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-Invited Paper-

Dialectical Images: Two Films from Chile, ...A Valparaíso (Joris Ivens, 1963) and The Settlers (Felipe Gálvez Haberle, 2023)[1]

Michael Wayne*

The title of my talk is Dialectical Images. First, I'm going to talk about what that means and why it's important. And then I'm going to illustrate those issues in relation to two films from Chile: ...A Valparaíso (1963) by Joris Ivens and The Settlers (Los Colonos) by Felipe Gálvez Haberle in 2023 made 60 years later. And I'm told that both these films are on Turkish MUBI, so I'm hoping many of you will have seen them.

OK, so the aims of the talk are, firstly, to recover dialectical thought as a weapon against the breakdown in social and historical thinking which results from reification, a term I will come back to explain. I want to make the case that dialectical images help nourish and revivify dialectical thought and vice versa the other way, dialectical thought helps nourish dialectical images. I'm going to talk a little bit about what dialectical images look like, what their strategies are and how dialectical images emerged out of political modernism in the first decades of the 20th century. I want to show that dialectical images not in opposition to narrative storytelling. Because that's one of the legacies of political modernism, the sense that dialectical images are anti-narrative. And I want to say that that's not necessarily the case. And as I said, I'm going to look at two films to help us think about these issues.

Reification means literally turning social relationships into things.

[1] This article is a revised version of the keynote speech delivered by Prof. Dr. Michael Wayne, moderated by Ertan Tunç, at the 7th International Cinema and Philosophy Symposium, organized by SineFilozofi Journal and the Cinema and Philosophy Association, held at CerModern in Ankara on December 7-8, 2024.

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* Prof., Brunel University, Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi, London
E-mail: michael.wayne@brunel.ac.uk
ORCID : 0000-0002-1285-5976
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'A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood…it is, in reality…abounding in metaphysical subtleties…A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour…a social relation, existing not between themselves, but the products of their labour…social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.'

This passage, which I'm sure you're probably familiar with, is from Karl Marx's Capital Volume 1. The word "reification" is not from Marx, it comes from (Max) Weber and (Georg) Lukács, but it's rooted in commodity fetishism, and in this section, Marx is talking about commodity fetishism. And interestingly, he makes sight, the visual sense a problem, an issue. Because at first sight the commodity appears easily comprehensible, easily apprehended andeasily known, but in fact it is, as he puts it, abounding in metaphysical subtleties. It is, in fact, a mysterious thing, because in the commodity, the social relationships out of which the commodity emerges have disappeared. They've been bracketed off. They've been eclipsed. And as a result, the social world appears to be made-up of things that are moving according to their own laws, their own dynamics of pure objectivity. And that's why Marx uses the metaphor of a stamp. The social character of our productive output, you know, our capacities, have an objective character stamped upon them. This objectivity is 'stamped' upon activities because it has an oumachine like purely objective quality where agency has disappeared, so it is a false objectivity to that extent. Against this 'pure' objectivity without agency we also have a pure agency without any objective conditions or context. Such antinomies are typical under capitalism and there are others: For example, a reified capitalist social order is changing constantly, but it's unchanging. It's fragmented, but it's also a world of totalizing power that touches every aspect of our lives. Confronted with this, the visual sense or images might seem like an odd ally because here is Marx saying that the visual is a limited form of knowledge, and if you look at French philosophy, there is an epistemic horror of the visual image. Think of (Jacques) Lacan's mirror stage in the imaginary or (Michel) Foucault's panopticon or Guy Debord's society of the spectacle. In all these cases, the image is the enemy. It is the place where people become oppressed, manipulated, it is the site of self delusion. So how can images be something else? How can they be liberatory? How can they be cognitively rewarding? This is the question that we need to address, and I want to kind of make an argument about. It's not a new argument, but it's worth having again.

There are some sources for dialectical thought. Obviously, Darwinian materialism is one source. Marx wanted to dedicate (his book) *Capital* to Charles Darwin. Darwin declined the offer. But Darwin's idea that material nature is a place of conflict and struggle, an open-ended non-teleological process where there is no divine presence is important for dialectical thinking Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher. was the subject of Marx's doctoral thesis. Epicurus looked to nature as a site for stimulating dialectical thought. He observed how nature is transforming all the time, and he was particularly interested in death and decomposition because that showed that nature never reduced to zero, but was always transforming itself, transforming the forms, if you like. And death and decomposition were important motifs in the work of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. They used death and decay as a way of puncturing the self-confidence of the commodity world in their own time, that sense of the commodity being an eternally youthful and permanent phenomena.

Then there is (Immanuel) Kant. Kant began the development of the idea that the subject is not just a passive receiver of external stimuli but actively works on sense perception synthesising that material in time and space and drawing it into or under concepts. This was the kind of transcendental machinery of consciousness that he was developing in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But sense perception was a problem for Kant, because it is rooted in time and space and doesn't seem to offer the universality that he was looking for in for cognitive thought.

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So, he's subordinated sense perception under this ahistorical conceptual machinery of this transcendental consciousness. What's important about Kant is that you can't have dialectical images unless you've got a subject that is doing some work on the sense-perception material and connecting that to concepts of cognition. His model begins to develop that. Hegel then takes that further. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Geist), he writes about 'sense certainty' being an inadequate form of truth that has to be situated within enlarged contexts, in other words, the idea of mediation, that you mediate sense perception into larger contexts. And you can see how that idea would be a weapon against the decontextualizing process of commodification or reification. And then Marx, if you like historicises and materialises this idea of mediation further via social-class relations He notes that for Hegel the main point is that the object of consciousness is nothing else but self-consciousness, that the object is only objectified self-consciousness. So, Hegel doesn't actually escape the limits of an idealist current.

So how do we link Marx who historicises and materialises this emerging dialectical thinking to political modernism in the 20th century? We cannot do it by looking at Marx's preferences for the 19th century novel. He was a big fan of Charles Dickens. The link between Marx and political modernism is there in Marx's 6th Thesis on Feuerbach where he says that the human essence is not an abstraction in each individual but is in the *ensemble of social relationships*. This idea of the ensemble of social relationships is what links Marx to, if you like, a constructivist philosophy that really emerges in the 20th century and becomes the cornerstone really of modernism and political modernism, because this is a philosophy that understands that the world is a construct. It is made. It can be re made and unmade. But not only the world is a construct, but how we comprehend and apprehend the world, how we make the world intelligible to us, is also a construct, and it can be made and remade in different ways. There are choices and selections to be had which have political significance. This all flows into the political modernism of the 20th century.

So, we can start with Kuleshov in Russia with his experiments in the ensemble of film relations. He starts off with his famous experiment where he notes that the meaning of a shot of what an actor's face might mean, for example, whether it means desire or hunger, depends on the image that it is cut with. So here we see very clearly something specific about the semantic formal structure of the aesthetic, *it can create its own context of meaning*. And this is very important because if you can create your own context of meaning, you can change the meanings that are in circulation outside that context, in the world beyond the aesthetic artifact, you can subvert them. You can begin to do some dialectical work on them.

For Eisenstein, the dialectical image is about the organisation of the language of film into tensions and conflicts. The semantic-formal orchestration of the elements of film language produce what he called "a montage of attractions". These are shocking stimuli that impact on one's cognitive or emotional understandings as in the famous Odessa Steps sequences in *Battleship Potempkin,* where from sensuous shocks are generated non-sensuous moral and political ideas about the meaning of Czarism in Russia. So, this link between the sensuous-particular and non-sensuous ideas that have a kind of critical cognitive, emotional cut through, that can help dismantle the kind of reification (of monarchy for example) outside the artistic work is what I'm trying to convey.

John Heartfield is trying to escape with his photo montages the limitations of the single image, the single photograph through juxtaposition. Again like Eisenstein he creating tensions and conflicts at a formal level in order to generate non-sensuous ideas. For example, about Hitler's big business backers or the way Hitler Nazism appropriated certain Marxist ideas and language to try and kind of win over the masses. So, at the same time that this the dialectical image is being practised and developed you've got a mass industry, a mass culture industry producing a gargantuan volume of images to sell, to seduce, to propagandise, to normalise and desensitise. This is the mass culture industries that produced what Walter Benjamin called

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the phantasmagoria. And the First World War was a watershed moment that revealed to states, to propagandists, to communication experts, journalists, public relations people and so forth just how powerful communication is as a means of persuasion.

So here we have a First World War propaganda image and literally you can see this sort of Althusserian concept of interpellation, of addressing the subject and fitting them into the social apparatus. Here literally it says, you know this is your space, enter this slot in the war machine. Are you fit (healthy) will you fit? ? Yes, is the answer! So, it's against this kind of mass culture being generated by the corporate and state apparatus, that the dialectical image is trying to combat.

And at the same time, critical thought is feeding into the dialectical image.. So, Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 article "The Mass Ornament" is really the foundation for the subsequent study of mass culture. And in that essay, he talks about the Tiller girls The Tiller girls were a popular troupe of synchronised dancing in the early 20th century, and he saw this as an allegory or a metaphor for regimentation and standardisation demanded by industrial production. And then the Busby Berkeley movies in Hollywood that developed this further and you can see from this image that once the women are pulled into the machinery of cinematographic apparatus, the body becomes even more rarefied, turn into pure geometry. And Kracauer talked about aerial photographs as a way of trying to imagine reification, through a visual metaphor.. He said the ornament resembles aerial photographs of landscapes and cities, the image does not emerge out of the interior of the given conditions but rather rises above them, so the aerial photograph conveys that sense that our own products don't emerge out of us but are imposed upon us by these rarefied relations. Visuality's is the way of either internalising that or critiquing it.

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Walter Benjamin talked about dialectics at a standstill, so here we get that sense of the dialectical image freezing linear time, disrupting the flow of time to study and to inspect what's going on. As he says, thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well, in a configuration pregnant with tensions. So again, that sense of stopping the flow of time so you can analyse the tensions and conflicts within it. Dialectical images have a spatialising dimension in order to disrupt time.. And here, in this collage by Brecht you've got three different times colliding, you've got a sort of fitness and leisure time, you've got work time and you've got wartime, all coming together in the same image.

Collage by Brecht.

The dialectial image can be traced back further to the work of Kant, especially the Critique of Judgment. So, in the Critique of Judgment, Kant is trying to actually escape the effects of his own philosophy in the Critique of Pure Reason. I said that Kant develops a model where the subject has some activity. Kant doesn't just accept an empiricist model that the seses passively receive external stimuli.He talks about synthesising sense perception and then, if you like, drawing that sense perception under a concept that makes sense of it. But the Critique of Pure Reason is a very reified model. In fact, it is very automated, there's very little for the individual (as opposed to the transcendental) subject to do and there is very little space for moral judgment, for example, and Kant recognised this in his own philosophy, he recognised the contradiction. So, he tried to address it in the Critique of Judgment and tried to bring back in some individual ability to make a moral-political judgment. He wouldn't have called it a judgment, but morals and politics are closely connected. So, he develops what he calls "reflective judgment" and you can see here the origin of the dialectical image. "To reflect (or consider [überlegen]) is to hold given presentations up to, and compare them with, either other presentations or one's cognitive power [itself], in reference to a concept that this [comparison] makes possible.", says Kant. So, he's talking about comparisons. He's talking

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about juxtapositions. He's talking about bringing these presentations together just as they are, in the work of Eisenstein, Heartfield, Benjamin and Brecht, in order to generate an idea that it was not possible to think of before. When he talks about comparing a presentation to one's own cognitive power. he's really alluding to the sublime where raging nature shakes our concepts so much that they begin to breakdown. But that stimulates our thinking for non-sensuous concepts, non-sensuous ideas. So, in Kant's philosophy it might be a metaphysical concept like infinity, but for us, it might be globalised capitalism. That's a very non-sensuous phenomenon, but somehow, we've got to try and find a way of glimpsing it through the visual sense. So, it might be, for example, that looking at a city, we might be able to find a comparison between a city and our cognitive powert in the for of an aesthetic artwork the aesthetic as a totality, a miniature totality. So, that brings us on to ...A Valparaíso (1963).

...A Valparaıso (1963)

The film was a Franco-Chilean co-production. It came out of some work that was being done at the University of Santiago. They were inviting Western filmmakers and cineastes over to Chile. Joris Ivens went there in 1962 for a retrospective of his work and then he returned a year later to make ...A Valparaíso. He might have been attracted to that city because it's a port city and therefore, it has these connections well beyond Chile and connections to the whole trading system of international capitalism, the whole colonial history. Chris Marker wrote the commentary, a very surrealist commentary. And Patricio Guzmán was also part of the production team. Guzmán, a Chilean, who would later, not much later, be making *Battle of Chile* (La batalla de Chile) about Salvador Allende's Popular Unity movement which was overthrown by Augusto Pinochet's fascist coup. So, watching ...A Valparaíso, there is a dialectics of history there because you can't really watch that film without thinking about the subsequent history just a few years later. The Spanish conquistadors discovered the Bay of Valparaíso in 1536. Valparaíso means paradise in Spanish. And that colonial legacy is still evident when Joris Ivens was making his film. The layout of the city is reminiscent, of Franz Fanon talking about the colonial city as a world cut in two between the native world and the colonial world, divided into compartments, divided between those with full bellies and those with empty stomachs and so forth.

So, in the film, the dialectical image emerges really around the cable cars and the stairs. The cable cars and the stairs connect the poor in the hills, in the barriers with the centre of the port, connect them with food, with water, with work. And they feature constantly throughout the film, which is a nonlinear collage and mosaic of images clustered around certain themes or visual similarities. For example, you see a shot of seagulls flying and then that cuts to human bodies in the air as they're jumping into the sea. So, you have these kinds of visual associations. It is a film built around the life of the city, people working, people going up and down the stairs, people flying kites, people putting out there washing lines, workers loading fish, everyday life, but it always comes back to this class fissure in the city which is represented by the stairs, people trudging up, people going down and the cable cars. It's got this surrealist commentary. 'All women of Valparaíso bring out their parasols to walk all the penguins of Valparaíso, all the bridges just into mid-air, all the homes are triangle. For each one of those statements, the film finds an image that seems to correspond with this. So, there is indeed, bizarrely, a woman walking a penguin! But of course, he's being playful with the image here because not everyone is walking penguins. He finds a bridge that sort of is cut off, but of course not all the bridges are cut off. He finds a home that looks like it's kind of has a triangle wedge-like structure, but of course, not all the homes are shaped like triangles, so Marker's playfully trying to undermine the way the image usually works in a documentary. The image usually stands for a general truth, and he's kind of playing with that by making absurd statements. There's a lot of lists in the film, in the voiceover, because surrealists like lists. 'climbs, panting, it's funny, it's tiring, it's abominable, joyful, inhuman, solemn, ridiculous and strange.' And the voice-over asks pointed questions like 'what price the white blouses, the clean faces when water arrives in barrels.'

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The film has a structure, although it's a collage, it does have structure, and it gradually moves higher and higher into the barriers. The higher you go, the poorer the people become and right at the top, the poorest of the poor. Right at the top is where we see the first forms of political organisation, a people's assembly, talking about their problems and what they can do about them. That is an anticipation of the kind of politics that will flower less than 10 years later under Allende. And then we moved to a dancehall, they are dancing to Chilean music and Western music. And you wonder what happens to those people in a few years time. They'll be in the middle of a socialist revolution and then they will be facing a fascist takeover. The film seems very prophetic because it is set in Valparaíso, which is where the CIA sponsored coup was launched in 1973. In Costa Gavras' film *Missing* (1982), that's where the character who goes missing, Charlie Horman, meets the military CIA attaché in Valparaíso, and that's what seals his fate because he sees too much.

The film ruptures out of the black and white social portraiture style towards the end, turning to colour film stock and using drawings, maps, paintings, cartoons, and so forth. We are plunged into a world of fiction, myth, adventure, allegory and storytelling, but also a history which the immediacy of the social portraiture form cannot access. A naval map whirls around and the voice over introduces us into the 'blood' history of Valparaiso, the history of colonialism as depicted often by images of a ideologically questionable kind, but here recontextualised to serve a new purpose of critique. When we return to the documentary footage of the city in 1962, the colour film stock is retained. The very final shot of the film is the shot of a bride with her bridal crown flowing out of the one of the cable cars and that crown that's flowing it, it has a kind of association with some seaweed that we saw earlier on. A voice over at that moment is talking about the Sirens who 'have not ceased to be singing in the port of Valparaíso'. And of course, the Sirens were a sign of danger, shipwrecking unwary sailors. So, the film kind of ends on a sort of optimistic note about the future, but also a sign of foreboding. Because very prophetically, the film understands the dangers of a new kind of adventure in social justice, which is what the film ends calling for. The subsequent history accentuates further our sense of the dangers and risks of social change.

The Settlers (Los Colonos, 2023)

I am going to speed on and go to The Settlers. So, this is a narrative fiction film. We can apply the idea of dialectical images to this story, and there are five layers if you like to this dialectical structure. 1) The British Empire versus the American Empire, 2) the expectations of a revolt versus the fact that revolt never happens in the film despite the expectation that it will, it never happens. 3) There's a dialectic between the violence that we see and the violence that we don't see. 4) There's a dialectic between the exterior setting where we see all this violence and the bourgeois interior which is a place of culture. 5) There's a final dialectic at the end of the film between the fictional story that we've seen and the end credits, which uses real archive documentary footage. So, I'm going to quickly go through these five layers.

The film starts with an act of violence. A worker loses half his arm putting up a fence, a private fence significantly, and the British Lieutenant arrives, the overseer, and just simply shoots the man dead because he's now useless to the employer. And this is the first act of violence witnessed by the character mestizo character Segundo. He witnesses violence all the way through, there are constant reaction shots of him witnessing violence and we expect him in the end to act. The lieutenant's boss Menéndez arrives and gives the British lieutenant MacLennan a new job. He's to go to another part of this remote territory where Indians have cut down the fences and killed his sheep, and his task is to clear them out the way. So, the Lieutenant takes Segundo who is a good shot, but Menéndez also insists that he takes an American mercenary that he's also hired, called Bill.

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So, here we have two characters, Bill the cowboy and MacLennan the British lieutenant, usually they're in separate genres, the western and a kind of colonial adventure story. The fact that they are brought together here in the same story is a kind of dialectical image, because what we see here are these two empires which they represent, the British Empire which dominated Latin America in the last part of the 19th century through trade and investments and the American Empire that will dominate Latin America in the 20th century. Their partnership and the tensions between them seem to speak to this and again you can see in this still Segundo in the background witnessing all this. Bill is constantly telling the Lieutenant that Segundo is going to turn on them, that he's got a weapon and he's going to fire on them. So, the viewer is primed to expect that to happen. They ride and they find some Indians on the land and at dawn in a very brutal scene, they just simply gun them down. And Segundo is seen here in these three stills, he's watching this slaughter and he is supposed to participate. He sees Bill killing the Indians and you can see in these shots him going through this process of trauma. Then apparently determination as he puts the gun to his shoulder, it looks like he's going to turn on the colonisers, but in the end, he can't take that final Fanonian step. He can't turn the violence on them. And then you see in that final shot, his anguish when he realises that he cannot pull the trigger. His revolt is stillborn.

Then they meet a mysterious figure, a British officer called Colonel Martin who has a very large armed group with him and Colonel Martin invites them, he really forces them to dinner. And here we find out more about the Lieutenant MacLennan. We find out that he's actually not a lieutenant, he's just an ordinary soldier. When Bill finds this out, he's outraged at this kind of class masquerade. Bill calls him an English Red Pig even though MacLennan is Scottish. And at that point Colonel Martin shoots Bill and makes an offer to MacLennan. He will give McLennan an Indian woman from his camp if he allows MacLennan, who is also a former officer in the British Army, to satisfy his cravings. And so, we then get another act of violence. A lot of sexual violence has been alluded to in the film, towards the Indians – although we actually do not see it, but it is very casually inferred. . Now the violence is turned on the coloniser not from Segundo (as we had expected) but from another coloniser, the British officer. So, it has an interesting class dimension as well as Martin satisfies his cravings and rapes MacLennan. And this violence we do see.

The next morning the party leave. Again, you see the Indian woman who has joined Segundo and MacLennan give Segundo a sharp stone. You think that is going to be the weapon that he will use against MacLennan, but it doesn't happen. Instead you see them riding off and then very unexpectedly, the film cuts to seven years later, a temporal ellipsis... And after seven years, after that ellipses we find out that what we've seen so far is just a prelude to the real violence. MacLennan went on to commit violence and murder against the Indians on a vast scale. Violence on such a scale is almost unrepresentable, it is sort of a hole, an absence, a silence which the film constructs itself around. But somehow this violence on this scale must be reckoned with, has to be remembered in some way. But again, it's interesting that that larger violence happens after MacLennan has himself being violated. So, you have this kind of cycle of violence expanding outwards from class violence to colonial violence and back again.

The scene that we cut to is the bourgeois interior of Menéndez's house. His daughter is playing on the piano, and her daughters are singing in their frilly dresses. They are singing a lullaby, 'All the Pretty Horses' whose meaning I will come back to, A Monsignor, always a reliable class ally for the bourgeoisie is listening to the performance and Menéndez is there as well, falling asleep, a bit older, a bit less vital. So, this is a Bourdieusian space and culture which is being built on all this violence. Interior, exterior, another dialectical image. And into this space of culture is also politics. Mr. Vicuña arrives from the capital where the stories of the violence have floated back to and he's there to try and persuade Menéndez to make peace with the remaining Mapuche Indians. Why? Because the centenary of the nation is coming up soon and they want to construct a mythology of the nation as a unified modern nation where

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everyone has a place. So then in the final scenes, Vicuña goes and finds Segundo and Rosa, the woman that was given to MacLennan, presumably as a sexual object. He finds them on a remote island off the coast of Chile. He goes there and he records what happened. This is where we find out the scale of the violence. But he's not recording this for the public, it's not for public consumption, it's not for social justice. What is it for? Maybe some more leverage over Menéndez. What he is really there for is to collect some footage of the happy Indians who are now part of the modern nation. He's become a film director, and you can see him here in this image directing the camera man. He's got Segundo and Rosa all dressed up in their best clothes, they are drinking tea. And this is a little attempt to construct this kind of nice anthropological image. And the very final shot of the film is Rosa staring directly into the camera and Vicuña is saying "Rosa, drink the tea. Do you want to be or not want to be part of the nation?" and she is just staring into the image. Staring into the camera might be the one act of defiance, but we don't know for sure. Maybe she probably did drink the tea. And the point is I think that there is a narrative expectation and perhaps too a historical expectation that people will revolt, that people will resist, and the film cunningly cultivatea our expectation the Segundo will revolt, but he never does. He always just remains a witness and participant to the violence. And in a way I think the film is teaching us that when people are ringed by, circled by superior force, revolt is actually less common, actually it's more common for people to submit. And so, I think it's kind of deconstructing an expectation we may have. And I think it therefore fits with our historical circumstances because the film is a kind of third cinema film, but in a very un-third-cinema context.

But in the very final images of the film there is another dialectic between the film that we've watched, a fictional film, that has uncovered all this violence and archive documentary footage -including footage of Menéndez's shipping Empire because Menéndez was a real person and so was MacLennan. This documentary archive footage is tinted all red, blood red and we have the lullaby song on the soundtrack: "Hush-a-bye, don't you cry, go to sleep my little baby / When you wake, you shall have all the pretty little horses". It was Segundo's dream to own a horse, and the lullaby is attempting to sing someone to sleep. In the aesthetic context which is being constructed here, of course the lull-a-bye function exactly the opposite to its usual form and function – it is a warning: "Don't go to sleep!". It's a warning to awake from a sleep that shields us from the nightmare of history and look it fully in the face.

Films

Ivens, J. (Director). (1963). ...*A Valparaíso* [Film]. Argos Films; Cine Experimental de la Universidad de Chile; Universidad de Chile.

Galvez Haberle, F. (Director). (2023). *Los Colonos* [Film]. Quijote Films; Rei Cine; Quiddity Films; Volos Films; Cinema Inutile.

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The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.