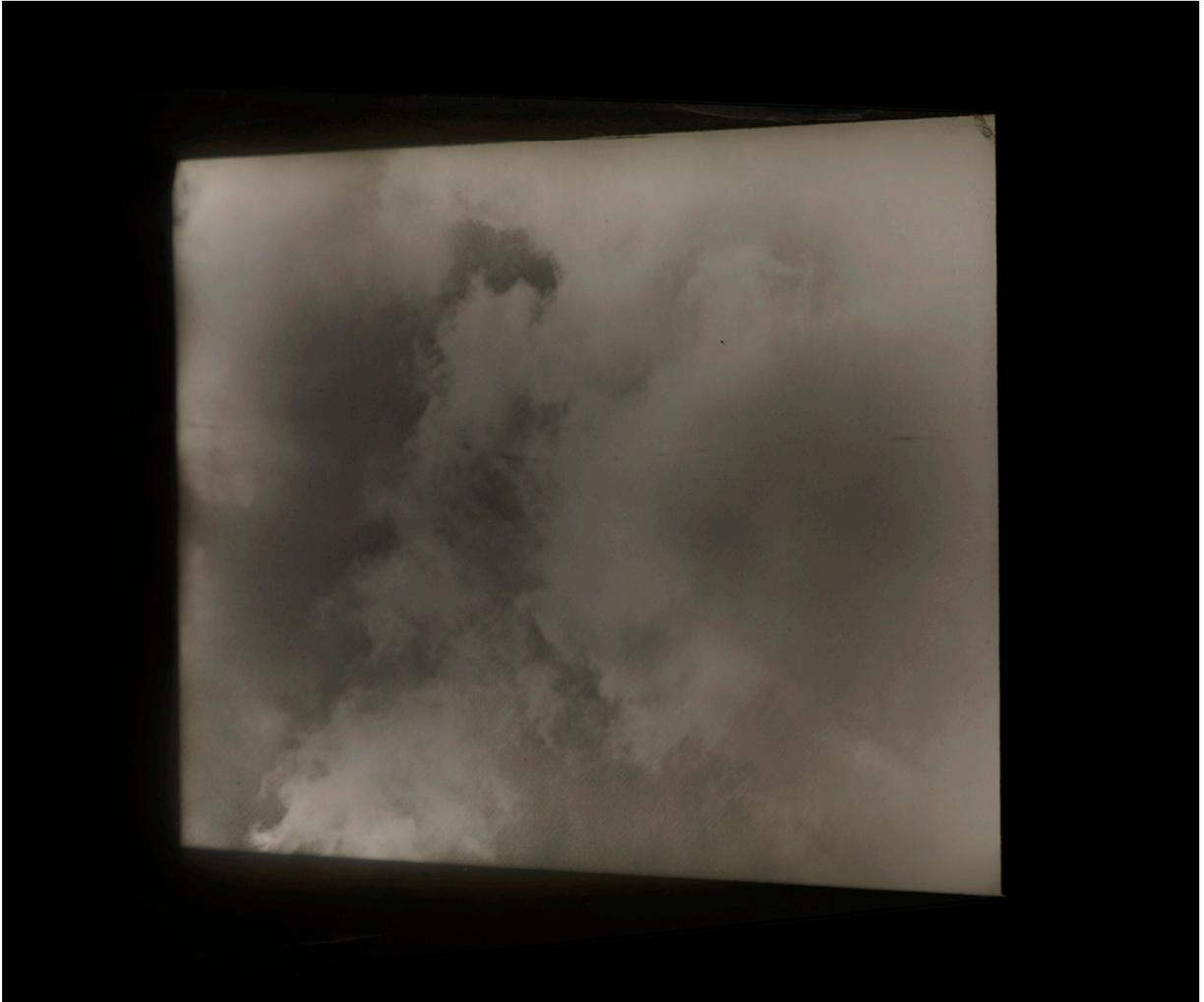




FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS
CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES
ENFANTS D'EMPIRES ET POSTMÉMOIRES EUROPÉENNES

Saturday, 1 December 2018



Cloud game | 2015 | [Carla Cabanas](#) (courtesy of the artist)

SO STILL A RAGE

Paulo de Medeiros

The first chapter of *Now*, a recent book signed by the collective that goes under the name of *The Invisible Committee*, bears a title as significant as it is ominous: “Tomorrow is cancelled”. It starts with a stark series of observations about our current moment:

All the reasons for making a revolution are there. Not one is lacking. The shipwreck of politics, the arrogance of the powerful, the reign of falsehood, the vulgarity of the wealthy, the cataclysms of industry, galloping misery, naked exploitation, ecological apocalypse—we are spared nothing, not even being informed about it all. “Climate: 2016 breaks a heat record,” *Le Monde* announces, the same as almost every year now. All the reasons are there together, but it’s not reasons that make revolutions, it’s bodies. And the bodies are in front of screens. (1)

Clearly, what is being derided here is the alarming entropy and apathy so characteristic of our (post-) consumerist societies, in which the perils of a “society of the spectacle” as Guy Debord warned about, already in 1967, have become not only rampant but close to normative. And yet, being in front of the screen can also signal something very different from the myopic narcissism and apolitical stand *The Invisible Committee* would make us believe is our only positioning in the world. For one, watching the recent documentary by João Moreira Salles, *No Intenso Agora* (In the Intense Now), which was first shown to general acclaim at the 67th Berlin Film Festival on February 2017, is anything but falling into that apathy. Nor is it an exercise in nostalgia. The film, in all of its complexity, is one of the most acute problematizations of the processes of memory and post-memory, at once intensely personal and even intimate, and forcefully collective as well. At stake is not only one individual’s personal reflections on the past, but the call for an entire society to look critically at a defining moment in its political past so as to better understand the chilling winds of the present and the brewing storm that threatens to destroy the future. It is obvious that Moreira Salles had no way of predicting the protests of June 2013 or the stunning results of Brazil’s presidential election on October 2018 as his film not only had been produced before but in effect he had been working on it for a considerable amount of time. Nonetheless, *now*, it has become impossible to understand the import of his film without thinking about those processes and those results. If film always already partakes of the spectral, as Derrida argued, this film, composed entirely of footage discovered in a number of archives in various countries as well as the family’s own, is doubly spectral. But the ghosts of the past, the failed utopias and dashed hopes of an entire generation as the ebullience of May 1968 soon gave rise to the complacency of the complicity between the state and capital, or the annihilation of democracy altogether be it in the then Czechoslovakia or in Brazil, those are not the ones that haunt us the most. The truly terrifying spectres are those possibly to come, and of which the October 2018 elections are but a herald’s trumpet call.

The film has been hailed primarily as an important way to reflect on, and remember, May 1968 in Paris. The title of the print edition of A. O. Scott's review in *The New York Times* (January 31, 2018), for instance, leaves no doubts about this: "France Revisited During a Tumultuous 1968". And even if the online version tries to be more expansive, adding the term 'Beyond' to the 're-visitation of France', the text itself in its single-minded investment in the centrality of France, fails to see anything else as more than a form of distraction: "[The Chinese interludes along with amateur film from Czechoslovakia, punctuate a main narrative devoted to the 'events of May' in France](#)". Brazil is simply elided from the narrative except in the brief mention that the director's family had gone from there into Parisian exile; any consideration of what might have been behind such exile, such as the military dictatorship inaugurated in 1964, is spared the readers. The review is as insignificant as it is banal and if I mention it at all has more to do with the actual questions the film asks, and the problems it exposes, than with the review in itself, since that text is but a symptom of a generalized crisis and lack of clarity that the authors of *Now* so sharply identify. It is as if the A. O. Scott, one of the leading film critics at *The New York Times* had been at pains to make as apolitical a reading of the film as possible, even while seeming to address the political issues commonly associated with '68. Maybe that is what *The Invisible Committee* means when stating that "the bodies are in front of screens"; maybe such reviews of Moreira Salles' film become themselves 'screens' or filters interposed between the intensity of reality whether that lived in the scenes rescued by the film or the one we are confronted with right now.

No Intenso Agora questions memory, be it personal or collective, and does so from the perspective of postmemory. One of the leading issues of the film is the quest to understand how his own mother had been happy and had lived intensely at a given moment of her life, when she had travelled to China in 1966 as part of a varied delegation, to witness the transformations being produced by the Cultural Revolution. Rather than constituting an 'interlude', the focus on that trip and the film footage his mother had brought back with her could be said to even be a central part of the entire film. Yet that too would be imposing a structure that the film refuses. Instead, it is precisely the interweaving of the different elements that forces the reader to consider the connections between the various events, be it the mother's trip to China, the brief moments of solidarity between students and workers in Paris, the crushing of hope in Prag by the soviet tanks, or the situation in Brazil with its systemic inequality predicated on race, gender and class. Moreira

Salles, born in 1962, cannot be considered a witness to those upheavals, whether the protests in Paris or the march of fifty thousand people for the burial of Edson Luís de Sousa, the 18-year old student killed by the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro on 28 March 1968. Significantly, that death is linked to that of other students, but also, with the death of a police officer as Moreira Salles comments on the gulf between the various representations accorded to the different dead. So even though the film itself only uses footage contemporary to the events, the way we watch and can start making sense of the various images and their interrelation is always dependent on the voice of the narrator, João Moreira Salles, himself, so that the perspective invoked is that of postmemory. The relation between both memory and postmemory is always a complex one, often, if not always, implicated in, and deriving from, trauma. The trauma in cause here is multiple though connected and it is both personal as well as collective. On the one hand we have the obvious reflection on the political events registered by the cameras; on the other, the quest for an image of the mother, and especially of the mother's happiness at a given moment of her life that must be understood in terms of loss, given her suicide in 1988. Even if this is never explicit in the film – one of the film's virtues is its avoidance of any form of sentimentality – it has been noted, especially in Brazil. Certainly the article in *Vogue* (3 March 2017), which seized primarily on an opportunity to remember how fashionable Elisa Moreira Salles had been to the very end, can be put aside. But the brief comments of the historian Sandra Starling in *O Tempo* (27 December 2017) point to the importance of the personal trauma at the root of the film. As he considers the film a form of filial homage to the mother, she notes that, [“her son has managed, now, to deal with such an intense pain”](#). But then Moreira Salles had already made that clear towards the conclusion of the film when he states about his mother “She spoke with pleasure, with happiness. With an intensity that time would steal from her. She was happy in China and thus I like to think of her there, when all seemed possible” (1:52).

Both kinds of trauma and both forms of memory and postmemory are political. Even Bruno As-tuto, in the *Vogue* article, ends the fluff about high-society life with a comment on how Elisa Moreira Salles, in spite of all her privilege and wealth, could have sharp critical remarks concerning the ways Brazilian politicians sought to unabashedly profit from their positions in spite of the nation's profound inequality, and ends with the comment that such remarks “could not be more actual”. So that even there we are confronted with the immediacy of the film and the questions it poses, rather than seeing it as merely a form of articulating the past. The film does articulate

the past and provides a strong interpretation, in which we are asked to let go of any pieties concerning May 68, the supposed solidarity between students and workers, or even amongst workers themselves. Moreira Salles's narrative voice as well as the images chosen, and to which the film returns to obsessively, also let viewers get a glimpse at the various gulfs between students and workers, women and men or between different ethnic backgrounds. The film offers a counter-narrative to the accepted, popularized view of May 68. For instance, half way through it we get to see and hear how Jocelyne, a factory worker, leaves no doubts at her sense of betrayal on the part of other, male, workers and the union (1:04). And immediately afterwards we also see how the students are ostensibly and literally pushed aside, having become politically irrelevant (1:05). Javier Porta Fouz, writing in the Argentinian *La Nación* (10 May 2018), offered one of the sharpest readings of the film and its significance both for our understanding of the form of film as well as for its political significance now: [“In the Intense Now is an essay by a Brazilian author on global politics and certain forms of collective and individual memory, which act on the present”](#). One distinguishing element of Porta Fouz's analysis is not only the focus on memory but also on how the film is an extended reflection on the concept of “image”. This is relevant for film studies certainly, but also for memory studies. Indeed, one could say that the rescue of these images for our present – and in the case of the amateur footage from Prague this is a literal recovery as they were forgotten in the archive – in itself is already an enactment of postmemory that will thus also be passed on to the actual generation. This dialogue will take multiple forms and has already started to take shape in the different conversations recorded on the platform “Rebel Streets” (Ruas Rebeldes, <http://www.fluxo.net/ruas-rebeldes/>). The film also brings about a profound charge against nostalgia, whether the nostalgia we might feel towards (the myth) of '68, as well as the nostalgia some of the actors in the events of '68 themselves already then felt about it (1:44). João Moreira Salles is very clear on the dangers of nostalgia as he states in a recent interview with Nathalia Zaccaro (9 November 2017): [“it is a reactionary passion because it denies the future”](#). Porta Fouz also, even if fleetingly, calls attention to the singularity of the sound in this documentary and in special to the voice of the narrator. One can interpret Moreira Salles's intonation in many ways as he reflects on the past, on the various losses, on death, on the images chosen, on how to read them and on how draw on them for now. With this present in mind, that voice to me is above all that of a rage, a necessary rage from which to draw strength to act now rather than be mired in the romance of the past, inescapable though perfectly contained, a rage so still...

(1) The Invisible Committee. *Now*. Transl. Robert Hurley. South Pasadena, CA: semiotext(e), 2017: 7.

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