

Living with friends

‘Le cinéma ne m’intéresse pas comme métier: c’est une façon de vivre en collectif.’¹

(Danel 2008: 95)

‘Que ce soit la politique, les échecs, les boules, le tricot, la pêche à la ligne, le bricolage ou le cinéma, il faut une pratique pour rester amis très longtemps, c’est indispensable: il faut du grain à moudre.’²

(Danel 2008: 47)

‘Mais, lorsque nous nous retrouvons, se met en place en un clin d’œil une communauté étonnante, un moment d’utopie où nous allons à nouveau confronter notre histoire à l’Histoire, c’est-à-dire continuer à vivre.’³

(Danel 2008: 46)

Robert Guédiguian has had an industrious and productive career lasting thirty-five years (and counting), producing, co-writing and directing nineteen full-length films, as well as a parallel career as an independent film producer with Agat Films & Cie, a company that he co-founded in the early 1990s. His work attracts a core of loyal fans, numbering approximately 200,000, who consistently turn out for

- 1 ‘The cinema does not interest me as a craft: it is a way of living collectively.’ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.
- 2 ‘Whether it is politics, chequers, boules, knitting, fishing, fixing things around the house, or the cinema, you need a practice in order to stay friends for a long time, it’s indispensable. You need grist for the mill.’
- 3 ‘However, whenever we meet up, an amazing community is instantly re-established, a moment of utopia, in which we can once again confront our story with History, which is to say, to continue to live.’

every film he releases. His most successful film, *Marius et Jeannette* (1997), attracted over 2.5 million viewers in France, had worldwide success and can be considered a key film of its decade.⁴

And yet, Guédiguian insists, as he does in the above citations (typical of many statements he has made over the years, and so to be taken seriously), that he really does not care so much about the cinema, that it does not interest him as a career or as a craft but as a practice with another goal: to enable friends to ‘live together’. The critical reception of his work may reflect this ambivalence: though he has many defenders, he also has a number of detractors who find his work too ideological, too simplistic, too Manichean, too melodramatic, etc. Guédiguian has sometimes been criticised for making ‘fictions de gauche’, well-intentioned leftist narratives that argue for a different world while neglecting to imagine a different cinema. The charge may or may not have some justification in the case of some individual films, but it is blind to the profoundly original and durable project of ‘living together’ that underpins Guédiguian’s work and that constitutes a truly different cinema. In this book, I will discuss all of Guédiguian’s films to date, sometimes in great detail, but I will do so with an eye to developing this deeper project. Indeed, much of their aesthetic merit, it seems to me, will appear more evident once it comes into focus.

L’Estaque, political commitment and the Common Programme

Living with friends, to ‘remain together for a long time’, involves a particular practice that I hope to explain over the course of this introduction. But it also has to do with ‘newly confronting our story with History’. On one hand, as we will see, this means that friendships are self-aware. On the other hand, the capitalisation of ‘History’ should tip us off that Guédiguian has a view of history related to Marxism. For Guédiguian, history, as Marx argues in *The German Ideology*, begins with life, the ‘real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which

4 Most of the films since *Marius et Jeannette* have had between the core 200,000 and 400,000 viewers, with as many as 600,000 for *Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro*.

they find already existing and those produced by their activity' (Marx 1983: 163). Human life is moulded by these conditions, but humans also act upon the world to produce new conditions for living. When there is a contradiction in the ways in which the means of subsistence are produced, for example, when the social organisation of feudalism no longer reflects an economy in which the bourgeoisie is the main producer of wealth, then a revolution takes place – thesis gives way to antithesis – and a new synthesis is, at least provisionally, put into place. Guédiguian is a film-maker from the working class, and so 'living with friends' involves, for him, a constant evaluation of friendship from an outside perspective, in light of the place of this class within History.⁵ These two strands of friendship will be at the centre of this book: friendship as a local story and friendship within a broader, collective History.

This understanding of 'living' in history is anchored in Guédiguian's own upbringing, in L'Estaque (and surrounding areas), the working-class neighbourhood of Marseilles where he was born and raised and where most of his films are set. L'Estaque, today forming a somewhat isolated northern neighbourhood of the city, sits on a bay surrounded by rocky hills, protected from the strong Mediterranean winds: the Provençal word 'Estaca' refers to floating landing stages in the bay where passing vessels sought shelter in bad weather. (The word's literal meaning, 'attachment', rings true to many of Guédiguian's thematic concerns.) L'Estaque has been inhabited since prehistoric times, served as a port for loading wine during antiquity and later became a small hamlet of peasants and fishermen, though eventually the mackerel, sardines and sea urchins will have disappeared.

Émile Zola's 1884 novella *Naïs Micoulin* reads like a sepia photograph of the village during the transformations of an industrial revolution characterised by toil and class divisions. Zola tells the story of two lovers: Frédéric Rostand, the son of a wealthy lawyer from Aix, and Naïs, a beautiful young peasant girl whose father is the caretaker of the Rostand family's country estate in L'Estaque. In an earlier period, Micoulin would have been a fisherman, and he still supplements his table with excursions into the bay to check his traps, but the family's way of life is disappearing, and his daughter Naïs

5 I will retain Guédiguian's capitalisation throughout whenever I am referring to this view of history.

must take a job in one of the new cement factories in town. Frédéric, who has known Naïs since childhood, becomes infatuated when she becomes a young woman; at night the two sit on rocks looking out at Marseilles at the other end of the bay. Micoulin discovers the affair and plots to kill Frédéric, but he is killed in the process, when a chance bolt of lightning causes a landslide in the ground that he has weakened by creating an irrigation system for the olive trees. (Modernity kills him.) Frédéric, though a bourgeois and becoming a lawyer, comports himself as a kind of village lord. An injustice is expressed in gendered power relationships in a way that announces many of Guédiguian's narratives: he soon tires of Naïs and abandons her; she marries a hunchback from the factory and grows old and ugly. Zola's story bears witness to rapidly disappearing, centuries-old work traditions – fishing and agriculture – rapidly transformed through modern, capitalistic industrial techniques.

Characters in Guédiguian's films still set out on a fishing excursion from time to time, in an evocation of antique L'Estaque. But his films are, of course, usually set in the stages of late capitalism, when the factories themselves are being torn down, as can be seen famously in *Marius et Jeannette*. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, L'Estaque experienced an influx of immigrants who came to work in these factories, following a promise of a better life, mainly from Italy, Spain, Algeria and Armenia, that would increase its population from a few hundred early in the twentieth century to 13,000 by 1931. Construction of canals, the Estaque train station and the viaduct of Corbière linked the town more closely to Marseilles. For many years L'Estaque remained a seaside resort known for its beach, village atmosphere and cuisine. At the same time, a neighbourhood like Les Riaux, built on housing allotments surrounding the factories, contrasted starkly with the few bourgeois homes of the village. This period also saw a rise in labour organisation and Communist Party activity. L'Estaque fell on hard times, however, after the Second World War, during recession, decolonisation and globalisation. Tile factories began to close, the bay was depleted of fish, shanty towns near factories started to appear in the empty lots made available by factory owners. Skilled labour jobs disappeared overseas; most factories were gone by the 1970s. *Rouge midi* attempts to tell much of this history. Even in 2015, while L'Estaque enjoys something of a third life with tourism, unemployment stands at over 16 per cent.

Guédiguian was born during the early days of L'Estaque's decline, in 1953, though he has fairly recent foreign origins. His paternal grandfather was an Armenian who had come to France to study theology and stayed in Marseilles, eventually giving help to the influx of Armenians escaping genocide in Turkey. His mother came from a Catholic, anti-Nazi family in Germany, where she had met Guédiguian's father in 1943, when he was stationed for obligatory work at a hospital near Cologne in the STO (Service du Travail Obligatoire) during the Second World War. At the same time, the first and strongest sense of significant group identification for Guédiguian did not come from national origins but from class and the Communist Party. Guédiguian's mother worked as a housecleaner and stay-at-home mother, his father as an electrician on the docks; they voted communist but were not politically militant. Guédiguian observed his parents' difficulties, feared for his own economic future and was politicised from an early age. He also owes a great intellectual and political debt to his childhood friend and future collaborator, Gérard Meylan, whom he had met at age five, when the latter was delivering the communist newspaper *L'Humanité* from door to door with his father.⁶ It was while listening to conversations between Meylan's father and uncle (one was a schoolmaster and the other a leader in the Confédération Générale de Travail, France's largest labor union – Guédiguian compares them to his personal Marx and Engels) that he started to form an understanding of the world.

Guédiguian's political consciousness grew during adolescence as he and Meylan became communist youth organisers. (He is proud that the youth cell he led was the largest in Marseilles.) During May 1968, at age fourteen, the two were organising demonstrations at their high school in Marseilles. Guédiguian eventually would attend the University of Aix-en-Provence to study law and economics and hone his debating skills against the conservative student body that dominated the university. (At the time there was no law school in Marseilles.) A year after meeting Ariane Ascaride in Aix in 1974, Guédiguian followed her to Paris, where he started a thesis at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (the EHESS), on the conception of the state in the history of the worker's movement, under the direction of a well-known Marxist historian, Georges

6 For a full treatment of Guédiguian's family origins and youth, see Kantcheff 2013: 8–17.

Haupt.⁷ History, and historiography with a militant and pedagogical goal, will be central to his cinema as well.

Despite this political commitment, Guédiguian underwent a major personal political crisis in the late 1970s, resulting in his departure from the French Communist Party in 1980. This departure was not unique to him: after decades of growth, the late 1970s and early 1980s were particularly difficult times for communism in France, and the party was in the throes of defeat, for many reasons. There are many ways of looking at the demise of communism in France, but two versions seem relevant here.

One version is perhaps best told by those whom one might consider Haupt's intellectual enemies, the anti-communist historians who took the weakening of the Communist Party for a positive sign of the end of totalitarianism. In his account of what he calls the 'communist illusion', François Furet argues that communism (and fascism) grew out of an historical break from aristocratic societies by which modern societies set forth on a course towards individual freedom and wealth. A new cultural figure is identified, the bourgeois, whose value is asserted through having more wealth than his neighbour. The bourgeois is 'animated by a corpuscular agitation, constantly driving it forward', blazing a self-sustaining path away from the common good, atomising society and turning government into a means of protecting economic interests (Furet 1999: 3). Furet, however, is sceptical of the intellectual fixation on the bourgeois and claims that much anti-bourgeois passion is simply self-hatred of the victorious bourgeoisie itself, torn between the need to protect the new money-based social order and feelings of guilt for having instituted a 'market, not a citizenry' (Furet 1999: 13). For Furet, communism and fascism were totalitarian choices within a much wider array of responses to the modern democratic world. Both begat violent, repressive regimes: in communism, 'Stalin would exterminate millions in the battle against the bourgeoisie' (Furet 1999: 29). Rather than the promise of democracy and the social link, communism

7 'C'était mon rêve d'alors de devenir un grand intellectuel au service de la vérité qui, comme on ne devrait jamais l'oublier, est toujours révolutionnaire' (It was my dream at the time to become a great intellectual at the service of the truth, which is, one should never forget, always revolutionary) (Guédiguian 2012: 135).

crudely defended the single-party state of the Soviet Union. This definition of communism as a totalitarianism became ambient among historians of the 1970s and 1980s, partly in reaction to academic historiography, dominated by Marxists such as Haupt. It does reflect the increasing conviction among many that the USSR was a monolithic roadblock to democracy; its fall could only be welcomed.

Since Guédiguian went on to make a film about him, it is important to mention the role played by François Mitterrand in administering the final political blow to communism at the French national level. Mitterrand had opposed communism his whole life but realised that the number of true believers in Stalinism and the French Communist Party was actually quite small and that most of the party's support resulted from anti-bourgeois sentiment and dissatisfaction with Gaullist and other rightist policies. He set out to gain the trust of as many party supporters as possible. This was the period of the 'Common Programme of Government', negotiated in 1972, between the socialists and the communists, which included an official leftist alliance through a shared platform, including mass nationalisations (Tiersky 2000: 111). The Common Programme returns intermittently in Guédiguian's interviews and even in films, including *Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro*, where a union organiser imagines that he has received a copy of it for his wedding anniversary. Mitterrand was never sincerely committed to collaboration with the communists but instead was interested in the electoral influence that the socialist reformers could win in communist strongholds. Eventually the communist leaders sabotaged the Common Programme by making extravagant demands such as 100 per cent state ownership of nationalised enterprises. Ronald Tiersky explains their intentions: 'At a negotiating meeting on September 22, 1977, the Communists achieved their goal, a crack-up of the Union of the Left in which they seemed no more responsible than the Socialists' (2000: 117). But it was too late for them: Mitterrand won the presidency in 1981, and the communists were permanently eclipsed.

No more responsible than the socialists? Here's how Guédiguian remembers the same events:

We told ourselves we were going to make it! And not three centuries from now – it was there, so close, within reach. And then, in 1975, we entered the period where the Communists and the Socialists

renegotiated their agreements for municipal elections in 1977 ... and I found myself in disagreement with the Communists. I continued to go to my cell every day, say what I had to say, but it didn't change anything. Then, in September 1977, I will never forget the day in the metro, coming out of the cinema with Gérard (Meylan), we read in *Le Monde* that the negotiations to renew the Common Programme were interrupted. Our deception was total: it was a closing off, a suicidal folding in ... I was certain then as I am now that a few leaders ... killed the Communist Party.

(Danel 2008: 42)

As communism fell apart, Guédiguian's faith in the movement of History ('we were going to make it, and not three centuries from now') was shaken.

But Guédiguian did not share the jubilation of some of the historians at the downfall of communism. Centrist liberal historians, like Furet, seem to warmly embrace the victory of the market economy and the rise of neo-liberalism. Furet's title itself – *Le Passé d'une illusion* (*The Passing of an Illusion*) – has echoes of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history', whose main thesis asserts that Western liberal democracies no longer have a viable opponent and have become the 'final form of government'. For Guédiguian, however – and this is the second way of looking at it – the fall of communism is tragic: he thus shares the view of those on the left who see this period as the imposition of a new global regime that has been particularly successful at eroding social protections and economic conditions for the working class.

The fall of communism, even partially self-inflicted, took away one major tool for forwarding History. For Martin O'Shaughnessy, the victory of neo-liberalism has reasons that are both positive and negative. On one hand, capitalism had become 'open to networking, creativity, intuition and difference in a way that made the critique of alienation and unfreedom harder to enforce' (O'Shaughnessy 2008: 8).⁸ But, on the other hand, there has been a systematic erosion of the institutions of the left and replacement with neo-liberal practices. O'Shaughnessy outlines a labour landscape divided by 'individualisation of awards', job insecurity, subcontracting, flexitime, surveillance

⁸ For Guédiguian, this happens often through the ease with which individuals can acquire credit and mind-numbing access to enhanced consumption (Sahuc 2011: 35).

and other forms of division (O'Shaughnessy 2008: 9). Of course the atrocities of communist states served readily as cover for these moves: the USSR, China and Cambodia had become, even for staunch Marxists like Alain Badiou, 'statist' and had wandered from the front lines of the 'vanguard of history' (O'Shaughnessy 2008: 9). In addition, the Socialist Party, for those on the 'left of the left', like Guédiguian, has turned increasingly to the centre since Mitterrand's election and supported liberal and neo-liberal economic policies. As a result, large portions of the working class were completely marginalised, which in turn eroded values such as solidarity, class identity and collective resistance.

For Guédiguian, no clear political option opened itself up: he did not cling to the party, did not 'reform' himself as a centrist liberal and did not become a socialist. He speaks of many friends and colleagues who became depoliticised (like some of his characters), joined the Human Rights League or turned to union organising (at a time when labour unions were also being emptied of their influence). There was still to be a left, but a left needing to be reinvented, and nobody quite understood how. O'Shaughnessy appropriately situates Guédiguian as a film-maker working within the 'fragments' of leftist identity; Philip Anderson, more pessimistically, calls his vision of history 'apocalyptic'. Guédiguian's response is actually quite original, though its effectiveness will only emerge over time. At the end of Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 I will return to Guédiguian's rejection of the point of view of Furet and like-minded historians and his personal redefinition of communism.

The adventure of friendship

I want to draw attention to his mention of Gérard Meylan, present with him in the metro car (coming out of the cinema) when the fatal news of the socialist-communist rift arrived. The detail hints at the second major theme that emerges from Guédiguian's youth, one that is perhaps less immediately visible since it is less frequently cited than ideology as a subject of critical analysis in the cinema: friendship. Consider just a few of the names that will occur throughout this book. The first difference-making friendship in Guédiguian's life was with Meylan, and the two were known as the 'twins' since they were

age ten and eleven. The friendship with Meylan survived two very different trajectories when Guédiguian studied in Aix and Meylan enrolled in nursing school in Marseilles: in fact, Meylan continued to work as a hospital nurse, acting during holiday and other types of leave, almost exclusively in Guédiguian's films, until his recent retirement. Others would join this pair. In 1968, while organising, the boys grew close to Malek Hamzaoui over a game of table football in a bar memorialised in *Lady Jane*. Hamzaoui, who appeared in two early films, is now Guédiguian's production manager. Ariane Ascaride would appear on the scene in Aix during Guédiguian's studies, and when Guédiguian followed her to Paris he would meet other future collaborators, Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Pierre Banderet and Jacques Boudet, who would also form part of Guédiguian's core ensemble. (See Chapters 2 and 5 for more details.) Guédiguian was undergoing a 'militant reconversion' (to borrow Tissot's term) from political organisation to the cinema, a career that would not abandon politics but would also be devoted to friendship, ethics and art (see Tissot et al. 2006). Indeed, friendship, in the way Guédiguian represents and explores it, will have important political implications.

It is helpful to consider friendship first as a philosophical notion. This discussion will be far from exhaustive: I merely want to give an idea of a certain type of friendship that seems relevant to Guédiguian's work, for it is valuable for appreciating the stakes involved. One of the most influential philosophical discussions of friendship can be traced back to Aristotle, whose interest in the subject grows out of a broader attempt to define 'happiness', or what he calls more generally *eudaimonia*, in 'actions, arts, and sciences' (Aristotle 2011: 2). Friendship, as Aristotle sees it, is a major part of all areas of a successful human life; indeed, he claims that it is one of the greatest goods that human beings can experience. If Marx wrote about the 'production' of life, Aristotle's account is about the quality or flourishing of life. In Guédiguian's work, friendship will mix with work and politics in a highly original way.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle divides friendships, or *philia*, into three types: friendships of use, friendships of pleasure and character friendships (sometimes called 'virtue', 'deep' or 'true' friendships). The first two types emphasise the primacy of one's individual self in relationship to others. Friendships of utility, like many business arrangements, are built on the expectation that I will receive, in

the future, some direct benefit from someone else. Pleasure friendships offer me immediate enjoyment or the gratification of some desire at this time and this place. Both of these types of friendship imply that the other person is to some extent functional in relation to me. There is a much sharper distinction between these and the third type of friendship. In character or true *philia*, relationships are not based on something I hope to gain for myself in the future or in the present. These friendships are other-oriented: I wish for and celebrate my friends' successes – and feel sorrow at their suffering – for their sake. These types of friendships draw us out of ourselves and towards the other person.⁹

The difference between character friendships and the first two categories is a sign that Aristotle's use of the term *eudaimonia* does not encompass everything we mean when we say 'good' or 'successful'. He does not have in mind a good in which an individual would accrue some direct and present profit or passing pleasure. Instead, Aristotle's view of *eudaimonia* is much more holistic and less definable; it refers to the flourishing of the entire life of a person in all its dimensions. Because of this, we do not enter into deep *philia*, as we might pleasure or utility friendships, because we have calculated some goal or a benefit that will accrue to us. The basic glue that holds together friendships is, as Elizabeth Telfer has argued, passion for the other person, an affection that draws us to who they are, what they say and what they do (see Telfer 1991). Such passion intertwines our life deeply with the lives of our friends, affecting all aspects of our lives.

For example, friendships produce sometimes imperceptible but profound effects on how we experience time, space and action at a basic, daily level. We want to be near our friends and spend our time with them. Much of our life stretches out over fairly empty periods of time that are not organised towards some goal. Friendships can cast a glaze of meaning over these empty periods. But even the accomplishment of important actions involves an interminable series of small, banal efforts. Discussions and collaboration with friends, or just the interest that our friends take in our work, can support us and keep us focused through the boring but necessary details. They

⁹ See Cooper 1980 for a canonical general interpretation of friendship in Aristotle.

can also give us the confidence to confront our weaknesses in the pursuit of something worthwhile (see Cooper 1980). For Alexander Nehamas, this kind of redemption of the quotidian has implications for how time is represented in works of art (Nehamas 2010: 271). If epics and novels have the scope to represent grand actions, a number of elements make cinema, and certainly Guédiguian's cinema, a natural genre for representing the microscopic and seemingly empty units of time at play in friendships. Limited to a couple of hours but with more built-in realism, a film often represents these quotidian moments – car rides, conversations in cafés, family dinners – in order to capture their hidden meaning or to allow the many facets of their more or less dramatic dynamics to unfold. We could make the same point about places and objects. Guédiguian avoids historic or striking settings to give meaning to banal social spaces: apartments, alleys, courtyards, bars, housing estates, etc. Guédiguian's films are also filled with objects – cups of coffee, pieces of clothing, streets, tables, etc. – that receive a layer of meaning because they have made some kind of entry into the dynamic relationships between people.

The deeper our intertwining, the more friendships open us up to latent differences within ourselves. Friendships can provide laboratories for exploring our own values by simple observation of and attention to our friends' better qualities: their beauty, talents and their moral and intellectual acumen. Friends act as analogies for ourselves: what we find valuable in them may help us locate and cultivate our own hidden talents and moral or intellectual qualities. One of the greatest transformative tools of friendship is the serious kind of conversation that Montaigne calls 'de la conférence'. Challenging conversation might not even take place without friendships, since without them we may not develop the deep level of trust necessary to tackle subjects on which we are vulnerable to challenge from other points of view. Guédiguian's films often take place away from dramatic action and around a table, where the characters eat, drink, play cards or table football, observe each other and their surroundings and, most importantly, discuss matters of personal, social and political importance. Sometimes these scenes are accused of being mere *pagnolades*, as in Marcel Pagnol's great *Fanny* trilogy, an obvious influence on Guédiguian but whose conversations are often more narrow and comic. Guédiguian's characters engage in critique and argument about ideas and actions, leading to changes in opinion and

the sharpening of critical capacities. Conversation with deep friends thus helps us develop and revise our way of looking at the world.

We can point to how deep friendships affect our outlook on various issues, but, since friendship is a kind of passion, as Telfer has argued, it would be odd to reduce the benefits of friendship to what we can name. Likewise, Nehamas emphasises that what matters to us is not what our friend 'did', but what he 'is, which no list of his features, however long, could ever capture' (2010: 277). For Nehamas this implies a Nietzschean conception of identity, according to which no division can be made between the individual and that individual's separate attributes. Instead of a static identity, this kind of identity grows and changes in friendships, through actions, conversation and a general engagement in life. This is close to Amélia Rorty's definition of friendship as a process of 'dynamic permeability' (1993: 79). Such dynamism makes friendship its own adventure, in which my encounter with this particular friend leads my identity into unforeseen territory. Friendships are 'difference-making' not only in that they matter but also in that they differentiate me from others through my shared narrative with another person.

Therefore, though we can have many friends, each one makes us different in a certain way. Montaigne answers enigmatically when asked why he and Etienne de La Boétie were such close friends: 'par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy' (Montaigne 1962: 187).¹⁰ Friendship is about personal and historical particulars, and friends are therefore irreplaceable. Character friendships are not predicated on promises of rewards or instant gratification but on long-term interaction with these particular other people: they link us into a narrative including past, present and future. Rorty again insists on 'constancy' and 'endurance' within change (1993: 73). What underpins Guédiguian's career as a film-maker, and a political militant film-maker, is the narrative (our 'story', he calls it) of a number of friendships that have developed over time. These friendships, these particular and irreplaceable friendships, are primary. This helps explain Guédiguian's frequent comment that he is both 'inside' and 'outside' the cinema. Film-making is grist for the mill of friendship, a necessity for 'remaining friends a long period of time' and a way

¹⁰ 'because it was him, because it was me'.

of 'living together'. Guédiguian's cinema is in many essential ways a monument built to the friendships that make up his life.

Figures and counter-figures: living with friends in the 'Age of Economics'

This turn to friendship at a moment of crisis might look like a renunciation of politics and a retreat to a private sphere. But such a retreat would not be 'living' in the sense of confronting the personal story of the friendship with 'History'. For Guédiguian, friendship is rather an essential part of the search for new forms of politics, a search whose urgency comes through in a response Guédiguian gives to a question about how to 'reconstruct the left': 'par abandonner le rêve sans le trahir, c'est-à-dire le réinventer' (Sahuc 2011: 61).¹¹ What role might friendship play in such a reinvention?

To see the role that *philia* might play in this reinvention, it is helpful to look at friendship, as does the philosopher Todd May, as a *figure* in contrast with other figures for human interaction. Figures take many forms: they can be images, narratives, debates, legal decisions, practices and other discursive figures that provide examples or paths that encourage people to live or think in certain ways. As May writes, they 'mould' our lives, often in a normative way. They choreograph our movements, structure our time, orient our relations to others and contribute to our self-definition. Often they work on us in an unconscious way, but we can also critique and reject figures, choosing new ones that better reflect our values. However, in an age of neo-liberalism, May points out that the normative figures that dominate economic and cultural forms are those that structure our selves in ways that increase the free flow of capital and assure the unfettered functioning of markets. According to May's analysis, this system proposes two main figures (both of which are highly relevant to Guédiguian's work): the consumer and the entrepreneur.

May analyses both of these figures in three ways: in the relation between individual and the environment; in the relation between the individual and time; and, finally, in the types of self-identification

¹¹ 'By abandoning the dream without betraying it, which is to say by reinventing it.'

and relationships to others that the figures encourage. The consumer, in contrast, say, to a creator or a producer, has a passive relation to the environment. We consume within the choices of activities and brand names that are laid out before us. As we consume, we are unconcerned with the past or the future but focused on what is going on around us right now: we are caught up in the moment, in our pleasure, in our entertainment, and, when instant gratification is fulfilled, we move on to another activity, another point in time. May calls this a pointillist relation to time. In turn, the present is redefined as that space of time that is somehow obliged to grant me gratification: any other experience of time seems without value.¹² Finally, as consumers, we are focused on our self, on our pleasure. A consumer has little empathy or concern for others and does not identify with a larger group.

More active than the consumer, the entrepreneur looks at life 'in terms of calculative self-enhancement' (May 2014: 54): the entrepreneur thinks, either explicitly or implicitly, in terms of rational investment. This way of thinking colours our choice of actions as we set goals, consider possible courses of action and make decisions based on how those actions will help or hinder our goals. Other people enter into our calculations as possible investments: will spending time with this person further my goals in an efficient way or not? Indeed, the entrepreneur will even consider his or her own self as 'human capital' to be developed according to some goal. May distinguishes between using this rationality to achieve goals that may be very diverse, and even altruistic, from their application in a strictly neo-liberal context in which, according to influential neo-liberal economic theorists such as Milton Friedman, altruism plays no role (May 2014: 47). The figure of the entrepreneur, then, encourages us to be active in relation to our environment, future-oriented and, once again, individualistic, despite any moral arguments to the contrary.

These two figures, it should be clear, map easily onto Aristotle's first two definitions of friendship relationships. Consumers, to the extent that they need other people at all, see them as providers of entertainment or objects of consumption, or at best, as in Aristotle's

12 One might add another dimension of time to the consumer, which May omits, a relation to the future, for much of contemporary consumption now creates debt, and the consumer's thoughts about the future may be accompanied by a vague dread.

pleasure friendships, they share some superficial, temporary pleasures. As in utility friendships, the entrepreneur enters into commerce with others in order to further his or her chances of reaching a particular goal. Neither figure includes a passion for the other as an end and everything that entails. As we have seen, Guédiguian responds to the ascendancy of the entrepreneur and the consumer by making the cinema an activity for living with friends, for a long time. His practice stands outside of industrial practices (through independent self-production) as a kind of heterotopia against the predominant figures of neo-liberalism. Friendship is a practice giving meaning to our lives, but it also has a stake in politics. For Guédiguian, in the age of economics, it is the anti-bourgeois figure par excellence.

Guédiguian's project is both practical and discursive: his friends are sharing a life together, but they are producing images of *philia* that they propose to viewers as figures for our own possible adoption. In terms of narrative, Guédiguian's films usually look something like this: a group of friends, in economic difficulties during a time of eroding class identity and waning political leverage, works together to preserve their relationships and solidarity. Their tone ranges from comic, as friends come together to eat, drink and make jokes, to tragic, when friendships are forced to end. In terms of image, Guédiguian's work is infused with a beautiful if realistic luminosity and colour, a camera whose supple movement follows the interactions of the characters, and editing that often reflects the situation of the friends in their stage of History.

Friendships are like strands of thread combining with others to become a fabric, with a certain design or shape, worn no matter where one goes, what one does or what one thinks. They give Guédiguian's work the feel of a coherent project from start to end. But when Guédiguian made the conversion from historian and 'communist intellectual' to film-maker working with friends, he was probably not aware of how long this project would last or how rich it would be. This book follows its development chronologically. Chapter 2 examines Guédiguian's first four films, in which the viewer discovers many facets of the experience of friendship. These films establish not only the particulars of space (L'Estaque and nearby places) and people (Guédiguian's core actors and technicians) but also their struggles as history shifts from class struggle to post-communist neo-liberalism. A reflection of the 1980s,

these films end pessimistically, in the permanent separation of the friends, in displacement or, most often, in death. In the films dealt with in Chapter 3, perhaps Guédiguian's most original work, friendships rise above these socio-political constraints in what he calls the *conte de L'Estaque*: instead of political impotence, these films offer a new model for political action, a model that is local, affective and utopian. By the time we reach the films made since 2000, treated in Chapter 4, friendships are deeply woven into the fabric of Guédiguian's cinematic and political life. These films explore more variety, in genre, geographical space, historical period and figures of identification. I will take advantage of the conclusion in Chapter 5 to step outside of individual films and examine Guédiguian's career as a whole, as an ongoing and cohesive project, and consider what makes it original, durable and valuable.

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