Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia as the Fairy Tale of Shock Economy

Alessandra Madella
Zaozhuang University
Zaozhuang, China

Poroi 17,1 (May 2022)

Abstract: In this essay, I examine the film *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989), made by German director Ulrike Ottinger in the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I argue that it can be read as an anti-authoritarian articulation of a desire for radical public spheres better suited to serve minority interests, particularly at a time of drastic transformations of social and political conditions. The film's narrative ambiguity should be read in the rhetorical situation of radical fairy tales in West Germany and their attempt to develop counterpublic spheres to resist the organization of experiences by the consciousness industry. Ottinger's film, while shot mostly in Inner Mongolia during the crucial year for the reunification of Germany, is far from being escapist. The shock of the displaced lower-class heroine, so different from the "happy ending" imperative in traditional fairy tales, unveils the fiction of a neoliberal economy that considers people and land as mere commodities. Like Karl Polanyi, Ottinger wants to empower people to question the assumption that they had to accept major displacements and flexibility in the name of a self-regulating market. The fairy tale, as a contested genre related to education, is a primary field for this struggle.

Keywords: Ulrike Ottinger, *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, radical fairy tales, Miriam Hansen, Oskar Negt, Alexander Kluge, Karl Polanyi, Friedrich Schiller, radical public sphere

Introduction: The Rhetorical Situation of the Film

In this essay, I examine the film *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (*Joan of Arc of Mongolia*, 1989), made by German director Ulrike Ottinger in the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I argue that it can be read as an anti-authoritarian articulation of a desire for radical public spheres better suited to serve minority interests,

particularly at times of drastic transformations of social and political conditions. The narrative ambiguity of the much-discussed final sequence of the film should be read in the rhetorical situation of radical fairy tales in West Germany and their attempt to develop alternative public spheres for adults and children. Actual fairy tales (*Kunstmärchen*) stressed resilience rather than a happy ending, without neglecting the field of sexuality, in contrast to Walt Disney's sanitized approach to education that by then had come to dominate the consciousness industry. Instead, they favor contingent and practical alliances among marginalized minorities through shared experiences and overlapping ways of life, in contrast to the stress on a tight community based on racial purity and the blind martial imperatives of the Nazi period. In the same way, the ambiguous ending of Ottinger's film promotes the critical use of fantasy to organize experience from below on the part of the experiencing subjects themselves in their changing contexts of living, against the hijacking of memories and differences by industrial-commercial publicity. What matters is not just a static contraposition between "inauthentic" dominant publicity and a repressed "real life" context, but rather the dialectic interplay between the two. Creative re-appropriations of experiences dis/organized by the consciousness industry allow the formation of alliances between minorities and the rhetorical construction of a communal horizon.

I also argue that this concern of the film with grassroots developments resonates with the German intellectuals Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's utopic view of the public sphere as the "general horizon of social experience" (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p. ix, note 1). In their book *Public Sphere and Experience* (*Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, 1972), Negt and Kluge aimed to empower constituencies hitherto excluded from the space of public opinion by focusing on the structures that determine which and whose experiences are considered relevant or irrelevant (Negt and Kluge, 1993: p. xxxi). Their "counterpublic" spheres, based on overlapping memories and the creation of new communal forms of *praxis* from "below," resist the exclusionary standards of the bourgeois public sphere and challenge the homologating incorporation by the consciousness industry. Similarly, the end of Ottinger's film, which presents the heroine Giovanna as the artist in a time of technological reproduction, suggests that the role of independent filmmaking is to counter this homogenizing tendency by empowering audiences to form radical public spheres through their memories and experiences.

Finally, I argue that Ottinger's film, while shot mostly in the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia during the crucial year for the reunification of Germany, is far from being escapist. Its ambiguous

end makes us aware of the implicit fiction of ethnographic documentaries that cater to Western orientalist nostalgia for unchanging ways of life in faraway places outside the course of history, which are a projection of the viewer's desires. But its ambiguity also makes us sensitive to the dangers of "shock economy" in the sense of Naomi Klein's acclaimed book S*hock Doctrine* (2007).[1] The term describes the neoliberal utopia of erasing and remaking the world to let a full-fledged self-regulating market come into being, even at the cost of imposing huge sufferings and impoverishment on a large part of the population. The shock of the displaced lower-class heroine Giovanna, so different from the "happy ending" imperative of traditional fairy tales, unveils the fiction of a neoliberal economy that considers people and land as mere commodities at the cost of damage and destruction to whole ways of life. Like historian Karl Polanyi, Ottinger wants to empower people to question that they had to passively accept major displacements and flexibility in the name of a self-regulating market, so that they could develop new forms of cooperation as forms of resistance to the excessive speed of the transformation. Her position resonates with Negt and Kluge's contention that fantasies could be re-organized from below, through practical convergences beyond narrow class borders, in order to create an alternative horizon that unveiled the incoherence of the smooth dominant narrative and allowed resisting it.

Johanna d'Arc evokes the way in which Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1795) and romantic fairy tales imagined a mythical past as a space of humanity and sensibility to resist the alienating effects of modern technological progress, while striving for a united and democratic Germany. But it also warns that the reunification of the German economy had to be a matter of political discussion from below, because it was dealing with real people and concrete contexts of living. The flash privatization of state enterprises actually brought about unemployment and social dislocation for many East Germans, making them second-class citizens in the name of a

[1] *Shock Economy* is the title of the Italian translation of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007). It has the advantage of stressing particularly the economic aspect, rather than the link with psychiatric shock therapy, which forms an important part of Klein's argument. In this way, the relation with Polanyi's writing, which several commentators have noted, also becomes clearer.

proclaimed necessary linear progression towards capitalism.[2] The ambiguous ending of *Johanna d'Arc* interrupts the straight course of this neoliberal utopia, asking us to stop and consider with more nuance different rhythms and ways of life that might disappear in the process. The counterpublic spheres of women, youths, intellectuals and immigrants the film wanted to address could be born out of this very interruption, in order to explore issues such as immigration and displacement in more practically empowering ways.

In order to support my arguments, in the next section I first provide a synopsis of *Johanna d'Arc* and a discussion of its ambiguous ending, which unveils the fiction of a self-regulating market and proposes the heroine Giovanna as a critical filmmaker. This reading, in turn, will allow us to see more clearly the particular position of the film in the context of Ottinger's *oeuvre*. In the following sections, I discuss more specifically how *Johanna d'Arc* engages the history of the fairy tale as a genre and how Ottinger was always interested in the question of radical public spheres from a theoretical and practical point of view. Like Negt and Kluge, she thinks that the struggle should be waged at the level of the consciousness industry itself. Her montage of fragments and irreconcilable temporalities attempts to upset its homogenizing practices, in order to bring about different contingent overlappings of memories and experiences of resistance.

A Film with an Ambiguous Ending

Johanna d'Arc has a puzzling ending, based on a shocking temporal *adynaton*. At the beginning of the film, we meet four Western women on board the Trans-Siberian railway: The young adventurous heroine Giovanna (Inés Sastre), the English amateur anthropologist Lady Windermere (Delphine Seyrig), the conservative German teacher Vohwinkel (Irm Hermann), and the Jewish-American Broadway star Fanny Ziegfeld (Gillian Scalici). They spend an evening of singing, dancing, and storytelling with the American Yiddish tenor Mickey Katz (Peter Kern), a Russian general, and the ethnic Georgian Trio the Kalinka Sisters. The headwaiter of the train brings about this mingling when he serves Katz a luxurious dinner and its artistic perfection rivals reproductions of Russian paintings which draws everybody's

[2] See, for example, the interview "East Germany's Shock Therapy," in which former East German economics minister Christa Luft is very critical of the flash privatizations imposed on the country after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was meant to signal political freedom and economic prosperity (Luft. 2021).

attention and becomes the ice-breaker of these heartfelt cultural exchanges. Windermere's "pedagogical eros" constantly encourages Giovanna to expand her boundaries by learning to appreciate other cultures, while Vohwinkel worriedly reminds her of the limitations of her lower-class status.

All the women continue their journey on the Trans-Mongolian railways, but they are kidnapped by the Mongolian princess Ulan Iga (Xu Re Huar) and her female warriors, who live a nomadic life without modern technology. When another tribe returns her stolen herds, the princess lavishes Mongolian hospitality on the Western ladies, and invites them to stay on as guests to enjoy the yearly festival and traditional epic. This part of the film is a long semi-documentary presentation of Mongolian life, shot with mostly nonprofessional actors. Giovanna becomes the beloved companion of Ulan Iga and shares her yurt. After the festival, most of the Western women board the train back home, apart from Vohwinkel who follows a Lamaist nun. Only Giovanna chooses to stay behind with the princess.

Here we get to the puzzling final ten minutes. We have just seen Giovanna and the princess greeting the Paris-bound train from the side of the tracks. But now in the rear compartment we find Windermere as guest of a Mongolian princess, who entertains her in Mongolian about the historical relationships of mutual attraction between China and the West. Is she the same Mongolian princess Ulan Iga we have just left behind? Was she really the chief of a semi-primitive tribe or was the whole semi-documentary part of the film just staged on behalf of our Western "anthropological" curiosity? As the princess remarks, several Mongolians go back to a life in the yurts only during the summer months in order to regain some subtle oppositional energy. Was the ethnographic "truth" we thought we were witnessing actually no more than a summer pageant?

The princess is played by the same actress, but she has now abandoned her traditional Mongolian clothes for an equally dazzling green Chanel suit. Her makeup has changed to the point of non-recognition. If she is really the same person? How can she be both a leader in an unchanging world and a modern cosmopolite? Our temporal confusion is increased when the back window of the compartment shows us Giovanna herself chasing after the train. Windermere helps her in, offers her a cup of tea, and soothes the general embarrassment by introducing her to the princess. The princess's name is not included in the English subtitles and is hardly understandable in French. The ambiguity, therefore, remains. In the sudden darkness, we see the princess talking with Giovanna and Windermere. The wall lights of the compartment start glowing while the Mongolian landscape in the

back gradually fades away, as if we were in a movie theater at the end of a show. Ottinger's voice informs us that Giovanna has become headwaitress in the exquisite Mongolian specialty-restaurant the princess opened shortly after her arrival in Paris, where Windermere visits them whenever she can.

The whole of *Johanna d'Arc* is built through the condensation of different epochs. Windermere belongs to the nineteenth century, like the eponymous heroine of Oscar Wilde's comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1982), while Giovanna is a girl of the Eighties, with her jeans and Walkman. Even in the "primitive" Mongolian world of the film, superstitions about washing clothes from medieval Arabic sources live side by side with a modern motorcycle, although it is pulled by a camel. But all these temporal inconsistencies merge smoothly in the big picture and in the gorgeous landscape of the semi-documentary for two and a half hours, until these final ambiguous ten minutes that scholars tend to brush aside with a few words or to explain in the most disparate ways.

According to Brenda Longfellow, for example, we meet "yet another Mongolian princess, who, in her aristocratic bearing, age, and class (not to mention the classy Chanel-type suit) represents a more likely object for Lady Windermere's erotic interest" (Longfellow, 1993, p. 135-6). This new encounter reiterates "an invitation to play, an invitation to invest, as a woman looking at other women, in the erotic fantasy which is the film" (Longfellow, 1993: 134).

Other American scholars are convinced that she is the same princess, but they are drawn to a more negative reading of the film. According to Katie Trumpener, the princess's avowal of the staged character of the Mongolian festival "attempts to maintain ironic distance from a fully utopian fantasy of Mongolia." But the film's extended use of ethnographic cinematic conventions remains irremediably complicit in an imperialist ideology that reduces the others to passive projections of Western fantasies (Trumpener, 1993, p. 91). Kristen Whissel finds patterns characteristic of the American Western in the way in which the racially mixed character — dark-skinned, lower-class Giovanna of possible Asian heritage — freely mingles with the natives, while we never see Lady Windermere in Mongolian garb. But eventually Giovanna returns to the White world and works in the princess's restaurant, which only facilitates the "reproduction of racial difference in the commodity-spectacle form" for the consumption of Anglo-western middle classes (Whissel, 1996, p. 43). According to John Davidson, the end of the film is a defeat for both Giovanna and Windermere, since the new identity of the princess as a Westernized sophisticate

shatters the first's utopia of unmediated love and the latter's dream of Orientalist knowledge (Davidson, 1999, p. 142).[3]

By contrast, I argue that the ambiguous nature of the ending is an essential component of Ottinger's film, which can be best understood as a fairy tale of shock economy, since it adopts the genre to explore forms of resistance to the social dislocations imposed in the name of a neoliberal utopia. The princess on the train is indeed played by the same actress, but the inspiration is taken from a different person, the Mongolian cosmopolite princess Nirgidma de Torhout (1908-1983). This historical figure — a journalist married to a French diplomat, a friend of philosopher/scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and of Surrealist artists — constantly mediated between Chinese, Mongolian and Western cultures, despite having personally experienced their tensions. The most immediately evident aspect of this sequence is, however, its temporal impossibility, which cannot be solved in any way. The "ethnographic" part of the Mongolian world cannot have been just dreamt or imagined, since Giovanna appears still partly dressed as a Mongolian. But why does Windermere completely ignore their time together in the tundra in her introduction to the princess? If the princess was the same person, how could she be both along the tracks and on the train, and why was a new introduction needed? If she is a different person, on the other hand, why does she appear so embarrassed at Giovanna's entrance?

In fact, I argue that this conclusion is so upsetting, because it seems to undermine the future-oriented imperative of self-bettering and the "happily ever after" of the lower-class hero or heroine in fairy tales. Giovanna had already become the beloved companion of the princess in the Mongolian paradise. But from one moment to the next the same Giovanna now risks being cast aside for Windermere, and she has to start from scratch or at the lower level of a headwaitress. We could think that Ottinger is just flirting here with a disappointing capitalist outcome. However, we

---

[3] Davidson stresses particularly Vohwinkel's decision to join a Lamaist *nunnery*, which he reads as a sign of the unresolved ties between German identity and the Nazi legacy, or as a return to her "authentic" roots grounded in the "genealogy of the Aryan" (Davidson, 1999, p. 135). However, this connection is at least dubious. According to Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, whose racist ideology influenced German Nazism, the choice of Buddha was rather a crime against the Aryan race that had created the caste system to protect itself from blood mixture (Cassirer, 1946, p. 237). In this sense, Vohwinkel's choice appears rather consistent with Ottinger's attempt to free the fairy tale discourse of this dangerously distorting legacy.

should remember that the headwaiter we met on board of the Trans-Siberian railroad in the first part of the film was coded as the modern *avatar* of the artist, who, in turn, is often the protagonist of romantic fairy tales in Germany. This previous headwaiter served a gorgeous dinner to Katz, by drawing inspiration from the printed reproductions of nineteenth-century Russian paintings that decorated the compartment's walls. As the Benjaminian artist at the time of mechanical reproducibility, Ottinger's headwaiter/filmmaker assembles fallen fragments which have already lost their aura in order to upset the pervasive phantasmagoria of the commodity.

In particular, the liberal fiction that the end of the film exposes is considering labor as a commodity to be exchanged as any other commodity, as in Karl Polanyi's critique of capitalism (Polanyi, 2001, p. 75). If we reread the rest of the film from this point of view, we see that the potlatches and festivals of the Mongolian world are also posed as Polanyian alternatives to the negative consequences of an exchange economy that does not sufficiently value social relations. Like Polanyi, Ottinger — who was a student of Claude Lévi-Strauss — sees in anthropology a reservoir of alternative economic forms that can correct our blind reliance on the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. Significantly, the folk stories and fairy tales told by characters in the film never arrive to a moment of "happily ever after." All of them stress difficulties to overcome and point to wishes to be realized as forms of individual and social empowerment that will not continuously hurt others.

The rhetorical situation of *Johanna d'Arc* is characterized by an ongoing debate on the meaning and role of children's literature, which started in the Sixties thanks to the rediscovery of Walter Benjamin's writing on folk tales and Jürgen Habermas's focus on the public sphere. At that time, the anti-authoritarian movement and the Left began to focus on children and socialization (Jack Zipes, 2006, p. 72). Ottinger consciously inserted herself in this discussion, I am arguing, when she described her film as a "fairy tale." In reaction to the racist colonization of the genre under the Nazis and to Disney's sanitized cartoons, engaged fairy tales in West Germany of the Eighties tended to privilege open endings and question existing social forms in order to envision new ways of cooperation.

Johanna d'Arc reflects on the major moments of the history of the fairy tale as a genre. The subtly subversive discourse on manners and civilization by women writers in the French salons of the seventeenth century or by Wilde's dandy coexists with pre-modern Mongolia as the Schillerian utopia of the German

romantics against the alienation of modern technology. A Benjaminian sense of the irredeemable loss of auratic experience of traditional folk tales is corrected by an equally Benjaminian feeling that in conditions of mechanical reproduction the forgotten traditions of the oppressed can come in fragmentary form to unsettle the eternal repetition of the commodity (Eagleton, 1990, p. 281). The ambiguous ending of *Johanna d'Arc*, like the antiauthoritarian fairy tales of the 1980s, aims to open up an alternative public sphere for the audience to allow new forms of socialization to be discussed and invented with major attention to the concrete contexts of living.

A Subversive Linguistic Performance and the Beauty of Fragile Arrangements

The last sequence of the film shows the importance of this context in the major cultural negotiation involved in the princess's subtly subversive linguistic performance as a Mongol in Inner Mongolia. On a Chinese-coded train with Chinese-speaking personnel, the princess proudly speaks with Windermere of the long reciprocal attraction between China and the West, but she does so only in Mongolian. This linguistic *tour de force* admiringly displays her ability to articulate resistance to Chinese technocratic rule with the partial belonging to a communal history. Trumpener complains that Ottinger's film is far from the revolutionary thrust of *Storm over Asia* (1928). However, Vsevolod Pudovkin's anti-imperialist masterpiece celebrated the birth of the modern Mongolian People's Republic, while *Johanna d'Arc* is set in the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia, where a reference to Pan-Mongolism might not have been allowed. Ottinger had been conscious of the complex dynamics of Chinese ethnic minorities at least since her 1986 travelogue *China: Die Künste — der Alltag. Eine filmische Reisebeschreibung* (*China: The Arts, The People*). Similarly, Windermere is not defeated, as Davidson thinks, but rather she is able to reestablish a channel of communication between Giovanna and the princess thanks to her manners and her ability to deal with complex identities. Her Wildean background, marked by the experience of the British colonization of Ireland, allows her to understand the plight and resilience of Chinese minorities. The mirror of reciprocal exotic attraction is not just ironic or simply ambiguous, but rather it has the potential to create new multilayered ways of living together, in line with the "open ending" evolution of the fairy tale as a genre.

In this sense, my reading is close to that of Rosalind Galt, which is indebted to feminist, queer, and postcolonial

intersectionality. Galt sees *Johanna d'Arc* as a major example of "prettiness," a new political category that allows her to open up masculinist film studies and question the way in which it is connected with neoclassical simplicity, predicated on a rejection of feminine rococo (Galt, 2011, p. 246-7). But she almost ignores the final ten minutes of *Johanna d'Arc*, the ambiguous character of which could have added a new meaning to her claim that the film does not aspire to coherence. Additionally, the ending could be interpreted to suggest that a new form of communal practice is created across different classes and ethnicities.

We can perhaps find a clue for this dismissal in Galt's understanding of Schiller. She considers Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* as an example of "neoclassicism," since it underlies how "the artist must avoid glitter and color, impotence and perversity, and savage ornament" (Galt, 2011, p. 241). This ideal beauty is the result of a careful policing of borders and is "available only to the proper kind of body, with the foreign, the feminine, and the effeminate located firmly on the wrong side of the line" (Galt, 2011, p. 241). In a more holistic reading of Schiller's aesthetic, however, the word "savage" does not mean "foreign" and it certainly does not have a connotation of inferiority. Rather, it signals a return to a Rousseauian imaginary state of nature that allows coming back to the technological present with an increased sensibility and a more balanced personality. The artist heroes of the romantic fairy tales similarly find in a past or exotic land resources for resistance against alienating bureaucracy and the division of labor. Even if Ottinger's Mongolia is staged in part as a return to a pre-technological past, it is not "primitive" as a barbaric horde could be in Schiller's terms (Schiller, 2004, p. 96). A group of people living together in huts with poetry and epic songs to form their social bonds correspond rather to Homeric Greece, Schiller's ideal of a still partly "savage" beauty, when reason and sensibility were in perfect harmony (Schiller, 2004, p. 37, 96). Ulan Iga and her court of warrior women, who live freely in their yurts, represent a much-needed feminist revision of that heroic model, whose masculine focus tended to underplay the role of women.

By contrast, Schiller was most wary of how modern reason, left to itself, generated the self-defeating excesses that undermined the ideals of the French Revolution. Even if he complained about the glitter of rococo, he was far from wanting to forego the advantages of civilization such as politeness (Schiller, 2004, p. 100). The fairy tale, like aesthetics, was born as a discourse on manners, clearly coded as feminine in absolutist France. Ottinger capitalizes on the important place it gives women in her reference to rococo at the end of the film and in the focus on customs throughout. Only Windermere's impeccable politeness allows the

channel of communication between Giovanna and the princess to be reestablished. Without forgetting the contribution of the queer aesthetic of the "pretty," we should also boldly see how Ottinger recuperates the beautiful from the very center of German aesthetic tradition and opens it up to new forms of living together for the present through a connection with radical fairy tales. The ambiguous ending of engaged fairy tales, in fact, refuses conventional views of success and makes us aware of the inescapable complexity of situations. But, for this very reason, it makes us perceive the beauty of more accidental and fragile arrangements that bring together different people through overlapping memories and practices. In the same way, the ending of *Johanna d'Arc* from the perspective of Giovanna might be read as a failure in terms of a success-oriented capitalist *doxa*. But it endows her with the ability to see how identities are rhetorically constructed and to envision the promise of an internally diversified community that her art can bring together.

Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia in the Context of Ottinger's *Oeuvre*: Counterpublic Spheres

The search for a radical public sphere based on memories and experiences was a constant in Ottinger's work. Before starting her career as an independent *auteur* in West Germany in 1973, she had studied painting in Paris, in the stimulating *bohème* of artists and Jewish German immigrants she well describes in her documentary *Paris Calligrammes* (2020). The visual influence of Symbolism, Surrealism, Situationism, and Pop Art converged with her personal experience of the students' revolt in 1968. Extremely well-read, she also attended lessons by Lévi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, and Louis Althusser. Significantly, upon her return to Germany she managed a film club before starting to make her own films. Even now, she tends to prefer venues and forms of distributions that assure that her films will be carefully watched and discussed by women and minority audiences.

In the Eighties, Ottinger was not well-known abroad, since the overt play on sexual stereotypes and the "baroque" character of her fictional works clashed with the more sober tones that audiences had come to expect from the authors of the New German Cinema. Despite her importance in art cinema, feminist film, and New German Cinema, her fictional films did not fit smoothly in any of these categories, and they also came too early for the queer cinema movement of the 1990s. Her early feminist critics were disturbed by her boldness in flirting with gender stereotypes and leather fetishism, in open contrast to what she saw

as the tendency of contemporary feminists to turn themselves into "grey mice." They considered her excessive, sumptuous style a sexist lack of social realism (Galt, 2011, p. 285). Meanwhile, her 1986 filmic travelogue on China, which focused particularly on the ethnic minorities of Sichuan and Yunnan, played before full houses in West Germany.

Johanna d'Arc was a turning point in the director's career as a "documentary film's covenant with art cinema," which brought together the anthropological and fictional trends in the director's work (Rickels, 2008, p. 127). Its successful screening at the 1989 Berlin International Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Golden Bear, increased Ottinger's visibility both in Germany and abroad. Some American critics such as Trumpener or Whissel worried that this ethnographic turn in the director's fictional production and the partial mainstreaming of her appeal were stained by her growing essentialism in the depiction of minorities and an unintended collusion with the marketplace. The *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism of Ottinger's previous productions showed marginalized minorities with an unconventional vocabulary and marked a radical refashioning of more standard film genres, which tended to present the primitive as always already corrupted. By contrast, Ottinger's semi-documentary parts in *Johanna d'Arc* brought her back towards a more utopian and essentializing feminism and "towards a more romantic fascination with cultural difference" (Trumpener, 1993, p. 78). Galt, however, points at the double standard of Trumpener's second-wave feminism in relation to Ottinger's film: Colorful images that would be acceptable for European women invoke "neocolonial exploitation" as soon as they represent non-European women (Galt, 2011, p. 288).

However, we should not forget that Ottinger's relation with her highly attentive German audience had centered on the problem of the public sphere at least since film historian Miriam Hansen's critical intervention in her 1984 essay, "Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse." Hansen, a student of Jürgen Habermas and author of the foreword to the English edition of Negt and Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience*, crucially changed the negative view of Ottinger among German feminists who read or wrote for the journal *Frauen und Film*. They had previously regarded with suspicion her excessive use of stereotypes and her sado-masochistic depictions of relations between women in *Madame X: Eine absolute Herrscherin* (*Madame X: An Absolute Ruler*, 1978). However, the whole film attempted "nothing less than to disentangle visual pleasure from the voyeurism inherent in the codes of patriarchal cinema" (Hansen, 1984, p. 103). Hansen read the Lady Dandy who wanders as a *flâneur* through Berlin in Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*:

Aller jamais retour (*Ticket of No Return*, 1979) as a Benjaminian allegory of modernity (Hansen, 1984, p. 107). She suggested the same filiation for the queer dandy who mobilizes forgotten memories of the defeated in the victorious course of progress to fight against capitalist global media control in *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (*Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*, 1984). Particularly this last film shows how Ottinger followed with interest Hansen's research on the potentially radically different public spheres of women and immigrants brought into being by polysemic moments that interrupted the linear progression of continuity editing in Hollywood silent cinema (Hansen, 1983, p. 156; Madella, 2020, p. 170). Despite Hollywood's desire to create a measurable homogenized consumer through the adoption of a universal filmic language and the spectacular appropriation of minority identities, radical reception practices on the part of minorities could still upset this uniformity in certain contexts. In this sense, the ambiguous ending of *Johanna d'Arc* continues the critical engagement of Ottinger's previous works in attempting to generate new forms of living together through radical communicative rationality.

Counter Publics and the Shock Economy

Some critics accused Ottinger of escapism for releasing an exotic film on Mongolia in the year of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. But the displaced figure of Giovanna and the abruptly reopened ending of her fairy tale can also be read as a critique of the shock economy. Far from being a sell-out to capitalism, the film can be read as an interruption of the liberal consensus that considered massive privatization, unemployment, and social dislocation a fair price to pay for the reunification of Germany under the banner of capitalism and of the Deutsche-Mark.[4]

Like Polanyi and Habermas, Ottinger wanted to preserve the positive values of liberalism, such as the right to nonconformity, peace, and cosmopolitanism. If Habermas considers these normative values a utopia worth striving towards, Polanyi argues that they have to be cherished, even if they are the byproduct of the

[4] "The privatization of state-owned assets in the now collapsed German Democratic Republic (GDR) was the price for getting the deutsche mark, which the West would have blocked otherwise" (Luft, 2021). Luft was part of the transitional government that from November 1989 to March 1990 attempted to modernize the socialist economic system of the GDR without privatizing key sectors like heavy industry, energy, and water, while keeping the profit motive out of public services such as health and education.

nineteenth-century economy. Neither freedom nor peace could be institutionalized under that economy, since its purpose was merely to create profits. But we will have to consciously strive for them in the future and create safeguards for their maintenance and extension. The dangerous utopia, or rather phantasy of a fully self-regulating market economy, ends up subordinating human purposes to market mechanisms that value only boundless gain, without investing in education and other social goods. Such regimes are inherently unstable — and unjust. But, if we realize that human resistance is necessary, we can open the way to the construction of unprecedented freedom (Polanyi, 2001, p. 263). Ottinger has used the documentary form as a powerful commentary on this matter. She shows her concern for what the triumphal first stage of the German reunification was pushing to the margins in her documentary *Countdown* (1990), which was shot in Berlin and follows the ten days leading up to July 1, 1990, when the monetary reunion was scheduled to begin. The film performs a slowing down that allows forgotten memories to reappear and new radical possibilities to be glimpsed in a moment of transition. More recently, her film *Ester: A Purim play in Berlin* (*Ester: Ein Purimspiel in Berlin*, 2002) suggests Ottinger's activism in favor of Jewish immigrants. In this documentary, people who had recently immigrated from Russia, Central, and South-Eastern Europe to Berlin performed together in a sort of Esther story, traditionally associated with the overcoming of threatening events, according to their different languages and variants of the original tale. Even if more indirectly, the end of *Johanna d'Arc* attempted to bring about alternative public spheres through which women, immigrants, minorities, and youths could organize their own memories and experiences from below. The fairy tale was the ideal form for this aim as a contested genre intimately connected to the challenged ground of education. Windermere's almost Socratic corrupting of the youth ultimately wins over the fearful conservative perspective of Vohwinkel, empowering Giovanna to go beyond a narrow view of education as mere instruction, to question the *status quo*, and to form alliances that help her to do so. In *Johanna d'Arc*, Ottinger dialectically plays out these two opposite tendencies that accompany the whole history of the genre, particularly in Europe.

Johanna d'Arc and the European History of the Fairy Tale

Rickels describes *Johanna d'Arc* as "a feminist lesbian fairy tale" that "mixes the Jeanne d'Arc myth of the heroic maiden with Mongolian epic celebrations of warrior women" (Rickels, 2008, p.

135). In a 1991 interview, Ottinger stated that *Johanna d'Arc* was "about different kinds of narration" and that it could be described as a "wandering fairy tale." The Mongolian part stages epic narration from an oral tradition, while the first part compares Western forms of narration: "Older kinds, like the fairy tale Lady Windermere tells to Johanna and all the songs, the Yiddish songs, and the others — you are playing with traditions, but you're also making entertainment" (Ottinger, 1991, p. 41). Her characters are prototypes developed in connection with the broader structure of the film. "I draw on early forms, the way Fellini does with baroque theater, the way Bergman and even Walt Disney do with fairy tales. All this interests me, but in my work these early forms evolve and develop further." *Johanna d'Arc* is "telling the history of nomads in a 1,000-year-old fairy tale." When the train stops, the characters go back in time to a nomadic culture. This fantastic form of dramatization allows an opening of many doors and shows culture as a permanently shifting process. The simple structure of the fairy tale can include complex contents: "You can make a fairy tale for our times, a modern fairy tale" (Ottinger, 1991, p. 41, 16). As the director reminds us, nomads in the film include not only Mongols, but also "jobseekers, Jewish intellectuals and artists, refugees, those travelling for edification or adventure" (Rickels, 2008, p. 133).

The fairy tale inspired Ottinger's other fictional films as well, such as *Freak Orlando* (1981), which shows Ottinger's conscious struggle against the Nazi distortion of the genre: "There was this kind of fascist aesthetic, not just in Germany but all over the world, in which only a kind of classical Greek body could be shown — a big, strong body. And all mentions of freaks — not just dwarves, but giants, too — was expunged, even from the old fairy tales" (Ottinger, 1991, p. 41). An iconic sequence of the film shows us a little woman and a giantess, who take pictures and eat popcorn in an empty stadium — the same one in which Leni Riefenstahl shot the racialized spectacle of her documentary *Olympia* (1938). Armed men arrive with wagonloads of naked victims to execute, and confetti are left on the empty bleachers. Under the Nazis, folktales were considered holy Aryan relics, while literary fairy tales had to be avoided or explained in terms of racial domination. The social experiments of the Weimar era were banned (Zipes, p. 141-2). The rhetorical situation of *Freak Orlando* was characterized by a refusal of this Nazi legacy, but also by a concern with how the consciousness industry is perpetuating exclusionary practices in the satellite broadcasting of the modern Olympics and other programs. The installation of "Telstar," a satellite that linked Western Television to a global network of electronic publicity, allowed participation in the spectacle of the Tokyo Olympics

(1964), but it also represented an increase in monopolistic practices of media distribution. The adoption of the fairy tale in *Johanna d'Arc* echoes these worries.

The very structure of the film reminds us of a fairy tale. Giovanna is a lower-class girl who sets out for an adventure, looks for help from a powerful intermediary (Windermere as a good fairy), interacts with others to show her value, and soon enough takes on a more active role usually reserved for the male hero. She arrives to a faraway land, where she wins the favor of a princess with the help of Windermere, who tells her how to fit in.

But *Johanna d'Arc* also engages the history of the genre in its various European stages through using the Italian name of Giovanna and its multilingual title — German, French, and English. Italian writers of the sixteenth century played a significant role in the rise of the literary fairy tale as a genre closely tied to the civilization process. Like Boccaccio's *Decameron*, they developed a frame narrative, in which the tales were told during banquets with songs and dances, as an elegant mode of conversing that had internalized strict rules of decorum. The fairy tales of French salons of the seventeenth century took up this conversational frame (Zipes, 2006, p. 13, 22). Similarly, on Ottinger's train, Windermere tells her long tale of the search for the root Pan Zui in the dining car, thus starting a conversation that leads to the performance of American, Russian, and Yiddish songs. She tells the stories in French and reminds the viewer that aristocratic French women writers of the 1690s were chiefly responsible for the establishment of the fairy tale in Europe. They wrote "to question the mores, customs, habits, and the use of power during their own time," subverting the male code in function of greater self-determination for educated women (Zipes, 2006, p. 22, 32). Windermere entertains her guests in her "salon" with impeccable manners, signaling a convergence between fairy tales and the project of aesthetics in the eighteenth century, for which manners "signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 41). Also, Schiller's utopian aesthetic state, in which diversity is respected and the lower classes have equal political rights, has its precondition in beautiful manners.

In Germany, fairy tales were used during the rise of the bourgeoisie to indicate socially acceptable roles for children. They became part of the literary socialization process to a degree unrivalled in other European countries. But in the nineteenth century the Brothers Grimm sanitized the folk tales they collected with a zeal comparable only to Disney, erasing the elements of class conflict in pre-capitalist folk tales. The appeals to imagination in fairy tales were dangerous for the German

bourgeoisie, who opted for a "limited Enlightenment" in the education of the people (Zipes, 2009, p. 137, 29). *Johanna d'Arc* plays out this dilemma on the meaning of Enlightenment in the competition between Windermere's "pedagogical eros" and Vohwinkel's fear of corruption. The English lady pushes Giovanna to expand her horizons, invites her to share her luxury compartment and teaches her Mongolian. By contrast, the German teacher would like her to limit herself to the instructive details of a Baedeker and to know her place in society.

Windermere fascinates Giovanna with the legend of a Mongolian princess and invites her to dinner with the promise of more tales. Her longest tale is about the search for the white root Pan Zui. It is easy to see in this miraculous root a joking reference to the way in which fairy tales were part of a search for a national heritage. The Grimms "wanted to foster the development of a strong national bourgeoisie by unraveling the ties to Germanic traditions and social rites" (Zipes, 2006, p. 61). In the Nazi era, folk tales were related to the pure Aryan blood and the German destiny of domination. However, in Windermere's tale, the precious root will disappear immediately before an evil man who continually inflicts insult on his fellow human beings. The Jewish dandy Katz, who compares the tale to the wisdom of a Taoist seated underneath a tree, reminds us of Wilde's essay "A Chinese Sage" (1890) on Zhuangzi's creed of peaceful inaction against authoritarian rule and a moralizing society based on capital and imperialist competition. Wilde himself refused standard notions of sexuality and told fairy tales from the perspective of the lower classes, through an "art of subversion" that stimulated the children's imagination and opened the way for further experimentation in the twentieth century (Zipes, 2006, p. 107). In this sense, Windermere's white root, which disappears deep into the earth as soon as somebody constantly intent on doing injury to others tries to grasp it, means that the search for roots is certainly important in terms of identity. But roots must be constantly rethought without prejudices, in order to see how they are always rhetorically constructed and how they should always be internally differentiated to include minorities and different ways of life.

According to the German scholar Hans Schuhmacher, the fairy tale, as a product of art, is close to Schiller's concept of aesthetic play of imagination between the sensuous and the rational (Zipes, 2009, p. 50). Schiller adopted the model of Jean-Jacques Rousseau for imagining a state of nature that could correct the unfeeling rationality of modern technology and counteract the fragmenting effects of the division of labor. Like Rousseau, Schiller did not really wish to return to the past, but rather to regain human wholeness, while retaining the benefits of

progress. The ideal of his aesthetic education was the free Homeric Hero with his harmony of rational and sensuous capacities (Schiller, 2004, p. 49-50). Schiller's view of Greek freedom overlooks slavery and the exclusion of women and foreigners. But it was a weapon to counteract the split between society and the state that hinders participation in the modern world. Like Karl Marx, Schiller wanted to include all classes in this transformation, giving all men political equality and the possibility of self-fulfillment in their work (Philip Kain, 1982, p. 21). *Johanna d'Arc*'s pre-technological Mongolia, led by an enlightened female ruler who talks harmoniously in rhythmic metaphors, seems a feminist translation of Schiller's Greece. In this semi-matriarchy of simple warriors, lower-class Giovanna fits perfectly, reverting to older models of a more enterprising heroine such as Joan of Arc. She becomes the princess's inseparable companion and she performs traditional rites with her. Even on the return train, she still wears a traditional Mongolian vest over her jeans. In Schillerian terms, her aesthetic education has been completed: sensibility has joined with reason in the harmonious play of beauty to make her able to resist the alienation of modern technology. But her education also includes an ability to counter stereotypical gender roles.

The early German romantics at the turn of the nineteenth century radicalized Schiller's attempt to conceive of a "golden age" in order to ask for social emancipation. They engaged in debates about the government, dreaming of a free, politically united, and democratic Germany. Their fairy tales critiqued the Enlightenment to fulfill its humanitarian legacy through the estrangement of their utopic worlds. Their open ending shows an increase of human emancipation, "despite the loss of formal symmetry and social harmony contained in the folk tale" (Zipes, 2009, p. 69). Their artist-hero fights against bureaucratization and industrialization to recover the revolutionary potential of the new inventions for a new social order that was still in transition. Ottinger, like the Romantics, has been accused of escapism for shooting a film in faraway Mongolia in a crucial year in German history. But her 1990's documentary *Countdown* — whose title refers to how people were counting the days to the Monetary Union under the D-Mark — shows her concern for the social conditions and the costs of the reunification of Germany before and after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. In contrast to the capitalist paean, she shows the complexity involved in bringing together two ways of life with different rhythms and values. Similarly, *Johanna d'Arc* can be read in the tradition of the German fairy tale as a major genre of subtle political commentary, which presents alternative worlds in order to critically reflect on existing conditions at home and imagine a democratic future for a united Germany.

Giovanna can somehow be read as a modern avatar of the romantic artist. At the end of the film, she becomes the headwaitress in the princess's restaurant, which could be read as a disappointing development in light of the bourgeois code of social advancement in the Grimms' fairy tales. She could even appear as the naive victim of two upper-class ladies who exchange her as a commodity. But in the context of the film the "headwaiter" seems to be a shorthand for "artist in the age of mechanical reproduction." The waiter who serves a genuine Russian *zakuska* to Katz on board of the Trans-Siberian needs to master all the necessary skills to produce a work of art — from sculpture and painting to mounting and collage. But his inspiration comes from copies of nineteenth-century Russian academic paintings by Konstantin Makovsky on the wall of the train. The scene reminds us of Benjamin's doctrine of mechanical reproduction, "in which the very technology which breeds alienation, given a dialectical twist, can strip cultural products of their intimidatory aura and refunction them in productive ways" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 327). The sumptuous collage and the feeling of mourning of Ottinger's Benjaminian *zakuska* subvert the taken-for-grantedness of the standardized service industry. Like the potlatches in the Mongolian part of the film, it also creates social relations, which on the train are notably conducted amongst minorities. The headwaiter accompanies by xylophone the Kalinka Sisters's performance of the Yiddish version of a song of mainstream American success "Bay mir bistu sheyn." Significantly, Ottinger makes this combo who sings in a minority language come from Georgia, where Stalin also came from. If Stalin's Russia-first policy undermined other languages in the Soviet Union, their performance, by contrast, becomes the catalyst for an exchange of musical dialects, from Yiddish theatre to Balkan pop. Katz himself takes his name from a real American singer, who became famous among older Eastern-European immigrants in the 1950s for his outrageously Yiddish renditions of Hollywood songs, like *Toot, Toot, Tootsie* from the film *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Directed by Alan Crosland, the movie was the first talkie and it told a success story of Jewish assimilation that paralleled the one of its star, vaudeville actor Al Jolson. By contrast, Ottinger's Katz taps into the ethnic performance tradition of silent films in order to fight against capitalist homologation in the culture industry. Giovanna, as the headwaitress in a Mongolian specialty restaurant, is the heir not only of the artist heroes of romantic fairy tales, but also of these forgotten oppositional traditions. Her utopic role is to bring alternative social relations into being, facilitating grassroots communicative rationality among minorities, which might otherwise be incapable to overlap and form alliances in the promise of a not-yet-existing community.

In the next section, I discuss how the undecidable ending of *Johanna d'Arc* follows the concerns of the antiauthoritarian fairy tales in Western Germany from the 1960s in gesturing towards the creation of radical public spheres, through which minorities unite in an alternative economic praxis.

Johanna d'Arc and Radical Public Spheres

Open-endedness became the central feature in fairy tales of the Weimar period, which showed an implicit quest for community against the breakdown of social relations in the capitalist world. Innovative fairy tales from the 1960s in Western Germany revived this tradition. Their use of estrangement made readers perceive the actual limits and possibilities of their deep personal wishes and draw parallels to the situation of others, in order to conceive new collective ways of life. Several publishing houses tried to offset sexism, racism, and authoritarian messages in the mainstream media by using countercultural fairy tales. Zipes connects this concern with the notion of a "proletarian public sphere," which Negt and Kluge developed in *Public Sphere and Experience*. It unites the fragmented experiences of the social contradictions of workers, intellectuals, the oppressed, and marginal groups. It goes beyond the narrow notion of "proletarian" as factory worker, maintaining its strategic position in the emancipation of the working class and its focus on production. This radical public sphere resists the capitalist commodification of daily life by developing a communal praxis of change, such as through alternative shops or restaurants. Only a radical reordering of the public sphere can help to realize the utopian elements of the fairy tale and its capacity to convey images of emancipation, otherwise locked into mass-mediated culture (Zipes, 2009, p. 142-5). Negt and Kluge also stress the importance of historical experiments in the self-organization of youths. They consider the "public sphere of children" as a form of "protest against the reduction of human beings to their productive function within the capitalist labor process" and the limiting use of education for social control (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p. 284). Artists, like young Giovanna in the princess's ethnic restaurant, guard fantasy from instrumentalization in the culture industry and help to develop resisting economic forms from below that value sociability more than gain.

Ottinger considered Kluge to be the most interesting fellow director of the New German Cinema, since he brought the struggle to the level of electronic media and the transnational networks of production and consumption themselves. She related to the way in which Hansen elaborated on his theory of radical public spheres in

her 1983 essay "Early Silent Cinema." Hansen argued that Hollywood strived toward the capitalist creation of a homogenized spectator through narrative film and continuity editing. However, the entire silent period still saw the temporary formation of oppositional public spheres of immigrants in America and of women in Germany (Hansen, 1983, p. 173-4). Their potential for radically different organizations of memories and experiences was facilitated by the survival of more static and potentially polysemic moments of primitive cinema. This forgotten tradition helps us to fight against the more pervasive control over human emotions generated by the public spheres of production within the modern consciousness industry. The end of *Johanna d'Arc* similarly attempts to interrupt the linear progression of narration and consciously revert to the polysemy of older forms in order to stimulate an authentic public sphere as a medium for the integral organization of human experience and a basis for radical politics.

The last sequence of *Johanna d'Arc* is staged as a frontal view of the rear compartment of the train, shot with a fairly static camera. Giovanna chases the train in depth of field, interrupting the narrative flow through the puzzling character of her appearance. The viewer can see how the temporal paradox makes any reading of her actual relation with the princess ambiguous. In fact, it is clear that Giovanna chases the train through the cinematic effect of rear projection. We see her leaving behind the Mongolian landscape and the ethnographic and personal encounter she had with the Mongolian people. But, in doing so, she also brings to the train the projection of a powerful myth central to German culture, which involves the Schillerian development of sensibility through a relation with nature and the pre-modern. This charged projection of the Mongolian landscape is the last thing that remains on the screen, when the compartment disappears into the tunnel. Ottinger attempts to salvage this utopia, as well as its relation with the fairy tale in its authentically egalitarian and cosmopolitan potentialities, by divorcing it from its racist and nationalistic drifts.

Some critics have pointed out that the chase is a convention of the Western, which is a filmic genre fundamentally complicit in a racist worldview based on the binary relation between the so-called primitive and civilized. According to this logic, the end of *Johanna d'Arc* merely reinscribes racial difference as a "spectacle" for the consumption of the White middle classes (Whissel, 1996, p. 43). However, Ottinger's intervention is much more sophisticated. The convention of the Western appears to suture the imaginary landscape to the action inside the train. But the temporal disruption upsets this taken-for-granted relation and makes the projection work in a disjunctive way, causing the viewer to

experience the complexity of the informational space. What appeared as the smooth progression of a linear narrative, suddenly turns into a rhetorical clash of meanings inside the image itself. If Guy Debord argues that the all-pervasive spectacle of homologated images lulls to inaction our critical imagination, which becomes unable to envision meaningful ways to change life, Ottinger's conscious use of the figure of the Western chase recalls his tactics of *détournement*. "*Détournement* means that we cannot get out of the spectacle, but we can use preexisting elements of it in a new ensemble that subverts, destabilizes, *détourne* the dominant spectacular logic" (Chiara Bottici, 2014, p. 121-22). Also for Negt and Kluge's conception of the public sphere, one of the problems of the modern consciousness industry is that the local is being reinvented as spectacle, masking the complexity of transnational financial, political, and cultural economies. As in Fredric Jameson's discussion of postmodernism, the turn to spectacle in Hollywood films is intended for a globalized commodity-fetishistic audience and even Nature has now been passively assimilated into this spectacular commodity production (Jameson, 1998, p. 134). But this mediated flow of images, lifestyles or modes of representation can also enrich the arsenal of alternative public spheres that continue to emerge and organize on the local level (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p. 13-14). The final sequence of *Johanna d'Arc* should be understood in a German rhetorical situation that claims for film the responsibility to stimulate a more authentic public sphere through puzzling devices that undermine the homologized forms of continuity editing and of the global spectacle. Like Debord, Ottinger plays with the spectacle in order to open it up to new practical ways to envision life.

In the context of *Johanna d'Arc*, the *détournement* of the Western chase has another consequence that we can more directly tie to a discourse on economics. For Schiller or the authors of romantic fairy tales, the return to the past was a matter of imagination, which endowed the hero with a more resilient and harmonious personality to face the real world of modern technology. But the undecidable ending of Ottinger's film upsets this binary and enables us to see that some supposedly positive aspects of modern economics are themselves fictitious. The train, like an apparently liberal economy, has a necessary course forward. But Giovanna has been left behind. The social relations she had in Mongolia have been destroyed. Like Polanyi, Ottinger's radical fairy tale makes us see that both labor and land are fictitious commodities, which cannot be simply exchanged like real commodities, because they involve relations of habitation in a natural and social environment (Polanyi, 2001, p. xxv). In the context of massive unemployment and the privatization of land

and enterprises necessary for the reunification of Germany under the D-Mark, *Johanna d'Arc* is not selling out to capitalism, as Trumpener feared. The film is rather an attempt to develop a counteracting economic praxis and a communicative rationality through which wishes can be realized in ways that value people — and particularly minorities — more than economic gain.

Conclusion: Against the Fiction of the Self-Regulating Market

In this essay, I have argued that the ambiguous character of the last ten minutes of *Johanna d'Arc* should be read in the rhetorical situation of radical fairy tales in West Germany and their attempt to develop alternative public spheres. Ottinger addresses crucial moments in the history of the genre, such as the subversive discourse on manners by Wilde and by French female writers of the eighteenth century. She also highlights the critical role of the artist in faraway lands in German romantic fairy tales that radicalize Schiller's aesthetics. Like the antiauthoritarian fairy tales in West Germany of the 1980s, she questions the racist legacy of Nazism, as well as the sanitized and restricted approach to education by Disney or before them the Brothers Grimm. The possibly disappointing ending of Giovanna's fairy tale seems to clash with the optimistic imperative of status improvement in classical fairy tales and in contemporary productions created by the consciousness industry. However, the open ending was a typical trope of anti-authoritarian fairy tales in West Germany from the 1960s onwards, which used it to promote a public sphere for children that could explore more egalitarian forms of play between adults and children. Similarly, the character of Windermere's manners succeed in soothing a moment of embarrassment in the film, reopening a channel of communication between Giovanna and the princess that allows for thinking about mutually satisfactory ways of life.

The development of resisting public spheres was also an important theme of the political Left. Negt and Kluge argue for a plebeian public sphere that could articulate resistance beyond a narrow proletarian identity through forms of praxis such as alternative restaurants. Giovanna, like Joan of Arc, is a lower-class heroine. However, her working in the princess's restaurant is not necessarily a form of exploitation since her job as headwaitress potentially enables her to exert her critical and creative abilities in a diverse and intellectually stimulating social context. In fact, the "headwaiter" in the film could be considered an artist in the time of technological reproduction, who assembles hijacked fragments to interrupt the flow of the culture industry. Self-ironically,

Ottinger depicts the "headwaiter" as adept at collage and montage, suggesting that Giovanna too is a potential filmmaker, able to counter the homogenizing tendency of continuity editing and to tap into the memories of minority audiences to give birth to radical public spheres.

Just as Joan of Arc was the savior of her country, in this respect Giovanna becomes almost the potential savior of her trans-country. The historical heroine had been hijacked by French nationalists after the loss of her native region of Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. General De Gaulle had embraced the cross of Lorraine as his symbol in the fight against Nazi Germany, while the Vichy collaborationist government had converted Joan into the champion of an anti-Semite, conservative ideology of family and soil in the fight against Britain. By contrast, Ottinger seems to resurrect her character as a girl born at the geographical, linguistic, and political intersection between various worlds. Like the Mongolian princess and the Wildean Windermere, her Giovanna is a border figure whose identity paradoxically depends on her awareness of what it means to live in a complex environment and with the bonds of resistance she is able to develop with other minorities.

Negt and Kluge, like Habermas and Polanyi, did not want to abandon the positive legacy of the Enlightenment as an ideal of freedom, peace, and cosmopolitanism towards which to strive. Ottinger stresses aspects of this legacy culturally closer to women and minorities, such as the subversive role of manners in relation to expected gender roles. But, with Giovanna's desperate chase of the train in depth of field, she also blurs Schiller's dichotomy between rational modernity and a pre-modern imaginary land of sensibility in order to show that the real fiction lays in a liberal economy when it considers people and land as mere commodities. Ottinger rejoins Polanyi in his rejection of what we now would call the "shock economy" at an extremely important moment of German history and in a way that cannot be deemed escapist. She evokes the tradition of the romantic fairy tales in asking for a democratic and united Germany, but she rejects the fiction that major displacements and flexibility had necessarily to be imposed onto the population in the name of a utopic, self-regulating market.[5]

---

[5] I wish to thank the two anonymous POROI reviewers, both of whom saw the inner meaning of what I was saying and helped bring it out. I am also thankful to Dr. Meghan Forbes and Prof. David Depew, whose edits and suggestions were invaluable.

Reference List

Bottici, C. (2014). *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cassirer, E. (1946). *The Myth of the State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Davidson, J. (1999). *Deterritorializing the New German Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Eagleton, T. (1990). *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Malden (MA): Blackwell.

Galt, R. (2011). *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hansen, M. "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" *New German Critique* 29 (1983): 147-184.

Hansen, M. "Visual Pleasure, Fetishism, and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*." *New German Critique* 31 (Winter 1984): 95 -108.

Jameson, F. (1998). *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. New York: Verso.

Kain, P. (1982). *Schiller, Hegel, and Marx: State, Society, and the Aesthetic Ideal of Ancient Greece*. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.

Klein, Naomi. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Longfellow, B. "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*." *Screen* 34:2 (Summer 1993): 124-136.

Luft, C. "East Germany's Shock Therapy." *Jacobin* 2 (2021): https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/02/east-germany shock-therapy-berlin-wall, accessed 3/15/22.

Madella, A. (2020). “Ulrike Ottinger’s *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press* (1984) as a Reflection on Cinematic Esperanto.” In Jones, K., J. Preece and A. Rees (Eds.). *International Perspectives on Multilingual Literatures: From Translingualism to Language Mixing*. (Pp. 159 -182) Cambridge (UK): Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Negt, O. and Kluge. (1993). A. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ottinger, U. “Minorities and the Majority: An Interview with Roy Grundmann and Judith Shulevitz,” *Cinéaste* 54 (1991): 40-41, 16.

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rickels, L. (2008). *Ulrike Ottinger*: *The Autobiography of Art Cinema*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota.

Schiller, F. (2004). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Mineola (NY): Dover.

Trumpener, K. “*Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* in the Mirror of *Dorian Gray*. Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetic of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger.” *New German Critique* 60 (1993): 77-99.

Whissel, K., “Racialized Spectacle, Exchange Relations, and the Western in *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*.” *Screen* 37:1 (Spring 1996): 41-67.

Zipes, J. (2006). *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Routledge.

Zipes, J. (2009). *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.