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Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations

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Towards a Third Cinema
Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World

Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino

... we must discuss, we must invent ...  

Frantz Fanon

Just a short time ago it would have seemed like a Quixotic adventure in the colonized, neocolonized, or even the imperialist nations themselves to make any attempt to create *films of decolonization* that turned their back on or actively opposed the *System*. Until recently, film had been synonymous with spectacle or entertainment: in a word, it was one more *consumer good*. At best, films succeeded in bearing witness to the decay of bourgeois values and testifying to social injustice. As a rule, films only dealt with effect, never with cause; it was cinema of mystification or anti-historicism. It was *surplus value cinema*. Caught up in these conditions, films, the most valuable tool of communication of our times, were destined to satisfy only the ideological and economic interests of the *owners of the film industry*, the lords of the world film market, the great majority of whom were from the United States.

Was it possible to overcome this situation? How could the problem of turning out liberating films be approached when costs came to

several thousand dollars and the distribution and exhibition channels were in the hands of the enemy? How could the continuity of work be guaranteed? How could the public be reached? How could System-imposed repression and censorship be vanquished? These questions, which could be multiplied in all directions, led and still lead many people to skepticism or rationalization: “revolutionary cinema cannot exist before the revolution”; “revolutionary films have been possible only in the liberated countries”; “without the support of revolutionary political power, revolutionary cinema or art is impossible.” The mistake was due to taking the same approach to reality and films as did the bourgeoisie. The models of production, distribution, and exhibition politics, films had not yet become the vehicle for a clearly drawn difference, and the development of a worldwide liberation movement whose change qualitatively. The most daring attempts of those filmmakers was possible

But the questions that were recently raised appeared promising; they arose from a new historical situation to which the filmmaker, as is often the case with the educated strata of our countries, was rather a late-comer: ten years of the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese struggle, and the development of a worldwide liberation movement whose moving force is to be found in the Third World countries. The existence of masses on the worldwide revolutionary plane was the substantial fact without which those questions could not have been posed. A new historical situation and a new man born in the process of the anti-imperialist struggle demanded a new, revolutionary attitude from the filmmakers of the world. The question of whether or not militant cinema was possible before the revolution began to be replaced, at least within small groups, by the question of whether or not such a cinema was necessary to contribute to the possibility of revolution. An affirmative answer was the starting point for the first attempts to channel the process of seeking possibilities in numerous countries. Examples are Newsreel, a U.S. New Left film group, the cinegiornali of the Italian student movement, the films made by the Etats Généraux du Cinéma

François, and those of the British and Japanese student movements, all a continuation and deepening of the work of a Joris Ivens or a Chris Marker. Let it suffice to observe the films of a Santiago Alvarez in Cuba, or the cinema being developed by different filmmakers in the homeland of all,” as Bolívar would say, as they seek a revolutionary Latin American cinema.

A profound debate on the role of intellectuals and artists before liberation is today enriching the perspectives of intellectual work all over the world. However, this debate oscillates between two poles: one which proposes to relegate all intellectual work capacity to a specifically political or political-military function, denying perspectives to all artistic activity with the idea that such activity must ineluctably be absorbed by the System, and the other which maintains an inner duality of the intellectual: on the one hand, the “work of art,” “the privilege of beauty,” an art and a beauty which are not necessarily bound to the needs of the revolutionary political process, and, on the other, a political commitment which generally consists in signing certain anti-imperialist manifestos. In practice, this point of view means the separation of politics and art.

This polarity rests, as we see it, on two omissions: first, the conception of culture, science, art, and cinema as univocal and universal terms, and, second, an insufficiently clear idea of the fact that the revolution does not begin with the taking of political power from imperialism and the bourgeoisie, but rather begins at the moment when the masses sense the need for change and their intellectual vanguards begin to study and carry out this change through activities on different fronts.

Culture, art, science, and cinema always respond to conflicting class interests. In the neocolonial situation two concepts of culture, art, science, and cinema compete: that of the rulers and that of the nation. And this situation will continue, as long as the national concept is not identified with that of the rulers, as long as the status of colony or semi-colony continues in force. Moreover, the duality will be overcome and will reach a single and universal category only when the best values of man emerge from proscription to achieve hegemony, when the liberation of man is universal. In the meantime, there exist our culture and their culture, our cinema and their cinema. Because our culture is an impulse towards emancipation, it will remain in existence until emancipation is a reality: a culture of subversion which will carry with it an art, a science, and a cinema of subversion.

The lack of awareness in regard to these dualities generally leads the intellectual to deal with artistic and scientific expressions as they were “universally conceived” by the classes that rule the world, at
best introducing some correction into these expressions. We have not
gone deeply enough into developing a revolutionary theatre, architec-
ture, medicine, psychology, and cinema; into developing a culture by
and for us. The intellectual takes each of these forms of expression as
a unit to be corrected from within the expression itself, and not from
without, with its own new methods and models.

An astronaut or a Ranger mobilizes all the scientific resources of
imperialism. Psychologists, doctors, politicians, sociologists, mathe-
maticians, and even artists are thrown into the study of everything that
serves, from the vantage point of different specialities, the preparation
of an orbital flight or the massacre of Vietnamese; in the long run, all
of these specialities are equally employed to satisfy the needs of im-
perialism. In Buenos Aires the army eradicates villas miseria (urban
shanty towns) and in their place puts up “strategic hamlets” with town
planning aimed at facilitating military intervention when the time
comes. The revolutionary organizations lack specialized fronts not
only in their medicine, engineering, psychology, and art—but also in
our own revolutionary engineering, psychology, art, and cinema.
In order to be effective, all these fields must recognize the priorities
of each stage: those required by the struggle for power or those de-
manded by the already victorious revolution. Examples: creating a po-
litical sensitivity to the need to undertake a political-military struggle
in order to take power: developing a medicine to serve the needs of
combat in rural or urban zones; co-ordinating energies to achieve a 10
million ton sugar harvest as they attempted in Cuba; or elaborating an
architecture, a city planning, that will be able to withstand the massive
air raids that imperialism can launch at any time. The specific
strengthening of each speciality and field subordinate to collective
priorities can fill the empty spaces caused by the struggle for libera-
tion and can delineate with greatest efficacy the role of the intellectual
in our time. It is evident that revolutionary mass-level culture and
awareness can only be achieved after the taking of political power, but
it is no less true that the use of scientific and artistic means, together
with political-military means, prepares the terrain for the revolution to
become reality and facilitates the solution of the problems that will
arise with the taking of power.

The intellectual must find through his action the field in which he
can rationally perform the most efficient work. Once the front has
been determined, his next task is to find out within that front exactly
what is the enemy’s stronghold and where and how he must deploy
his forces. It is in this harsh and dramatic daily search that a culture of
the revolution will be able to emerge, the basis which will nurture,
beginning right now, the new man exemplified by Che—not man in
the abstract, not the “liberation of man,” but another man, capable of
arising from the ashes of the old, alienated man that we are and which
the new man will destroy—by starting to stoke the fire today.

The anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World and
of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today
the axis of the world revolution. Third cinema is, in our opinion, the
cinema that recognises in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, sci-
entific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of
constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting
point—in a word, the decolonization of culture.

The culture, including the cinema, of a neocolonialized country is
just the expression of an overall dependence that generates models
and values born from the needs of imperialist expansion.

In order to impose itself, neocolonialism needs to convince the
people of a dependent country of their own inferiority. Sooner
or later, the inferior man recognizes Man with a capital M; this
recognition means the destruction of his defenses. If you want to
be a man, says the oppressor, you have to be like me, speak my
language, deny your own being, transform yourself into me. As
early as the 17th century the Jesuit missionaries proclaimed the
aptitude of the [South American] native for copying European
works of art. Copyist, translator, interpreter, at best a spectator,
the neocolonialized intellectual will always be encouraged to re-
fuse to assume his creative possibilities. Inhibitions, uprooted-
ness, escapism, cultural cosmopolitanism, artistic imitation,
metaphysical exhaustion, betrayal of country—all find fertile
soil in which to grow.1

Culture becomes bilingual.

... not due to the use of two languages but because of the con-
juncture of two cultural patterns of thinking. One is national,
that of the people, and the other is estranging, that of the classes
subordinated to outside forces. The admiration that the upper
classes express for the U.S. or Europe is the highest expression
of their subjection. With the colonialization of the upper classes
the culture of imperialism indirectly introduces among the
masses knowledge which cannot be supervised.2

Just as they are not masters of the land upon which they walk, the
neocolonized people are not masters of the ideas that envelop them.
A knowledge of national reality presupposes going into the web of
lies and confusion that arise from dependence. The intellectual is
obliged to refrain from spontaneous thought; if he does think, he generally runs the risk of doing so in French or English—never in the language of a culture of his own which, like the process of national and social liberation, is still hazy and incipient. Every piece of data, every concept that floats around us, is part of a framework of mirages that is difficult to take apart.

The native bourgeoisie of the port cities such as Buenos Aires, and their respective intellectual elites, constituted, from the very origins of our history, the transmission belt of neocolonial penetration. Behind such watchwords as “Civilization or barbarism,” manufactured in Argentina by Europeanizing liberalism, was the attempt to impose a civilization fully in keeping with the needs of imperialist expansion and the desire to destroy the resistance of the national masses, which were successively called the “rabble,” a “bunch of blacks,” and “zoological detritus” in our country and “the unwashed hordes” in Bolivia. In this way the ideologists of the semicountries, past masters in “the play of big words, with an implacable, detailed, and rustic universalism,” served as spokesmen of those followers of Disraeli who intelligently proclaimed: “I prefer the rights of the English to the rights of man.”

The middle sectors were and are the best recipients of cultural neocolonialism. Their ambivalent class condition, their buffer position between social polarities, and their broader possibilities of access to civilization offer imperialism a base of social support which has attained considerable importance in some Latin American countries.

If in an openly colonial situation cultural penetration is the complement of a foreign army of occupation, during certain stages this penetration assumes major priority.

It serves to institutionalize and give a normal appearance to dependence. The main objective of this cultural deformation is to keep the people from realizing their neocolonialized position and aspiring to change it. In this way educational colonization is an effective substitute for the colonial police.4

Mass communications tend to complete the destruction of a national awareness and of a collective subjectivity on the way to enlightenment, a destruction which begins as soon as the child has access to these media, the education and culture of the ruling classes. In Argentina, 26 television channels; one million television sets; more than 50 radio stations; hundreds of newspapers, periodicals, and magazines; and thousands of records, films, etc., join their acculturating role of the colonization of taste and consciousness to the process of neocolonial education which begins in the university. “Mass communications are more effective for neocolonialism than napalm. What is real, true, and rational is to be found on the margin of the law, just as are the people. Violence, crime, and destruction come to be Peace, Order, and Normality.” Truth, then, amounts to subversion. Any form of expression or communication that tries to show national reality is subversion.

“Cultural penetration, educational colonization, and mass communications all join forces today in a desperate attempt to absorb, neutralize, or eliminate expression that responds to an attempt at decolonization. Neocolonialism makes a serious attempt to castrate, to digest, the cultural forms that arise beyond the bounds of its own aims. Attempts are made to remove from them precisely what makes them effective and dangerous; in short, it tries to depoliticize them. Or, to put it another way, to separate the cultural manifestation from the fight for national independence.

Ideas such as “Beauty in itself is revolutionary” and “All new cinema is revolutionary” are idealistic aspirations that do not touch the neocolonial condition, since they continue to conceive of cinema, art, and beauty as universal abstractions and not as an integral part of the national processes of decolonization.

Any attempt, no matter how virulent, which does not serve to mobilize, agitate, and politicize sectors of the people, to arm them rationally and perceptibly, in one way or another, for the struggle—is received with indifference or even with pleasure. Virulence, nonconformism, plain rebelliousness, and discontent are just so many more products on the capitalist market; they are consumer goods. This is especially true in a situation where the bourgeoisie is in need of a daily dose of shock and exciting elements of controlled violence—that is, violence which absorption by the System turns into pure stridency. Examples are the works of a socialist-tinged painting and sculpture which are greedily sought after by the new bourgeoisie to decorate their apartments and mansions; plays full of anger and avant-gardism which are noisily applauded by the ruling classes; the literature of “progressive” writers concerned with semantics and man on the margin of time and space, which gives an air of democratic broadmindedness to the System’s publishing houses and magazines; and the cinema of “challenge,” of “argument,” promoted by the distribution monopolies and launched by the big commercial outlets.

In reality the area of permitted protest of the System is much greater than the System is willing to admit. This gives the artists the illusion that they are acting “against the system” by going beyond certain narrow limits; they do not realize that even anti-
System art can be absorbed and utilized by the System, as both a brake and a necessary self-correction.

Lacking an awareness of how to utilize what is ours for our true liberation—in a word, lacking politicization—all of these “progressive” alternatives come to form the leftist wing of the System, the improvement of its cultural products. They will be doomed to carry out the best work on the left that the right is able to accept today and will thus only serve the survival of the latter. “Restore words, dramatic actions, and images to the places where they can carry out a revolutionary role, where they will be useful, where they will become weapons in the struggle.” Insert the work as an original fact in the process of liberation, place it first at the service of life itself, ahead of art; dissolve aesthetics in the life of society: only in this way, as Fanon said, can decolonization become possible and culture, cinema, and beauty—at least, what is of greatest importance to us—become our culture, our films, and our sense of beauty.

The historical perspectives of Latin America and of the majority of the countries under imperialist domination are headed not towards a lessening of repression but towards an increase. We are heading not for bourgeois-democratic regimes but for dictatorial forms of government. The struggles for democratic freedoms, instead of seizing concessions from the System, move it to cut down on them, given its narrow margin for maneuvering.

The bourgeois-democratic facade caved in some time ago. The cycle opened during the last century in Latin America with the first attempts at self-affirmation of a national bourgeoisie differentiated from the metropolis (examples are Rosas’ federalism in Argentina, the Lopez and Francia regimes in Paraguay, and those of Bengido and Balmaceda in Chile) with a tradition that has continued well into our century: national-bourgeois, national-popular, and democratic-bourgeois attempts were made by Cardenas, Yrigoyen, Haya de la Torre, Vargas, Aguirre Cerda, Peron, and Arbenz. But as far as revolutionary prospects are concerned, the cycle has definitely been completed. The lines allowing for the deepening of the historical attempt of each of those experiences today pass through the sectors that understand the continent’s situation as one of war and that are preparing, under the force of circumstances, to make that region the Vietnam of the coming decade. A war in which national liberation can only succeed when it is simultaneously postulated as social liberation—socialism as the only valid perspective of any national liberation process.

At this time in Latin America there is room for neither passivity nor innocence. The intellectual’s commitment is measured in terms of risks as well as words and ideas; what he does to further the cause of liberation is what counts. The worker who goes on strike and thus risks losing his job or even his life, the student who jeopardizes his career, the militant who keeps silent under torture: each by his or her action commits us to something much more important than a vague gesture of solidarity.

In a situation in which the “state of law” is replaced by the “state of facts,” the intellectual, who is one more worker, functioning on a cultural front, must become increasingly radicalized to avoid denial of self and to carry out what is expected of him in our times. The impotence of all reformist concepts has already been exposed sufficiently, not only in politics but also in culture and films—and especially in the latter, whose history is that of imperialist domination—mainly Yankee.

While, during the early history (or the prehistory) of the cinema, it was possible to speak of a German, an Italian, or a Swedish cinema clearly differentiated and corresponding to specific national characteristics, today such differences have disappeared. The borders were wiped out along with the expansion of U.S. imperialism and the film model that is imposed: Hollywood movies. In our times it is hard to find a film within the field of commercial cinema, including what is known as “author’s cinema,” in both the capitalist and socialist countries, that manages to avoid the models of Hollywood pictures. The latter have such a fast hold that monumental works such as Bondarchuk’s War and Peace from the U.S.S.R. are also monumental examples of the submission to all propositions imposed by the U.S. movie industry (structure, language, etc.) and, consequently, to its concepts.

The placing of the cinema within U.S. models, even in the formal aspect, in language, leads to the adoption of the ideological forms that gave rise to precisely that language and no other. Even the appropriation of models which appear to be only technical, industrial, scientific, etc., leads to a conceptual dependency, due to the fact that the cinema is an industry, but differs from other industries in that it has been created and organized in order to generate certain ideologies. The 35mm camera, 24 frames per second, arc lights, and a commercial place of exhibition for audiences were conceived not to gratuitously transmit any ideology, but to satisfy, in the first place, the cultural and surplus value needs of a specific ideology, of a specific world-view: that of U.S. finance capital.

The mechanistic takeover of a cinema conceived as a show to be exhibited in large theatres with a standard duration, hermetic struc-
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The absorption of forms of the bourgeois world-view which are the continuation of 19th century art, of bourgeois art: man is accepted only as a passive and consuming object; rather than having his ability to make history recognized, he is only permitted to read history, contemplate it, listen to it, and undergo it. The cinema as a spectacle aimed at a digesting object is the highest point that can be reached by bourgeois filmmaking. The world, experience, and the historic process are enclosed within the frame of a painting, the stage of a theater, and the movie screen; man is viewed as a consumer of ideology, and not as the creator of ideology. This notion is the starting point for the wonderful interplay of bourgeois philosophy and the obtaining of surplus value. The result is a cinema studied by motivational analysts, sociologists and psychologists, by the endless researchers of the dreams and frustrations of the masses, all aimed at selling movie-life, reality as it is conceived by the ruling classes.

The first alternative to this type of cinema, which we could call the first cinema, arose with the so-called “author’s cinema,” “expression cinema,” “nouvelle vague,” “cinema novo,” or, conventionally, the second cinema. This alternative signified a step forward inasmuch as it demanded that the filmmaker be free to express himself in non-standard language and inasmuch as it was an attempt at cultural decolonization. But such attempts have already reached, or are about to reach, the outer limits of what the system permits. The second cinema filmmaker has remained “trapped inside the fortress” as Godard put it, or is on his way to becoming trapped. The search for a market of 200,000 moviegoers in Argentina, a figure that is supposed to cover the costs of an independent local production, the proposal of developing a mechanism of industrial production parallel to that of the System, but which would be distributed by the System according to its own norms, the struggle to better the laws protecting the cinema and replacing “bad officials” by “less bad,” etc., is a search lacking in viable prospects, unless you consider viable the prospect of becoming institutionalized as “the youthful, angry wing of society”—that is, of neocolonialized or capitalist society.

Real alternatives differing from those offered by the System are only possible if one of two requirements is fulfilled: making films that the System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System. Neither of these requirements fits within the alternatives that are still offered by the second cinema, but they can be found in the revolution-
ted certain political vanguards to discover the importance of movies.
This importance is to be found in the specific meaning of films as a
form of communication and because of their particular characteristi-
cs, characteristics that allow them to draw audiences of different ori-
gins, many of them people who might not respond favorably to the
announcement of a political speech. Films offer an effective pretext
for gathering an audience, in addition to the ideological message they
contain.

The capacity for synthesis and the penetration of the film image,
the possibilities offered by the living document, and naked reality,
and the power of enlightenment of audiovisual means make the film far
more effective than any other tool of communication. It is hardly nec-
essary to point out that those films which achieve an intelligent use of
the possibilities of the image, adequate dosage of concepts, language
and structure that flow naturally from each theme, and counterpoints
of audiovisual narration achieve effective results in the politicization
and mobilization of cadres and even in work with the masses, where
this is possible.

The students who raised barricades on the Avenida 18 de Julio in
Montevideo after the showing of La hora de los hornos (The Hour of
the Furnaces), the growing demand for films such as those made by
Santiago Alvarez and the Cuban documentary film movement, and the
debates and meetings that take place alter the underground or semi-
public showings of third cinema films are the beginning of a twisting
and difficult road being travelled in the consumer societies by the
mass organizations (Cinegiornali liberi in Italy, Zengakure documentary
in Japan, etc.). For the first time in Latin America, organizations are
ready and willing to employ films for political-cultural ends: the
Chilean Partido Socialista provides its cadres with revolutionary film
material, while Argentine revolutionary Peronist and non-Peronist
groups are taking an interest in doing likewise. Moreover, OSPAAAL
(Organization of Solidarity of the People of Africa, Asia and Latin
America) is participating in the production and distribution of films
that contribute to the anti-imperialist struggle. The revolutionary or-
ganizations are discovering the need for cadres who, among other
things, know how to handle a film camera, tape recorders, and projec-
tors in the most effective way possible. The struggle to seize power
from the enemy is the meeting ground of the political and artistic vangu-
guards engaged in a common task which is enriching to both.

Some of the circumstances that delayed the use of films as a revo-
lutionary tool until a short time ago were lack of equipment, technical
difficulties, the compulsory specialization of each phase of work, and
high costs. The advances that have taken place within each specializa-
tion; the simplification of movie cameras and tape recorders; improve-
ments in the medium itself, such as rapid film that can be shot in
normal light; automatic light meters; improved audiovisual synchroni-
zation; and the spread of know-how by means of specialized maga-
zines with large circulations and even through nonspecialized media,
have helped to demystify filmmaking and divest it of that almost
magic aura that made it seem that films were only within the reach of
"artists," "geniuses," and "the privileged." Filmmaking is increasingly
within the reach of larger social layers. Chris Marker experimented in
France with groups of workers whom he provided with 8mm equip-
ment and some basic instruction in its handling. The goal was to have
the worker film his way of looking at the world, just as if he were
writing it. This has opened up unheard-of prospects for the cinema;
above all, a new conception of filmmaking and the significance of art
in our times.

Imperialism and capitalism, whether in the consumer society or in
the neocolonialized country, veil everything behind a screen of images
and appearances. The image of reality is more important than reality
itself. It is a world populated with fantasies and phantoms in which
what is hideous is clothed in beauty, while beauty is disguised as the
hideous. On the one hand, fantasy, the imaginary bourgeois universe
replete with comfort, equilibrium, sweet reason, order, efficiency, and
the possibility to "be someone." And, on the other, the phantoms, we
the lazy, we the indolent and underdeveloped, we who cause disorder.
When a neocolonialized person accepts his situation, he becomes a
Gungha Din, a traitor at the service of the colonialist, an Uncle Tom,
a class and racial renegade, or a fool, the easy-going servant and
bumpkin; but, when he refuses to accept his situation of oppression,
then he turns into a resentful savage, a cannibal. Those who lose sleep
from fear of the hungry, those who comprise the System, see the revolu-
tionary as a bandit, robber, and rapist; the first battle waged against
them is thus not on a political plane, but rather in the police context of
law, arrests, etc. The more exploited a man is, the more he is placed
on a plane of insignificance. The more he resists, the more he is
viewed as a beast. This can be seen in Africa Addio, made by the fas-
cist Jacopetti: the African savages, killer animals, wallow in abject
anarchy once they escape from white protection. Tarzan died, and in
his place were born Lumumbas and Lobegulas, Nkomos, and the
Madzimbamutos, and this is something that neocolonialism cannot
forgive. Fantasy has been replaced by phantoms and man is turned
into an extra who dies so Jacopetti can comfortably film his execution.

I make the revolution; therefore I exist. This is the starting point
for the disappearance of fantasy and phantom to make way for living
The well-known quote from Marx deserves constant repetition: destruction and construction: destruction of the image that neocolonialism has created of itself and of us, and construction of a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions.

The restitucion of things to their real place and meaning is an eminently subversive fact both in the neocolonial situation and in the consumer societies. In the former, the seeming ambiguity or pseudo-objectivity in newspapers, literature, etc., and the relative freedom of the people’s organizations to provide their own information cease to exist, giving way to overt restriction, when it is a question of television and radio, the two most important System-controlled or monopolized communications media. Last year’s May events in France are quite explicit on this point.

In a world where the unreal rules, artistic expression is shoved along the channels of fantasy, fiction, language in code, sign language, and messages whispered between the lines. Art is cut off from the concrete facts—which, from the neocolonialist standpoint, are accusatory testimonies—to turn back on itself, strutting about in a world of abstractions and phantoms, where it becomes “timeless” and historyless. Vietnam can be mentioned, but only far from Vietnam; Latin America can be mentioned, but only far enough away from the continent to be effective, in places where it is depoliticized and where it does not lead to action.

The cinema known as documentary, with all the vastness that the concept has today, from educational films to the reconstruction of a fact or a historical event, is perhaps the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking. Every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image of purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible.

Testimony about a national reality is also an inestimable means of dialogue and knowledge on the world plane. No internationalist form of struggle can be carried out successfully if there is not a mutual exchange of experiences among the people, if the people do not succeed in breaking out of the Balkanization on the international, continental, and national planes which imperialism is striving to maintain.

There is no knowledge of a reality as long as that reality is not acted upon, as long as its transformation is not begun on all fronts of struggle. The well-known quote from Marx deserves constant repetition: it is not sufficient to interpret the world; it is now a question of transforming it.

With such an attitude as his starting point, it remains to the filmmaker to discover his own language, a language which will arise from a militant and transforming world-view and from the theme being dealt with. Here it may well be pointed out that certain political cadres still maintain old dogmatic positions, which ask the artist or filmmaker to provide an apologetic view of reality, one which is more in line with wishful thinking than with what actually is. Such positions, which at bottom mask a lack of confidence in the possibilities of reality itself, have in certain cases led to the use of film language as a mere idealized illustration of a fact, to the desire to remove reality’s deep contradictions, its dialectic richness, which is precisely the kind of depth which can give a film beauty and effectiveness. The reality of the revolutionary processes all over the world, in spite of their confused and negative aspects, possesses a dominant line, a synthesis which is so rich and stimulating that it does not need to be schematized with partial or sectarian views.

Pamphlet films, didactic films, report films, essay films, witness-bearing films—any militant form of expression is valid, and it would be absurd to lay down a set of aesthetic work norms. Be receptive to all that the people have to offer, and offer them the best; or, as Che put it, respect the people by giving them quality. This is a good thing to keep in mind in view of those tendencies which are always latent in the revolutionary artist to lower the level of investigation and the language of a theme, in a kind of neopopulism, down to levels which, while they may be those upon which the masses move, do not help them to get rid of the stumbling blocks left by imperialism. The effectiveness of the best films of militant cinema show that social layers considered backward are able to capture the exact meaning of an association of images, an effect of staging, and any linguistic experimentation placed within the context of a given idea. Furthermore, 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. To put it another way, it provides discovery through transformation.

The differences that exist between one and another liberation process make it impossible to lay down supposedly universal norms. A cinema which in the consumer society does not attain the level of the reality in which it moves can play a stimulating role in an underdeveloped country, just as a revolutionary cinema in the neocolonial situation will not necessarily be revolutionary if it is mechanically taken to the metropolitan country.

Teaching the handling of guns can be revolutionary where there are potentially or explicitly viable leaders ready to throw themselves into the struggle to take power, but ceases to be revolutionary where the masses still lack sufficient awareness of their situation or where they...
have already learned to handle guns. Thus, a cinema which insists upon the denunciation of the effects of neocolonial policy is caught up in a reformist game if the consciousness of the masses has already assimilated such knowledge; then the revolutionary thing is to examine the causes, to investigate the ways of organizing and arming for the change. That is, imperialism can sponsor films that fight illiteracy, and such pictures will only be inscribed within the contemporary need of imperialist policy, but, in contrast, the making of such films in Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution was clearly revolutionary. Although their starting point was just the fact of teaching, reading and writing, they had a goal which was radically different from that of imperialism: the training of people for liberation, not for subjection.

The model of the perfect work of art, the fully rounded film structured according to the metrics imposed by bourgeois culture, its theoreticians and critics, has served to inhibit the filmmaker in the dependent countries, especially when he has attempted to erect similar models in a reality which offered him neither the culture, the techniques, nor the most primary elements for success. The culture of the metropolis kept the age-old secrets that had given life to its models; the transposition of the latter to the neocolonial reality was always a mechanism of alienation, since it was not possible for the artist of the dependent country to absorb, in a few years, the secrets of a culture and society elaborated through the centuries in completely different historical circumstances. The attempt in the sphere of filmmaking to match the pictures of the ruling countries generally ends in failure, given the existence of two disparate historical realities. And such unsuccessful attempts lead to feelings of frustration and inferiority. Both these feelings arise in the first place from the fear of taking risks along completely new roads which are almost a total denial of "their cinema." A fear of recognizing the particularities and limitations of dependency in order to discover the possibilities inherent in that situation, by finding ways of overcoming it which would of necessity be original.

The existence of a revolutionary cinema is inconceivable without the constant and methodical exercise of practice, search, and experimentation. It even means committing the new filmmaker to take chances on the unknown, to leap into space at times, exposing himself to failure as does the guerrilla who travels along paths that he himself opens up with machete blows. The possibility of discovering and inventing film forms and structures that serve a more profound vision of our reality resides in the ability to place oneself on the outside limits of the familiar, to make one's way amid constant dangers.

Our time is one of hypothesis rather than of thesis, a time of works in progress—unfinished, unordered, violent works made with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other. Such works cannot be assessed according to the traditional theoretical and critical canons. The ideas for our film theory and criticism will come to life through inhibition-removing practice and experimentation. "Knowledge begins with practice. After acquiring theoretical knowledge through practice, it is necessary to return to practice." Once he has embarked upon this practice, the revolutionary filmmaker will have to overcome countless obstacles; he will experience the loneliness of those who aspire to the praise of the System's promotion media only to find that those media are closed to him. As Godard would say, he will cease to be a bicycle champion to become an anonymous bicycle rider, Vietnamesestyle, submerged in a cruel and prolonged war. But he will also discover that there is a receptive audience that looks upon his work as something of its own existence, and that is ready to defend him in a way that it would never do with any world bicycle champion.

In this long war, with the camera as our rifle, we do in fact move into a guerrilla activity. This is why the work of a film-guerrilla group is governed by strict disciplinary norms as to both work methods and security. A revolutionary film group is in the same situation as a guerrilla unit: it cannot grow strong without military structures and command concepts. The group exists as a network of complementary responsibilities, as the sum and synthesis of abilities, inasmuch as it operates harmonically with a leadership that centralizes planning work and maintains its continuity. Experience shows that it is not easy to maintain the cohesion of a group when it is bombarded by the System and its chain of accomplices frequently disguised as "progressives," when there are no immediate and spectacular outer incentives and the members must undergo the discomforts and tensions of work that is done underground and distributed clandestinely. Many abandon their responsibilities because they underestimate them or because they measure them with values appropriate to System cinema and not underground cinema. The birth of internal conflicts is a reality present in any group, whether or not it possesses ideological maturity. The lack of awareness of such an inner conflict on the psychological or personality plane, etc., the lack of maturity in dealing with problems of relationships, at times leads to ill feeling and rivalries that in turn cause real clashes going beyond ideological or objective differences. All of this means that a basic condition is an awareness of the problems of interpersonal relationships, leadership and areas of
competence. What is needed is to speak clearly, mark off work areas, assign responsibilities and take on the job as a rigorous militancy.

Guerrilla filmmaking proletarianizes the film worker and breaks down the intellectual aristocracy that the bourgeoisie grants to its followers. In a word, it democratizes. The filmmaker’s tie with reality makes him more a part of his people. Vanguard layers and even masses participate collectively in the work when they realize that it is the continuity of their daily struggle. La hora de los hornos shows how a film can be made in hostile circumstances when it has the support and collaboration of militants and cadres from the people.

The revolutionary filmmaker acts with a radically new vision of the role of the producer, team-work, tools, details, etc. Above all, he supplies himself at all levels in order to produce his films, he equips himself at all levels, he learns how to handle the manifold techniques of his craft. His most valuable possessions are the tools of his trade, which form part and parcel of his need to communicate. The camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.

Each member of the group should be familiar, at least in a general way, with the equipment being used: he must be prepared to replace another in any of the phases of production. The myth of irreplaceable technicians must be exploded.

The whole group must grant great importance to the minor details of the production and the security measures needed to protect it. A lack of foresight which in conventional filmmaking would go unnoticed can render virtually useless weeks or months of work. And a failure in guerrilla cinema, just as in the guerrilla struggle itself, can mean the loss of a work or a complete change of plans. “In a guerrilla struggle the concept of failure is present a thousand times over, and victory a myth that only a revolutionary can dream.” Every member of the group must have an ability to take care of details, discipline, speed, and, above all, the willingness to overcome the weaknesses of comfort, old habits, and the whole climate of pseudonormality behind which the warfare of everyday life is hidden. Each film is a different operation, a different job requiring variation in methods in order to confuse or refrain from alerting the enemy, especially since the processing laboratories are still in his hands.

The success of the work depends to a great extent on the group’s ability to remain silent, on its permanent wariness, a condition that is difficult to achieve in a situation in which apparently nothing is happening and the filmmaker has been accustomed to telling all and sundry about everything that he’s doing because the bourgeoisie has trained him precisely on such a basis of prestige and promotion. The watchwords “constant vigilance, constant wariness, constant mobility” have profound validity for guerrilla cinema. You have to give the appearance of working on various projects, split up the material, put it together, take it apart, confuse, neutralize, and throw off the track. All of this is necessary as long as the group doesn’t have its own processing equipment, no matter how rudimentary, and there remain certain possibilities in the traditional laboratories.

Group-level cooperation between different countries can serve to assure the completion of a film or the execution of certain phases of work that may not be possible in the country of origin. To this should be added the need for a filing center for materials to be used by the different groups and the perspective of coordination, on a continent-wide or even worldwide scale, of the continuity of work in each country: periodic regional or international gatherings to exchange experience, contributions, joint planning of work, etc.

At least in the earliest stages the revolutionary filmmaker and the work groups will be the sole producers of their films. They must bear the responsibility of finding ways to facilitate the continuity of work. Guerrilla cinema still doesn’t have enough experience to set down standards in this area; what experience there is has shown, above all, the ability to make use of the concrete situation of each country. But, regardless of what these situations may be, the preparation of a film cannot be undertaken without a parallel study of its future audience and, consequently, a plan to recover the financial investment. Here, once again, the need arises for closer ties between political and artistic vanguards, since this also serves for the joint study of forms of production, exhibition, and continuity.

A guerrilla film can be aimed only at the distribution mechanisms provided by the revolutionary organizations, including those invented or discovered by the filmmakers themselves. Production, distribution, and economic possibilities for survival must form part of a single strategy. The solution of the problems faced in each of these areas will encourage other people to join in the work of guerrilla filmmaking, which will enlarge its ranks and thus make it less vulnerable.

The distribution of guerrilla films in Latin America is still in swaddling clothes while System reprisals are already a legalized fact. Suffice it to note in Argentina the raids that have occurred during some showings and the recent film suppression law of a clearly fascist character; in Brazil the ever-increasing restrictions placed upon the most militant comrades of Cinema Novo; and in Venezuela the banning of La hora de los hornos; over almost all the continent censorship prevents any possibility of public distribution.
Without revolutionary films and a public that asks for them, any attempt to open up new ways of distribution would be doomed to failure. But both of these already exist in Latin America. The appearance of these films opened up a road which in some countries, such as Argentina, occurs through showings in apartments and houses to audiences of never more than 25 people; in other countries, such as Chile, films are shown in parishes, universities, or cultural centers (of which there are fewer every day); and, in the case of Uruguay, showings were given in Montevideo’s biggest movie theatre to an audience of 2,500 people, who filled the theatre and made every showing an impassioned anti-imperialist event. But the prospects on the continental plane indicate that the possibility for the continuity of a revolutionary cinema rests upon the strengthening of rigorously underground base structures.

Practice implies mistakes and failures. Some comrades will let themselves be carried away by the success and impunity with which they present the first showings and will tend to relax security measures, while others will go in the opposite direction of excessive precautions or fearfulness, to such an extent that distribution remains circumscribed, limited to a few groups of friends. Only concrete experience in each country will demonstrate which are the best methods there, which do not always lend themselves to application in other situations.

In some places it will be possible to build infrastructures connected to political, student, worker, and other organizations, while in others it will be more suitable to sell prints to organizations which will take charge of obtaining the funds necessary to pay for each print (the cost of the print plus a small margin). This method, wherever possible, would appear to be the most viable, because it permits the decentralization of distribution; makes possible a more profound political use of the film; and permits the recovery, through the sale of more prints, of the funds invested in the production. It is true that in many countries the organizations still are not fully aware of the importance of this work, or, if they are, may lack the means to undertake it. In such cases other methods can be used: the delivery of prints to encourage distribution and a box-office cut to the organizers of each showing, etc. The ideal goal to be achieved would be producing and distributing guerrilla films with funds obtained from expropriations from the bourgeoisie—that is, the bourgeoisie would be financing guerrilla cinema with a bit of the surplus value that it gets from the people. But, as long as the goal is no more than a middle- or long-range aspiration, the alternatives open to revolutionary cinema to recover production and distribution costs are to some extent similar to those obtained for conventional cinema: every spectator should pay the same amount as he pays to see System cinema. Financing, subsidizing, equipping, and supporting revolutionary cinema are political responsibilities for organizations and militants. A film can be made, but if its distribution does not allow for the recovery of the costs, it will be difficult or impossible to make a second film.

The 16mm film circuits in Europe (20,000 exhibition centers in Sweden, 30,000 in France, etc.) are not the best example for the neocolonized countries, but they are nevertheless a complementary source for fund raising, especially in a situation in which such circuits can play an important role in publicizing the struggles in the Third World, increasingly related as they are to those unfolding in the metropolitan countries. A film on the Venezuelan guerrillas will say more to a European public than twenty explanatory pamphlets, and the same is true for us with a film on the May events in France or the Berkeley, U.S.A., student struggle.

A Guerrilla Films International? And why not? Isn’t it true that a kind of new International is arising through the Third World struggles; through OSPAAAL and the revolutionary vanguards of the consumer societies?

A guerrilla cinema, at this stage still within the reach of limited layers of the population, is, nevertheless, the only cinema of the masses possible today, since it is the only one involved with the interests, aspirations, and prospects of the vast majority of the people. Every important film produced by a revolutionary cinema will be, explicitly, or not, a national event of the masses.

This cinema of the masses, which is prevented from reaching beyond the sectors representing the masses, provokes with each showing, as in a revolutionary military incursion, a liberated space, a decolonized territory. The showing can be turned into a kind of political event, which, according to Fanon, could be “a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard.”

Militant cinema must be able to extract the infinity of new possibilities that open up for it from the conditions of proscription imposed by the System. The attempt to overcome neocolonial oppression calls for the invention of forms of communication; it opens up the possibility.

Before and during the making of La hora de los hornos we tried out various methods for the distribution of revolutionary cinema—the little that we had made up to then. Each showing for militants, middle-level cadres, activists, workers, and university students became—without our having set ourselves this aim beforehand—a kind of enlarged cell meeting of which the films were a part but not the most
important factor. We thus discovered a new facet of cinema: the participation of people who, until then, were considered spectators.

At times, security reasons obliged us to try to dissolve the group of participants as soon as the showing was over, and we realized that the distribution of that kind of film had little meaning if it was not complemented by the participation of the comrades, if a debate was not opened on the themes suggested by the films.

We also discovered that every comrade who attended such showings did so with full awareness that he was infringing the System’s laws and exposing his personal security to eventual repression. This person was no longer a spectator; on the contrary, from the moment he decided to attend the showing, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than the comrades who were speaking, a glass of wine, a few mates, etc. We realized that we had at hand three very valuable factors:

1) **The participant comrade**, the man-actor-accomplice who responded to the summons;
2) **The free space** where that man expressed his concerns and ideas, became politicized, and started to free himself; and
3) **The film**, important only as a detonator or pretext.

We concluded from these data that a film could be much more effective if it were fully aware of these factors and took on the task of subordinating its own form, structure, language, and propositions to that act and to those actors — to put it another way, if it sought its own liberation in its subordination to and insertion in others, the principal protagonists of life. With the correct utilization of the time that that group of actor-personages offered us with their diverse histories, the use of the space offered by certain comrades, and of the films themselves, it was necessary to try to transform time, energy, and work into freedom-giving energy. In this way the idea began to grow of structuring what we decided to call the **film act**, one of the forms which we believe assumes great importance in affirming the line of a third cinema. A cinema whose first experiment is to be found, perhaps on a rather shaky level in the second and third parts of *La hora de los hornos* ("Acto para la liberacion"; above all, starting with "La resistencia" and "Violencia y liberacion").

Comrades [we said at the start of “Acto para la liberacion”], this is not just a film showing, nor is it a show; rather, it is, above all a MEETING—an act of anti-imperialist unity; this is a place only for those who feel identified with this struggle, because here there is no room for spectators or for accomplices of the enemy; here there is room only for the authors and protagonists of the process which the film attempts to bear witness to and to deepen. The film is the pretext for dialogue, for the seeking and finding of wills. It is a report that we place before you for your consideration, to be debated after the showing.

The conclusions [we said at another point in the second part] at which you may arrive as the real authors and protagonists of this history are important. The experiences and conclusions that we have assembled have a relative worth; they are of use to the extent that they are useful to you, who are the present and future of liberation. But most important of all is the action that may arise from these conclusions, the unity on the basis of the facts. This is why the film stops here; it opens out to you so that you can continue it.

The film act means an open-ended film; it is essentially a way of learning.

The first step in the process of knowledge is the first contact with the things of the outside world, the stage of sensations [in a film, the living fresco of image and sound]. The second step is the synthesizing of the data provided by the sensations; their ordering and elaboration; the stage of concepts, judgements, opinions, and deductions [in the film, the announcer, the reportings, the didactics, or the narrator who leads the projection act]. And then comes the third stage, that of knowledge. The active role of knowledge is expressed not only in the active leap from sensory to rational knowledge, but, and what is even more important, in the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice . . .

The practice of the transformation of the world . . .
general terms, is the dialectical materialist theory of the unity of knowledge and action\textsuperscript{16} [in the projection of the film act, the participation of the comrades, the action proposals that arise, and the actions themselves that will take place later].

Moreover, each projection of a film act presupposes a different setting, since the space where it takes place, the materials that go to make it up (actors-participants), and the historic time in which it takes place are never the same. This means that the result of each projection act 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; its perspectives are not exhausted in the struggle for power but will instead continue after the taking of power to strengthen the revolution.

The man of the third cinema, be it guerrilla cinema or a film act, with the infinite categories that they contain (film letter, film poem, film essay, film pamphlet, film report, etc.), above all counters the film industry of a cinema of characters with one of themes, that of individuals with that of masses, that of the author with that of the operative group, one of neocolonial misinformation with one of information, one of escape with one that recaptures the truth, that of passivity with that of aggressions. To an institutionalized cinema, it counterposes a guerrilla cinema; to movies as shows, it opposes a film act or action; to a cinema of destruction, one that is both destructive and constructive; to a cinema made for the old kind of human being, for them, it opposes a cinema fit for a new kind of human being, for what each one of us has the possibility of becoming.

The decolonization of the filmmaker and of films will be simultaneous acts to the extent that each contributes to collective decolonization. The battle begins without, against the enemy who attacks us, but also within, against the ideas and models of the enemy to be found inside each one of us. Destruction and construction. Decolonizing action rescues with its practice the purest and most vital impulses. It opposes to the colonialization of minds the revolution of consciousness. The world is scrutinized, unravelled, rediscovered. People are witness to a constant astonishment, a kind of second birth. They recover their early simplicity, their capacity for adventure; their lethargic capacity for indignation comes to life.

Freeing a forbidden truth means setting free the possibility of indignation and subversion. Our truth, that of the new man who builds himself by getting rid of all the defects that still weigh him down, is a bomb of inexhaustible power and, at the same time, the only real possibility of life. Within this attempt, the revolutionary filmmaker ventures with his subversive observation, sensibility, imagination, and realization. The great themes—the history of the country, love and unlove between combatants, the efforts of a people who are awakening—all this is reborn before the lens of the decolonized camera. The filmmaker feels for the first time. He discovers that, within the System, nothing fits, while outside of and against the System, everything fits, because everything remains to be done. What appeared yesterday as a preposterous adventure, as we said at the beginning, is posed today as an inescapable need and possibility.

Thus far, we have offered ideas and working propositions, which are the sketch of a hypothesis arising from our personal experience and which will have achieved something positive even if they do no more than serve to open a heated dialogue on the new revolutionary film prospects. The vacuums existing in the artistic and scientific fronts of the revolution are sufficiently well known so that the adversary will not try to appropriate them, while we are still unable to do so.

Why films and not some other form of artistic communication? If we choose films as the center of our propositions and debate, it is because that is our work front and because the birth of a third cinema means, at least for us, the most important revolutionary artistic event of our times.

Translation from Cineaste revised by Julianne Burton and Editor

Notes

1. The Hour of the Furnaces—Neocolonialism and Violence.
3. Rene Zavala Mercado, Bolivia: Growth of the National Concept.
4. The Hour of the Furnaces.
5. Ibid.
6. Observe the new custom of some groups of the upper bourgeoisie from Rome and Paris who spend their weekends travelling to Saigon to get a close-up view of the Vietcong offensive.
8. The organization Vanguard Artists of Argentina.
9. The Hour of the Furnaces.
14. The raiding of a Buenos Aires union and the arrest of dozens of persons resulting from a bad choice of projection site and the large number of people invited.
15. A traditional Argentine herb tea, *hierba mate*.