

A WANDERING ARCHIVE: HERBERT KLINE AND THE TRANSNATIONAL ITINERARIES OF ANTI-FASCIST FILMMAKING*

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Introduction

In 1952, the US filmmaker Herbert Kline directed the feature fiction film *The Fighter*, an adaptation of Jack London's short story "The Mexican" (1911). The film tells the story of Felipe Rivera, a revolutionary from the town of Pátzcuaro in the Mexican state of Michoacán who settles in El Paso, Texas, in the hope of joining a group of exiled Mexicans who are planning to overthrow the dictatorial regime of President Porfirio Díaz (American Film Institute, 2019b). As the narrative unfolds, we discover that Felipe's town was burned to the ground and his family, friends and fiancée were tortured and killed by Díaz's federal troopers, as punishment for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of a revolutionary guerrilla leader. *The Fighter* could be considered an example of Hollywood's fondness for exoticising the Mexican Revolution in the years immediately after World War II; other examples of this tendency

include *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston, 1948) and *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan, 1952), films that tend to use the Mexican war as an epic background largely emptied of its revolutionary content.¹ However, a closer examination of *The Fighter* reveals that the film could be characterised as a political and personal project in which the character of Felipe serves as a kind of alter ego of Kline himself. Like the Mexican revolutionary in his film, Kline travelled back and forth between the United States and Mexico in those years on a quest for social justice while fleeing repression in his native country—in Kline's case, that of McCarthyism.

As will be shown in this article, Kline's fervent anti-fascist convictions led him to produce a heterogeneous body of work in a diverse range of countries over the course of fifty years, nearly always with his own resources. He made films in Spain during the Civil War; in Czechoslovakia just before the Sudeten Crisis; in Poland at the time of

THE NOMADIC ROVING THAT CHARACTERISED KLINE'S PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL HISTORY (...) REQUIRES A PARTICULAR APPROACH, EQUALLY NOMADIC, TO THE RESEARCH AND THE ANALYSIS OF ITS ARCHIVE, COVERING A VAST DISTANCE NOT ONLY GEOGRAPHICALLY BUT ALSO CONCEPTUALLY IN RELATION TO CERTAIN IDEAS ABOUT FILM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBJECT

the Nazi invasion; in Britain at the beginning of World War II; in Mexico during the institutional consolidation of the Revolution; in Hollywood in the 1940s; in Palestine on the eve of the foundation of the State of Israel; and again in Mexico, during the presidency of Luis Echeverría in the 1970s. At the same time, he moved between fiction film, political documentary, docudrama and art documentary. *The Fighter*—the first independent production by former Warner Bros. producer Alex Gottlieb—was the last film Kline made as a Hollywood director before his fall from grace in the McCarthy era. When his turn came to testify before the House Un-American Affairs Committee (HUAC) in the early 1950s, he refused to name names or to abandon his anti-fascist convictions. As a result, after *The Fighter*, more than twenty years would pass before he was able to release his next film in the United States, the documentary *Walls of Fire* (1973), dedicated to “the three greats” of Mexican muralism, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera.

Kline's constant roaming and his versatility as a filmmaker led him to describe himself colloquially as a “film gypsy”.² In the draft of his autobiography (a kind of scrapbook that combines autobiographical writings with original manuscripts, film projects, correspondence and press cuttings compiled over the course of sixty years), Kline re-

fers on several occasions to his nomadic nature—his “film gypsy wanderings” (Kline, n. d.: 51)—as an essential part of his filmmaking praxis. The nomadic roving that characterised Kline's professional and personal history has made it difficult for his films to find a place on mainstream or art film circuits, as his work lacks the kind of stylistic or geographic unity and continuity over time that generally define the filmographies of the directors who form part of the film canon. Moreover, this object of study requires a particular approach, equally nomadic, to the research and the analysis of its archive, covering a vast distance not only geographically but also conceptually in relation to certain ideas about film as an epistemological object.

In a sense, Kline's self-designation as a wandering filmmaker seems to find an echo in the concepts of “intercultural cinema” and “accented cinema” coined by Laura Marks (2000) and Hamid Naficy (2001), respectively, to describe films made under conditions of exile, diaspora and migration. However, these analytical frameworks have only a limited usefulness for examining the work of Herbert Kline. Both Naficy and Marks analyse the work of filmmakers chiefly from “third world” countries who have immigrated or been forcibly displaced to “the cosmopolitan centres of the North”, and whose films therefore reflect the (post-)colonial context of their production conditions. Naficy also refers to filmmakers from the “first world” who have travelled to countries in the “Global South” for political and creative reasons, such as Chris Marker and Joris Ivens. We would argue that Kline's status as a “wandering filmmaker” places him in an interstitial place between these two categories.

Kline's career bears certain resemblances to the career of the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens, described by Naficy as a “great wandering cineaste” with an “accented” oeuvre who (like Kline) “travelled nomadically from one troubled spot of the world to another to document what he saw” (216).

In contrast to many of the other filmmakers studied by Naficy, Ivens, like Kline, is not a filmmaker of the South who migrated to the North, but a director from the North whose political and creative interests led him to travel to different countries of the South. Naficy describes Ivens—but also Luis Buñuel—as a “peripatetic and nomadic Western subject [...] who] had the freedom—despite many obstacles—to roam the world, touching down here and there like the wind, and make films.” This distinguishes him from those filmmakers who travelled in the opposite direction from the “third world” to the “first”: exiles or post-colonial creators who have to deal with racism and a feeling of “outsiderism”, who lack the freedom of someone like Ivens because they are subject to a “type of choiceless deterritorialization and reterritorialization that breed pessimism and paranoia” (219). It is undeniable that Kline had a privileged position as a white male from the “Global North” with connections in Hollywood and in the upper echelons of artistic and cultural worlds both in the United States and internationally; and like Ivens, and like photographers of the same era such as Henri Cartier-Bresson or Robert Capa, his wandering was driven by his artistic and ideological interests. However, in Kline’s case, it was ultimately the political persecution he suffered in his own country for standing by his convictions that led him to spend much of his career working in Mexico, a country that today is considered part of the “Global South”.³ Moreover, Kline’s films differ from the cases analysed by Marks and Naficy in what is perhaps a deeper—and, we would argue, hugely significant—sense. According to these two authors, the production conditions that characterise films of the diaspora, migration and exile give rise to a degree of formal or stylistic experimentation, resulting in films that in a way embody the violence and conflicts associated with these types of experiences: a “haptic, or tactile, visuality”, as Marks calls it (2000: 2), or a cinema of “dislocation” that is “informed by the tensions

and ambivalence of exilic liminality”, in Naficy’s case (2001: 22, 275). However, when analysing Kline’s filmography as a whole what becomes apparent is not a particular set of formal or stylistic features, but the diverse range of techniques, genres and styles used in his films. This suggests that beyond certain recurrent tropes, there is no stylistic signature in his work that ostensibly expresses the experience of migration. We would argue that this diverse range of techniques and styles is not so very different from that of recognised *auteurs* such as Ivens. Nevertheless, it may seem that the uneven and discontinuous nature of Kline’s work would undermine any reading of his filmography from the perspective of Naficy’s concept of “accented cinema”.

Although the categories of “accented cinema” and “intercultural cinema” help us to conceive of Herbert Kline’s career in nomadic terms, the features of his work that indicate the circumstances of uncertainty, personal risk and political persecution under which he made his films are the very same features that expose the gaps, inconsistencies, discontinuities and disjunctions present in his filmography. For this reason, despite the undeniable technical, aesthetic and narrative value of many of the films that Kline made both within and outside the commercial circuit, the aim of this study is not to focus on these features in order to vindicate him as a filmmaker or to integrate his work into some kind of counter-canon. Instead, the objective here is to tease out what the nomadic condition of Kline, his films and his archives can reveal about the value of film for articulating a historical reflection on what it means to make “useful cinema”. This term, coined by Haidee Wasson and Charles Acland (2011: 3) to refer to “films and technologies that perform tasks and serve as instruments in an ongoing struggle for aesthetic, social and political capital,”⁴ can help us locate Kline’s creative process in a context marked by financial uncertainty, war and political repression. The analysis of his filmography in its entirety

therefore does not constitute an attempt to identify certain stylistic features that would make it possible to place his films homogeneously within the parameters of an auteur style that could contribute to his “canonisation”. On the contrary, the objective is to expose the displacements, interruptions, discontinuities and gaps that speak almost as eloquently as the films themselves of the experience of filmmaking under the conditions described above.

The first question that arises when embarking on the study of an inconsistent, discontinuous, and geographically dispersed filmography like Herbert Kline’s is where to find the films, and the documents related to their production, distribution and audience reception; where to find the signs of repression, the documentation on the unrealised projects and the reasons why they never got off the ground. The evidence suggests that most of the films and materials that document the difficulties he faced are not in film archives, and the few that can be found there are merely isolated cases. We have managed to locate prints of Kline’s films in the Filmoteca Española in Madrid, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Jerusalem Cinematheque, the Filmoteca UNAM (the film library of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), and the Cinémathèque Française in Paris. With the exception of the MoMA, none of these archives hold more than four titles by the filmmaker. On the other hand, documentation related to the films has been found in other archives not specific to cinema, associated with solidarity campaigns and humanitarian organisations, research centres dedicated to collective memory, archives of political and activist organisations, general archives and personal collections. In fact, it could be argued that just as Kline described himself as a film gypsy, researching his films requires the identification and reconstruction of a kind of wandering archive, scattered across a wide range of institutions around the world, each operating with its own very different system and institu-

tional agenda. This article constitutes an initial attempt to map out this wandering archive, and to establish certain parallels between it and Herbert Kline’s nomadic career.

A WANDERING ARCHIVE FOR A WANDERING FILMMAKER

Herbert Kline’s work as a filmmaker is marked by gaps and silences that produce an inconsistent—and at times incoherent—picture of his career, rendering it difficult to periodise. However, an examination of the archives that document his praxis can fill those gaps with projects that never came to be realised. Catherine Benamou adopts the concept of the *longue durée* (long duration), coined by Fernand Braudel, for the analysis of Orson Welles’s unfinished film *It’s All True* (1941) (Benamou, 2007: 3). The classification of unrealised projects like this one over an extended time-frame represents an expansion of the “geo-historical lens” to go beyond the more immediate circumstances of a given project. This approach, which makes it possible to document not just a creative process but also the historical or cultural processes that influence it, seems a particularly useful way of assessing how roaming and repression gave shape to Kline’s career. Obviously, Kline cannot be described as an extremely personal filmmaker like Orson Welles, an artist of the big screen who fought against huge obstacles to consolidate his status as an *auteur*. However, it would also be very reductive to label him a mere director of commissioned films. We should not underestimate his importance as a creator who played a key role in the construction of films resulting from partnerships and negotiations with a wide range of agents and shaped by different cultural and political factors. Indeed, his unique career requires a category of its own, specific to a wandering filmmaker who used cinema to forge a political vision as ideologically consistent as it was stylistically unpredictable.

The considerations outlined above raise some questions about the methodological implications of this study. As noted above, to appreciate the full complexity of the connections and tensions between Kline's wanderings as a filmmaker and the various social, political, and creative factors associated with them, any analysis of his oeuvre also needs to involve mapping out an equivalent route for the research. Beyond contributing to studies of this filmmaker in particular, this exploration offers an opportunity to reflect on how film history is constructed and the role played in that construction by archives and institutions that store, preserve and ensure access to prints of films and documents related to them. In other words, the analysis of a filmmaker like Kline lends itself particularly well to a complex, multifaceted research method that rejects both the *auteur* logic that places creative responsibility with the director, screenwriter or leading actor while ignoring the role that other factors play in the final form of the film—an idea also present in Naficy's concept of accented cinema—and the mythologising logic of film history associated with cinephilia that sometimes pervades film libraries and archives, as reflected in the documentary *Le fantôme d'Henri Langlois* [The Ghost of Henri Langlois] (Jacques Richard, 2004) and exposed in studies by Hagener (2014: 299) and Frick (2011: 3-26). The tentative category of Kline's wandering archive—drawing on the concept of media archaeology as defined by Thomas Elsaesser (2004: 103)—might constitute a first step in this direction.

Based on these assumptions, we have established three periods of different lengths that help shed light on the relationship between the nomadic nature of Kline's filmmaking praxis and his political identity as an anti-fascist filmmaker. The intention of this periodisation is not so much to reconstruct a linear progression with a teleological orientation that could give Kline's filmography a degree of stylistic or narrative homogeneity; rather, these periods are intended to function as an-

HIS UNIQUE CAREER REQUIRES A CATEGORY OF ITS OWN, SPECIFIC TO A WANDERING FILMMAKER WHO USED CINEMA TO FORGE A POLITICAL VISION AS IDEOLOGICALLY CONSISTENT AS IT WAS STYLISTICALLY UNPREDICTABLE.

alytical categories that provide a framework and a common narrative for the displacements (both physical and symbolic), divergences and discontinuities that characterise the filmmaker's career. It is important to stress here that the objective is not to minimise or obscure the disjointed, nomadic nature of his praxis, but to inscribe it in the broader context of anti-fascist internationalism and of the vicissitudes faced by individuals who adopted this type of political identity. The first period, which covers Kline's production from 1937 to 1940, includes films he and those he worked with made under the "Popular Front" banner in Europe; the second period, covering the decade from 1941 through to 1952, is defined by the continuation of his anti-fascist project after the end of the Popular Front era; and the third period, covering the nearly three decades from 1953 to 1981, refers to the years when Kline could not make a single film because of his blacklisting in the McCarthy era, as well as the years when he began directing again, making his last three films.

THE CULTURAL FRONT YEARS (1937-1940)

In the 1930s, Herbert Kline forged his political identity in the context of anti-fascism, and more specifically as part of what came to be known as the Cultural Front (Denning, 2011). Both anti-fascism and the Cultural Front formed part of the "Popular Front" initiative launched by the Third Communist International (Comintern) at its Seventh World Congress in 1935. At that time, the

Comintern abandoned the “social fascism” theory—which identified social democratic parties as enemies in the class struggle—and began promoting alliances between social democratic and revolutionary leftist parties with the aim of halting the advance of Nazism and fascism around the world. The Cultural Front was a way of giving a name in the 1930s to the interrelationship between the political and cultural dimensions of American cultural industries and apparatuses, and to partnerships established by “artists and intellectuals who turned the ‘cultural’ dimension into part of the Popular Front” (García López, 2013: 51). From 1937 to 1940, Kline made his first films in an international context fundamentally shaped by these fronts that waged a war on fascism and Nazism. All of these films were made in co-directing partnerships with a large group of filmmakers from different countries who had joined the anti-fascist movement.

Kline had begun his professional life in the early 1930s as editor for the magazine *Left Front* in Chicago, and subsequently moved to New York to become the editor of *New Theatre* magazine, which subsequently expanded its purview to include dance and cinema as well (Vallance, 1999), changing its name to *New Theatre and Film*. At the end of 1936, he left his well-paid position as director of this magazine and used his own savings and donations from family and friends to travel secretly to Spain to support the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War (Kline, 1937a). Shortly afterwards, he was commissioned by the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy (MBASD) to direct his first documentary, *Heart of Spain* (1937), in collaboration with the Hungarian photographer Geza Karpathi (who would go on to pursue an acting career in Hollywood as Charles Korvin). The film was produced by Frontier Films, an independent studio that Paul Strand, Leo Hurwitz, and other filmmakers of the Cultural Front worked for. The following year he continued his work for the MBASD and Frontier Films,

this time co-directing *Return to Life* (1938) and its French version, *Victoire de la vie* (1938), with Henri Cartier-Bresson. In parallel with these films, Kline and Cartier-Bresson also filmed a silent film that was hugely popular at the time, *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* (1938).

During those months, Kline met up again with the woman who would become his life partner, as well as the producer of his films during the most crucial years of his career: Rose Harvan, an American born in Czechoslovakia who had gone to Spain to work as a nurse for the MBASD. A little later, in the spring of 1938, after a contact of Kline’s in Germany informed them that Czechoslovakia was to be Hitler’s next stage of operations, Kline and Harvan moved there to continue their commitment to fighting fascism through film, teaming up with Hans Burger and Alexander Hackenschmied, who after emigrating to the United States would change his name to Alexander Hammid (Cook, Maloney, 1939). Together they produced the documentary *Crisis*, which the critic for *The New York Times*, Frank S. Nugent, acclaimed as “one of the best political documentaries of all time” (Nugent, 1939).

The anti-fascist principle that had underpinned the “Popular Front” doctrine was weakened when Hitler and Stalin signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact in August 1939. Nevertheless, many of the intellectuals and artists that belonged to the Cultural Front continued to call for the intervention of the US government in the fight against fascism, as they had been doing up until then. That same year, Kline developed an interest in Latin America and began working intensely on a project related to the rise of Nazism in the region that to a large extent anticipated the proposition of cinematic pan-Americanism of the early 1940s. But the project stalled or was set aside due to the more urgent matter of the Nazi invasion of Poland and the outbreak of World War II, as the team made up of Kline, Harvan and Hackenschmied made *Lights Out in*

Europe (1940), a documentary about the Nazi advance in Poland and the defence of Britain.

The films that Kline and those he worked with made in Europe in the 1930s contributed to the anti-fascist cause in several ways. Firstly, the films made in Spain were exhibited on non-commercial but strongly politicised circuits and helped to raise funds for the purchase of ambulances and medical equipment and to send volunteers who had fought with the International Brigades in the Lincoln Battalion back home. Secondly, the films made in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Britain made it onto the commercial film circuit, helping to raise the public profile of the anti-fascist agenda. And thirdly, all these films received an enthusiastic response from critics, so that (to paraphrase Joris Ivens) not only did they achieve “direct political and ideological action [and] immediate substantial action,” but also, through their aesthetic values, they constituted “a historic act of testimony for the future” (Segal, 1981: 5).

In any case, beyond his artistic concerns, Kline always prioritised the objective that his films should contribute to furthering a cause. For this reason, archival research on his career necessarily requires shifting the focus from film archives (without ever ignoring them altogether) to other types of collections—in this case, archives related to solidarity campaigns and the history of political and workers’ movements—where film is only of partial or even marginal importance. For example, many of the documents related to the production of the films that Kline made in Spain for the MBASD and for Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (FALB) can be found in the archives of the Spanish Refugee Relief Association (SRRA) (Spanish Refugee Relief Association Records, 2021).⁵ This collection, which contains documentation related to organisations that were active during the Spanish Civil War, is held at Columbia University’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library and includes more than 340 boxes of documents dated from 1935 to 1957 (Columbia University Li-

brary, 2007). Most are administrative documents, including official reports, correspondence, pamphlets, photographs and advertising material for the SRRA, the MBASD and the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (NACASD).

The creation of this archive was the result of a donation from Herman Reissig, Executive Secretary of the Spanish Relief Campaign (1942), and from Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), shortly after the creation of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA, 1979). However, part of the ALBA collection was deposited in Brandeis University, and since the year 2000 it has been kept at New York University’s Tamiment Library. Consequently, some of the documents related to the films Kline made in Spain, but also in Czechoslovakia and Britain,⁶ are also held at this centre, which collects documentation in all formats related to the history of labour, the Left, political radicalism and social movements in the United States, with a special emphasis on communism, anarchism and socialism (New York University Libraries, 2021a; 2021b).

Although both the SRRA and ALBA archives have sections organised by proper names, the documents related to film productions nearly always extend beyond those assigned to their creators, and in many cases they are scattered across various files labelled with the titles of the films in question or the solidarity campaigns that sponsored them. However, although it would be problematic to classify him as an *auteur*, Herbert Kline’s legacy has also been organised according to a more strictly individual principle in the collections at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and at Syracuse University. The first of these collections is of special interest here, because the social and cultural mission of the USHMM links it in a way to the SRRA and ALBA archives. Moreover, in historical terms, it is possible to identify a certain continuity between the anti-fascist project shared by the SRRA and ALBA collections and the condemnation of Na-

zism that defines the philosophy of the USHMM. It is no accident that this institution is presented to the public as a “living memorial to the Holocaust that inspires citizens and leaders worldwide to confront hatred, prevent genocide and promote human dignity” (USHMM, 2021a). The “Herbert Kline Papers” are held at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. As a “generator of new knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust” this centre partners with associated institutions and produces publications and programs to contribute to the creation of a new generation of teachers, authors and researchers with the aim of ensuring the continued growth and vitality of Holocaust studies (USHMM, 2021b). The Herbert Kline document collection contains correspondence, documents and photographs related to Kline’s films that provide evidence of the conflicts related to fascism and Nazism in Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s, as well as documents related to the production of *The Forgotten Village*, a film made by Kline and his team in Mexico in 1941.

CONTINUITY OF THE ANTI-FASCIST PROJECT (1941-1952)

In the 1940s, with Europe at war and subsequently with the anti-communist persecution in the United States, Latin America became for Kline a site of possibilities to continue the anti-fascist project. After his first attempt in 1939 to make a docudrama about the rise of Nazism in Latin America, Kline declined the opportunity to keep working in Hollywood for Warner (Kline, n. d.: 34) and teamed up again with Harvan and Hackenschmied to make *The Forgotten Village*, with a screenplay written by John Steinbeck and music composed by Hans Eisler. The film is a docudrama set in rural Mexico that tells the story of the efforts of a boy and a young teacher to convince a village’s indigenous inhabitants of the benefits of modern medicine to combat colitis. It was the first

production made by Kline in Mexico, a country that years later he would recognise as his second home (Kline, 1983).

In this film, Kline had to reconcile his anti-fascist agenda with the modernising, developmentalist ideology that Steinbeck brought to the production (Pineda Franco, 2019; Geidel, 2019). Pineda Franco suggests that while the film aims to endorse the achievements of the outgoing radical government of Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) in heading off the proto-fascist threat of presidential candidate Juan Andreu Almazán, Steinbeck’s script was concerned “not so much with a struggle against fascism [...] but with one against the cultural habits of rural Mexico, [... which] had to be sacrificed for a liberal, modern society to be born” (2019: 20). Even so, in his own writings about the filming of *The Forgotten Village*, Kline draws attention to the connections between the Mexican project and his previous experiences in Europe. In July 1940, while filming the riots that broke out between the supporters of Almazán and those of future president Manuel Ávila Camacho (footage that would not end up being included in the film), Kline expressed his desire to frame the film in a contemporary context marked by the urgency of the political moment: “The scattered scenes of violence reminded us of the dead and wounded we had known in Europe—the Spaniards, the Czechs and the Poles who fell before the fire of soldiers and ‘fifth columnists’ of Hitler and Mussolini” (Kline, 1940). Locating the film’s creative process (although perhaps not the final product) in the broader time-frame of Kline’s career, *The Forgotten Village* could be described as a link in a chain of international anti-fascist filmmaking that would be reinforced in his subsequent projects.

In the final years of World War II and the early post-war years, Kline moved back and forth between Mexico and the United States to work in the film industries of both countries without ever fully integrating into either. After requesting

leave from Metro Goldwyn Mayer, where he was working in the early 1940s,⁷ he made his second Mexican feature fiction film, *Cinco fueron escogidos* [Five Were Chosen] (1943), which, unlike *The Forgotten Village*, was a product of the Mexican film industry. Set in a Yugoslavian town invaded by the Nazis, the film constituted an “update of the French film *Les otages*” [The Hostages] (Raymond Bernard, 1939) (Ramírez, 1992: 69) and at the time it was considered the first anti-Nazi film made in Mexico.⁸ On this occasion, Kline teamed up again with the Mexican filmmaker Agustín Delgado, who had worked as a camera operator on *The Forgotten Village*, and who served as co-director on *Cinco fueron escogidos*, with Xavier Villaurrutia as screenwriter. Subsequently, also in Mexico, Kline shot an English version of the film, *Five Were Chosen* (1944), with a script by Budd Schulberg and with Rose Harvan playing one of the leading roles. A year later, Kline and Delgado worked together on *El mexicano* [The Mexican] (1944), based on an adaptation of the Jack London short story of the same name, with a script written by Delgado himself together with the Mexican writer José Revueltas. Although Kline ultimately abandoned this production,⁹ he would use the same story for the aforementioned film *The Fighter*, which he would direct eight years later in the United States. After these four years working in Mexico, Kline would never work again for any of the major studios.¹⁰ The three films he made in those years—*A Boy, a Girl, and a Dog* (1946), *The Kid from Cleveland* (1949), and *The Fighter*—were all independent productions, and in 1952 all doors in Hollywood were closed to him by the forces of McCarthyism.

In most of these films, Kline’s anti-fascist commitment is expressed in the choice of anti-Nazi subject matter (*A Journey for Margaret*, *Cinco fueron escogidos*/*Five Were Chosen*) or their resemblance to what had been the aesthetic of the Cultural Front, either in terms of the social themes (*The Forgotten Village*, *The Kid from Cleveland*) or the idea of resistance against oppression

(*The Fighter*). In practically all of them there is an emphasis on the importance of the collective and of solidarity between different social groups. The narrative motif of a character who refuses to betray his comrades in the fight against the enemy also sometimes appears, which could be interpreted as an allegory for Kline’s own situation at that time in his career, marked as it was by political persecution.

Separate mention is warranted for *Beit Avi/My Father’s House* (1947), a fiction film with documentary elements about refugees from Nazi extermination camps who arrive in British Mandatory Palestine after World War II and before the creation of the State of Israel. For this project, Kline went to Palestine to direct what is considered to be one of the first films made in that country, commissioned by the Jewish National Fund and produced by Kline together with the writer Meyer Levin, who also wrote the screenplay. Although Kline’s work in Palestine was limited to this one production, which was somewhat out of keeping with his work in Mexico and Hollywood in those years, it is nevertheless indicative of Kline’s habit of wandering in search of places and themes related to Nazism and its consequences.¹¹

During this period Kline produced most of his films independently, seeking financial support through agreements with distributors such as Mayer & Burstyn (which specialised in the distribution of neorealist films in the late 1940s) or United Artists. As these films were not associated with the kind of solidarity campaigns that had resulted in the production of *Heart of Spain* and *Return to Life*, the material documenting this era is dispersed across a multitude of archives and collections including those mentioned above, as well as others located in the United States, Mexico and Israel. In this respect, the material from this period that is perhaps easiest to locate is that related to the films that Kline made in Hollywood because, although many were independent films, they were made in a context that, as Frick (2011)

and Slide (1992) demonstrate, is characterised by a highly developed archival capacity. For example, material related to the production of *Journey for Margaret* and *The Kid from Cleveland* (including manuscripts, screenplays, photographs and production documents) can be found in the Academy Film Archive and the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.¹² Of special interest for the analysis of *The Forgotten Village* is the material preserved at the CREFAL (Regional Cooperation Centre for Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean) in Mexico, which also holds the only print that we have been able to find of the Spanish version of *The Forgotten Village* (*El pueblo olvidado*, on 16mm). Documentation was also found in the archives of this institution containing information on the inclusion of the documentary in educational programs aimed at indigenous communities in the geopolitical context of the Cold War and the consolidation of Mexico as a key player in the new world order (Geidel, 2019; Wood, 2020).

It is worth adding that Kline's recurring partnerships with prominent figures in the fields of art and culture—coupled with the fact that he has never been characterised as an *auteur*—means that many of the documents related to the productions mentioned above are preserved in the archives of the people he worked with. For example, the well-documented studies by Molly Geidel (2019) and Adela Pineda Franco (2019) on *The Forgotten Village*¹³ draw largely on the archives of John Steinbeck, referring to sources such as John Steinbeck Personal Papers in the Stanford University Archives and Steinbeck's documents in Annie Laurie Williams' records at Columbia University. Similarly, some of the documentation related to *Beit Avi* was found in the Meyer Levin collection in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Boston University.¹⁴

PERSEVERANCE (1953-1981)

On September 18, 1951, Herbert Kline was called to testify before the HUAC. The Hearst Newsreel Collection at UCLA contains raw footage of a newsreel with recordings of the hearing, whose content description defines Kline as a “com-mie who would not answer questions.” As noted above, Kline's refusal to testify against his professional colleagues—like so many other filmmakers who were blacklisted during the McCarthy era—marked the beginning of a long period of close to twenty years when he could not work in Hollywood or get any of his film projects off the ground. Nevertheless, this period is of special interest for the purposes of this article, as it is precisely the evidence of the projects that Kline conceived, wrote and tried to make happen—but that never saw the light of day—that truly reveals the extent to which his commitment to radical democracy kept him out of circulation during the dark days of the communist witch hunts in the United States. In the 1950s alone, he took numerous projects to different stages of development (synopsis, treatment or screenplay): *The Yankee* (1952), *Sparks Fly Upward* (1953), adaptations of Jack London's novel *Star Rover* (1953) and Daniel Dafoe's *Moll Flanders* (1955) and a project about Barabbas titled *The Thief and the Cross* (1959).¹⁵

In those years, Kline searched relentlessly for partnerships and funding for his projects from friends and new partners “who didn't mind [his] leftist background” (Kline, n. d.: 2). In the early 1960s, he wrote the screenplay for a film about Simón Bolívar that caught the interest of Hy Martin, president of Universal Pictures on the East Coast, who laid down the condition that the leading role be played by a Hollywood star. Anthony Quinn expressed interest in playing Bolívar in response to a request from Kline, but the actor's exorbitant fee prevented an agreement from being reached and the project was shelved. A short time later, Kline accepted a work offer from Bart

Lytton, a screenwriter who had also fallen from grace in the McCarthy era, but who, after making a fortune in banking, opened the Lytton Center of Visual Arts with the archive collection of the Danish producer and director Mogens Skot-Hansen. Since Lytton offered Kline and his family financial support, his wife, the curator Josine Inco-Starrels, ended up directing the centre, while Kline supervised the permanent collection, dedicated to pre-cinema artefacts, and a wall installation on 20th-century film history (Kline, n. d.: 61; *The Architectural Digest*, 1963: 136-137). Kline ultimately returned to Mexico, where he found someone to support a new project, *Walls of Fire*, marking his return to documentary direction after having been banned in Hollywood for twenty years.

In *Walls of Fire*, Kline combined the experience he had acquired in museum curation with his unshakeable commitment to fighting fascism. As a result, this documentary paying tribute to Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera showcases the potential of public art to critique and transform society. For the production of *Walls of Fire*, Kline had the support of Gertrud Ross Marks and Edmond Penney, although by far the most important backing came from the painter Siqueiros himself and his partner Angélica Arenal. The documentary premiered in 1971 in Mexico, and in 1973, after winning the Golden Globe for Best Documentary, it was released in the United States, where it received an Oscar nomination. Thanks to the film's success, Kline obtained support from the French Ministry of Culture and the Cinémathèque Française, among many other institutions in the art world in France and other European countries (American Film Institute, 2019a), for his next documentary, titled *The Challenge... A Tribute to Modern Art* (1975), which would also be nominated for an Oscar in the Best Documentary category. With Orson Welles' narration enhancing the film's prestige, *The Challenge...* explored key factors behind the origins of modern art while also constituting a

living archive of major figures such as Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, and Peggy Guggenheim. At the same time, beyond its clear intention to make art accessible to the general public, it is hard to overlook the fact that many of the artists featured in *The Challenge...* had identified as staunch anti-fascists in the past. The concept of modern art itself, historically associated with the avant-garde, was dismissed by the Nazis as "degenerate art", as evidenced by an article included in Kline's scrapbook about the exhibition "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany", organised by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 1991 (Kline, n. d.: 23).

With his last documentary, titled *Acting: Lee Strasberg and the Actors Studio* (1981), Herbert Kline not only offered a portrait of the mastermind behind "The Method" and the inspiration for and director of one of the most influential acting schools of the 20th century, but also sought to recover the image of a friend and colleague who, along with Harold Clurman, had promoted the Theatre Group, which was associated with the Cultural Front in the 1930s. Together with Clifford Odets, Kline, Clurman and Strasberg had taken part in one of the most memorable episodes in the history of the American Cultural Front when in December 1934 Odets sent his unpublished play *Waiting for Lefty* to the magazine *New Theatre and Film*, where Kline worked as editor for several years. Thanks to the success the play enjoyed a few months later, the magazine, which had begun as a self-financed publication with a small readership and contributors who offered their work free of charge, became recognised as one of the benchmark publications of the Cultural Front. Although this story and others of that era were left out of his last documentary (Kline, 1985: 8-10), it could be argued that it was this legacy that inspired his final film, just as it had inspired so many of his other projects.

This long period of Kline's career is extensively documented in the collection containing his most

personal records, donated in 2009 by his daughter Elissa Kline to Syracuse University (Special Collections Research Center). Like other collections, it contains material related to his anti-fascist commitment in the 1930s and 1940s, but it also includes family correspondence and notes for his aforementioned autobiography, as well as scripts and correspondence related to projects that never made it to the screen during the period that Kline was banned from working in Hollywood. Just as documentation related to other projects that the filmmaker worked on with prominent artistic and cultural figures can be found in the archives of those individuals, the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in Mexico City—which houses the Centro de Documentación e Investigación Siqueiros—contains numerous documents related to the production of *Walls of Fire*, a film about which there are practically no references in the other collections mentioned above.¹⁶ The document collection has been especially useful for this research as it contains an abundance of correspondence between Kline, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Angélica Arenal (Siqueiros's life partner and business manager), as well as correspondence between the couple and the producers Gertrud Ross and Edmond Penney. This correspondence is dated from 1967 to 1983, and thus covers the period of the film's production practically from its inception, as well as the events following its release in Mexico (1971) and the United States (1973). The document collection in the Siqueiros Archive also contains the screenplay to the film, an extensive press kit and promotional material.¹⁷ Both the Kline collection at Syracuse University and the Siqueiros Archive also include references to the last two documentaries directed by Kline,¹⁸ although this is a part of his filmography that will be explored in future research.

CONCLUSION

As this article has shown, exploring Herbert Kline's career as a whole from the perspective of his nomadic filmmaking praxis can shed some light on a creative trajectory that at first glance may seem inconsistent, heterogeneous and filled with gaps and contradictions. Specifically, analysing Kline's oeuvre with a *longue durée* approach reveals a filmmaker on a quest for ways of carrying out an anti-fascist cinematic project at different historical moments and in a wide range of cultural and political contexts. This approach makes it possible to identify connections, for example, between a series of political documentaries about the Spanish Civil War, a docudrama promoting the modernisation of healthcare in rural Mexico, a Zionist drama made just prior to the foundation of the State of Israel, a Hollywood baseball movie, and a series of documentaries about modern art.

It has been argued here that what characterises Kline's work is the *absence* of an authorial signature, as this absence constitutes a reflection of the uncertainty, migration, and persecution that conditioned his creative production. In light of the above, it could even be argued that Kline was a wanderer not only in geographical terms but also in terms of style, as he conceived of filmmaking from an instrumental or utilitarian perspective. Although it is not absent *per se*, style in Kline's films tends to be largely subordinate to the nature and needs of the subject matter, the approaches of the people he worked with, the financial possibilities, and the infrastructure of the production environments in which he operated. Rather than asserting a definitive creed in relation to the documentary or realism, Kline repeatedly plundered generic codes and aesthetic paradigms to consolidate a social or political agenda that varied according to the historical moment and the geographical location without ever losing its anti-fascist dimension. Ultimately, the analysis of Kline's wandering archive shows us that to uncover the grey areas of

film history, we need to abandon the assumptions on which that history is founded and explore its inconsistencies, deviations, and dissonances. ■

NOTES

- * This article is the result of the research project titled “Cartografías del cine de movilidad en el Atlántico hispánico” [Cinematic Cartographies of Mobility in the Hispanic Atlantic] (CSO2017-85290-P), financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation - State Research Agency, and with funds from the ERDF.
- 1 For more on Hollywood’s approach to the Mexican Revolution, see Miranda López (2010).
 - 2 We believe it important not to misconstrue Kline’s expression “film gypsy” in ethnic terms, as it should be understood as an allusion to the nomadic condition that characterises Kline’s filmmaking practice, a condition that has also historically been associated with the Roma people. To avoid confusion or offence, throughout the article we employ the alternative term “wandering filmmaker”.
 - 3 Revealing in this respect is a conversation between Bertolt Brecht and Hans Eisler cited by Kenneth H. Marcus, who reports that the German playwright confided in Eisler that “in the film world the people I know are [William] Dieterle, [Fritz] Lang, [Henry] Koster and [Herbert] Kline.” Marcus draws attention to the fact that all of these filmmakers were exiles like Brecht, except for Kline (Marcus, 2015: 214). He also notes that most of them ended up excluded from commercial film circuits due to their leftist convictions.
 - 4 Wasson and Acland refer mainly to films made in an institutional context. However, as they specify in the introduction to their book, the concept of useful cinema is multi-dimensional and flexible enough to include “experimental films and a variety of didactic films that are fictional as well as non-fictional, narrative as well as non-narrative” (Wasson & Acland, 2011: 4).
 - 5 Prints are preserved of *Heart of Spain* on 35mm film, and of *Return to Life* on 16mm, in the MoMA and in Filmoteca Española. Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archives has a 16mm print of *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* (Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archives, 2021).
 - 6 The MoMA has restored prints of *Crisis* and *Lights Out in Europe* in its archives. Both were included in the “Documenti e documentari” section of the Il Cinema Ritrovato festival, directed by Gian Luca Farinelli (2019 and 2018, respectively).
 - 7 The film he was directing for MGM was *Journey for Margaret* (1942), a drama about an orphan girl in London during the Blitz, which due to disagreements between Kline and the managers of the London Underground ended up being completed by W. S. Van Dyke, who was credited as its sole director.
 - 8 *Jueves de Excelsior* (1942, 29 October). *Lumière dice... Jueves de Excelsior*, p. 38.
 - 9 The press of the day described Kline as the person responsible for the project, with Budd Schulberg as screenwriter (*Motion Picture Daily* (1943, 9 July). Kline is in Mexico for ‘The Mexican’. *Motion Picture Daily*, p. 6.
 - 10 He did work as a screenwriter for RKO on *Youth Runs Wild* (Mark Robson, 1944), and for Universal Pictures on *Illegal Entry* (Frederick De Cordova, 1949). The latter film, set in the United States and Mexico, tells the story of a Polish refugee and Dachau survivor who falls victim to a human trafficking gang.
 - 11 Although the opening credits present it as a simple “story of the people of Palestine, and not of its politics”, the film expresses clear sympathies with the Zionist cause.
 - 12 The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) has nitrate prints of these films on 16 and 35 mm, respectively.
 - 13 There are prints of *The Forgotten Village* in various institutions; for example, UCLA, the Stanford Theatre Foundation, the MoMA and the Filmoteca UNAM all have 35mm nitrate prints.
 - 14 We would like to thank Mikael Levin for helping us to track down these documents, as well as the print of the film preserved in the Jerusalem Cinematheque.
 - 15 The script for this project is preserved at the University of Delaware (“Herbert Kline collection related to the film *Barabbas: The Thief and the Cross*”). We would like

- to thank Julia Dudley, a librarian at the University of Syracuse, for bringing this collection to our attention.
- 16 We would like to thank Mónica Montes Flores, Director of the Centro de Investigación y Documentación Siqueiros, for providing access to the materials related to the production of *Walls of Fire* in the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros.
- 17 The Filmoteca UNAM has a 16mm print of this film. We would like to thank Ángel Martínez, head of cataloguing at the Filmoteca UNAM, for his help in locating this print.
- 18 UCLA has a 35mm print of *The Challenge... A Tribute to Modern Art* (1975) and the Cinémathèque Française holds a print of *Acting: Lee Strasberg and the Actors Studio* (1981).

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A WANDERING ARCHIVE: HERBERT KLINE AND THE TRANSNATIONAL ITINERARIES OF ANTI-FASCIST FILMMAKING

Abstract

This article analyses the transnational and itinerant work of the US anti-fascist filmmaker Herbert Kline, whose career spanned five decades from the 1930s to the 1980s. Kline's urge to combat Nazism and fascism and to promote radical democracy through film took him to Europe, the US, Palestine and Latin America. Taking as our starting-point the theories by Naficy and Marks on diasporic and exilic cinemas, but avoiding an authorial approach, we take up Kline's own self-definition as a *film-gypsy* to account for a highly heterogeneous and discontinuous oeuvre that comprises finished and uncompleted films as well as unmade film projects; and documentary, fiction and dramatised documentary films. Furthermore, the article proposes that the scholarly study of a filmmaker such as Kline calls for a multiple and complex research methodology in order to fully account for what we call the filmmaker's *gypsy archive*.

Key words

Herbert Kline; Cinema; Anti-fascism; Internationalism; Archive.

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UN ARCHIVO VAGABUNDO: HERBERT KLINE Y LOS ITINERARIOS TRANSNACIONALES DEL ANTI-FASCISMO CINEMATOGRAFICO

Resumen

Este artículo examina la itinerancia transnacional de Herbert Kline, cineasta estadounidense antifascista cuya carrera se extiende desde la década de 1930 hasta mediados de 1980. A lo largo de cinco décadas, Kline se desplazó por Europa, Estados Unidos, Palestina y América Latina, siguiendo el impulso de combatir el nazismo y el fascismo y promover la democracia radical a través de su práctica cinematográfica. Partiendo de las teorizaciones de Naficy y Marks sobre el cine de la diáspora y el exilio, pero eludiendo el enfoque autorial, tomamos la autodefinición de Kline como *cineasta vagabundo* para dar cuenta de una obra enormemente heterogénea y discontinua que comprende documentales y ficciones, películas finalizadas y otras incompletas, así como proyectos que nunca se desarrollaron. Por lo demás, el artículo propone que el estudio de un cineasta como Kline requiere de una investigación metodológica múltiple y compleja para poder dar cumplida cuenta de lo que denominamos el *archivo vagabundo* del cineasta.

Palabras clave

Herbert Kline; cine; antifascismo; internacionalismo; archivo.

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