A Closer Look at Third Cinema

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Who today does not know the classic films of Brazil’s cinema novo, the pamphlets of the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés, the works of the Cuban cinema, the Chilean, Argentinian experiences, and others? [1]

This rhetorical question introduced a poll on ‘The influence of third cinema in the world’ published in Revue Tiers Monde in 1979. Some 10 years earlier, Latin America was the site of an explosion of militant cinema theory and practice. This cultural activism accompanied progressive political movements throughout the region, stimulated most significantly by the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959. Military repression during the 1970s crushed the progressive movements, and ended the creative filmmaking episodes. With the so-called return of democracy in the 1980s, filmmaking revived in Latin America, but no longer under the same militant banner. At the same time, no comparable theoretical work emerged. The younger filmmakers did not churn out theoretical statements as their predecessors had done in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Bolivia and Chile. As the theoretical impulses faded, however, non-Latin American critics reached back to the earlier period to pluck one particular document as a metonymy for Latin America’s contribution to a renewed militant criticism. Indeed, the third cinema became the official rubric for this renewal. While it is true that the 1969 manifesto ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ does merit a special position in the critical tradition, these writers reinforced the marginalization of Latin American film theory by ignoring so much of what made the manifesto unique. More conscientious critics respected the context of third cinema, but no account draws on the extensive complementary material by the authors to clarify some of the central ideas of the manifesto. This article helps fill in those missing contours of third cinema by drawing on both the manifesto and numerous untranslated commentaries on the topic by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas.

One reason behind this phenomenon is linguistic. The manifestoes found their way into English only sporadically in militant film journals on both sides of the north Atlantic, in Cineaste, Jump Cut, Afterimage, and Framework. Only the third cinema manifesto was anthologized in film theory and criticism textbooks, and the group of contemporaneous manifestoes was never available in one place before the publication by the BFI of Michael Chanan’s invaluable but not easily available Twenty-five Years of Latin American Cinema in 1983 [2]. Scholars of Latin American film discussed the manifestoes on many occasions, but Latin American film theory remained a backwater to the wave of Anglo-American-French theory sweeping the academy [3].

Early in the 1980s, critics less familiar with Latin American cinema began to detach the concept of third cinema from its source document. The Ethiopian-born, US-based scholar Teshome Gabriel, in the first book devoted to third cinema, Third Cinema in the Third World (1982), went so far as to claim that ‘The notion of “Third Cinema” is not the creation of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino alone’ [4]. In 1985 Clyde Taylor,
somewhat cryptically, announced that ‘The films made by progressive directors in pre-revolutionary China from 1936 on [represent] the historical beginning of Third Cinema’ [5]. The key turning point occurred when the organizers of the Edinburgh film festival decided to hold a conference on third cinema in 1986. Held at a time when identity politics was roiling the political scene, the conference sparked sharp polemics played out in a number of publications, punctuated by charges of a repressive Eurocentrism [6]. The renewed interest in third cinema culminated in the publication of Edinburgh conference papers in 1989 in Questions of Third Cinema, a collection that managed to exclude any writer from Latin America, let alone Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, authors of the original manifesto [7]. In the preface, Paul Willemen signals the importance of the work of Teshome Gabriel in the rethinking of third cinema (without mentioning once Solanas and Getino): his work ‘provided another important source of inspiration’ (p. viii), effectively anointing him as a valuable interpreter of third cinema; two articles by Gabriel follow Willemen’s introductory essay.

While surely one cannot object to the adaptation of critical ideas, the problem here is the surprising indifference to the context from which the expression was taken. Gabriel blithely claims that

The concept and proposition of ‘Third Cinema’ used to refer to a special kind of Latin American film. Of late its use encompasses all films with social and political purpose. The term is being widely accepted by the progressive Third World cineaste [sic] [8].

Gabriel does not deign to mention how the term has come to encompass ‘all films with social and political purpose’, nor does he mention a single filmmaker who ‘accepts’ the term. In fact, Zuzanna Pick recently noted that Latin America filmmakers had criticized her (in 1979!) for applying the term to their work, and that she had used the term improperly when calling her edited collection Latin American Film Makers and Third Cinema [9]. In the special dossier on the influence of third cinema compiled by CinémAction in 1979, the Latin American filmmakers wrote of the lack of influence of third cinema [10].

Paul Willemen, after warning against dehistoricizing the term, discussed the manifestoes together as third cinema ‘manifestoes’, though only ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ even mentions the term. Furthermore, Willemen identifies filmmakers throughout the world as practitioners of third cinema, including Gitai, Angelopoulos, Chahine, Kaige, Ghatik, Julien, among others, but exclusively for their film productions, not for their active political work for specific political organizations. Finally, he places third cinema in the great political avant-garde tradition beginning with the revolutionary artists of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and incorporates the concept into the modern European critical tradition of Benjamin, Bakhtin, and Brecht.

As a European intellectual, Willemen wanted to formulate a progressive critical practice for committed intellectuals. For this reason he reaches back to the Soviet artists and intellectuals of the 1920s—Tretyakov, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky—as the founding moment of a criticism which engages the audience in understanding their particular situations of oppression:

The Latin Americans’ emphasis on lucidity echoes Brecht’s confidence in the emancipatory power of reason, something he shared with many Soviet artists allied to Lunacharsky’s Commissariat of Enlightenment … . (p. 12)

Willemen tries to use the ‘re-actualisation of the Third Cinema debates in the UK in the 80s’ (p. 28) to advance a form of criticism, a ‘necessarily utopian image of what a
socialist critical-cultural practice might/should be’. He concludes his Introduction with a forthright admission:

... my primary aim in drawing attention to the issues which the notion of Third Cinema allows me to raise is an attempt to help change the (film) culture which I inhabit … . (p. 29)

Anyone reading ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ would find this modest, circumscribed goal a faint echo of the fiery aspirations of *third cinema*—‘a gun [the projector] that can shoot twenty four times per second’—in struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism. Notwithstanding the distortions, there are in fact several compelling reasons to distinguish ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ from the other Latin American theoretical writings, for the manifesto was unparalleled in fundamental ways. First, the written manifesto emerged from a specific and concrete practice: the production, distribution, and exhibition of the epic *Hour of the Furnaces*. In 1982, Getino recalled ‘The fact that still today it is difficult to separate the concept of Third Cinema from *The Hour of the Furnaces* once again proves the intimate dependence of the theoretical elaboration on concrete practice’ [11]. The film itself was also unprecedented in its 4 hour and 20 minute length, and had a powerful impact on other Latin American filmmakers. Raul Ruiz claimed at Viña del Mar (Chile) in 1969 that the film ‘hurled us against the walls and left us breathless’ [12]. Though the film did not meet unanimous praise, its undeniable power guaranteed wide exhibition, particularly in Europe, where it first showed at the Pesaro (Italy) film festival in 1968:

When the projection ended, they prepared a demonstration and carried us out of the theater on stretchers. The demonstration reached the Pessaro [sic] town square, where it joined with another demonstration of students. The thing ended with the police attacking and finally several directors were arrested. From that moment, *La hora de los hornos* was a big event and they demanded it everywhere [13].

In subsequent interviews in Europe and Latin America, the filmmaker/theoreticians discussed the ideas in their manifesto, conjoining theory and practice around the dual text of film and manifesto. No other manifesto was so inextricably linked to a particular film.

Second, the Cubans published the manifesto in *Tricontinental*. *Tricontinental* first appeared in 1967, simultaneously published in four languages (Spanish, French, English, and Italian) by the Organization for the Solidarity of African, Asian and Latin American Peoples (OSPAAL). The journal expressed the aspirations of peoples from three continents struggling against ‘the criminal policies of intervention, plunder and aggression employed by the world-wide imperialist system and particularly by U.S. Imperialism against the Afro-Asian-Latin American peoples’ (inaugural issue, July/August 1967). The first issue included articles by Franz Fanon, Kim Il Sung, and Fidel Castro. It also affirmed that ‘the guerrilla detachments of Latin America demonstrate their solidarity with the combatants waging daily combat for national liberation on a tricontinental scale’, and cited a message from Ché Guevara:

And let us develop a true proletarian Internationalism, with International proletarian armies; the flag under which we fight shall be the sacred cause of redeeming humanity. To die under the flag of Viet Nam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Colombia, of Bolivia, of Brazil—to name
only a few scenes of today’s armed struggle—would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, an Asian, and African, even a European [14]. Launched at this historical and geographical intersection, ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ was translated into 12 languages and had more international exposure than the other manifestoes.

Third, Solanas and Getino did not let the manifesto, with its inevitable ambiguities, gaps, slippages, and elisions, rest as a final document. They clarified and elaborated their thinking in multiple articles and interviews, in Latin America and Europe, responded to criticisms and questions and even published retrospective comments on their original formulations [15]. No other Latin American filmmakers so systematically articulated a theory of cinema for politically committed filmmaking. Of course, any document might elicit varying interpretations, and the manifesto acknowledged that it was presenting only a ‘sketch of a hypothesis’. But beyond the cavalier treatment of the manifesto itself by some writers, none of the commentators refers to a single one of these complementary Spanish texts, presumably—for the critics mentioned above—because the other writings were not translated into English [16]. Those commentaries in fact do pursue ideas broached in the manifesto, especially in relation to what they referred to as ‘militant cinema’. These texts underline aspects of the manifesto virtually ignored by so many critics: the centrality of the projection circumstances and the use value of the film for militant political organizations.

The manifesto opens by attacking the cinema of spectacle. This cinema, a cinema of consumption, ‘a digesting object’, creates and depends on a passive spectator. This key idea, one with clear affinities to Brecht’s radical ideas, simultaneously being resuscitated by European filmmakers and intellectuals, does not stop at strategies of distancing intended to promote lucidity, a central category for Willemen [17]. Solanas and Getino insist on ‘intervention’:

… revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which illustrates, documents, or passively establishes a situation: rather, it attempts to intervene in the situation as an element providing thrust or rectification. It is not simply testimonial cinema, nor cinema of communication, but above all Action Cinema [18].

While Solanas and Getino supported the importance of raising consciousness, the central aim of Fernando Birri’s work 10 years earlier, they wanted to go beyond this [19]. In the same passage, they cite Marx’s well-known 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: ‘it is not sufficient to interpret the world; it is now a question of transforming it’. Many invoke this injunction, but Getino and Solanas draw on their own experience distributing and exhibiting their film to demonstrate concrete ways of applying this principle. For exhibition, they encouraged organizers to project the film in whatever manner was appropriate for their own purposes. The film itself announces several breaks in the projection, allowing for discussion among the spectators. The ‘act’ of screening presupposed the presence of ‘relators’ prepared to stop the film:

The act is guided by one or more relators [relatores] in the room who can interrupt the projection when the participants find it necessary so that the relation between the film and the protagonists eliminates definitively the spectator [20].

The film’s last part includes commentaries from ‘protagonists’, obviously not part of the original film.

That is, the film changed over time with these additions, and these changes implied
an even more radical repudiation of the notion of an ‘original’ than Walter Benjamin had envisioned. As many theorists rediscovered Brecht, they also read his comrade Benjamin, in particular the article on ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’. Benjamin’s article welcomed mechanical reproduction for its role in dissolving the ‘aura’ traditionally attached to artworks, demoting the status of the original, effectively democratizing the availability and accessibility of art [21]. Solanas and Getino extended this process beyond the idea of mechanical reproduction. They rejected the very existence of a final product multiply reproduced; with multiple changeable copies, there is no original. For Solanas and Getino, any individual copy should be viewed as malleable. In a later article, they refer to films made by their group, Cine Liberación (‘or by analogous groups’) as ‘modular’ films, whose parts could be rearranged according to the purposes of a given screening, cutting out reels, changing the order, etc.:

already at the time of projection, outside of the control of the group which made the film, in the hands of the projecting group, the copy underwent various modifications [cuts, additions, changes] which were never questioned by us, inasmuch as we gave priority to the person and the concrete process itself, more than to the life of the film ... [22].

This formulation prioritizes the ‘concrete process’ of the screening situation. In fact, Solanas and Getino prefer the term ‘film act’ to ‘film’ per se. The film is ‘important only as a detonator or pretext’. Attendance at screenings of such a cinema already constituted an action:

This person was no longer a spectator; on the contrary, from the moment he decided to attend the showing, from the moment he lined himself up on this side by taking risks and contributing his living experience to the meeting, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than those who appeared in the films.

Outside this space which the films momentarily helped to liberate, there was nothing but solitude, noncommunication, distrust, and fear; within the freed space the situation turned everyone into accomplices of the act that was unfolding.

Just as Brecht had called for breaking down the barrier between proscenium and audience, for putting the spectators at ease so that they could enjoy the didactic experience, Solanas and Getino developed similar methods to solicit participation:

As we gained in experience, we incorporated into the showing various elements (a mise en scène) to reinforce the themes of the films, the climate of the showing, the ‘disinhibiting’ of the participants, and the dialogue: recorded music or poems, sculpture and paintings, posters, a programme director who chaired the debate and presented the film and the comrades who were speaking, a glass of wine, a few mates, etc.

Unlike Brecht, however, and other writers on the epistemology of radical artistic practice, which would include the Argentine Birri (whose 1958 documentary Tire dié is ‘cited’ in Hour of the Furnaces), Solanas and Getino insist on the importance of knowledge which leads to action. Furthermore, this customizing of the film text to the particular exhibition circumstances presupposes that

the space where it takes place, the materials that go to make it up (actors-par-
participants), and the historic time in which it takes place are never the same. This means that the result of each projection will depend on those who organize it, on those who participate in it, and on the time and place; the possibility of introducing variations, additions, and changes is unlimited. The screening of a film act will always express in one way or another the historical situation in which it takes place.

Just as the filmmaker/theorists try to deflect significance from themselves or their group as directors of the films [23], they stress the particular historical conjuncture of their interventions. They do not believe that their ideas will mobilize the masses in some illusory imputation of power to cultural work [24]. They state at the very beginning that questions about a revolutionary cinema before the revolution cannot be answered in some ahistorical debate, but only by the masses in struggle:

The existence of masses on the worldwide revolutionary plane was the substantial fact without which those questions could not have been posed.

Despite this emphasis on the international revolutionary upsurge, the impetus for launching Tricontinental, both the film and the manifesto concentrate on Argentina, and their particular insertion in the Argentine reality has drawn criticism [25]. The manifesto does not address the correlation of forces in Argentina at that time, but the authors made no secret of their political affiliation as militant Peronists. Some left critics hesitated to endorse the manifesto for this reason, and the film quite explicitly supports the Peronist trade union movement.

But these criticisms do not apply to the theoretical (and practical) project outlined in the manifesto. In interviews and later articles, Solanas and Getino distinguished between their own personal political commitments and the program of the manifesto. They did tend to view all anti-imperialist struggle in Argentina as part of a broad ‘National Liberation Movement (Peronism)’ [26], but they understood revolutionary cinema in less sectarian terms as any cinematic practice developed within a militant political organization:

Its primary responsibility is the complete mastery of the resources that it manages and which defines the group precisely as militant filmmaking group ...

The militant filmmaking group does not aspire to win people for itself, but for the organization and the space in which it works [27].

or

Militant cinema is that cinema which is integrated as instrument, complement or support of a specific politics, and of the organizations which carry out the plan together with the diversity of objectives which it pursues [28].

On many occasions, Solanas and Getino stressed this uncompromising position on the ‘instrumentalization’ [29] of filmmaking. Filmmakers bring their expertise to the militant organization, but their work acquires value only as it advances the organization’s strategy. The film itself has no intrinsic value [30].

The subordination of filmmaking to the work of political organizations contains a certain conceptual confusion, implicitly recognized by Solanas and Getino. After the manifesto’s publication, the writers tried to clarify ‘militant cinema’, which they referred to as an ‘internal category of third cinema’ [31]. They acknowledge that the term third cinema is ‘sufficiently new that it still lacks a rigorous level of analysis and criticism’. This admission corresponds to the manifesto’s claims that third cinema is an
open category, not fixed and rigid, hence the critical importance of specific and changing historical circumstances. By concentrating so exclusively on the original manifesto, faithfully or not, critics have overlooked the significance of ‘militant cinema’ for third cinema.

In their first discussion of the distinction, after listing militant films made by groups in Chile, Colombia and Argentina, Solanas and Getino hazard a provisional distinction:

... the responsibility which falls to those making militant cinema is much greater than the responsibilities assumed by directors of third cinema. And it is greater precisely because the instigators of a cinema of militants are not trying now only a work of cultural decolonization or the recuperation of a national culture, but are proposing to complement through their militant activity (which they place above any political-cinematic work) a revolutionary politics, that which leads to the destruction of neocolonialism, to the national liberation of our countries and to the national construction of socialism....

Can we establish perchance hermetic definitions or theses? If we did that, would we not be violating precisely the greatest virtue and quality of this attempt: its character of hypothesis and inconclusiveness? [32]

They imply that the more global term third cinema refers to the struggle of ‘cultural decolonization’ and the ‘recuperation of a national culture’, themes discussed by Gabriel and Willemen. But subsequent articles and interviews of Getino and Solanas dwell almost exclusively on this more narrow concern of third cinema, such that militant cinema clearly represents a privileged internal category of third cinema, what they called the ‘most radicalized category’ of third cinema [33].

Militant cinema, according to these later elaborations, is a cinema committed to working within and for militant, political, revolutionary organizations. For Solanas and Getino, the key criterion is the relation between the spectator and the work. Therefore, not only does their criterion de-emphasize the text’s significance, but they also judge a text according to its effect on spectators, its ‘use value’. For example, in 1971, Solanas and Getino asserted that

A cinema is militant and revolutionary to the extent that the people, through the representative and revolutionary organizations which propel the process of liberation, shape implicitly or explicitly its nature.

This cinema recognizes in the first instance no other specificity than politics, no other function or front.... Filmmakers cannot be considered militant if the work is not part of the work and practice realized within organic militant formations [34].

Judging film on its efficacy as an organizing tool radically changes the status of the film object, and indicates an extremely functional view of the role of aesthetics. Various critics, though acknowledging the third cinema’s goal of making revolution, have sought a revolutionary aesthetics in the manifesto. According to one recent account, the original impulse of third cinema was ‘a critically conscious and experimental agency of signification’ [35]. Teshome Gabriel writes that

the aim of third cinema is not to re-aestheticize traditional cinematic codes but to politicize cinema to such an extent that a new cinematic code appropriate to its needs is established [36].

Cynthia Ramsay maintains that ‘third cinema films make revolution on the ideological level with a new film style’ [37]. For Robert Stam, third cinema is
independent in production, militant in politics, and experimental in language. Revolutionary films must be esthetically avant-garde [38].

Despite occasional remarks by Solanas and Getino about finding new forms for new situations, the theorists of third cinema did not restrict the form that third cinema should take. For example, contrary to the assertion that the revolutionary film must have a revolutionary form, they praised Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés’s work, even though Sanjinés may use conventional and old language, which, perhaps in Bolivia, would allow it to play a role superior to what that same language would signify today in the Argentinian context; that is, it might play a more significant role in Bolivia [39].

Based on the relation between the film and the spectator, one of transforming him/her into a protagonist, their criterion for a revolutionary act derives from a similar instrumentalization:

What defines the revolutionary act [in film, for example] in fact is not the form in which it is expressed, but the transformative role that it reaches in a specific (tactical) circumstance in a strategy of liberation [40].

Furthermore, taking this de-emphasis of a film as a fixed text to its logical conclusion, a single film may qualify as militant or not depending on the context of its use. ‘A militant Cuban film, for example, is not necessarily a militant film in Argentina if it does not serve the political necessities of the local revolutionary organizations’ [41]. Needless to say, if a given film may qualify as third cinema in one screening and not in another, one must examine the relation between the film and the spectator to assess its qualification as third cinema, not the film text in isolation.

Third cinema must serve a specific political purpose for the particular political organization using it. At the same time, even films from the ‘metropolis’ might qualify as third cinema, or at least as militant cinema. Solanas and Getino acknowledge that one Italian theorist’s dismissal of Battle of Algiers as reformist ‘is correct from his perspective’, but the same film may become a militant film in Argentina if such works in our context play a role of stimulation and mobilization, of transformation of consciousness and of sharpening of contradictions, which is what valorizes such films in Argentina today. From such a perspective we could characterize this type of work as the most important that European filmmaking is producing in relation to our historical context [42].

What characterizes First, Second or Third Cinema is not the theme, the type of distribution, narration structure, direction, format or economic size of the production, but the ideological sustenance and the project toward which it is oriented or of which it consciously or unconsciously forms a part [43].

Solanas and Getino also display a bias toward documentary. In the manifesto, they state that ‘documentary [cinema] is perhaps the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking’. Here they mean revealing the national reality to the people, anticipating the use of the ‘testimonial’ which achieved critical currency during the 1980s: ‘Testimony about a national reality is also an inestimable means of dialogue and knowledge on the world plane.’ But their orientation corresponds to an unproblematized belief in the truth of the image:

An image is a fact [datum] of reality, a proof which is defined by itself...
The documentary image, which cannot be disputed, that is the proof, reaches a total importance faced with the ‘proofs’ of the adversary [44]. For many years, film theorists have debated the ‘ontology of the photographic image’, to quote André Bazin’s title of a celebrated 1945 article. In the late 1960s, the moment of La hora de los hornos and the manifesto, French critics and filmmakers were attacking this naive realism as a foundation of bourgeois aesthetics. Godard’s adage from Vent d’Est (1969) that ‘Ce n’est pas une image juste, c’est juste une image’ is a typically Godardian intervention in this debate. Solanas and Getino accept some ontological character of the photographic image, but as the reference to Sanjinés’s fictional work cited above indicates, Solanas and Getino had no theoretical objection to fiction filmmaking. Both made fiction films after Perón’s triumphant return to Argentina in 1973.

No doubt Argentina’s reputation as the most ‘European’ Latin American country partly accounts for the emphasis on concrete historical and political circumstances. The manifesto carefully limits its references to Latin American and other Third World theorist/activists, for Solanas and Getino identified Argentina’s principal enemies as the local neo-colonized bourgeoisie, repeatedly excoriated in La hora de los hornos as craven imitators of European culture. Promoting national culture motivates them to repudiate inclusion in European militant filmmaking. While Willemen wanted to claim third cinema for the radical European critical tradition, beginning with the Soviet Union, Solanas specifically rejected that critical gambit years earlier:

I remember at the time [following the 1967 festival of Mérida, Venezuela] an error of evaluation by the Italian critic Guido Aristarco, when he found the Latin American cinema which he had seen at the Mérida Festival to be revolutionary. He resituated it, in its experiment and its form, beside the Soviet cinema of forty years earlier, that of Eisenstein or Vertov. The analysis certainly could be correct on the plan of experiment and form, but is nevertheless wrong in isolating it from its historical context, as the large part of European critics do. Which is to say that we thought that what was really new in the majority of the Latin American countries—and not only in our film—... is a cinema on the margins of the system, a cinema radicalized ideologically, a cinema of combat, of essay and of reflection born of some very precise circumstances which were occurring in unliberated countries where the mechanisms of oppression are powerful. Eisenstein and Vertov had the Soviet power behind them, the Latin American filmmaker has the police behind him. That is the difference [45].

In an era of globalization, these protestations of regional specificity in the context of attacks on neo-colonialism have become quaint. The precondition for third cinema—the worldwide uprising of the masses—sounds like a rhetorical anachronism, soggy with Marxist internationalism. At the same time, nationalism no longer holds the same appeal for progressive movements. However, as new social movements impose new configurations on left political activism, developments in the media environment have opened spaces for application of some of the central tenets of third cinema, specifically those overlooked by previous writers: the transformation of the act of projection and the instrumentalization of the medium.

Left national cinema projects in Latin America will probably never return. States may moderate the current passion for privatization, but governments will not invest in a national cinema project, as so many Latin American countries did three decades ago in
Cuba, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua, among others. Cinema theaters have closed at staggering rates over the last 20 years. Audiences are watching telenovelas, often from Latin America, on their television screens; the more affluent also drive to multiplexes to watch Hollywood films. But since the 1980s, new social movements have taken advantage of inexpensive video technology to produce their own audio-visual ‘weapons’, albeit firing now 30 times a second. With concerns more local and hybrid than ‘national’, groups can easily organize their own screenings as part of a strategy to advance the interests of the groups. Whether that legacy of *third cinema* will advance the cause of liberation in Latin America remains to be seen.

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**NOTES**


[3] ‘Towards a Third Cinema’, published only in the Nichols anthology, is the only translation from Spanish in any of the major anthologies by Nichols (I and II), Mast/Cohen, Rosen; the four anthologies contain over 30 articles translated from French.


[9] In her 1993 book, *The New Latin American Cinema*, Pick reported that ‘During my first visit to Cuba in 1979, filmmakers and critics pointed out that the title of my recently published anthology ... was misleading in that not all of the New Latin American Cinema should be defined as “third cinema”’ (pp. 200–201). In a marvelous typo, the title of the earlier *Latin American Film Makers and the Third Cinema* has changed to *Latin American Film Makers and the Third World* in Martin, *New Latin American Cinema*, Vol. 1, p. 309. Getino specifies that the first use of the term ‘third cinema’ appeared in the written responses of Getino and Solanas to a series of questions from *Cine Cubano*, published in that journal in March 1969, No. 56/57, under the title ‘Fernando E. Solanas y Octavio Getino responden cine cubano’. For Getino’s clarification of the first appearance of the term, see ‘Algunas observaciones sobre el concepto del “Tercer Cine”’, reprinted in *Un diez años de ‘hacia un tercer cine’*. In that article, Getino identifies the title of the *Cine Cubano* article as ‘La cultura nacional, el cine y La hora de los hornos’. (Also found with that title in O. Getino and F. Solanas, *Cine, cultura, y descolonización* (Mexico, 1973).)

[10] While only three Latin American filmmakers were included in the dossier, all wrote that the manifesto had little influence in their countries (Jaime Lorrain, Chile; Rodolfo Izaguirre, Venezuela; Sergio Muniz, Brazil). Each stresses the inapplicability of the ideas of *third cinema* to the particular situations in his country.


[13] Fernando Solanas, La hora de los hornos, in Fernando Ferreira, Luz, cámara ... memoria: una historia social del cine argentino (Buenos Aires, 1995), p. 300. Another Latin American filmmaker recalled that ‘When they screened The Hour of the Furnaces, director Fernando Solanas was carried out into the streets on the shoulders of the crowd in a spontaneous demonstration of support. As the festival repeatedly spilled out into the street, there were many confrontations with the police. I remember hearing out telephones and throwing them at the police through the windows of the second story of the festival office. I remember fleeing en masse down the narrow cobblestone streets of Pesaro with the police in hot pursuit’, quoted in Pick, New Latin American Cinema, p. 22; from J. Burton (ed.), Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: conversations with filmmakers (Austin, 1986), p. 228. When first shown in Argentina, the film was shown clandestinely; Solanas claims that 100,000 spectators saw it during that period. After the return of Perón to power in 1973, the film received a normal release and Solanas asserts that 400,000 saw it during that run. Cinéma d’auteur ou cinéma d’intervention, CinémAction, 1, in Ecran (hors série) (1978), p. 61.

[14] Tricontinental, 1 (English) (July/August 1967), Havana.

[15] Many of the writings are collected in O. Getino and F. Solanas, Cine, cultura, y descolonización (Mexico, 1973). For a retrospective view, see O. Getino, a diez años de ‘hacia un tercer cine’.

[16] I believe only one of these complementary texts has been translated. See note 11, above.

[17] As a critic, Willemen stresses the importance of lucidity, as if it were the end point of political filmmaking: ‘... the Latin American put an extraordinary, almost desperate stress on the need for lucidity in the struggle for a renewed attempt to integrate art and life.’ The Third Cinema question: notes and reflections, in Questions of Third Cinema, p. 12.

[18] I have revised the standard English translation here. In the sentence cited in the text, the original Spanish reads as follows:

‘No es simplemente cine testimonio, ni cine comunicación, sino ante todo Cine Acción.’ Burton’s translation renders the Spanish in the following manner:

‘To put it another way, it provides discovery through transformation.’ There are anomalies in the various published versions of ‘Towards a Third Cinema’. Though published initially in Tricontinental in four languages, several republications in Spanish are taken from the text which appeared in the Mexican publication Cine Club, año 1 (October 1970); for example Hojas de Cine, and a diez años de ‘Hacia un Tercer Cine’, both published in Mexico. Sometimes it appears without the original footnotes, as in Afterimage, No. 3 (1970). There are also discrepancies in the translation. The most common English translation was by Julianne Burton, published originally in Cineaste, IV, 3 (Winter 1970–1971), and reproduced and revised by Burton and Chanan in Twenty-five Years of New Latin American Cinema. For example, the Spanish version ends with the following sentence:

... el nacimiento del Tercer Cine, al menos para nosotros, significa el acontecimiento cinematográfico más importante de nuestro tiempo.

Burton’s version offers the following translation:

... the birth of a third cinema means, at least for us, the most important revolutionary artistic event of our times.

It may be that the original Spanish manifesto published in Tricontinental may differ from the versions mentioned above, but I have not seen that version. Throughout the article, all emphases are from original texts, unless indicated otherwise.

[19] Fernando Birri, often referred to as the founder of New Latin American Cinema, was the only name cited by Gabriel after he asserted that third cinema was not the creation of Solanas and Getino: ‘similar concerns about the state of Third World cinema were articulated earlier by such notables as Argentinian Fernando Birri [sic] who wrote about “a cinema that reintroduces the revolutionary consciousness of the masses”’, Third Cinema, p. 122. Certainly there is some overlap between the ideas of Birri and Solanas and Getino, but these kinds of vague affiliations and slippages—third cinema/third world—only exacerbate difficulties with some of the formulations of Solanas and Getino, but Gabriel does not substantiate the claim, and I know of no earlier Birri text that uses the term.

[20] Fernando E. Solanas y Octavio Getino responden a cine cubano, Cine Cubano (March 1969), p. 33. Commenting specifically on La hora de los hornos, Solanas elaborated on this idea of the elimination of ‘the spectator’:
He ceases to be a spectator and becomes the protagonist and actor passing from the screen to the projection room and from the projection room to the screen. [Interview with Louis Marcorelles, Cahiers du Cinéma (March 1969), p. 62.]


[22] El cine como parte de los proyectos de liberación, in a diez años de ‘hacia un tercer cine’, p. 34. More recently, Getino recalled that ‘Very few copies were similar. To make its use most functional, the organizers of the exhibitions added or cut certain fragments to make them appropriate to the specific characteristics of each space or moment of projection’. O. Getino, Cine argentino: entre lo imposible y lo deseable (Buenos Aires, 1998), pp. 58–59.


[24] ‘We understand that a film, like a novel, a painting or a book, will not liberate our country; neither will a strike, a demonstration, or an armed action, all isolated actions. Each one of these, or the militant cinematic work, are forms of action within the current battle that is currently taking place. The effectiveness of one or another cannot be evaluated a priori, but only through its own practice’. This passage is one that does not appear in the standard English translation. See the manifesto in Cine, cultura, y descolonización, p. 89.

[25] Robert Stam, for example, claims that ‘There is an ambiguity in the film and in the concept of Third Cinema. The Third Cinema, while obviously referring to the Third World, also echoes Perón’s call for a “third way,” for an intermediate path between socialism and capitalism.’ Stam in Burton, p. 264. More recently, Burton wrote that ‘Viewing la hora in hindsight, its faith in Perón seems pathetically misplaced.’ Latin American cinema, in Handbook of Latin American Studies, p. 491.

[26] ‘The militant cinema in Argentina has grown as an integral part of the same process of national and social liberation as has occurred in various expressions throughout the continent and which in our country has been called Peronism for twenty five years…. This political characterization of the national militant cinema naturally presents particular situations that, in addition to not being perhaps applicable to other countries, neither are they perhaps applicable to future groups which may appear linked to political experiences distant from those of the Peronist Movement’. El cine como hecho político, in Cine, cultura, v descolonizacio´n, p. 141.

While it is true that Solanas and Getino confine the militant political orbit to Peronism, they describe Peronism as a broad agglomeration of political positions, some tied to a reformist past, others more militant and anti-imperialist, and they view ‘militant cinema’ as a bridge linking the various groupings. In an interview published before the Manifesto, Solanas provides the fullest commentary on their position on Peronism:

So, once and for all, what is our position on Peronism? In these historical circumstances, it has signified a great step forward in the process of national liberation, a process which is not over … but which offers some possibilities for development for a vast proletariat and a very profound anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic, class consciousness. With Peronism, the crushing of the farm worker, of the peasant, of the factory worker is impossible. One cannot control the social relations concerning the worker in whatever of these areas without provoking a conflict. Before Peronism, there was no type of social legislation. Peronism, even paternalistically, has facilitated all this social legislation. It expresses also, as a mass movement, it synthesizes, the aspirations and efforts of the Argentinian masses. If Peronism nonetheless subsists as a mass movement (the masses identify themselves in the class struggle and the anti-imperialist struggle as much as Peronism) and if the movement continues to have a great national cohesion, it is because the movement has meant for the masses their most advanced political experience. Peronism is not a political party, a party with a traditional secular structure. Nor is it a revolutionary party. It is a mass movement objectively revolutionary because it contains the objectively revolutionary Argentinian forces whose social and political demands are passing through a profound revolution. [Interview with Solanas by Louis Marcorelles, in Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 210 (March 1969), p. 60.]

In a later interview, after the death of Perón, Solanas expresses his annoyance at the European left’s criticism of Perón:

‘… over here [Europe] the image of Perón is that of a tyrant, I don’t know … Then, Europeans don’t remember anybody before Perón, the man who nationalized banking credits, who nationalized technical services, who for the first time ends foreign debt, a debt
which dated back to 1823 with the Baring Brothers. The first time the nation paid off its foreign debt is during Peron’s time in ’47 and ’48. Woman’s vote, equality of rights between men and women, this is the role of Evita who anticipated one of the most important feminist movements which exists in the world. Well, all this is important. But this does not mean to say that either Peronism or its leaders was or should be the panacea of revolution. For us, for the Argentine nation, Peronism has been, with all the limitations and mistakes, its most advanced, its most progressive expression and we must constantly focus on the context within which it grew. What existed besides Peronism in ’46 and ’47? The most cruel Stalinism, the occupation of almost all eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, what was that ...

[27] El cine como hecho político, p. 144.
[28] Ibid., p. 129. Nor can a filmmaker or film group be considered militant if not working within some organized political movement: ‘Can a filmmaker or film group be considered militant when [s/he or they] are not integrated into an organized political organization or sphere? We believe not, for the category of militant can be determined only on the basis of the work and practice realized within organic militant formations’, p. 143.
[29] ‘A language does not become revolutionary within the language itself, but from its instrumentalization for the change and liberation of our peoples’, El cine como hecho político, p. 155.
[30] ‘... the theme or the manner in which a film is expressed does not define the film in itself as militant or nonmilitant, but the militance derives from the relation of the film to its concrete circumstance, from the revolutionary effectiveness or justification that might emerge from this relation’, El cine como hecho político, p. 131.
[32] Ibid., pp. 122–123.
[33] El cine como hecho político, p. 170. In ‘Some notes on the Concept of a Third Cinema’, Getino explained that ‘Certain ambiguities remained in the formulation of the theory [in the manifesto], however, so these were clarified during the Latin American Filmmakers’ Conference held in Viña del Mar, Chile [1971] with the publication of the article “Militant Cinema, an Internal Category of Third Cinema”’, in Martin, p. 100; originally published in Cine, cultura, y descolonización (1973), where a note indicates that it was written for the Viña del Mar meeting of L.A. filmmakers, March 1971. In the same article, he calls the piece on militant cinema one of the three major theoretical pieces (the other two being the manifesto and the responses to Cine Cubano, cited in note 9.
[34] El cine como hecho político, pp. 134, 143.
[38] R. Stam, The Hour of the Furnaces and the two avant-gardes, in J. Burton, (ed.), The Social Documentary in Latin America (Pittsburgh, 1990), pp. 253, 261. In the recent anthology edited by Stam and Toby Miller, the third cinema manifesto is included in a section called ‘Alternative Aesthetics’. Film and Theory. An anthology (New York, 2000). It might be noted that this new anthology includes only two (or three) translations from French, and two translations from Spanish. Michael Chanan properly notes that ‘The third cinema cannot be defined as a cinema of formal research.’ On the other hand, Chanan does not consider adequately, though he mentions it, the concept of ‘Militant Cinema: an internal category of Third Cinema’, Le troisième cinéma de Solanas et Getino, CinémAction, No. 60 (July 1991) (revised translation as: The changing geography of Third Cinema, Screen, 38, 4 (Winter 1997)).
[40] El cine como hecho político, p. 131.
[41] Apuntes para un juicio crítico ..., p. 133.
[42] Apuntes para un juicio ..., p. 117.
[44] El cine como hecho político, pp. 146, 162. Twenty-five years later, Solanas repeated the same position: ‘The documentary ... is an irrefutable proof.’ Fernando Pino Solanas, La hora de los hornos, in F. Fereira (ed.), Luz, cámara ... memoria: una historia social del cine argentino (Buenos Aires, 1995), p. 298.
[45] Marcorelles interview, p. 43. Guy Hennebelle made the same ‘error’ when he wrote that
This ‘Third Cinema’ has existed from the beginning as attested by the experiences of Alexander Medvekin and Dziga Vertov, but also by a large portion of the great golden age of Soviet cinema, by the proletarian cinema of Germany between 1920 and 1932, by the cinema of revolutionary filmmakers like Joris Ivens ... [Quinze Ans de cinéma mondial, 1960–1975. Cited in Burton, ‘Cinema as a Gun’, p. 64.]
