On the Epistemological Potential of Film: An Inquiry into Apparatus Theory

Filmin Epistemolojik Potansiyeli Üzerine: Aygıt Kuramına Yönelik Bir İnceleme

Ufuk Gürbüzdal, Arş. Gör., Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi,
E-posta: gurbuzdal.ufuk@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9944-0759
Derleme/Compilation

Keywords:

Apparatus Theory,
Cinema, Epistemology,
Ideology, Materialist,
Realism

Abstract

This study questions the cinematic pathways for materialist social inquiry through a theoretical discussion that scrutinizes interconnections among the seventh art, cinematic realism, and ideology. One of the early systematic approaches which comprehensively deals with the discussion of ideology in cinematic practice is the apparatus theory. Broadly speaking, scholars of apparatus theory discuss the structure of cinema in the context of the social reproduction of prevailing ideologies. Although they are mostly pessimistic about the possibility of creating a critical, materialist cinematic approach, they nevertheless offer brilliant cinematic strategies to sabotage prevailing ideological reproduction. This article revisits the most crucial discussions of the apparatus theory with a contemporary look. By doing so, the possibilities of an alternative cinematic practice that may function as a cognitive tool to develop a critical/materialist social inquiry within the neo-liberal capitalist social structure are discussed.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Aygıt Kuramı,
Epistemoloji,
Gerçekçilik, İdeoloji,
Materyalist, Sinema

Öz

Bu çalışma, yedinci sanat, sinemada gerçekçilik ve ideoloji arasındaki karşılıklı bağlantıları irdeleyen teorik bir tartışma yoluyla materyalist sosyal araştırmanın sinematik yollarını sorgulamaktadır. Sinema pratiğinde ideoloji tartışmasını kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alan erken sistematik yaklaşımlardan biri aygıt kuramıdır. Genel olarak, aygıt kuramı araştırmacıları, sinemanın yapısını hâkim ideolojilerin toplumsal yeniden üretimi bağlamında tartışırlar. Eleştirel ve materyalist bir sinema yaklaşımı yaratma olasılığı konusunda çoğunlukla karamsar olsalar da hâkim olan ideolojilerin yeniden üretim sürecini sabote etmek için yaratıcı sinematik stratejiler sunarlar. Bu makale, aygıt kuramının en önemli tartışmalarını güncel bir bakışla yeniden gözden geçirmektedir. Bu yol ile neo-liberal kapitalist toplumsal yapıda eleştirel/materyalist bir sosyal araştırma geliştirmek için bilişsel araçlar olarak işlev görebilecek alternatif bir sinema pratiğininin olanakları tartışılmaktadır.

Introduction

Marxist scholars and film directors have long sought to liberate cinema from being the capitalist industrial practice it is today; one which legitimises prevailing ideological notions and consolidates exploitative power relations through concealing the real nature of the social contradictions which lie at the heart of society (Wayne, 2005: 1-33). As a modern phenomenon, cinema is an aesthetic discipline with which working masses densely interact. Films which are produced under the guidance of the prevalent aesthetic codes and formulas of the capitalist cinema industry situate the spectator in a passive position in which they are considered an ordinary consumer who has to be satisfied by a commodity. Kracauer (1995: 58) underlines that the mass consumption of images, which duplicate the photographed objects in a photographic sense, does not necessarily increase the audience's level of awareness about social affairs in modern societies. In this context, upgrading the passive position of the cinema spectator from being an ordinary consumer of the free market to an active and participatory subject, who is encouraged to employ their cognitive capacity to decode abstract meanings lying behind what is visually projected on cinema screen, is a primary aim which diverse traditions of critical cinema currents commonly concentrate on.

One example is remarkably Eisenstein's (1957; 1977) understanding of montage improved by a dialectical insight. Another is Vertov's (1992) theory of Kino-Eye which identifies film-drama as "the opium of the people" (p. 71). A third would be Brechtian artistic techniques which employ the aesthetics of cinema (Parkan, 2015). Finally shine out tragic fates of Visconti's (1963) film characters who recognize the insignificance of their personal desires in the presence of objective laws of historical transitional periods. Even though all these cinematic approaches are distinct in their answers to the question of how the film technique should be, the common ground that combines them categorically is their desire to transform the viewer to an active subject critically interacting with the pieces of images displayed on the screen.

In a similar vein, with its fertile theoretical framework, the critical tradition of apparatus theory provides us with a conceptual repository for the discussion of cinema theory, the main debate of which is on the captive position of the cinema spectator induced by the impression of reality produced by photographic reproduction. Against the backdrop of May 1968, France hosted the development of a critique of cinema in which technical aspects of cinema are identified as the main object of inquiry. During this era, neo-Marxist theoretical frameworks give shape to the political tones of widely-known French intellectual groups such as *Cahiers du cinéma, Cahiers*'s rival film journal *Cinéthique,* and *Cinéthique*'s ally, literary journal *Tel Quel.* Taking these journals into account, this period is considered the reign of theory; as an insider in the editorial board of *Cahiers* from 1964 to the Mao years, Jean Narboni himself describes the era as a Marxist and hyper-theoretical one (Ganzo, 2012)[1].

[1]Regarding the sudden rise of Cinema Studies in academia throughout the 1970s, Sklar (1988) presents an influential summary. He provides a brief discussion on the positive and negative aspects of the rise of *theoretical* film studies and evaluates its impact on the tenor of the discipline. According to Sklar (1988), the prevailing premise of film theory discourse has been to differentiate film theory from other fields such as History since it has identified itself as a *science* and simultaneously condemned film history for remaining in the realm of *ideology. Cahiers du cinema, Cinéthique, and Tel Quel* have a significant role in cinema studies' prevailing discussions.

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, studies by Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz constituted an intersecting framework for the central paradigm of film theory's hyper-theoretical milieu (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010). Two theoretical veins, Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Dayan, 1974), chiefly organized the main tenor for the *Cahiers*'s school of ideological criticism, which reached its peak during 1969 - 71 and aimed to develop a materialist method for the analysis of cinema. While critics of *Cahiers* maintain for the most part that the ideological aspect of cinema lies in the image of life mechanically reproduced by camera, the authors of *Cinéthique* recognized the camera as an ideological invention in itself and arrived at the conclusion that the task is to destroy all the "apparatuses", e.g., television and cinema, which create "representations of the ruling class" (Grant, 2016: 161).

Despite these conceptual differences, the central aim of apparatus theory as tackled by these journals can be explained as an attempt to diagnose the delusive aspects of cinema technology, which make the audience prey to aesthetic codes of bourgeois representation, while at the same time disclosing the contradictions of the dominant ideology by cultivating specific theories which question the potential relations between the ideological field and cinema (Allen, 2004). Apparatus theory thus problematizes the way in which mechanically reproduced images of life through which the impression of reality is generated by cinema technology, come to common recognition as neutral, objective and real reflections of life.

In the neo-liberal phase of the capitalist mode of production, the image-based cultural products of late capitalism's culture industry have rendered the reproduction of dominant ideological notions an omnipresent process. As the result of recent broadcasting technologies, cultural products produced by monopolized private streaming services encompass almost every single hour of people in their residences, in transport vehicles, in brief, almost all places of daily human practice. Today, millions of people consume hours of their leisure time by just watching TV formats broadcast by private television channels and which propagate competitiveness as natural and vital.

Concomitantly, the spectacle of *the visible* has increasingly reinforced its dominance over space and time. The abstract theoretical knowledge of the social field lying behind the visible surface has been castrated by the reign of the image. By means of new media, the socio-economic dynamics of human relations have receded to a mere symbolic process. Appearing to do has taken the place of doing. Thus, enriching the worldview of working masses with the abstract theoretical knowledge of the social field is today a more crucial and urgent task to systematize spontaneous ideas and class instincts of the people for a potential societal change. In this article, I thus argue that cinema's formal structure may help this enrichment process by providing the spectator with an abstract, theoretical practice. In this context, I discuss whether the theoretical training of the working masses can be supported through films which function as cognitive machines. Even though apparatus theory is not crystallized as a systematic film practice, revisiting its theoretical domains and evaluating its 'hyper-theoretical' territory via a contemporary outlook may bring us closer to exploring alternative ways of creating a critical practice of cinema. Due to the scope and limitations of the study, the ideology discussion will be conducted over

Europe and the films to be given as examples throughout the discussion will be selected from the European cinema.

Main Theoretical Origins of Apparatus Theory

In cinema's mode of operation, along with industry and text, the existence of machines puts a peculiar emphasis on another feature, that is, a film is a technologically mediated signifying practice (Heath, 1981). Aware of this fact, both Baudry (1974/1975) and Metz (1982) examine what is arranged on the cinema screen, in order to elaborate the identification process of spectators in cinema, regarding the spectator's cognitive interaction with the machinery. Despite slight differences in their theoretical frameworks, both critics consider film as a signifying practice, the symbolic meaning of which is constituted by the institutionalized, economically and ideologically determined nature of the machine.

Baudry (1986) is not convinced by the common assertion among traditional film critics that the ideological nature of cinema is only associated with the narrative structure of films, such as the story line. He charges this argument with being too naïve, since according to him, the ideological employment in cinema lies ultimately in the mode of operation of the cinematographic apparatus[2] and the spectator's place before it. The apparatus includes the subject in its totality (Baudry, 1986). In this sense, Baudry regards the essential conditions of the cinematographic apparatus as a fundamental condition of ideological implementation. Inspired by Freudian theories of the unconscious, he observes a bridge between the human psyche and cinema. Then, he arrives at the dictum that the entire institution of cinema is based on a desire immanent to the human psyche that leads the subject towards a regression to an earlier developmental stage (Penley, 1989).

For Baudry, the institution of cinema is "a faultless technological simulacrum of the systems Ucs (unconscious) and Pcs-Cs (preconscious-conscious) and their interrelations" (Penley, 1989: 61). In its nature, the cinematographic apparatus is capable of re-enacting the scene of the unconscious and duplicating its mechanisms via the illusion provided by cinema technology. By negating explicit differences between separate photographs, projection restores the narrative continuity of space at any cost to ensure the constitution of meaning by the spectator (Baudry & Williams, 1974/1975). Similarly, prevailing codes of editing have a determinative role for ideological implementation since editing promises to deliver a final assembly by exposing raw signifying material into a mutation. The mutation generally takes place precisely where the camera is (Baudry & Williams, 1974/1975). Echoing the mirror stage in Lacanian psychology (Spellerberg, 1977), Baudry observes that these specific technological mechanisms secure the spectator's identification with what is screened.

Metz (1982) makes a departure from Baudry in terms of the latter's analogy of

[2]Baudry (1986) distinguishes between the basic cinematographic apparatus (*l'appareil de base*) and apparatus (*le dispositif*). The former concerns the ensemble of the equipment and mandatory operations for the production of a film, e.g., film stock, camera, montage, which also includes apparatus (*le dispositif*) in itself. The latter concerns the socio-psychological and physiological process between film and spectator during projection. Baudry also warns against equalizing the meaning of apparatus to that of camera: "the basic cinematographic apparatus is a long way from being the camera by itself" (Baudry, 1986: 317).

cinema and dream. Metz observes some structural resemblances between cinema and the Lacanian mirror phase (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010). In an attempt to clarify the identification process of the spectator in cinema, Metz extends the predominant use of the term apparatus in technological accounts to a meta-psychological one that also encompasses this use (Heath, 1981). According to Metz (1982), the ideological implementation of the cinematographic apparatus is inextricably intertwined with two phases of identification, namely, primary and secondary; these are respectively identification with the machine and identification with characters. He associates these two identification processes with the analogy of the Lacanian mirror: "I just wished to show that in the end there is no break in continuity between the child's game with the mirror and, at the other extreme, certain localised figures of the cinematic codes" (Metz, 1982: 56).

For Metz (1982), in cinema, the spectator is absorbed into the imaginary through a real perception process. During projection, the cognitive state of the spectator reminds of the sub-motor state of the Lacanian conceptualization of a child in front of the mirror. Since the spectator identifies with the machine, they do not have to turn their head simultaneously with the camera's pan because the latter turns its head in an all seeing capacity (Metz, 1982). Nevertheless, for Metz, it is all clear that cinematic perception partially differs from the mirror stage since the spectator herself is not included in the frame of the cinema screen, whereas the child is included in the frame of the mirror. In any case, the spectator is aware of the fact that it is themself who perceives the imaginary one.

For Baudry (1986), it is in fact quite apparent that cinema is not a dream; however, it reproduces an impression of reality that simulates the condition of the subject in a dream since cinema releases a cinema effect comparable to the impression of reality operative in a dream. He underlines the mediated aspect of cinema to remind the existence of the apparatus which has a central role on the reproduction of the impression of reality: "In dream and hallucination, representations are taken as reality in the absence of perception; in cinema, images are taken for reality but require the mediation of perception" (Baudry, 1986: 316). In general, Baudry's curiosity of Freud's analyses of dreams is ultimately motivated by his central objective to conceptualize the misleading feature of the image of reality produced by the cinematographic apparatus. As Elsaesser and Hagener (2010) put it, Baudry aims to show that dreams may constitute a base for the analysis of cinema because the spectator's grip on reality is lost in the dark movie theatre.

Plato's famous parable of the cave provides Baudry with an analogy between cinematographic apparatus and the cave through which Baudry (1986) discusses the condition of the spectator in the movie theatre. Baudry (1986) underlines the misdirected state of human subjects in the cave which is caused by the reflected quality of the shadows on the cave's wall. In essence, they are nothing more than mere props and simulacra of the reality (Baudry, 1986). Similar to objects in a film studio that are open to be arranged by others, the cave's puppeteers use human and animal figures made of wood to reflect their shadows on the wall. According to Baudry (1986), this process recalls the experience of watching a film in a cinema hall. The interior setting of a movie theatre is similar to the dim space of the cave, and the immobilized positions of the spectators during the

cinematic experience resembles those of the prisoner-spectators of the cave. In the dark movie theatre, as a reflection, what a film projects is the image of an image (of reality)*,* which refers not to the reproduction of life but to the reproduction of the image of the image of life and its existing prevailing representations (Heath, 1981).

The cinema reproduces an impression of reality and thus it reproduces the dominant ideology. This impression of reality is thus only an enunciation of the ambiguous, untheorized and unformulated world of the prevailing ideology; it is reality "as […] experienced when filtered through the ideology" and "not as [it] really [is] but as [it] appears when refracted through the ideology" (Comolli & Narboni, 1971: 30). Within this direction, the cinematic apparatus both simulates the idealist Platonic thesis of the unknowability of the world and also puts an emphasis on the human subject's lack of motor coordination needed to conduct an investigation of reality (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010).

As Grant (2016) also points out, numerous interpretations of apparatus theory based on this main framework drawn by Baudry culminate in the notion that it is not achievable to create a film which produces non-ideological knowledge since the lens is brought into disrepute by bourgeois ideology. According to some proponents of apparatus theory, the task for a film theorist is implied as both exposing the construction of the subject as an illusory process and revealing the ideology from a cognitive standpoint which is outside the ideology in question (Allen, 2004). For instance, Comolli & Narboni (1971) argue that a filmmaker's initial critical task is to reveal cinema's quasi-depiction of reality. Along these lines, the main rationale of cinematic apparatus theory is not to produce a different content within the given structure of cinema. On the contrary, most critics of apparatus theory take upon themselves eradicating cinema itself as a capitalist tool through their criticism.

Considering Technique in the Context of Economic and Ideological Determinants

Associating the nature of cinema technology with the ideological field is an expression of a quest for developing a materialist critique of cinema. Considering the evolution of cinema technology within the scope of the historical invention of optics and perspective draws a leading direction for such an endeavor. Critics who aim to develop a materialist critique of cinema condemn other approaches which classify the history of cinema according to autonomous events and arbitrary choices of ingenious film directors for having an idealist core.

As one of the critics seeking to detect the ideological determinants of cinema technology, Pleynet (1978) identifies the film camera (basic apparatus) as an ideological tool in its nature. He argues that, as a technological tool, the evolution of photographic recording is grounded on, and is conditioned by, the inherited code of the Renaissance perspective advanced by painters of the quattrocento (Pleynet, 1978). They would abide by the injunction that "the perceived size of objects in nature varies proportionally with the square of the distance from the eye" and apply this code in their drawings in order to reflect a three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional canvas, so that they can create a kind of optical illusion (Stam, 1992: 190). For Pleynet (1978), the camera inherits this code to rectify any anomalies in perspective to reproduce the code of specular vision

defined by Renaissance Humanism. According to Pleynet (1978), the camera is thus essentially ideological.

According to Comolli, the evolution of film technology has not an autonomous and spontaneous developmental line as some scholars suggest (Spellerberg, 1977: 292) because the technical ingredients to cinema are overdetermined by economic and ideological conditions (Comolli, 1986). On the other hand, he refuses the argument that cinema is ideological in its own right. Comolli (1986) associates the invention of the cinematic technique with a specific ideological demand of artists throughout centuries. This demand calls for a production of the best imitation of nature through the technique. Comolli (2015: 168) emphasizes the identification of the commerce of images of life "as it is" as a profitable form of spectacle, motivated to realize this specific ideological demand. For this reason, evolution of the cinematic technique cannot simply be explained by a neutral and scientific development process.[3]

In the early years of cinema, the use of medium focal lengths, i.e., f35 and f50, which correspond to the assumed normal vision, is motivated by the epoch's codes of realism (Comolli, 1986). The cinématographe used by the Lumières, extensions of the infantile industrial bourgeoisie, sells its mimetic power to the spectators who wish to see realism (Comolli, 2015: 88-119). Along these lines, according to Comolli, as a signifying practice, the cinema is technically and materially conditioned by economic and ideological fields, and there is a reciprocal relationship between ideological and economic determinants. The precedence of the ideological field over science is quite clear in the following assertion by Comolli: "the restitution of movement and depth are not camera effects, rather, it is the camera itself that is both the effect of, and the solution to, the problem of this restitution" (2015: 214-16). Within this direction, he also associates other growing technical components of cinema and their usage, e.g., synchronous sound and colour, with the demand of the film market to reach a total cinema which aims to arrive at an absolute duplication of life.

The Technique, Perspective, and Identification of the Spectator

Baudry (1974/1975) and Metz (1982) problematize the technique around the question of identification. For Baudry (1974/1975: 45), rather than the spectacle itself, the spectator identifies with what the spectacle stages, the camera "obliges him to see what it sees." Similarly, Metz states that the spectator does not have any option other than identifying with the camera "which has looked before him" (Metz, 1982: 49). In Baudry's consideration, along an evolutionary line beginning from painting and then reaching out to the invention of photography and cinema, the ideological aspect of perspective is defined by the claim that the artificial perspective implies and sets up a perceiving subject who is assumed as the ultimate constitutive agent producing meaning (Spellerberg, 1977).

Contrary to multiple perspectives, Baudry problematizes the visual structure of the Italian Renaissance painting regarding its centred space coinciding with the eye level to call the centre as subject (Baudry & Williams, 1974/1975: 41). He also tackles the

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[3]Comolli's article is written as a response to the arguments by Lebel (1971) who argues for a scientific core of cinema technology. According to Lebel (1971), the camera is a neutral tool which expresses the interests of the subject sitting behind it.

Western easel painting's elaboration of a total vision which corresponds to "the idealist conception of the fullness and homogeneity of being" and the "tangible representation of metaphysics" that contribute to the ideological function of art (Baudry & Williams, 1974/1975: 42). In this sense, for Baudry, the usage of diverse angles or different lengths of camera lenses have nothing to do with deviating from the norm because in any case the norm is related to ideology inherent in the perspective. Metz (1982: 49) is also suspicious of the monocular perspective and vanishing point in cinema. In conjunction with Baudry's previous arguments on the cinematic frame, he states:

> Analyses of *quattrocento* painting or of the cinema itself which insist on the role of monocular perspective (hence of the *camera)* and the 'vanishing point' that inscribes an empty emplacement for the spectator-subject, an all-powerful position which is that of God himself, or more broadly of some ultimate signified.

In this peculiar process of perception, echoing the process of being a subject through interpellation as defined by Althusser (2008), the spectator assumes that she/he freely and willingly chooses what she/he perceives and identifies with. But in fact, the world that is perceived by the spectator and the point of view upon that world, which is the constraint of a central location reserved for God or another substitute, are constituted by the apparatus as an instrument of ideology (Allen, 2004). The apparatus hails the individual as a subject in a continual re-totalization of the imaginary (Heath, 1981). In order to maintain subject-as-spectator's identification with what is screened, the apparatus should operate in a hidden way:

> [. . .] *this substitution is only possible on the condition that the instrumentation itself be hidden [. . .] Both specular tranquillity [sic] and the assurance of one's own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism that is of the inscription of the film* (Baudry & Williams, 1974-1975: 46).

Overall, the two primary theses in these arguments are that the established Western representational codes have a determinative role on the improvement of cinema technology and that the camera effect creates a sense of idealist wholeness which the spectator identifies with. The way of seeing in cinema is not natural or neutral because the cinema reproduces the points of view of prevailing classes through specific representational systems (Rodowick, 1988). To guarantee this reproduction process, as Rodowick (1988: 91) explains, the apparatus represses any difference in projection with the specific intention to establish meaning in "linearity", "continuity" and "movement". This being the case, the question of whether cinema can be used to conduct a scientific inquiry by being dissociated from a tool of ideological reproduction is discussed in the context of Althusser's critique of empiricism. Apparatus theory takes films and cinema in its entirety as an epistemological problematic. As Elsaesser (2011: 40) puts it, the proposition that the apparatus creates an illusion through the impression of reality encapsulates in itself the presumption that a non-illusory reality exists.

Althusser's Critique of Empiricism and the Epistemological Possibility of Cinema

Several critics following the main theoretical framework of apparatus theory look for alternative ways of creating the "epistemological break", as conceptualized by Althusser, within semiotic, aesthetic and formal structures (Rodowick, 1988: 70-71). The argument that the camera is tainted by bourgeois ideology in its nature makes it difficult to answer the question of how films may be freed from the ideological field. As it is widely recognized, Althusser's critique of empiricism grounds on his epistemological debate which is built on a dichotomy between ideology and science (Althusser, 2001: 11). To Althusser, moreover, art as a form of perception is inherently related to the process of ideological cognizance. Althusser (2001: 222) argues:

> "what art makes us *see*, and therefore gives to us in the form of '*seeing* ', '*perceiving* ' and '*feeling*' [. . .] is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes.*"

Corresponding to this notion, some proponents of apparatus theory assert that the cinema is an ideological apparatus which does not allow us to know but to see and feel. Within this framework, the possibility of a critical cinematic practice producing a materialist inquiry is seen as impossible. This is an observation especially common among some critics writing in *Cahiers.* Thus, the only progressive possibility in cinematic practice is recognized by some scholars as revealing the ideological nature of cinema in films. For example, Klinger's (1984: 32) neo-Marxist taxonomy of films, which classifies films according to their deviation from conventions of classic texts, looks for alternative texts that would be an "auto-critique of the ideology in which it is held." Similarly, Comolli & Narboni (1971), who stress that theoretical practice cannot be reached through an aesthetic practice, make a film classification which evaluates the progressiveness of several texts in terms of their success in unmasking ideology.

Besides, critics in *Cinéthique* in general argue that making visible material aspects of cinema in a self-reflexive approach may eliminate the ideological function of the cinematographic apparatus by creating a leak in the impression of reality (Emmelhainz, 2019: 61). *Cinéthique* writers advocate that a critical, materialist film practice can be realized by disclosing the economically and ideologically determined codes of bourgeois representation (Grant, 2016: 155). This is what they see valuable in Baudry's insights and in apparatus theory more broadly. For example, the *Cinéthique* tradition observes a revolutionary potential in a new kind of montage which spoils the narrative continuity of decoupage (Grant, 2016: 157). The suggestion that cinema technology creates an idealist vision in its own right implies that a revolutionary cinematic practice would only be established by a deconstructive materialist method aiming to destroy the given idealist codes of representation (Rodowick, 1988: 73-80). According to *Cinéthique,* if one is informed about economic and ideological determinants on visual representation, she/he may create a critical counter-practice by formal deconstruction.

In fact, either the above mentioned taxonomies of progressive text or *Cinéthique*'s

proposition of deconstructive cinema practice, which notably aims to create an abstract conception of the world through formal interferences, does not completely align with the key concepts of the Althusserian paradigm. As Rodowick (1988: 81-82) discusses, in Althusser's thought: (i) except for Althusser's brief mention on an "authentic art," art is conceptualized as a general structure which is "independent of particular texts"; and (ii) there is not an established distinction between normative/realist and avant-garde/modernist texts in terms of formal regimes of different texts. Moreover, even though films may create a certain kind of knowledge of the world, it is open for discussion to what extent this specific type of knowledge leads to what Althusser defines theoretical practice (Rodowick, 1988: 101). Given these points, even though circles of *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* are theoretically inspired by the Althusserian current, they occasionally depart from, or challenge, central Althusserian concepts.

Spellerberg (1977) criticizes idealist positions that conceive ideology as a total aim which completely determines the technique. Even though it is done with materialist motivations, construing ideology as an ultimate, all-encompassing decisive power which determines the evolution of cinema technology has an essentialist core that leads to idealism. Moreover, if cinema is conditioned by specific determinants of the ideological field, it is also subject to contradictions existing in the field of ideology (Spellerberg, 1977). In this context, although being aware of the ideological determinants of cinema technology is a precondition of thinking an alternative non-idealist cinematic practice, considering ideology from an essentialist point of view builds walls of a prison, bricks of which are laid together by an omnipresent ideology in order to prevent any kind of artistic action by the materialist artist and thinker.

Herein, Godard's response to the Niépce-Hegel relationship provides us with an alternative area of action by reminding us the reciprocal relation between economic and ideological fields. According to Godard (1969), what matters is not the Niépce-Hegel relationship but the Niépce-Rotschild relationship. In order to underline existence of a tangible social agent which encourages an idealist practice of cinema, Godard mentions Rotschild's name as an ordinary representative of the bourgeoisie as a whole social class. For him, bourgeois image-makers invest in the images of the capitalist world and they present these images as a real, objective and ultimate reflection of the world's reality. If they were to do the opposite, it would come out that the image of capitalist society and capitalist society itself, have temporary, changeable and subjective aspects (Macbean, 1970/1971: 16).

The ideological aspect of bourgeois representations is that the bourgeoisie expresses its own reality as the ultimate reality of the world. If the bourgeoisie is investing in its own representation through dominant codes of representation, there should be also possibilities to produce an artistic practice which intentionally violates those codes to reveal the contradictory and exploitative nature of capitalist society. Therefore, instead of putting cinematic technique into an essential and inescapable association with idealism, a critical materialist cinematic practice, developed by grasping cinematic technology on a materialist plane, can be a deconstructive tool. As Godard puts it: "In a word, the bourgeoisie creates a world in its image" and the task is "destroying that image!" (*British*

Sounds, Godard, 1970). The strategies of the counter cinema, which can be defined as cinematic rupture techniques such as narrative intransitivity and estrangement, are the approaches mobilized for this specific task (Akcaalan & Özçınar, 2021; İpek, 2017; Wollen, 1972).

As Rodowick (1988: 104) points out, Pleynet warns that such an artistic practice which aims to benefit from some deconstructive formal techniques "as an end in itself" may be paradoxically eventuated in an avant-garde empiricism. On the other hand, regardless of whether it coincides with the definition of theoretical practice conceptualized by Althusser, it can be argued that films may bring materialist inquiry of social contradictions, namely Marxism, to the consciousness of the spectator by means of some artistic techniques, through a cognitive process. In the end, for Althusser (2001: 13) "to arrive at proletarian class positions, the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated" and this education process may only be realized by a real meeting of the class with the theory. And if the theory is an abstract thought process that takes place through concepts, films may give the spectator the key concepts with which carry them to a theoretical level.

Considerations on a Materialist Practice of Cinema and Cinematic Practices that may Inspire a Materialist Approach

Theoretical Contextualization of the Visible

Detecting that economic motivations have a crucial impact on the development of cinema along with the ideological determinants, Comolli (2015) shows that cinema and cinematic representations today are almost entirely shaped by the interests of the market. More importantly, these interests only aim to be more visible in the age of global consumerism, rather than channelling people towards a process of meaningfully thinking (Brown, 2015). In short, the spectacle on screen meets with the unbearable lightness of not thinking. As Comolli (2015: 71) puts it, blindness is situated at the heart of sight, and deafness is located at the heart of hearing. With its newest technologies like 3D and 4K, the cinematic practice of late capitalism is one that considers being more visible and having higher resolution as an ultimate motivation in its own right to reach a total representation of life in the form of an image.

Each technological breakthrough in the technology of cinema gives way to new films which promise the spectator a higher quality of images. The means of cinematic lure always aim to reach a higher duplication of life via recent technological developments. Within this context, one of the most crucial tasks of a materialist film practice developed by a critical point of view against the bourgeois representations of spectacle would be understanding and insistently expressing the fact stated by Comolli (2015: 134) that "the world is not totally visible, seeing is beyond the frame." Seeing the images of the world in higher resolutions does not equal knowing the world. Thus, an alternative materialist cinema approach cannot be simply built on a conventional understanding of cinema even if it shouts the slogan of "long live class solidarity!" as long as the prevalent codes of bourgeois visual representation and the linear narrative structure based on continuity are

unchallenged.

In 1944, within German airspace, an American reconnaissance aircraft took an aerial photograph of an industrial chemical plant named IG Farben. It was only realized after many years during an archival analysis conducted by CIA that the Auschwitz concentration camp was unintentionally covered by the photograph taken by the aircraft (*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, Farocki, 1988). As can be deduced from this example, seeing is not knowing or seeing is not understanding the whole context of what is seen. To transform the process of seeing into a cognitive process of knowledge production, several formal aesthetic interferences to a given image are needed. For instance, in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (Farocki, 1988), Farocki uses words and commentaries on some given photographs with a critical outlook to decode their ideologically encoded structure.

An image is already an entity fabricated by the discourses of some specific institutional power relations. Correspondingly, in the interpretation process of an image, the social context through which the image is discussed has a real importance (Cox, 2014). The spectator has to be equipped with the conceptual tools necessary to critically decode what is produced by the machine in the form of an image. In a film, a realist representation of a discriminated LGBTI+ character, a woman confronting a sexist manner, or the exploitation of a proletarian, does not provide the spectator with the necessary knowledge of society which materially explain the reasons for discrimination and exploitation. The cinema of spectacle escapes from revealing materialist knowledge of social contradictions when it depicts inequalities in its narrative structure. For example, one of the recent films distributed by Netflix*, The Platform* (Gaztelu-Urrutia, 2019)*,* does not express appropriation of surplus-value as the main source of economic wealth and as main reason of social inequality, whereas it visually represents inequality in a symbolic way (Önal, 2020). Unequal social conditions are represented in the film as if they are divinely ordained, stable and unchangeable situations independent of time and space.

At this point, Comolli's (2015: 61) remark that "if the cinema shows, it also hides" should be remembered. In other words, the frame can hide by showing (Comolli, 2015: 134). In this context, *realist* representations of exploited and discriminated people on screen do not significantly contribute to spectators' understanding of the world they inhabit. Besides, the spectators are already witnessing these social issues in their daily practices. Thus, what would be significant through the artistic technique is providing the spectator with the materialist knowledge which gives him/her the concrete reasons of his/her discrimination and exploitation.

Disruption of the Spectator's Identification Process by Artistic Techniques

As Vertov has done in his famous *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), projecting cinema technology and process of film production on screen in order to demystify cinematic production is a beneficial artistic strategy which a materialist cinema practice may be grounded upon. Sharing a similar motivation with Vertov, Godard also benefits from variations of this strategy in his *Tout va Bien* (1972)*.* However, as Spellerberg (1977) puts it, this strategy is open to exploitation as an instrument to re-invest the claim of truth on screen. For example, cinéma-vérité may be recognized as a real paradox because the

spectator is expected to believe that what is screened is truth (Comolli, 2015: 72). Thus, even though crippling cinematic fascination by revealing the process of film production on screen is an essential strategy, it is not enough in itself and carries the danger of the re-investment of claims of truth.

Alongside Vertovian self-reflexivity, the aesthetic approach of Brecht, whose aim is to "unmask the prevailing view of those who are in power" and to "overcome socialist realism in transforming it formally" (Emmelhainz, 2019: 56-58) also provides pursuers of a critical materialist cinema practice with an advanced approach. Similar to the theoretical framework of apparatus theory, in the Brechtian approach, mechanical reproduction of reality as we experience through our senses is considered as inadequate to explain the dynamics of the social field because according to Brecht, in the reified world of advanced capitalism, mere representations of life are not able to convey the material conditions of social reality (Giles & Kuhn, 2003). Accordingly, through his concept of the de-familiarization effect ("verfremdungseffekt" in German), Brecht seeks to reveal the mysterious character of the commodity-form as conceptualized by Marx. On the other hand, Comolli (2015) is suspicious of the Brechtian approach because "the suspension of illusion is the desire or the promise of the illusion still to come" (Comolli, 2015: 72). Nevertheless, benefiting from some Brechtian strategies would be inevitable to create a critical cinema practice, such as looking directly into the camera which equally means to look at the audience to spoil the identification process.

A specific sequence in Kramer's *Ice* (1970) may be a sample that conveys a materialist inquiry to the audience via filmic disruptions that destroy the illusion induced by cinema technology. The sequence in *Ice* (Kramer, 1970) begins with a written declaration on screen that "false consciousness is people not understanding their actual role in society or their un-freedom." During further shots, the voice-over states that "here are some examples of ruling class ideology" and then it gives some examples one by one, such as: "your suffering and your patience and your pain is rewarded fully in God's goodness" (*Ice*, Kramer, 1970). While these examples are told by the voice-over, random images of ordinary people are shown in a way which perpetually distract the spectator's identification with what is screened by virtue of abrupt and sudden empty frames that interrupt narrative linear continuity. In any case, through its content-related components and formal structure, *Ice* reveals the circuit of prevailing ideological thoughts and weakens them by indicating their ideological nature.

Films by Harun Farocki can be shown as another illustrative set of samples which are not simply confined to given images of mechanical reproduction but reconsider them in a new social context through some aesthetic techniques. As a director, Farocki does not aim to implant his moral judgements to the spectator via the institution of cinema. Instead, by following a materialist impulse, he tries to reveal buried meanings lying inside of archival and institutional images, e.g., advertisements, military footage. In this framework, he predominantly refuses to work with actors and with images made by the director himself, as was the case with the Vertovian project (Ehmann & Eshun, 2009). In his *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (Farocki, 1988) he tries to deactivate the camera's function as an apparatus by deconstructing the institutionalized context of

archival images of Auschwitz. By doing so, he intends to free these images from the ideologically aimed use of the Nazis.

Moreover, when Farocki includes actors in his films, he does it to reveal the economic and material base of the capitalist system. In his agitprop film named *Inextinguishable Fire* (Farocki, 1969)*,* while forcing the spectator to think about the use of napalm bomb by the US army in Vietnam, the actor directly looks at the camera in a way that hampers the identification of the spectator and asks: "How can we show you napalm in action?" Afterwards, the actor simply refuses to show the spectator the pictures of napalm burns since he is aware that if he does the spectator will close his/her eyes: "First you will close your eyes to the pictures, then you will close your eyes [. . .] to the facts [. . .] to the entire context" (Farocki, 1969). In the following sequences, the voice-over gives some information about the bomb: "When napalm is burning, it is too late to extinguish it. Napalm has to be protested where it is produced, in factories." (Farocki, 1969). Herein, as Voltzenlogel (2014) states, Farocki exposes the alienation of workers who fail to recognize the final form of their work and usage of commodities produced by their labour in the capitalist mode of production. Though the film includes definite propagandist motivations, as Diederichsen (2009) argues, *Inextinguishable Fire* (Farocki, 1969) proposes to fight the napalm bomb at its place of production before the bomb can ever be dropped in Vietnam by recognizing the use of the bomb as a material phenomenon.

The Question of Alternative Film Exhibition Spaces

As a consequence of the development of diverse technological tools such as televisions, smart-phones and tablets, spatio-temporal aspects of the film consumption process have drastically altered. As Elsaesser (2011) argues, this phenomenon carries some dimensions of Baudry's theoretical framework towards a paradox. The capitalist cultural industry in the neo-liberal phase encompasses almost all of people's space and time. The interaction of the working masses with films is now a perpetual process. Leisure time has been occupied by emerging video-on-demand services. Even in transport vehicles during commutes, the workers continue to consume films from the smart-phones in their pockets. In this sense, it can be asserted that ideological reproduction continues through developing video technologies. The monopolization of film distribution is no longer restricted to cinema halls but it has entered into homes via new media.

Besides, in the contemporary world, since the simple visual representation regime of the cinema of spectacle encourages the tendency of the human subject of neo-liberal capitalism not-to-think, as Brown (2015: 4) infers from analysis of Comolli, "rather than being an illusion of which we are not aware [. . .] we actively and knowingly seek to hide within the cave." The cultural products of bourgeois representation which accustom the audience not-to-think and not-to-question the knowledge existing beyond the cinematic frame are almost everywhere. Today, an average cinema-goer goes to the movie theatre to be fascinated by the cinema-spectacle which aims to reach a total duplication of life. Thus, a quest for a materialist cinema practice has to find new places of film screening rather than the cinema halls of the market in which the spectator is considered as a mere customer of the spectacle. Public places and gates of workplaces may be considered as new alternatives for such a quest.

A project by Farocki in 1968 which aims to convert fictional and documentary film into a learning machine provides us an alternative screening practice which turns the cinema into a service for the public (Holert, 2009). The theoretical framework behind Farocki's idea to produce educational films is mainly based on the analysis of the function of film under capitalist conditions. First, within the context of scientific agitation, film-as-slogan is supposed to be replaced with the film under the rational control of a political concept (Holert, 2009). Through this approach which entirely opens the position of the author, the apparatus-related, institutional and architectural location of film for debate, Bitomsky proposes that films should be discovered as a use-value, as a means of production of consciousness (Holert, 2009). For Bitomsky, cameras and projections can be placed in public places such as factory gates or campuses similar to 1920's kolkhozes, factories or schools in the Soviet practice of cinema, instead of commercial cinema halls (Holert, 2009). Creating a similar practice of exhibition may both change the spectator's position from being a consumer to an active participant of screening practice and lead to fruitful theoretical discussions among people after the exhibition process.

Conclusion

This article argued that an alternative cinema practice developed by the guidance of some specific approaches borrowed from the theoretical universe of apparatus theory would encourage the people's affinity with materialist social inquiry in the neo-liberal capitalist structure. Throughout the article, the historical development of apparatus theory was discussed by revisiting the theory's key concepts, and thereupon the aesthetic possibilities of a theoretical practice that can be realized through films were examined. Since film consumption is a key process of the film experience alongside production of a text, alternative film exhibition spaces were also proposed.

Almost all contemporary films are produced merely as commodities of the spectacle; as an industrial practice, cinema is formatted by the economic and ideological interests of the market. Within such a conjuncture, the proposition that the high-resolution image obtained through advanced technologies enhances the impression of reality should be rejected. On the contrary, these technologies, used as instruments in the hands of capitalists, conceal the materialist social inquiry of social conflicts through the magical world of the cinematic spectacle. On the other hand, in order to create a materialist cinematic practice that will lead the audience, who is a social subject, to a systematic theoretical analysis, there are alternative aesthetic paths that may be reached under the guidance of the film comprehension of apparatus theory. The sabotage of classical linear narratives and narrative continuity through editing, the inclusion of film production stages in the frame, and the other relevant aesthetic formulas discussed in this article are examples of these alternative paths. On the other hand, new film practices to be constituted in the light of this specific theory should courageously generate and test new aesthetic techniques and not limit themselves to old formulas.

Given Althusser's approach to the concept of art, the proposal to create an alternative film practice that leads to a materialist inquiry guided by the Althusserian apparatus theory may seem like a theoretical impasse. Althusser builds his critique of

art on the critique of empiricism, thus, within the scope of Althusserian Marxism, an attempt to create an alternative revolutionary artistic practice always risks degradation to an avant-garde empiricism. Therefore, it is a matter of debate to what extent a theoretical activity realized through films coincides with the theoretical practice defined by Althusser. Yet there is no valid reason for this discussion to restrain the quest for films that will lead the audience to a systematic theoretical activity. It is needed to consider the theoretical legacy of apparatus theory not as a burden, but as the productive pillar of our research to reach a revolutionary cinema practice.

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