Crafting the Common: The Political Poetics of Pantelis Voulgaris's *The Last Note* (2017)

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ABSTRACT

Produced and screened in 2017, Pantelis Voulgaris's To teleftaio simeioma/The Last Note *reconstructs the story of the massacre of two hundred imprisoned Communists, in retaliation for the execution of four Nazis by the Greek Resistance, in 1944. The analysis proposes a political reading of the film, as it deals with the collective trauma of the Occupation, and the heroic acts of the Leftist Resistance.* The Last Note *may be seen to produce what according to the historian Enzo Traverso (2017) can be called a "melancholic topos", concerning the making of a symbolic locus, which reserves and revives an emancipatory horizon for the politics to come. In the midst of a prolonged and ongoing social, political and economic crisis that Greece and potentially the whole world is at, grand narratives of struggle, collectivity and emancipation may contribute towards the generation of politics that can overcome the political impasse that contemporary societies are experiencing.*

KEYWORDS

Antifascism
German Occupation
Grand narratives
Greek crisis
Pantelis Voulgaris
Resistance films

INTRODUCTION: THE SITUATED CONTEXT OF *THE LAST NOTE*

Produced and screened in 2017, Pantelis Voulgaris's *To teleftaio simeioma/The Last Note* presents the story of a true and iconic event related to the deeds of the Greek Resistance against the Occupation of Greece by Nazi Germany between 1941 and 1944. The film represents the two hundred Communist Party members shot dead on the 1st of May 1944 by the Germans, to retaliate the execution of a Nazi general and his three escort soldiers by the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) Partisans in late April that year, after an ambush set at Molaus, Peloponnese. The film revolves around the figure of Napoleon Soukatzidis, an imprisoned communist syndicalist, who, as a polyglot, was appointed by the Germans as the translator of the prison camp. Being among the two hundred shortlisted for execution, Soukatzidis was offered to have his life spared in exchange for another prisoner, who would have to take his place instead, before the firing squad. This offer was done by Karl Fischer, the commander of the notorious Haidari concentration camp, where Soukatzidis along with his comrades were detained. Soukatzidis is known to have refused this offer by stating to a bewildered Nazi that "if I accept, I will be nothing afterwards".

The analysis proposes a political reading of the film, as it deals with the collective trauma (that of the Nazi Occupation), and the heroic acts of the Leftist Resistance. Further, the film was produced during the years of the so-called Greek crisis, at a moment when socio-political mobilization and collective visions for social change seem to be atrophied by the disciplinary logics and dictates of austerity policies and financial indebtment, marked by the momentarily defeat of the counter-hegemonic politics against the neoliberal restructuring of Greece. The adoption of different austerity regimes in Greece from 2010 onwards, triggered various forms of popular resistance and struggles that cumulated to the electoral victory of a left-led government headed by Syriza (the coalition of the radical left) in January 2015, which was elected on an anti-austerity program (Sotiris 2018: 2). Up until that time, the protest movements politicized a whole society (Sakellaropoulos 2019: 171). In this process, Greece's socio-political establishment and hegemonic groups and discourses were seriously challenged. The pressures of the Syriza-led government by European and local elites and its subsequent submission to continuation of austerity policies, brought to surface public disillusionment, cynicism and a regressive turn (as the numerous racist practices against migrants and refugees in the country demonstrate), that was exploited by the revitalized conservative party of ND (New Democracy), which returned into government in July 2019, with a nationalist, anti-leftist, and neoliberal program, along with a "law-and-order" agenda.

There are different explanations regarding the aforementioned "regressive" turn, not just in Greece, but elsewhere too. In a recent study of the Greek crisis politics, Koutouza (2019) notes nationalism and a fetishized form of anti-capitalism (e.g.

by focusing mostly on the parasitic nature of finance) that fails to perceive the social relations of the capitalist accumulation process, as pivotal to understand the regressive turn of the Greek society after 2015 and the failure of the anti-austerity resistances overall. After Syriza's turn to the political center, others (Chrysis, 2018: 246) foreground the lack of a (left-wing) political party structure and organization able to function in Gramsci's sense as a "modern prince" so as to transform widespread resentment into a political and social movement. From a broader perspective, while discussing the political impasse of the contemporary times, Jodi Dean (2019) considers the lack of a party-based organizational form that can create its own counter-hegemonic political strategy, as well as an antagonistic culture, values along with the development of comradely social relations among the oppressed and the exploited, so as to effectively challenge the hegemony of capitalism and the bourgeois society. For Dean, communism should be the horizon defining such politics and culture, because communism is the true antagonistic ideology to capitalism. For this reason, she digs into the stories and the successes of the older social movements that occurred in the early to mid-20th century, which were guided by a shared communist idea and a communist party structure.

Themes related to Greece's German Occupation and to the patriotic and anti-fascist Resistance were mobilized in very effective ways during the anti-austerity protests, as well as during the anti-fascist protests after the Nazi party of the Golden Dawn got elected into the parliament in 2012. Thus, the German hegemonic interventions in the neoliberal restructuring of Greece were often publicly interpreted as a return of the Third Reich to Greece, and the Greek governments that agreed for neoliberal austerity policies were associated with Greek collaborationism during the German Occupation, themes developed by both right-wing and left-wing anti-austerity voices (Koutouza 2019: 129). Prominent former resistance fighters such as Manolis Glezos and Mikis Theodorakis actively participated in the anti-austerity movements, particularly during 2010-2015. Further, the anti-fascist movement also deployed themes related to the 1940s leftist resistance, seeing its activities as a continuation of the deeds of the EAM-ELAS (National Liberation Front-Greek People's Liberation Army) (Koutouza 2019: 242).

On a broad level, the *Last Note* can be viewed in association to the above-mentioned discourses that mobilize past events and struggles to produce affects, memories and identities that are both patriotic and antifascist. Launched in 2017, at a moment when political mobilization had ceased in Greece, with regressive phenomena such as apathy, cynicism, anti-leftism, and racism to cumulate in society, the film is also distanced from the aforementioned uses of the 1940s legacies that occurred during 2010-2015. To this regard, the analysis wishes to emphasize a) the comradeship of the two-hundred communists and its

importance as a prerequisite of emancipatory struggle, b) the production of the common, manifested through the depiction of the experience of captivity and the utopic desire of liberation, and c) the radical negation of Nazism and the kind of society that Nazism represents.

The *Last Note* is understood in relation to what the historian Enzo Traverso (2017) may call a "melancholic topos". Traverso uses the concept of melancholy to describe the left-wing political culture and cultural production in the late 20th and early 21st century, a time when leftist politics and political projects are marked by defeat. Cultural products, such as films, establish a symbolic topos, which allow the maintaining of shared visions, values, narratives, memories and identities that characterize leftist politics. Continuity, Traverso maintains, is established through spaces, material and symbolic. Although narrating defeat, "melancholic images" rescue and reproduce the horizon of political reflection and identification, sustaining critical and counter-hegemonic historicities and ideas, along with the desire for universal equality and emancipation (Fig. 1). *The Last Note* is viewed in such terms, as a film that can induce political passions, sustain collective memories of trauma and struggle, and potentially trigger counter-hegemonic narratives and identifications.

Fig. 1: A street poster announcing a series of screenings of political films, under the Traverso-inspired title "the melancholic images", organized by the "Mundo Nuevo" squatted social center in Thessaloniki, Greece in June 2018. Voulgaris's *Petrina Chronia/Stone Years* (1985) also features among them (photo by the author).

Additionally, *The Last Note*, as well as other political films on the Second World War (WWII), that will be later mentioned in the analysis, challenges the hegemonic ideology of the "extreme center" (Ali 2015), which offers an ahistorical equation of Communism with Nazism, viewing anything outside the scope of capitalism and liberal democracy as "totalitarian" (Losurdo 2016; Traverso 2019). To this respect, the urban theorist and historian Mike Davis (2007) showed how US nationalism downplayed and caricatured the Soviet Union and the Red Army's decisive contribution in the Allied victory against the Axis forces during WWII, and the enormous sacrifice of the Soviet people in the fight against fascism[1].

Indeed, liberals and conservatives in Greece and elsewhere have accused the Left for the economic crisis of Greece, and for Greece's dysfunctional state, for Greece's supposed anomic culture, which has, among other things, led to the austerity reforms' failure. The rise of the Nazi Golden Dawn party was also seen by the liberals as something equivalent to the Left. As far as the Nazi Occupation of Greece is concerned, the Greek liberals in some ways follow the historical Nazi-propaganda arguments blaming the Resistance movement for the Nazi crimes in Greece. For the Nazis claimed that the mass reprisal acts done by the Wehrmacht in Greece, were somehow triggered by "brutal" partisan activities. Tellingly, the execution of the two-hundred communists that *The Last Note* reenacts was publicly announced with the following statement:

> On the 27/04/1944 in an ambush attack at Molaus, communist groups cowardly assassinated a German general and his three soldier escort group. Several other German soldiers were also wounded. In reprisal, the following will be executed:
>
> 200 communists will be shot
>
> All men outside villages at the road between Molaus and Sparta met by the German army will be shot
>
> Due to the proportions of the crime, Greek volunteers on their own initiative killed 100 more communists.
>
> The military commander of Greece
>
> *I Kathimerini*, 30/04/1944

Finally, it is important to note that in the German-Occupied Greece, the life of a German was deemed equal to ten or even one hundred Greeks, dependent on the German's military rank. The German atrocities committed in Greece parallel to

[1] Davis (2007: 285) further argues that the Red Army maintained important elements of revolutionary fraternity in it (as opposed to the class and racially divided army of the USA), despite its representation as a brutal and somehow "barbarian" force by Western propaganda.

those occurred in the USSR occupied territories, Poland and Yugoslavia, countries whose populations were considered to be "inferior" by the Nazi ideology (Heer et al. 2012; Fleischer, 2008). In this sense, the liberals' ahistorical and politically reactionary claim works in defense of the Nazi deeds in Greece, as if the country's Occupation occurred, not through an aggressive war provoked by the Germans, and as if the German Occupation was benign and without exploitation, injustice, dispropriation, humiliation, and death, suffered by the majority of the population.

"FREEDOM SOON WILL COME, AND THEN WE'LL COME FROM THE SHADOWS"[2]; THE RESISTANCE IN FILM AND VOULGARIS'S ENGAGEMENT

Recognized as one of the most important filmmakers of contemporary Greece, Pantelis Voulgaris emerged as a New Greek Cinema auteur. The New Greek Cinema was a modernist film wave, with its main characteristics summarized in the development of representational "understatements, ambiguities, and openness", marked by "slow pace, long takes, distantiation techniques, and elliptic editing" (Karalis 2012: 244), while dealing with various social and historical issues of Greece. Though often not resisting the development of a "powerful melodramatization" (ibid.: 256), Voulgaris's cinema casts an empathic gaze on his subjects. The women, the aged, the working class, the poor and the marginalized, the migrants, political dissidents, as well as alienated middle-class figures, are the usual heroes of Voulgaris's films. A prominent topic that Voulgaris returns to is that of Greece's political history, particularly related to the trajectories of the Greek left after the Greek Civil War (1944-1949) in particular. *Happy Day* (1976) (showing the hardships and torments experienced at the exile islands of Greece, which functioned until 1974), *Ta petrina chronia*/*The Stone Years* (1985) (showing the hardships and persecutions that leftist citizens had to endure in Greece from the end of the Civil War [1949] until the end of the Colonels' Dictatorship [1974]), *Psychi vatheia*/*A Soul so Deep* (2009), (depicting two brothers forced to serve in the rival camps, the Nationalist and the Communist, during the Greek Civil War), and *The Last Note* (2017), are the films dealing with the specific topics.

In principle, the Greek Resistance during WWII has not been adequately depicted in the Greek cinema. In this context too, the politics of the Resistance in particular, and the centrality of the Left in the Greek Resistance movement have been seriously undermined, suppressed by the Right's hegemony during the post-war years, and later neglected (Andritsos 2004; Kornetis 2014b: 95; Chalkou 2018). The Cold War climate of anti-communist frenzy contributed to the physical and symbolic marginalization of the Greek Resistance from the

[2] Leonard Cohen, "The Partisan".

Greek public realm. Mainstream filmmaking during this time largely reflected these trends, not just in Greece, but in other European states too, where Sorlin (1991: 73) notices a decline of Resistance-related topics in the war cinema from the mid-1950s and onwards, although the former socialist countries (e.g. Yugoslavia and the USSR), continued to produce highly politicized films on the specific issue. The collapse of the Socialist Block saw a revived interest in the WWII-related topics and the Resistance, not from a political and socialist perspective though (Traverso 2017: 85). Here, films on Resistance activities focused more on the depiction of presumably "apolitical" actors, resisting fascism due to individual and patriotic morals, and less on political grounds. The French *Lucie Aubrac* (Berri, 1997), the British–Australian–German *Charlotte Gray* (Armstrong, 2001), *Flame and Citron* (Madsen, 2008), a Danish production on the story of two patriotic Danish resistance heroes, following the noir style of the *Army of Shadows* (Melville, 1969) that focuses on the French Resistance, the US produced *Defiance* (Zwick, 2008), the French *Army of Crime* (Guédiguian, 2010), the French-Belgian *Man with Iron Heart* (Jimenez, 2017) are such examples of films. They were based on actual historical events related to the French, Danish, Soviet Jewish- Belarusian, and the Czech Resistance, focusing on the "non-political" dramatization of Resistance acts, often done in a rather spectacular way, where the heroes emerge as extraordinary individuals usually associated with the Western allies (e.g. the spy character of *Charlotte Gray* in Vichy France), while ideological issues are largely absent. Although the *Army of Crime* casts light on the story of a French Resistance communist group that was headed by an Armenian militant, it does so by mainly focusing on individual militants. The militant, as Jodi Dean (2019: 78) writes, is a single figure fighting for a cause, without expressing political relationality. Dean's concerns are related to the potentials of social change, which is something that can only emerge through the collective struggle. In that sense, the relations and the subjectivity of the comrade is something that is much more important to be stressed from a political perspective. Regarding Greece, Kornetis (2014: 97) notes that Voulgaris's related films (*A Soul so Deep* – and consequently *The Last Note* –) should be understood to be part of a broader turn to politics in the Greek cinema, connected to the turbulence and the political polarization that the economic crisis, and preceding events (particularly the December 2008 upheaval triggered by the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police), has created in the country. In that sense too, Chalkou (2018) saw *The Last Note* as an important contribution to the cinematographic depiction of the majoritarian Leftist Resistance in Greece.

Either way, what is common in films dealing with the Resistance is the depiction of the wretched and high-risk conditions that the Resistance fighters had to endure. As in the aforementioned *Flame and Citron*, so in its preceding *Army of Shadows* (1969), or in 2010s *Army of Crime*, all demonstrate the "life in the shadow" that the partisans (militant or "apolitical") went through, where, in

most cases, they would not survive the war. In that sense, the partisans are besides heroic, also tragic figures, as they did not live to enjoy the fruits of their struggle. *The Last Note* shares these characteristics too. Although melancholic, this may not lead to a pessimistic conclusion, given that the films establish that the struggle was worth taking.

THE LAST NOTE'S STORYLINE AND HISTORICAL REALM

The historical time that *The Last Note* recreates is a dramatic moment of 1944, the last year of the fierce Occupation of Greece by Nazi Germany. 1944 was the Occupation's most brutal year, particularly because the Resistance movement had acquired mass proportions across the country, which the Germans attempted to repress through terroristic means, while following a scorched-earth and divide-and-conquer policy (Mazower 2001). The film takes place at the Prison camp of Haidari, a notorious site of Nazi crimes in Greece, located at the outskirts of Athens. Here, Resistance fighters, communist party members, and Greek Jews were mainly incarcerated. Often enough, the inmates of Haidari served as a pool for reprisal acts, such as the one depicted by the film. It is interesting to note that the two-hundred communists that the film deals with had been imprisoned before the Occupation, during the Metaxas's dictatorship in the late 1930s. These political prisoners were handed in to the Nazis by the Greek authorities, in one of the first acts of Greek collaborationism. In that sense, the two hundred did not participate in concrete actions against the Germans. Nevertheless, they were executed due to their organic connection with the Antifascist Resistance movement, representing the Nazis' greatest enemy, the Communists, those from whom the Nazis were to be eventually crushed. Furthermore, the two hundred were also murdered at a working-class Athenian suburb, Kaisariani, on the 1st of May, a date with its obvious symbolic meanings for the international working class.

The German Occupation of Greece is contextualized through a brief and informative text provided at the film's introduction. Then, the historical metanarrative of the film, regarding what the Nazis did to Greece, as well as the politics connected to the Resistance, is also advanced in a rather fragmented, but also carefully orchestrated way, through dialogues and through the various "minor" moments and events that unfold. Hence, at 00:14.38, we hear the Germans to announce through the camp's loudspeakers the following propaganda message: "attention, attention, German soldiers of the Reich, you should not trust the sly Greeks; relations between Germans and Greeks are strictly forbidden" suggesting the racist construction of the Greeks and the symbolic boundaries that the Nazi propaganda set between the oppressors and the oppressed. Likewise, at 00:33.07, a propagandistic inscription is shown writing "Kind donation of the Athenian civilians to the people of Berlin", followed by the depiction of prestigious goods be packed by the prisoners; one of them is

shown to recognize a painting and to say to the other inmates "booty; this is from a friend's home in Piraeus". Fischer, the commander of the camp, then inspects the goods and sips into his pocket a piece of jewelry. When one inmate (Christos) is visited by his father and offered his freedom through the mobilization of the father's social networks, Christos emphatically negates it. The father recounts his son's success as a university student and then tells him in an emotionally laden way that "it is unfair" for him to be imprisoned. Christos responds by stressing his agonistic patriotism, arguing, at 00:38:06, that "what is unfair is that the fascist Metaxas left all of us who wanted to fight at the front, to be locked at the cells of Akronauplia[3]". In moments like this, the film's narrative reproduces the leftist, national-liberation discursive framework of the Resistance and the general politics of the time and their stakes.

The plot unfolds through a focus on Napoleon Soukatzidis, who serves as a translator during the Germans' interrogations and an intermediate between the inmates and the German authorities. His position as interpreter, combined with his intelligence, courage, and overall ethos, gains the personal interest of the aforementioned camp's commander, Karl Fischer, who vainly tries to befriend him and to take him on the Nazis' side, as he confesses to him, at 00:22:37, during a visit at a site of ancient Greek ruins, which the Nazis admired. At the same time, the film depicts the subjectivity and dilemmas of the inmates' group and its inner disputes conflicts. As antifascists, as patriots, as Communist Party members and comrades, they remain intact, united and disciplined while facing the camp's hardships. For instance, at 00:54:22, when Fischer presents Soukantzidis's partner, Haroula, before him, while proposing both to join him in Berlin so as to live a life of "opportunities", Soukantzidis firmly refuses the offer.

The execution of the four Nazis at Molaus by the partisans is celebrated, when news arrives through the camp's underground network. Through this act, the inmates feel part of the general antifascist struggle, connected to that of the Red Army and its continuous victories in the Eastern Front, which are also rejoiced. From 00:39.10 and later from 00:41.39 (Fig. 2 & 3), the film demonstrates the murder of random civilians by killing squads (of both German soldiers and Greek collaborators), a practice that was common during the German Occupation of Greece. These murders are shown through tilted and shaky frames, along with minimalistic and slow ambient sound effects, suggesting the victims' anguish. Following the execution of the four Nazis, these indiscriminate killings are meant to escalate the film's plot and to show that the countdown has already started for the two hundred.

[3] Akronauplia was a notorious prison site in Nauplion at Peloponese that was transformed into an exile space for communists during the Metaxas's dictatorship (1936-1941).

Fig. 2 & 3: *Indiscriminate killings in the spring-blossomed plains*

Soon, Fischer is ordered to summon two-hundred prisoners for immediate execution. This is done in secrecy, but the news leak. In what is to be their final night, the political prisoners disregard the camp orders and set a festivity where they sing and dance until the dawn of May 1, 1944, the date of their execution. Overall, the film shows a whole society at war, where all aspects of life are precarious and politicized. In this sense too, the more private and human sides of the actors are overdetermined by the historical context.

THE DIALECTICS OF THE COMMON: SHARED AFFECTS, MATERIALITIES AND IDENTITIES

Voulgaris reconstructs, often in a rather nostalgic and emotional way –which is common in his cinema (Kornetis 2014: 96)– the socio-historical and material context of the 1940s Greece, through images of olive groves, the springtime's blossomed landscape, stark sunshine, and the sea, among other. Here, a notion of the common emerges through the depiction of the habitus shared by presumably "all", "average" Greeks, that stretches in time and concerns materialities related to the climate and the physical and built environment, as well as to enduring cultural features, such as music, folk festivities, and social habits (such as eating

among other). These characteristics suggest a common identity, a common "we" that transgresses the historical gap between the film's historical framework and the contemporary context of today's Greece.

Voulgaris's portrayal of the common seems to share the aesthetics of the "poetic mythology" of Greekness (Vitti 2004), as developed by writers during the interwar and the post war years. This usually suggests a somehow perennial, essentialist and exceptional understanding of the Greek natural, historical and cultural environment, as something that stretches from the Greek antiquity to now, and remains pure and unchanged. Such an understanding is highly ideological and relates to the nationalist-modernist aspirations of the so-called "Generation of the 1930s" intellectuals and their hegemonic legacy in the shaping of the modern Greek identity (Platzos 2017). Critics (Gavriilidis 2002; Platzos 2017) understood such essentializations as nationalistic and reactionary. However true, I would also like to suggest a different reading of the common, related to the work of the cultural theorist Raymond Williams and his analysis of the working class culture. Williams (1985) argues that the notion of the common concerns a people's collectively shared characteristics, like values, meanings, backgrounds, habits, experiences, memories, and general interests. In Williams's sense, the idea of the common stresses the ordinary, which is often seen in derogatory terms by elitist discourses, as a banality or as a somewhat "inferior" cultural topos. The common though concerns entities that are potentially accessible by all, without any necessary nationalist idealization that may qualify them as exceptional, as is the case with the aforementioned reactionary notions of an essentialist Greekness.

The film's anachronistic beginning, where mourning women and men bury the bodies of the murdered two hundred under a bright spring sun foregrounds the harrowing experience and remembrance of the Occupation, through the affective recreation of a calm and sunny landscape that is familiar to "all", burdened by a collective sense of loss and mourning. The faces of black-dressed grieving women (Fig. 4) connotes to iconic images that signify the trauma of the Occupation in the collective memory, such as the photo of Marina Pantiska (Fig. 5) grieving the murder of her family by the Nazis (who also destroyed the whole town of Distomo killing its inhabitants) taken by Dmitri Kessel at Distomo in 1944, five months after the massacre, and featured in *Life* magazine issue of November 24, 1944 under the title "What the Germans did to Greece".

Fig. 4 & 5: *Haroula grieves before the grave of Soukantzidis in* The Last Note*; Marina Pantiska grieves in Distomo (photo: Dmitri Kessel)*

The common is also expressed through the depictions of the inmates' daily life in captivity, functioning as a collective, with relations shaped by solidarity and political commitment. As Chalkou (2018) further writes, in *The Last Note*, Voulgaris presents the collective without neglecting the individual and his dilemmas, background and conflicts. The individuals composing the collective of the imprisoned comrades, and the resistance fighters themselves (Fig. 6) are "common", working and middle class people, peasants, workers, students, artisans, among other (Traverso 2017: 118). Their commonness emerges organically, through the depiction of their family ties, life aspirations and dilemmas, making them usual people instead of stereotypes of communist militancy, often represented in various films (such as the aforementioned *Defiance*, where the Red Army officers are shown as stereotypically brainless and sly bullies, a practice common to Hollywood production [Shaw 2007: 288]). As

opposed to the arrogant and secluded Nazi personas, the comrades are humble; they trust each other, they speak a common language of calmness, reason and prudence; this way, they are maintaining a shared humanity that has not been debased and alienated by Nazi coercion. The common is thus survived in an ideal form, defended and reproduced through the social relations and the stance of the imprisoned comrades.

Fig. 6: *A man of the EAM-ELAS partisans that ambushed and executed a German general and his escort group, as represented by Voulgaris (00:23:58)*

Their difference (from the non-fighters) lies in their level of political consciousness, and their comradeship, qualities that enable them to endure and to fight oppression. Their identity is primarily politically produced and less deriving from personal charisma (as films narrating stories of extraordinary individuals may suggest). The collective has an empowering function for the individual, who is otherwise lost when caught in the tide of history on its own and faced with such aggressive forces. The collective is crucial in the development of dignity as well as a stance of courageous defiance and resistance, amounting to the establishing of moral superiority against the oppressor. According to Dean (2019: 89) courage is less of an individual virtue and more of an outcome of discipline, self-denial in the service of common struggle, also related to the capacity of self-criticism, things that can develop through the participation in a radical political structure.

The cinematic recreation of the inmates defying of death by singing folk songs and dancing, summons traits of widely shared cultural practices, intensified by the familiar sounds and images of joy and festivity. Placed in the highly oppressive context of the Nazi Occupation, marked by a death sentence, these representations of festivity estrange and defamiliarize their otherwise joyful ritualized context, probing towards the intensification of the feeling of oppression to the viewer. The notion of the common is deepened through its dialectic affirmation and negation, as something produced by the inmates and also repressed by the Nazis. The common is secluded and cannot be lived freely

and enjoyed (Fig. 7 & 8). Simultaneously though, the common is reproduced through the social relations of the comrades and their resistances, and survived through the future generations' memory of the trauma and the struggle.

Fig. 7 & 8: *The secluded common appearing through dialectic images: In* ***Fig. 7****, Soukantzidis appears agonizing in an isolation cell; this is followed by* ***Fig. 8****, where Soukantzidis recalls (while confined in isolation) personal instances of his life in freedom.*

The highly emotional representation of the inmates defying death through folk songs and dances probes towards a collective heritage of heroism, struggle and resistance. The long and slow procession of the two hundred through olive groves towards the firing squad, and the long and repeated depiction of them being shot, falling in a slow motion on the dry soil of the Greek land, monumentalizes the sacrifice and the martyrdom of the two hundred, who fall for the defense and the liberation of the common. In that sense, the common emerges in a utopic form, as something that is yet to be accomplished. The cinematic monumentalization of such a sacrifice, potentially confronts the viewer, addressing the contemporary state of the common and its fragmented form.

THE RADICAL NEGATION OF EVIL

In line with the political films dealing with the WWII and the antifascist Resistance, the Resistance movement, its fighters and the partisans come to represent and incarnate a promise of restoration, freedom, and justice, often materialized. In Louis Malle's *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974), the film closes with the announcement that Lucien Lacombe (who is the film's protagonist) was arrested, tried and executed by the French Resistance for his crimes as a Nazi collaborator, despite his eventual exodus from the collaborationists' camp. In Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) those murdered by the Nazis (including his mother) haunt the protagonist, the twelve-year-old orphaned Ivan who begins to work as a reconnaissance scout for the Red Army, so as to avenge them (Fig. 9) (Youngblood 2001: 849). In Elem Klimov's *Come and See* (1985), the Soviet partisans destroy the German military unit and execute those captured alive, after a short trial, as perpetrators of depicted crimes, such as those of the pillaging of whole villages and the torturing, raping and murdering of their populations, which the film graphically shows (ibid.: 854), through the reenactment of a prolonged and dystopian orgy of Nazi violence against civilians (which was a common tactic that the Germans regularly perpetrated at innumerous locations across the Eastern occupied territories, from Greece to Russia). The Resistance, therefore, obtains a cataclysmic status, coming to symbolize the unleashing of what Walter Benjamin (2004) described as "divine violence", a mass and popular (revolutionary) form of violence with a universal claim, delivering not only vengeance, but most crucially, justice and a sense of symbolic restoration, by perpetually remembering and avenging all the victims of fascist crimes (Lloyd 2008).

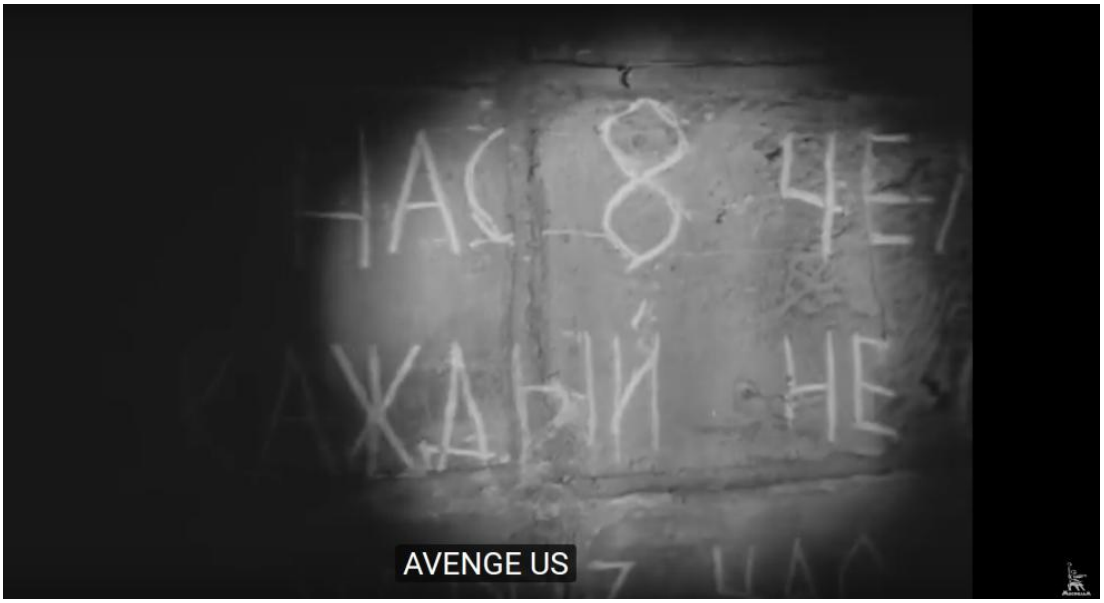

Fig. 9: *"Avenge us" scene from Tarkovsky's* Ivan's Childhood *(00:52:35); wall inscription with message from the eight partisans incarcerated to be executed by the Nazis, discovered by the scout Ivan in the cellar where he sought shelter at.*

In *The Last Note*, as soon as Soukantzidis announces their execution at the yard of Haidari at the dawn of 01/05/1044, the women inmates –upon hearing the death sentence– immediately begin to shout curses at the Nazis (at 01.32.22), as a chorus that is meant to symbolically stain the Nazis with the blood that they are about to spill, inscribing their crimes to their consciousness, haunting them – through the sheer expression of mass indignation and hate– with the fate that awaits them soon, especially given that in May 1944, Germany was already being defeated at all fronts. Likewise, in the form of a counterpoint, as soon as the news of the execution leak, Voulgaris inserts a brief sequel (at 01:15:14 [Fig. 10]) where, one of the camp's bakers, a religious and half-sane man, stops his work, turns his face to the sun and begins to shout "No passaran![4] The scums, the dammed fascists are soon to take off from here; I had a vision that Holly Mary from the Skies sticks the gun into their ass", defying the camp's rules and the Nazi terror. Again, despite the killing about to be committed, his rather prophetic call and his act of disorder seem like a prelude for the coming anti-fascist victory, which cannot be halted by any Nazi brutalities any longer.

Fig. 10: No passaran!

The ethos of the Resistance fighters represented in *The Last Note*, characterized by courage, determination, fidelity and solidarity, resembles the equivalent constructions of antifascist figures in Soviet war films such as Larisa Shepitko's *The Ascent* (1977). There too, the captured partisan, Sotnikov, remains firm to the anti-fascist (and Communist) cause until his execution by hanging. In *The Ascent*, Shepitko finely sketches what follows the loss of integrity, as Rybak, the otherwise courageous comrade of Sotnikov, while in captivity becomes demoralized and captured by fear. Eager by a desire to carry on living, accepts the fascists' offers to join their units. Somehow believing that he could carry on the fight in disguise, Rubak becomes a Nazi collaborator. Humiliation and moral degradation follows Rubak as the fascists assign to him different acts of compliance (including the hanging of Sotnikov), so as to undermine his integrity

[4] The antifascist slogan from the Spanish civil war.

and to turn him into an accomplice. The rigidity of Sotnikov empowers the others to be executed with him, while his dignity shocks the Nazis.

Although lagging behind in depth of characters, controversy and sophistication of dialogues when compared to *The Ascent*, *The Last Note* also demonstrates archetypes of desperate individuals in captivity and reenacts their fruitless efforts to cling to life at any cost. At 00:32:12 the film shows a group of inmates being brought to the camp's yard for immediate transportation. In a sign of humiliation caused by the Nazis, these inmates are made to appear dressed only in their underwear. Upon their embarkation to trucks, one of them breaks down in a futile attempt to be relieved shouting "I am innocent, I didn't do anything, I never harmed a German" (as if his arrest was a "mistake" and the others a "legitimate" action; earlier, during the interrogation process, the same man, overtaken by panic, betrays someone that gave him a clandestine flyer). This individual is soon captured and executed by the sadistic soldier Kovats. The "broken" individual is shot with a pistol at a close range in the neck while bended on his knees in broad daylight. His murder resembles the slaughtering of an animal. The film represents this very rapidly (it is visualized through a close and oblique camera shot lasting a few seconds only) with the camera to be quickly switching its focus at the inmates witnessing the murder. Such a way of dying comes into a sharp contrast to the kind of death that the two hundred are to meet. Their execution is reenacted through a long and graphic representation (from 01:38:00 to 01:49:00) that shows them to walk calmly towards the firing squad (Fig. 11), facing it courageously, and thus symbolically defying it, while falling slowly to the ground as heroes.

Fig. 11: *The epic reconstruction of the procession of the two hundred towards the firing squad*

Heroism creates a form of ascent (similar to the one emerging from the execution of Sotnikov) that transgresses the fascist aggression and disregards the Nazi death penalty, by crafting a monumental form of living and dying, worthy of remembrance by the young generations, thus making a civic example for a life

well lived, as argued by Arendt (1998) drawing on Aristotle. In *The Ascent,* this is shown through the camera's following of Sotnikov's last glances, which he exchanges with a boy wearing a Budenovka (the iconic Red Guards' cap) (Fig. 12), forced (along with other villagers gathered in the village square) to watch the execution of Sotnikov and his comrades (and along with it, the demoralization of Rybak). In *The Last Note*, this mainly occurs through the comrades' care to Miltos, the youngest political prisoner of the camp who is not in the list of the two hundred sentenced to execution, but also through the traces that the inmates leave behind them, such as Soukantzidis's final note to his father and to his partner, Haroula, or, through the shared moments in the comrades' encounter with their close persons, such as partners, parents and children. To this regard, a child also witnesses the execution hidden behind a tree, while shouting to his to-be-executed uncle that his daughter (who was introduced to us during her visit to her imprisoned father) has given birth to a girl. These features are meant to reserve the memory of the two hundred's struggle and martyrdom, as well as to express a sense of hope that the struggle and the sacrifice were not futile. The final words of various members of the two hundred, while facing the firing squad, such as "revenge!", "for a people's revolution!", "my son will avenge me, you scums!", "death to the Nazis, long live the un-slaved Athens!", "my poor, blood stained Kaisariani!" among other, more personal ones, signify the defiance of the Nazi occupiers and the death that they bring, and probe towards the continuity of the universal struggle for emancipation, which has been the case with the known final words of various executed revolutionaries. The film thus monumentalizes the sacrifice and the struggle of the two-hundred, so as to set an example and to reproduce their memory for the future generations, in a way that is common to political art (Fig. 13 & 14).

Fig. 12: *Boy watching Sotnikov's last moments at the gallows, in* The Ascent

Fig 13: *The two hundred before the firing squad, signifying the communist salute with their raised fists*

Fig. 14: *A fragment of a memorial complex ("the alley of the heroic cities", 1981) at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in WWII, depicting the beginning of the Ukrainian anti-fascist Resistance; the youth to be executed raise their fists in defiance of fascism and death (photo by the author)*

Either way, the humiliation caused by oppression shows the point beyond which life is not worth living, as, even death becomes ignominious. Benjamin's (2005)

VI thesis on history arguing that "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" emerges in this context. The numbing of personality and the loss of autonomy, integrity and will are common features of dehumanization. Hannah Arendt (1985) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) have adequately described the progressive loss of one's humanity in the terrorizing system of the Nazis, as an effective means of establishing absolute power. Here, the concentration camp marks the archetype of the totalistic space where full control is accomplished by the permanent exercise of oppression and terror, aiming to discipline and subordinate the individual inmate biopolitically, by producing a fully docile and predictable entity, disconnected from any sense of community. In *The Last Note*, one may notice that communication is also reduced into basic forms, intimidated and canonized by numerous commands that are constantly repeated by the camp's loudspeakers and by Fischer to Soukantzidis. The inmates speak fast and mostly in a low voice, while the contact is often coded, and usually associated to matters of life and death (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15: *An eerie image of a death signal, concerning the news of an impending execution order, passed from the women's to the men's section in Haidari*

The idea of evil here is useful to make sense of the importance of sustaining such forms of political binaries. Alain Badiou (2001: 61) understands evil as the complete absence of truth, along with a total disregard of the dimension of good: "For whom is a truth absent? For the human animal as such, absorbed in the pursuit of his interests, there is no truth, only opinions, through which he is socialized." Therefore, the evil is not merely a matter of opinion but something that can be understood through axiomatic criteria. The evil must be negated, and in that sense, the taking of sides is inevitable. The problem here though lies in the uses of the evil so as to establish the good. For, ideological and structural issues are key in the denoting of the good and the evil. Other than an absolute, the evil also appears as a subjective category defined by politics, contexts, interests and ideological processes. In contrary to relativistic definitions and uses of the evil, Badiou (2001: 67) foregrounds the notion of "a truth process", which marks the

course to actually oppose evil. For Badiou, a truth process is composed by three components, the event, fidelity, and truth. The event is the situation that foregrounds and inscribes a name to the void, that which has been excluded from the dominant form of order. Fidelity concerns the belief in the event; fidelity is sustained both semantically, and through praxis. Truth is, finally, what fidelity produces and it often emerges as a rupture, so as to confront the evil: "the power of a truth is that of a break; it is by violating established and circulating knowledge that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation" (Badiou 2001: 70). An ethics of truth stands in opposition to terror, betrayal and total power (or, disaster). These are the antonymic concepts to those that characterize a "truth process", and for Badiou make the characteristics of evil.

In these terms, the establishing of an "us versus them" binary, "we" the comrades, and "them", the fascists, marks a rigid line of political division. For Jodi Dean (2012: 121) antagonism, as well as division is a central feature of politics that is necessary to be claimed in order to resist oppression, coercion and colonization. The merciless, murdering, deceptive, and plundering acts of the Nazis are juxtaposed to the ascetic, honest and righteous images of the imprisoned inmates to be executed. The rival ideologies are thus exposed and challenged beyond the "post-historical" liberal simplifications (that equate Communism to Nazism), thus showing the radically opposite values, visions, and identities, as well as actions that they are concerned with, historically. While Fischer talks about force, supremacy and competition from his dominant position as the head of a prison and a Nazi officer of an army of an Occupation, Soukantzidis, despite his precarious existence as a communist captured by the Nazis, talks about accountability and equality in a parrhesiastic way, risking his life by an infurious Nazi camp commander who often comes to appear to be short of words. The dialogue starting at 48.06 is indicative:

> Fischer: Take a look at these pathetic people; if they survive, the best they could make would be good soldiers. But they will never be victorious, because they lack in faith of their supremacy. As long as I treat my enemy as equal, I am not in a position to eliminate him once and for all.
>
> Soukantzidis: Mister Commander, as you may know, perhaps the final countdown has started for you…
>
> F. Possibly but it will be an unprecedented one in human history. We will take everything down with us.
>
> S. You are a lawyer; don't you ever question the logics and the value of an order?
>
> F. Obedience, as a meaning and as a stance is a very interesting issue. For a self-confident personality, it is a great call and a tempting challenge. You and I have something in common. We follow the orders dictated by our ideology [Soukantzidis here pauses and turns towards his comrades. The camera follows

his gaze capturing their torment by the sadistic soldier Kovats, who submits them into humiliation and torture]

S. Imagine yourself in front of a court, to account for the crimes of this war.

F. [laughs sardonically] I will show you what I think [he then grabs the whip of Kovats and begins to strike Soukantzidis on his face and body].

DEPICTING NON-BOURGEOIS SUBJECTIVITIES: COMRADESHIP, FIDELITY, AND SELF-SACRIFICE

The moral supremacy of the Resistance is stressed in films like *The Ascent*[5], as well as in *The Last Note*, where the Nazis are also depicted as reactionaries who devalue human life to the outmost and who obey the strongest out of fear and calculation. This way, the fascists emerge as indecent and immoral figures of opportunistic cynics who only seek the fulfilling of short-sighted self-interests, pursued at under any cost, while using relativistic sophisms to cover up their deeds. Moral integrity though emerges as something that the fascists fear, because it is precisely what they lack of, despite their effort to undermine, suppress and obliterate it. The comrades' practical fidelity is marked by discipline, joy, enthusiasm and courage (Dean 2019: 90). These traits are shared on the basis of an equalizing promise, indifferent to individual specificities (ibid.: 10; 59), making the specific political relation that characterizes comradeship as highly disruptive of the hierarchies, norms, values and identities of the capitalist society.

To elaborate these points, in *The Last Note*, Fischer's offers to Soukantzidis regarding the sparing of his life, aim at gradually converting Soukantzidis and thus breaking his spirit and value system. The possibility of collaboration though is firmly denied by Soukantzidis. Soukantzidis's agonistic ethos is secretly

[5] To this regard, the dialogue (at 50.17) in *The Ascent* between Sotnikov and his interrogator, Portnov, a Russian Nazi collaborator is telling:
Portnov: There is no way out. None.
Sotnikov: I won't betray anyone. No-one. There are more important things than one's way out.
P: (looks bewildered and then laughs) where? What is it? What is it made of? That's nonsense. We are mortals. With death everything ends for us all, all life. The entire life. It is not worth it… for the sake of what? For an example to the future generations? You will not have a heroic death either. You won't just die. You'll croak like a traitor. And if you won't tell, someone else will, and we will write it off to you. Understand?
S: Scum. Human scum.
P: Now you will see what the true scum is. Don't be surprised, it will not be me, it will be you. You'll discover something in yourself that you never imagined to be. Where will your determination and the fanatic glimpse in your eyes go then? It'll all be taken over by fear. That is right. The fear of losing that refuge. And then you will discover who you are, alone, deserted. A simple human non-entity full of ordinary shit, without any of your noble words of arrogance. There, that's where the truth is. You did not insult me. No. I know what a human being really is. And you'll find out too.

admired and openly loathed by Fischer, who is challenged by his integrity and resistance. Soukantzidis's absolute negation shocks the Nazi, who even calls him "dump" for seemingly failing to follow his "personal interests". Drawing on Dean (ibid.: 13) again, a mere focus on individual survivability in a context of a generalized non-survival and extinction (such as the Nazis' unleased total war) most often proves to be vain, and simultaneously, such an individualist stance cancels politics, which may offer the sole possibility of emancipation.

Soukantzidis negates the prospect of developing a "normal life", showing that such a kind of individual escape would be undignified. Likewise, other inmates of the group too resent attempts of family members to intervene on their behalf, as earlier discussed with the example of Christos, who denounces his middle-class privilege and refuses his father's appeals to save himself, so as to cultivate further his individual potentials and develop a future academic career. Comradeship, according to Jodi Dean (ibid.: 95), "names a relation characterized by sameness, equality, and solidarity. For Communists, this sameness, equality, and solidarity is utopian, cutting through the determinations of capitalist society".

Besides a sadist, the Nazi Fischer also illustrates a petty-bourgeois archetypical identity. On the antipode, Soukantzidis and his comrades personify what Alberto Toscano (2010: 253) describes as a true fanatical stance. Dissociated from its ahistorical, liberal underpinnings, fanaticism is understood as a condition born out of "urgency and shock". Indeed, the terror and violence of fascism leave no space for compromise. An adamant position against fascism, followed by a firm and unconditional clenching to the patriotic, communist and antifascist struggle, characterize Soukantzidis and his comrades' tenet. Their radical negation of the evil that Nazism represents marks a positivity that is signified by the common that they produce and defend in the conditions of non-freedom and captivity, which organizes a horizon of universal justice and emancipation.

Fischer then represents mainstream conceptions of the fanatic. He is loyal; he does not question things and believes in his country's supremacy, and its dominant ideology. Further, he is aggressive, and arrogant. Simultaneously, Fischer is mannered (showing respectful and polite ways to his fellow officers), responsible in his work as the head of a concentration camp, and obedient to his superiors. Fischer is shown to enjoy visiting sites of antique ruins, and to play with his dog in the camp's yard. Fischer also has some refined tastes: he is shown to be listening to classical music while sipping a cup of tea or a glass of brandy with a cigarette at a comfortable space, after a day's work (at the camp), while depicting signs of melancholy as he rests in his private and enclosed realm. He is also a collector of music instruments; he even confesses to Soukantzidis his post-war aspiration to open a museum of music instruments in Germany, disregarding the origins of his collections, which are war booty –something that Soukantzidis

eloquently reminds him of. Further, he believes in success (through supremacy), which makes a key characteristic of the bourgeois competitive and individualist spirit, further amplified by the Nazi ideology and its racial, Western-centric intercessions. Therefore, the private side of the Nazi reconstructed in the film, is close to the bourgeois sense of normality. What Hannah Arendt (1986) described as the "banality of evil" emerges in the representation of Fischer, overdetermined by his engagement, both ideological and practical, with Nazism. Although not in unproblematic or coherent ways, Nazi ideology is related with various bourgeois values and imperatives:

> In Germany, fascism became a "middle-class revolution" it was "an attempt to keep middle-class values intact". Fascism all over Europe sought to combine traditionalism with modernity, the appeal to the past with a future far from the problems of the post-war world, and this not through a social or an economic revolution, but thanks to a "spiritual revolution" which did not want to abolish the political or economic hierarchy. (Plessini 2004: 236)

Erich Fromm (2001) has well analyzed the petty-bourgeois character of Nazism and its popularity, related to the resentment triggered by the oppressive conditions of bourgeois society, particularly when in crisis. For Fromm, Nazism was a politico-economic phenomenon (connected to specific historical circumstances such as the interwar economic crisis) that spread upon a socio-psychological basis. While working class people also joined Nazism without much resistance to it in Germany, for Fromm, it was the liberal and Catholic bourgeoisie that came to be the most ardent supporter of Nazism. This occurred due to the identity traits of this social segment, related to the love of power, its opportunism, its overall austere lifestyle characterized by hard work and conservation, and the loathing towards the stranger.

Left alone, the banalization of the Nazi (merely understood as an "ordinary" human being naturally succumbing to Nazism due to its pressures) may enact a misleading humanization of the monstrosity of Nazism and exonerate the perpetrators of Nazi crimes. Such a banalization of Nazism may sanction misleading identifications, falsely suggesting that "anyone" can potentially become a fascist, in a sense that fascism cannot be (easily) resisted due to circumstances and flaws of "human nature". In a sharp distinction from the supposedly "diachronic" individualist, bourgeois morals and aspirations, *The Last Note* produces a non-bourgeois subjectivity based on the collective agonistic spirit of the Communist and Greek subaltern, who is deemed as "non-Arian" by the Nazi ideology. A dialectic form of montage establishes this antithesis in different moments throughout the film, where opposing social relations and habits are demonstrated (Fig. 16 & 17).

Fig. 16 & 17: *A dialectic juxtaposition of the elites vs. the people; the Nazis are dining formally (with the camera lens focusing on the dinner table), while the two hundred are making their final fest in their prison cells*

Further, Fischer is shown to be sunk in inertia while sitting isolated in a dark, lonely but spacious and luxurious private space; the comrades have minimal private possessions and instead, share everything (from each cigarette to their collective fate [Fig. 18 & 19]). This way, they manage to create poetry (e.g. they are depicted to sing verses of Lorca and to make theatrical plays, before crafting an ultimate fest to farewell life) in the minimal, enclosed and deprived space of their common prison cell. The incarcerated comrades occupy the ground that for Jodi Dean (2018: 102; 2019) marks the zero level of communism; they are deprived of everything but their comradeship, unity and an absolute determination for struggle. These features stand in sharp opposition to the bourgeois forms of social relations, based on hierarchy, personal calculation, competition, conformity, and the accumulation of property.

Fig. 18 & 19: *The individual vs. the collective*

The relation between comrades is mediated by fidelity to a truth that they constantly produce. This agonistic spirit is also expressed through a radical negativity, which is eventually punished by death. This way, the comrades become universal symbols of a spirit to be preserved, and a struggle to be continued, denoting, in Traverso's (2017: 119) sense, the topos of hope for the better world to come.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: LET NO ONE FORGET. LET NOTHING BE FORGOTTEN[6]

The Last Note was produced in a time of an ongoing and severe politico-economic crisis, characterized by a generalized pessimism, social fragmentation, political apathy and regression, where, in a country slayed and ravaged by the Nazis, the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn emerged between 2012 and 2019 as

[6] Olga Berggolts, "Here lay Leningraders". Olga Berggolts was a Soviet poet and journalist, famous for her radio broadcasts during the 872-day long blockade of the city of Leningrad by the Nazis. The specific words are the title of Berggolt's poem inscribed at the motherland monument of the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery, which is dedicated to the city's inhabitants, as well as to the defenders of the city, who perished during the blockade.

the third largest party in the Greek Parliament. Sadly, such characteristics are not unique to Greece. In this context, with *The Last Note*, Voulgaris monumentalizes the struggle and the sacrifice of the two-hundred communists, murdered by the Nazis in Kaisariani, Athens on the 1st of May, 1944, an iconic event of the brutality of the Occupation. The historical context of WWII Greece is depicted through an anti-fascist metanarrative, by showing the crimes that the Nazis did in Greece, as well as the politics and the hardships of the Resistance.
The analysis forefronts the importance of the common, recreated by the film through an affective dialectic of the experiences of freedom and captivity, and shown in an era that is overdetermined by the "capitalist metanarrative", described by the late cultural critic Mark Fisher (2009) as "capitalist realism", placing individualization as a supposed solution to all problems, and hostile to grand narratives of universal emancipation and system change. The two-hundred comrades are common and ordinary people, living in extraordinary times. Their clinging to the struggle for deeply humanistic aspirations (such as those of socialism) rescues and reproduces the aspiration for a common world, defending it from the Nazi onslaught. The common is idealized; and yet, this ideal only forms a horizon that serves to direct politics. Socialism, to this regard, is not an end that signifies a fully resolute (and thus, ahistorical) entity, where conflict and problems will be totally eliminated, but a process towards a future when social life will become more inclusive, just, free and sophisticated.

Furthermore, the analysis also suggests that *The Last Note* prioritizes the centrality of comradeship in emancipatory socio-political struggles. This is particularly important for today, where mass politics from below are in decline amidst a polyvalent (political, economic, social, environmental) crisis that humanity and the planet are undergoing. Comradeship can allow people to develop the courage, fidelity, joy and excitement necessary to overcome the individualist impasse that capitalism and liberalism have advanced for several decades now. A communist vision and a communist party structure are crucial to this regard (Dean 2012; 2019). As Žižek (2011) and Traverso (2019) have argued, the liberal equation of communism with fascism, as totalitarian extremes tends to work in favor of fascism by relativizing it, something that post-modern theory can also be accountable for. Hence, the communist idea and historical experience needs to be rethought, reconfigured, and communicated anew. The reinvention of grand narratives, related to universal emancipation is a crucial component missing from today's politics. The cinematic depiction of past struggles, characterized by universal visions (e.g. international socialism) can create moments of reflection for today's political contexts and their pitfalls, and provide a symbolic space of shared memories and collective identification. In Walter Benjamin's sense, "clinging to things from the past enables interest and action in the present world […] allow[ing] one to gain access to the historical origins of one's suffering, and indeed to the logic of historicity itself" (Flatley,

2008: 65). Therefore, the kind of melancholia deriving from the engagement with history and loss is not depressing but entails a political potential of connection, reflection and reinvention of past hopes in the present era. Overall, Voulgaris tells a story of comradeship, fidelity, and ultimately, heroism, connected to the devotion to a cause of justice, equality and emancipation. *The Last Note* emerges as a cinematic ritual pointing towards "actions to follow in exceptional moments when one does not know anymore how to act" (De Groof 2015: 191). Though narrating trauma and loss, the film's narrative is not a defeatist one. Instead, the Nazi's moral and overall historical defeat is underlined. The film creates a visual memory of the Resistance, an unofficial historical account for the contemporary generations. By stressing the demarcating lines of the adversaries (Nazis vs. Communists), while emphasizing on their fundamental differences, *The Last Note* engages with the legacies of the communist-led antifascist Resistance in Traverso's (2017: 99) sense, setting an example for contemporary and future emancipatory struggles.

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