

Cinema/History/Feminism: Intersecting Discourses in *Rosa Luxemburg*

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Margarethe von Trotta's 1986 film *Rosa Luxemburg* offers a cinematic portrait of a historically significant female revolutionary, one of the central figures of 20th century socialism. The film attempts to reclaim this figure as historical subject, as feminist subject, and as a cinematic subject for contemporary audiences for whom socialist and feminist history has been lost or suppressed and for whom cinema is articulated within mainstream conventions. In its recovery of Luxemburg as a historical subject, in its interpretation of her as a feminist subject, and in its cinematic construction of her, the film has been seen by some as a major work of late 20th century European cinema, but it has also been attacked on various grounds—as presenting inaccurate history, as being insufficiently feminist, or as conforming too closely to mainstream cinematic conventions. What seems most significant about *Rosa Luxemburg*, however, is the complex way in which the film allows the historical, feminist, and cinematic discourses that comprise it to interrogate each other. It is through that process and in the intersections of history, feminism, and cinema that *Rosa Luxemburg* challenges conventional cinematic representations of history and of women and articulates a different historical, feminist, cinematic subject.

History/Cinema

The relation of cinema to history is complex and problematic. Most obviously, there is the question of accuracy raised by historical or biographical films. As a tool of critical analysis, the concept of "accuracy" encompasses not only issues such as the degree of historical faithfulness of the details of mise-en-scene, but also discussion of the extent to which "narrative"—and especially mainstream narrative's reliance on fixed conventions and formulas—necessarily distorts "history." However, there is also the more abstract question of the screen in general as the site of cultural production, the question of the extent to which the imaginary figures of the cinema reveal the historical conditions of the period of their production. Because *Rosa Luxemburg* is a narrativized account of a historical figure and because it is a German film, it engages with these intersections of cinema and history in particularly compelling ways.

For German cinema in particular, the history/cinema relation has been especially important, ever since Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* published in 1947. Kracauer's study of German film from 1895 to 1933 constructed a cinematic history for Weimar film that was retrospectively dependent on subsequent national history, that is, on the Nazi period. Writing immediately after the war and looking back through the period of Nazi history, Kracauer claimed that Germany's "deep layers of collective mentality" (6) were written on the screen, and that if properly read this mentality reveals the trajectory of middle-class paralysis and collapse leading to the Nazi ascendancy. In imaginary form, then, German history was embodied in the fantasmagoric figures of the German cinema although that inscription could only be legible from a retrospective position, across the gap in that same history. Despite challenges to the details of his analysis, Kracauer's central point that argues a German national history merged with its Weimar cinematic reflections has remained influential. And many years later, another spectral relation between German history and cinema emerges in the films of the New German Cinema (1969-1990), a movement that includes the films of von Trotta. One of the persistent issues confronting this West German film movement is the cultural failure (and the need) to come to terms with the Nazi past, to confront history, the problem of how

to work through the "amnesia" of the post-war period in an effort not only to represent that which has been repressed but also as a means of constituting an individual and social self/identity from the fragments of a divided nationality and a denied history (Cook 584-85). This raises again the question, from the other side of Kracauer's divide, of what it means to represent history, the past, on the screen.

The two discourses of history and of cinema intersect in various ways in *Rosa Luxemburg* as the film recreates events from several periods of Rosa Luxemburg's life. The film concentrates on the personal relationships and political activities of Luxemburg and her German socialist colleagues in the years between 1906 and her murder in Berlin in 1919; some attention is paid to her earlier political activity in Poland and to her childhood. On the most fundamental level, the cinematic discourse is constituted by the actors, the sets, the apparatus of production and reception while the historical discourse is constituted by the iconic relation between the character "Rosa Luxemburg" and the actual person of that name, the use of that person's actual letters and speeches, and the use of documentary footage from the period. In one way, the relation between the two discourses signifies nothing more complex than the familiar convention of the cinematic apparatus creating a fictional world or diegesis that is taken to "represent" or "substitute for" the absent "real world"—in this case, the historical past. Seen in this way, *Rosa Luxemburg* conforms to the conventions of mainstream or classical narrative cinema and even to the conventions of the Hollywood biopic (Custen). And the film has generally been praised for its representation of the complicated dynamics of the German Social Democratic Party, for its general "recreation" of the (look of the) period, and for its treatment of Luxemburg's personal relationships (Diggins; Kuhn; Eley). However, when seen in this way, the film also opens itself to scrutiny and debate regarding what some critics see as a historical discourse of omissions and evasions.

Those historical "errors" regarding Luxemburg's life include the omission of her long political relationship and ideological conflicts with Lenin and the omission of direct reference to her Jewishness (Kuhn 180; Lant 108-09). Von Trotta has responded to these criticisms by drawing a line between the discourses of

history and fiction ("...we must remember that a strictly historical perspective would be safer conceived as a documentary") and by pointing out that Luxemburg scholars have defended her artistic right to select and omit historical material (26, 28). And she has responded to specific accusations by providing rationales for her omissions. She argues that although her decision to have the narrative adhere to Luxemburg's perspective allowed her to avoid "historical squabbles" over the representation of other historical figures, Lenin presented a specifically cinematic problem she could not solve and so she omitted him: "I omitted Lenin, for example, because I find his whole personage as it has traditionally appeared in films simply embarrassing. I had to avoid the recognition factor of such a major 'film' figure. As you know, he has been portrayed in hundreds of films" (25). That Lenin had become too recognizable as a screen presence to figure in a historical film is a somewhat odd argument and one that does not address the issue of omitting Luxemburg's political quarrels with him since those could have been conveyed in any number of ways. On the issue of omitting Luxemburg's Jewishness, von Trotta argues that this omission is justified by Luxemburg's own refusal to address "Jewishness" as a personal or political determinant in her life, but in addition she again relies on a rationale that concerns itself with the spectator, that privileges cinematic needs over historical truth. She argues that to present a post-World War II film audience with the fact of Luxemburg's Jewishness would cause that audience to misunderstand "the real cause, the political grounds" and the historical meaning of her death: "[I]t was because she was a radical leftist and a powerfully charismatic leader and writer...Her politics, not her race, were the cause of her murder" (27). In both cases, then, von Trotta's omissions "deform" history in ways designed to privilege cinematic discourse and serve the perceived needs of her film audience.

In a 1981 interview, von Trotta affirmed her desire to reach that audience politically: "I cannot imagine making a film that does not bear directly on our situation in Germany" (qtd. in Elsaesser 233). Her subsequent *Rosa Luxemburg* is no exception. Critics have pointed out the "utopian function" (Kuhn 184) of Luxemburg's character and the "harnessing" of the film to contemporary German politics (Eley 1040-41; Donougho 151). The

film invites the spectator to identify with the exemplary figure of Luxemburg; it thereby connects the "fallen world" of the mid-1980s (with its divided Germany and legacy of failed radicalism) to the "utopian" world depicted in and by the film, the time before Nazism, the time when other futures seemed possible or at least were fought for. But Antonia Lant has argued that this attempt to create a utopian version of history for the benefit of the present is part of a cultural attempt to erase the Nazi period; in her view, the film is "a vivid example of precisely how committed contemporary German culture is to representing itself in either pre-Nazi or post-Nazi terms in order to elide the literal fact of Nazi Germany" (107). Instead of recovering and reclaiming the historical Luxemburg for a contemporary generation, the cinematic discourse transforms her into "an unnecessarily mythic and nostalgic character" in a romanticized and sentimentalized past (107). Lant sees the film as a "formally conservative film" that "whitewashes the contradictions" of Luxemburg's life (108). As a result, by the end of the film, instead of functioning as a revolutionary inspiration, von Trotta's Luxemburg is entrapped in the present, "in the cultural schizophrenia of contemporary Germany" (122).

Lant's argument that "von Trotta's film is the ground on which the historical evidence of a revolutionary woman and the need to idealize a lost era collide" (108) and produce a "misreading" of Luxemburg is provocative and illuminating. However, it relies on an understanding of the film as "formally conservative" and it sees that conservative cinematic discourse as opposed to and undermining the historical. Both of those positions are open to debate by locating the film less firmly within the conventions of classical narrative cinema. Such a move allows us to see the film as "exposing the contradictions in Luxemburg's life" (Kuhn 169) rather than "whitewashing" them. It also allows us to understand cinema and history in *Rosa Luxemburg* as intersecting discourses that perform reciprocal acts of interrogation, thereby producing a cinematic/biographical subject "exposed" as necessarily incomplete.

In its adherence to representational codes of realism, *Rosa Luxemburg* indeed adopts many of the conventions of classical narrative cinema while rejecting the modes of production offered by avant-garde practices and by materialist cinema. However,

the film also undermines mainstream conventions by adopting the practices of European art cinema, a form of filmmaking practice that employs unconventional and complex modes of narration as well as unconventional editing and camerawork and that works to unsettle the spectator's (conventional) relation to cinema (Elsaesser 5; Bordwell 205-33). The clearest and most important aspect of *Rosa Luxemburg*'s adoption of anti-Hollywood art-cinema practices is the disjunctiveness that characterizes the film's temporal structure and that disrupts a "seamless" fit between the film's diegesis and its historical material.

Rosa Luxemburg begins in the year 1916 with a sequence depicting Luxemburg in prison for her opposition to German participation in World War I. Through an extremely complex and by mainstream standards confusing chronological structure, the film then shifts back and forth in non-linear fashion between earlier events (and locations) and 1916. There are at least sixteen temporal shifts in this part of the film, with the different time periods "jumbled" in such a way that although some events appear to be "internal flashbacks" their status is never clear. In the final part of the film, the past "catches up" with the 1916 cinematic present; from that point on, the film proceeds linearly—although still episodically and elliptically—until the event of Luxemburg's murder by the right-wing Freikorps in January 1919. The disorienting temporal shifts produce significant "gaps" and result in an unusually complex, fragmentary, "incomplete" narrative chronology, one so disjunctive that it is all but impossible to piece together a coherent (conventional) biography from it. And it is thus impossible for the spectator to construct Luxemburg as a coherent (conventional) biographical subject.

The conventions of classical narrative cinema also work to suppress the marks of production in historical or biographical film by suppressing the traces of research (Custen 128), thereby rendering "seamless" the fit between the cinematic construction of the diegesis and the historical material that (to varying degrees) informs it. However, far from suppressing the traces of research, *Rosa Luxemburg* tends to flaunt them. (Luxemburg's words—and the evidence of von Trotta's massive research project—are everywhere, from the private correspondence rendered through voice-over to the public speeches staged for the camera.)

And in doing so, *Rosa Luxemburg* calls such seamlessness into question. For example, in the opening and subsequent 1916 prison sequences, Barbara Sukowa's voice-over narration presents Luxemburg's actual words, taken from her letters (to Sonia Liebknecht and Luise Kautsky). On one level, the actor speaking the words of the historical person appears to enact a seamless inseparability of discourses. But since voice-over narration also calls attention to itself as a cinematic device, these 1916 sequences constitute a cinematic self-consciousness that marks a difference from the historical discourse they purport to contain.

The way in which the film uses the discourses of cinema and history to unsettle each other is perhaps most clear in the case of von Trotta's use of documentary footage. In the first instance, such footage is used in an arguably conventional way. Luxemburg, in prison, receives word that a young male friend has died in the war. The camera tracks in to a close-up of her as she lies on her bed and cries; then there is a cut to documentary footage of the fighting and to footage of mourning women. This transition within the diegesis from a fictional to a documentary discourse can be read as another self-conscious art cinema "intervention" (Bordwell 233)—like the voice-over narration—but because it is a familiar enough convention in contemporary historical films it can also be read as not necessarily constituting a break in the diegetic illusion.

However, the second time documentary footage is used, in the section of the film depicting the street fighting in 1918 as the war is ended, the Social Democrats win parliamentary control, and Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht break from the Party, it functions explicitly to disrupt the fictional diegesis. As this section of the film begins, the imprisoned Luxemburg hears the political news and demands to be released. At this point, as in the earlier case of the war footage, there is a single interpolation of documentary footage of the street fighting. But then, after her release from prison, documentary footage of the street fighting is in several places interpolated into the sequence depicting Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as they participate in Spartacus rallies or come under fire. The cross-cutting between the fictional and documentary discourses is deliberately jarring and disjunctive, not at all a "seamless" merging of archival footage and von Trotta's footage. The sequence looks exactly like footage from a

1918 documentary set against a contemporary reenactment, and it thereby foregrounds their radical difference. In other words, it is that which is most fully a part of historical discourse that disrupts the diegesis and signals self-conscious awareness of "the cinematic." Thus, while the cinematic discourse here works to "represent" the historical, the historical discourse becomes the self-reflexive signifier of the text's disjunctiveness. History and cinema remain in tension, each producing the effect of the other, in an intersection that does not dissolve into the seamless fantasy of mainstream cinema, the fantasy of "coherence," but that instead suggests contradiction and incompleteness as the necessary results of cinematic and historical inquiry.

Feminist Cinema

Throughout her career, von Trotta has been a leading figure in the German (and European) feminist film movement (Quart 93; Acker), and in *Rosa Luxemburg* she is of course not only reclaiming a historically important socialist figure but a historically important female socialist figure. Her long-standing fascination with Luxemburg, dating to a 1968 student protest, grows out of her discovery that Luxemburg left two kinds of writing, the "logically argued and progressive and hopeful" political essays and the "warmhearted, subtle and almost poetic" personal letters: "These two dimensions in one woman made me want to address her from the very beginning" (Von Trotta 24). Challenging the separation of the private and the public is central to von Trotta's feminist practice in all of her films: "We [German women filmmakers] make no separation between private and political, between public and personal life ... and it is precisely this quality that can be encountered in our films and that may perhaps lead to a new esthetic" (qtd. in Moeller 113). *Rosa Luxemburg* constructs a Luxemburg who repeatedly struggles as a woman to reject the private/public or personal/political oppositions imposed by the patriarchal culture around her; she thus functions as a paradigmatic female figure and feminist precursor for von Trotta and for her audience. In this film, the discourses of history and cinema, then, are interrogated not only by each other but also by the discourse of feminism. As Susan Linville notes, "Indeed, [von Trotta] dramatizes the process of retrieving

both personal and public history as a critical form of feminist intervention" (*Feminism, Film, Fascism* 15).

Feminist film theory defines feminist cinema not only by its subject matter but also by its anti-traditional cinematic strategies (Kaplan). Feminist film practices, like those of the art cinema, constitute an "assault" on the conventions of classical narrative cinema through the adoption of non-linear structures, fragmentation, and disruptions in the structure of the gaze. Prior to *Rosa Luxemburg*, von Trotta's films typically centered on dual protagonists, contemporary German women, often literal and figurative sisters, and used the deconstructive strategies of feminist filmmaking to present the divided, fragmented inner lives of these female characters as individualized mirrorings of the psychic, political, and national divisions and fragmentations of contemporary German society. Although in *Rosa Luxemburg* she "simplifies" (or makes more conventional) this doubled narrative structure, she does not abandon the strategies of feminist filmmaking. *Rosa Luxemburg's* feminist difference is marked both by its choice of a female socialist figure as narrative subject and by its anti-conventional cinematic strategies of disjunctiveness, strategies that belong to both von Trotta's art cinema and feminist filmmaking practices. Those strategies are parallel to the strategies of written feminist biography (Alpern et al. 6-11) and function to represent Luxemburg as a feminist subject, one who struggles against the separation of public/political from personal/private spheres. That the historical Luxemburg refused to engage in "the woman question" (because she thought the larger issue was the class struggle) is one of the "contradictions" in her life; von Trotta uses the resources of feminist filmmaking not only to expose but also to "undo" that contradiction.

The central articulation of Luxemburg's struggle against the private/political split occurs about one third of the way through the film as an embedded flashback. At the end of a sequence set in 1906, Luxemburg returns home after delivering a speech at a workers' hall. She is alone. A dissolve introduces an apparent flashback to a previous quarrel in 1899 with Leo Jogiches, her former lover and life-long political comrade. In a classically constructed eight segment shot/reverse shot sequence, they argue. Leo claims, "Rosa, you have to choose: mother or revolutionary"; she answers, "Both." Leo replies, "That's impossible"; she

cries out "Why?" As Leo rather pedantically explains that "Your task is to give birth to ideas; they are your children," there is a cut to Rosa who turns away from Leo and hurls something, her motion followed by a swish pan. The eighth, concluding shot is a reverse shot of a shattered mirror framing Rosa's fractured image with Leo in the background. This moment clearly resonates as the film's central articulation of Luxemburg's constant struggle to integrate personal and political desires and its significance is marked cinematically by the self-reflexivity implied in the *mise-en-scene*: that is, in the shattered mirror that disrupts the previous shot/reverse shot pattern (shots alternating between Rosa and Leo) and thus reveals the (usually repressed) place of the camera. And because the camera is now "replaced" by a shattered mirror, the sequence calls into question the processes of identification in cinema. It is not only Rosa's identity that is "fractured" in the sequence's final image, but also the conventional process of identification, of "mirroring," between spectator and screen. The cinematic gaze, the process by which the spectator and the camera align themselves so as to identify with the image that objectifies female subjects (Mulvey 19-21), is here "exposed" and mirrored back as also shattered.

The sequences that surround this brief flashback also serve to underscore its significance. The first seven sequences of this lengthy 1906 section of the film are as follows: Luxemburg's return by train to Berlin after being released from prison in Poland; her reunion with her close friend Luise Kautsky, in the course of which she is furious to learn that she was released from prison only because friends paid her bail against her wishes; a discussion of Party tactics with Karl Kautsky; Luxemburg's speech at a workers' hall and her encounter with a young man who asks her a "personal question"; her return home from the hall and the flashback to the quarrel with Leo; a small dinner party with old friends and comrades at the home of Luise and Karl Kautsky; Luxemburg's speech at a large Party meeting in (we later learn) Mannheim. This 1906 section of the film is one of the most disjunctive, marked by severe ellipses between the individual sequences, which are separated only by straight cuts, such that temporal and causal connections are often obscured. But the disjunctiveness of this section functions precisely to juxtapose public space and domestic space, personal relationships and

political relationships, "framing" the feminist shattering of the (cinematic) mirror.

However, the construction of this section of the narrative is even more complex in its exploration of the personal/political tension than the pattern of the juxtaposition of personal and political sequences suggests. The sequences are also linked through repeated visual motifs and through verbal repetitions. The juxtaposition of the Kautsky dinner party and the Party meeting in Mannheim illustrates the type of linkages at work. The sequence of the dinner party immediately follows the image of the shattered mirror. It is shot in conventional shot/reverse shot and establishing shot editing patterns and begins with a shot of Luxemburg and a small group of friends, including August Bebel, the Party chairman, in the Kautsky dining room. In what is clearly a domestic scene, the three Kautsky children come in to say goodnight (setting up an ironic comment on the previous "mirror" sequence with its quarrel about motherhood). Bebel then raises his glass in a toast to Rosa, "our little dervish." Luxemburg, who during this period has been criticizing the Party leadership for being too conservative, accepts the toast but then responds with "To the revolution!" Ignez Auer promptly chokes on his wine, and she reassuringly pats him on the back. Luxemburg and Bebel continue to spar over tactics; Bebel says that she is so far to the left that the revolution, when it comes, may have to hang her, and she replies that no one knows who will do the hanging. It ends as Bebel toasts her again and she rather fondly replies, "I love you, August." The first shot of the next sequence is a long shot showing Luxemburg speaking to a large meeting of the German Social Democratic Party. The camera moves in on her from a distance, as it usually does when presenting her as a public speaker, circling, approaching tangentially, then finally centering her in the frame and setting up the more conventional shot/reverse shot editing that will alternate shots of her and reaction shots of the audience. As this sequence begins, she is commenting on the previous speaker, Bebel, and she jokes that she could not hear him properly because she was sitting on the left and he was speaking to the right. Her words obviously serve to link this sequence to the previous sequence in the Kautsky dining room. And although the temporal relation between the two events is obscured, the domestic space and the

public space have been linked associatively, as have Luxemburg's personal relationships and political relationships.

In addition, the complexity with which this section of the narrative explores the personal/political tension is revealed not only by the sequences' juxtapositions and linkages but also in the way that each of the seven sequences incorporates both the domestic, personal sphere and the public, political one. For example, the fourth sequence in this section, Luxemburg's speech at the workers' hall, is clearly a "public" sequence. The sequence begins with a long shot from the far side of the hall. As Rosa is introduced and moves toward the place from which she is to speak, the camera tracks laterally, parallel to the stage, keeping her deeply recessed in the long shot. This is the same type of distancing or "historicizing" frame used in the seventh sequence, depicting the Mannheim speech, described earlier. After she begins speaking, the sequence uses shot/reverse shot editing to cut between reaction shots of the crowd and ever-closer shots of Luxemburg, the classical editing pattern functioning to overcome that "historical" distance and suture the spectator to Luxemburg's image via the gaze of the diegetic audience. At the end of the speech, a stationary shot taken from behind Luxemburg frames her solitary figure against the mass of cheering workers; it also separates the spectator's gaze from the gaze of the audience and places the spectator "within" Luxemburg's space. The second part of the sequence then begins with a cut to Luxemburg standing in the midst of the crowd, accepting congratulations and exchanging greetings. A young man approaches and urgently asks her advice on a "personal question"; he wants to know if it would be socialistically correct—or too bourgeois—if he and his pregnant girlfriend/comrade were to marry. (She tells him to give it a try.) Through its layering of events (public speech and private question) and also through its dual strategies of distancing and identification, this sequence illustrates how the film encodes the personal/private within the political/public. Similarly, the domestic and personal sequences are steeped in political issues. For example, Luxemburg's reunion with her close friend Luise Kautsky, the second sequence, is also about Luxemburg's politically based anger on learning that her friends bailed her out of prison. And the fourth sequence, the intimate and

domestic Kautsky dinner party, contains her political sparring with Bebel over his patronizing dismissal of her radicalism.

One of the most important of such sequences occurs in a later section of the film, again at the Kautsky dining table, and is the place in the narrative where von Trotta addresses one of Luxemburg's most significant "contradictions" her rejection of "the woman question." Clara Zetkin, the feminist theorist in the group, raises the question of women's suffrage; Luxemburg responds, "That's not the point." The men at the table become patronizing, criticizing her for not taking up the issue. She snaps back that it is the men who want to separate out the woman question from the larger class struggle so that they can in effect forget it. There is a cut to Clara who looks at her with approval, apparently agreeing that Luxemburg should not let the men "divert" her (or feminism) in this way. In an unsettling of the conventional workings of the gaze, the spectator is clearly meant to identify with Clara's gaze and (feminist) judgment. However, the sequence also clearly invites the spectator to understand that at some point in the historical future—the moment of the film's production and reception—Luxemburg's choice will be seen as problematic, not by the descendents of Bebel, Auer, and Kautsky, but by the feminist descendents of Clara Zetkin. As Anna Kuhn notes, the sequence makes clear the limitations of a Marxist analysis of class oppression that does not address the oppression of women under patriarchy and "points dialectically to the necessity for a feminist analysis" (173). In this sequence, the personal, the political, the historical, and the cinematic all intersect to "expose the contradiction" of Luxemburg's refusal to take up the woman question.

Through its disjunctive strategies, *Rosa Luxemburg* deploys the "associative" processes associated with women's cinema (Knight 145-46) in order to tell Luxemburg's story as feminist biography. Its mixture of practices that mimic and practices that destabilize mainstream narrative and spectatorship produces what Linville, speaking of a previous von Trotta film, has called a cinematic realism that is "more qualified and more reflexive" than has been acknowledged ("Retrieving History" 449). Rather than seeking to "transcend" contradiction and incompleteness by constructing the fantasy of a "coherent" self revealed "objectively," *Rosa Luxemburg* continually pivots around the contradiction

with which it begins. The 1916 sequence that begins the film and the subsequent 1916 sequences that anchor the non-linear portion of the narrative contain the emblematic contradiction: Luxemburg is in prison for her political and public activities, for her fiery speeches and writings, but imprisonment isolates her from the world of politics and constitutes a private and even domestic world in which she is often alone, tending to birds and plants and writing personal letters. The Luxemburg that the film constructs cannot resolve the contradiction and remains divided, adhering to political convictions that entail the rejection of the very feminist analysis that might have allowed her to effectively escape the patriarchal dead-end represented by the quarrel with Leo. By constantly calling attention to oppositions between the personal and the political, between the private and the public, in Luxemburg's life and by causing that opposition to continually collapse in on itself in the construction of the narrative, *Rosa Luxemburg* offers itself as a feminist intervention in Luxemburg's story, an attempt to undo those oppositions and perhaps to compensate for what it sees as Luxemburg's own largely frustrated desire to resist them.

The last section of the film proceeds linearly and ends with Luxemburg's murder in 1919, but even here, the film refuses traditional closure. In the final sequence, Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are taken into custody by the military. As they are taken separately out of a hotel, each is attacked by members of a growing crowd of soldiers and para-military figures. In a shockingly brief and abrupt final series of shots, Luxemburg is hit by a rifle, pushed into a car, shot, and her body is dumped into a canal. The final shot is of the black water of the canal; the screen then fades to black. That black "abyss" of the water and the screen represents the future: Luxemburg's and the Weimar Republic's. But it therefore also inscribes the past. Present/future/past come together as sliding temporal perspectives, but in an image that also inscribes the gap that separates them, that separates the spectator from history and from cinema. In *Rosa Luxemburg*, history and cinema inscribe and reinscribe their intersections on the feminist screen, thereby telling and not telling the real story of Rosa Luxemburg.

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