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The Strike Film as World Picture

A scholarly truism holds that we cannot grasp global capitalism through any one image, narrative, or viewpoint, but only through necessarily partial attempts at totality. Since (at least) Eisenstein's generative failure to film Marx's *Capital* as "libretto," the cinematic avant – garde has sought a film form adequate to apprehend this always partial totality. The two major waves of avant – garde cinemas – the experimental films of late silent and early sound period (1925-1934) and their reiteration in the global militant experimental films of the "long 1968" – were particularly invested in film's particular material and indexical relationship to global capitalism. On their view, film was *the* global medium poised to apprehend global capitalism's invisibilized itineraries and constitutive asymmetries. In this context, the strike film – a nexus of the political and aesthetic avant – garde – provides a unique approach to the problem of scale. Its impetus and principal subject is a local demand in a particular worksite. Yet it is not content to remain there: through experiments in film form, it aspirationally seeks to scale out to global capitalism.

To explore the problem of scale in the strike film, I compare examples of documentary strike films from the two waves of avant – garde cinemas. The first, *Misère au Borinage* (Henri Storck and Joris Ivens, Belgium, 1934), recounts a mining strike through the frame of global upheaval, where Brazil and Pennsylvania grant us access to the titular Belgian conflict. The second, Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas' *La hora de los hornos* (Argentina, 1968), among the most prominent of experimental leftist films of the second wave, deploys montage to scale national – urban Peronist labor struggles up to the status of Global South allegory. I analyze how both documentaries seek to apprehend the ostensibly local strike as, per Rosa Luxemburg, a "gigantic, many – colored picture of a general arrangement of labor and capital." Ultimately, I am also interested in how a focus on the strike film might shed light on methodological debates surrounding the intersection of world cinema and world literature studies.