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# Third Cinema/Militant Cinema

## At the Origins of the Argentinian Experience (1968–1971)

Mariano Mestman

### I

The manifesto ‘Toward a Third Cinema’ (‘Hacia un Tercer Cine’), is one of the most well-known and cited texts of the political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Its appearance figured significantly in, and corresponded to, the expansion of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and Third Worldism, but its impact and influence extended to diverse geographical locations and historical moments.

The manifesto is the best known document of the group Cine Liberación in which the authors laid out the principles of their proposal for three types of cinema and of ‘cine-acción’. However, because of its early appearance in October 1969, this manifesto did not fully take into account the experience of the screening of political cinema. In this sense, the later document, ‘Militant Cinema: An Internal Category of Third Cinema’ (‘Cine militante: una categoría interna del Tercer Cine’), written for circulation in March 1971, attains a certain precision in its concept of militant cinema. The notion of ‘Third Cinema’ referred to a cinema of ‘cultural decolonisation’ for the Third World that was defined in opposition to the cinema of Hollywood (First Cinema) and sought to overcome the limitations attributed to the so-called ‘auteur cinema’ (Second Cinema). ‘Militant cinema’, by contrast, was conceived as the most advanced category of Third Cinema and was associated with a type of immediate, direct intervention intended to generate discussion at a political ‘event’, during or after the projection. Thus, the notion of *film event*, as a tool to convert the spectator (in the traditional cinematic sense) into protagonist of the exhibition and ‘actor’ (militant) in the political process, assumed a fundamental role. The principal hypotheses of ‘militant cinema’ also followed from this notion: on the one hand, the necessary involvement and integration of the cinema group with specific political organisations; on the other, the instrumentalisation of film in the process of liberation.

These definitions were being constructed during the production (1966–1968) and distribution (1968–1970) of *La hora de los hornos*

(*The Hour of the Furnaces*, directed by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino) and other Argentinian political films. The year 1970 became a singular one both in terms of the organisation of the principal groups distributing the film in Argentina and in terms of various developments leading to alliances and positioning of Cine Liberación that allow us to understand the context of the definitions of militant cinema. In this way, as Jonathan Buchsbaum shows, these definitions linked to the experience of the instrumentalisation of the film are treated at greater length in a second version of the manifesto ‘Toward a Third Cinema’, published in October 1970, and they reach a fuller systematisation in the definition of ‘militant cinema’ in the document of March 1971.

But despite its importance in the history of the Cine Liberación group, this latter document did not circulate beyond its inclusion in the 1973 book by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *Cine, cultura y descolonización*, perhaps because the Encuentro de Realizadores Latinoamericanos (Meeting of Latin American Film-makers) at Viña del Mar in Chile in March 1971, for which the article was written, did not take place.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the great impact of the Festivals and Encuentros at Viña del Mar in 1967 and 1969, the meeting planned for 1971 was cancelled, perhaps because of differences among tendencies in the Chilean left during the government of Popular Unity under Salvador Allende, according to the recollection of Aldo Francia, director of the Festival.<sup>2</sup>

Given this background, as far as we know, the parts published here of ‘Cine militante, una categoría interna del Tercer Cine’ – from *Cine, cultura y descolonización* – are appearing for the first time in English. In the original publication in the book, the essay was edited as two separate documents with two different titles: ‘Cine militante...’ (pp 121–3) edited separately from the more extensive text that follows it in the book, ‘El cine como hecho político’ (pp 125–70). Nevertheless, while edited as separate, for at least two reasons it seems likely those three initial pages represent an introduction to those that follow it in the original publication in the book. On the one hand, each one of the themes presented in the first pages is developed extensively in the second article (the definitions of militant cinema, its differences from Third Cinema, the ‘types’ of militant cinema, the practical experience of distribution, etc); on the other hand, one of its authors, Octavio Getino, referred years later to these pages as if they form part of a single document called ‘Cine militante: una categoría interna del Tercer Cine’.<sup>3</sup>

In this document, for the first time, Cine Liberación expanded on the practical experience of the exhibition of *La hora de los hornos* and other materials, and – as Getino maintained in the later text – clarified its ideas, even as it presented them as ‘provisional hypotheses’.

## II

In its first pages, the document speaks of the Groups of Cine Liberación in Argentina and the more than 25,000 spectators attending screenings of *La hora de los hornos* in only eight months of 1970. While that figure may not necessarily be accurate, given the difficulty of verifying the circulation of the film in those months, there is no doubt that 1970 was

1. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *Cine, cultura y descolonización*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 1973
2. Aldo Francia, *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano en Viña del Mar*, CESOC, Santiago, 1990, pp 171–3
3. ‘Algunas observaciones sobre el concepto del “tercer cine”, in *A diez años de ‘Hacia un tercer cine’*, UNAM, Mexico City, 1981; or the slightly different version published in *Notas sobre cine argentino y latinoamericano*, Edimedios, Mexico City, 1984.

a very important year in relation to the organisation of Cine Liberación in Argentina. Even though no films were made or manifestos published in this year (both came before and after 1970), the conjuncture was one of interventions and definitions, including the expansion of the parallel distribution circuits for *La hora de los hornos*.

The clandestine, or semi-clandestine (depending on the time frame), exhibition of the film in Argentina had begun after the return of Getino and Solanas from abroad in 1968, the same year as its impressive international premiere at the Pesaro Festival in Italy in early June.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning, the distribution took place in relation to the space created around the Confederación General del Trabajo, known as the ‘CGT of the Argentinians’, one of the two large national federations of unions, the most radical and combative one, opposed to the dictatorship of General Onganía. That worker organisation included relations with political or intellectual groups or formations, and student movements. It was in this orbit that some members of the group Cine Liberación – Getino, Gerardo Vallejo and Nemesio Juárez – experimented briefly with filmed newsreels, known as the ‘Cinema Reports of the CGT’, between the end of 1968 and the beginning of 1969.

In this context of an alliance of middle classes and intellectuals with this sector of the worker movement opposed to the military regime, *La hora de los hornos* began a first circuit of exhibition. But if in the first year after the completion of the film (mid-1968 to mid-1969) the screenings were still not organised in a systematic fashion, even when there were contacts with the popular movement, the primary groups responsible for the projection of the film in the country would form only in the second half of 1969, catalysed by national uprisings such as the Cordobazo and the Rosariazo, or radical meetings like the Encuentro de Realizadores Latinoamericanos at the Festival of Viña del Mar in Chile at the end of October of 1969 attended by various students from the La Plata, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires film schools in Argentina. Some of these students, after encountering *La hora de los hornos* for the first time, organised themselves to project the film in Argentina. Thus, it was only in the following months and during 1970, while groups of Cine Liberación were forming in various cities of the country, that the distribution of the film achieved a certain level of systematic organisation.

The Cordobazo constituted a turning point in national politics in various ways.<sup>5</sup> It was the beginning of the end of the military dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía and it became a symbol of the insurrection and the struggles of the period for groups of both the Marxist and Peronist left. Most of the political films made after the event incorporated, as the symbol of the popular movement against the dictatorship, the same sequence of images which was used for purposes that varied according to the voiceover, the music or other sounds used in each film. The sequence, taken from television footage and re-appropriated by political film-makers, shows demonstrators rushing forwards and hurling stones at the mounted police, forcing the police to turn back and retreat at a gallop.

Two of these films were made immediately after the event. At the same time that Enrique Juárez – who later organised one of the distribution groups of *La hora de los hornos* in Buenos Aires – reworked materials ‘recuperated’ from television for his documentary feature, *Ya es tiempo*

4. The third part of the film (45 minutes) was finished after this Festival and was projected less frequently than the others in the following years.

5. This event was a worker uprising with massive student and popular support that took place in the city of Córdoba, 29–30 May 1969. It began with a general strike called by the worker unions brutally repressed by the police and army. But the uprising was massive, with considerable spontaneous popular support, and the centre of the city was occupied by demonstrators with their own snipers at the barricades for several hours during the day; the Clínicas neighbourhood, where the students lived, was also occupied during the night, preventing the police from entering. To retake control of the city, the government had to send in the army on 30 May. Before and after the uprising in Córdoba there were similar, if smaller, uprisings in other cities in the country.



Top: aftermath of the Cordobazo uprising in 1969. Below: students and workers protest during the uprising; images courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Argentina (inventory numbers 348379 and 348381), reproduced under disposition no 516/04 of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Argentina

*de violencia* (*The Time for Violence is Now*), the first nucleus of Cine Liberación launched an initiative to produce a collective documentary about the Cordobazo, leading to the creation of the group Realizadores de Mayo, some of whose members were working on the distribution of *La hora de los hornos* in different ways. These film-makers produced a series of short films on the Cordobazo and the contemporary situation included in the collective film *Argentina, mayo de 1969; El camino de la liberación*.<sup>6</sup>

Still, at the end of 1970, Cine Liberación questioned the political vagueness and lack of commitment on the part of the Realizadores de Mayo group in the process of instrumentalisation of the collective film and spoke of the difficulty of maintaining a common front between film-makers with different political positions: the Peronism of Cine Liberación contrasting with the Nueva Izquierda (New Left) position of other members of the Realizadores de Mayo. Cine Liberación maintained that the dissolution of the collective was inevitable, withdrawing half of the short films made that corresponded to the positions of Cine Liberación members. In this way, the political identity of the group Cine Liberación became more explicit and distinct, as did the centrality of the experience of distribution for the group. This experience provided the background for the two definitions of militant cinema in the 1971 document which link the cinema group to a concrete political organisation (Peronism) and the instrumentalisation of film in the political process.

Thus, 1970 was a key year. Combined with the process of clandestine exhibition and the above-mentioned differences with the other members of the Realizadores de Mayo group, two other events in 1970 that involved members and followers of Cine Liberación were also relevant in debates over proposals linked to the ‘cinema for development’ on the one hand, and the search for formal experiment on the other.

Regarding the former, the discussion revolved around the tensions that erupted in August in the city of Córdoba at the IV Festival Internacional de Cine para la Educación y el Desarrollo (FICED, International Festival of Film for Education and Development) sponsored by the Universidad Católica de Córdoba, OEA (Organisation of American States), FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation), UNESCO and various official and private organisations. There, in relation to the ban imposed upon the documentary *Muerte y pueblo* (1970) by Nemesio Juárez, a campaign against censorship was organised by students of the cinema schools and associations linked to Cine Liberación and other political-cultural groups of the left. This had a major impact in Latin American film journals.

In relation to experimental cinema, three months later in November, in the city of Santa Fe, a confrontation occurred between sectors of Cine Liberación: a leftist FATRAC and others on one side, and a group of avant-garde film-makers from Buenos Aires on the other.<sup>7</sup> During the so-called ‘night of the awakened cameras’ (‘noche de las cámaras despiertas’), this group had produced a series of short films to be shown in a conference against censorship at the film school of Santa Fe (Instituto Superior de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales). This episode was related to the internal tensions at the film school between factions committed to social documentary along the lines of Fernando Birri and those with another conception of the avant-garde more interested in experiments with

6. Ten short films made by Mauricio Berú, Nemesio Juárez (brother of Enrique), Rodolfo Kuhn, Octavio Getino, Jorge Martín (Catú), Humberto Ríos, Rubén Salguero, Eliseo Subiela, Pablo Szir. About half of the nine members of Realizadores de Mayo were linked to Cine Liberación.

7. FATRAC is the acronym for Frente Anti-imperialista de los Trabajadores de la Cultura (Anti-Imperialist Front of Cultural Workers), an organisation linked to the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, Revolutionary Workers’ Party).

8. Birri had created the Documentary School at the end of the 1950s where *Tire dié* was made.
9. In the Communist orbit, the Spanish critic Fernando Lara covered the Pesaro Festival of 1968 for the journal *Nuestro Cine*. Referring to the Peronist political option presented by *La hora de los hornos*, Lara wrote of 'political and ethical immorality', 'ideological opportunism', 'protofascist event'. *Nuestro Cine* 74, June 1968, p 29 and no 75, July 1968, p 22.
10. We found these types of practices in interviews with alternative distributors of the film. Also a passage in this article refers specifically to this practice: 'To whom do we intend each film in particular?... A militant film is also directed toward an historical addressee, which is the working class and the people, but it reaches this general audience through a series of immediate and specific addressees... A militant film must be directed toward a much more concrete public/ audience: the urban working class, the rural proletariat, the student movement, the comrades in a factory or a region in conflict, a public in other countries, the cadres of a political organisation, etc... For example, Part 2 of *La hora de los hornos* ('The Resistance'), was conceived for a concrete audience: the urban Argentine proletariat, but at the same time it served to transmit information and open a discussion on the experience of struggle in certain sectors, such as students and intellectuals in the process of radicalisation. What is important is to specify the concrete or principal audience for which it will be pertinent for the most part' (pp 150–1).
11. In an interview with Getino in 1969 the critic Martínez Torres asked him if they

cinematic language who rejected the subordination of cinema to politics *tout court*.<sup>8</sup> In the former were students who had spent the last year distributing *La hora de los hornos* in the cities of Santa Fe and Paraná and who were more concerned with the problem of the political use of cinema and the organisation of exhibition circuits.

Also in November 1970, the already mentioned rupture took place between Cine Liberación and the Realizadores de Mayo group, and in the succeeding months Solanas and Getino strengthened their relations with Juan Domingo Perón, then exiled in Madrid, and the Movimiento Nacional Justicialista, the name of the Peronist party. Eventually the interviews they did with Perón in 1971 resulted in two documentary features, *Perón, la justicialista revolución* (*Péron: The Justicialist Revolution*) and *Actualización política y doctrinaria para la toma del poder* (*Doctrinal Update for the Taking of Power*).

### III

If the Peronist line of the Cine Liberación group retained the same approach as that followed in the production of *La hora de los hornos*, the trajectory outlined above clarifies this position and locates Cine Liberación between 1971 and 1972 aligned with the directives of General Perón, a stance it would follow in the difficult following years when the leader returned to Argentina in the middle of 1973 to assume the Presidency, through to his death on 1 July 1974 and the succession of the vice-president, his wife María Estela Martínez, until the coup d'état in 1976.

The Peronist identification of the Cine Liberación group generated confusion and polemics in the circles of international political cinema during these years. In spite of the recognition received by both *La hora de los hornos* and the manifesto 'Toward a Third Cinema' in the post-1968 period, from both counter-cultural and third worldist perspectives the Peronist question unleashed bitter arguments to a large degree because the 'classical left', ie Communists and Socialists, viewed Perón as a populist and demagogic leader, or even at times explicitly Fascist, a perception coloured by the former Argentinian President's exile in Franco's Spain during the 1960s until 1973.<sup>9</sup> For this part of the international left, when the wide distribution of *La hora de los hornos* was noted, in many cases had seen only the first part of the film, arguably the 'least Peronist' part. In Argentina, however, the remarkable clandestine exhibition of the film varied with the groups arranging the screenings. In many cases both parts were shown, but some groups tended to project only the first part for middle-class and intellectual audiences, as many on the traditional left in Argentina as well were less sympathetic to or critical of Peronism. For worker audiences, or at least organised movements of students or intellectuals, it is very likely that only the second part, in which the Peronist identification was more pronounced, would be shown, even if these practices were not rigid.<sup>10</sup>

In any case the group Cine Liberación always defended its adherence to Peronism.<sup>11</sup> Even when they acknowledged the historical limitations of that movement on the path to Revolution, they recognised their possibilities.<sup>12</sup>

were seeking a leftist infiltration into Peronism: 'No, no, there is no subterfuge here.' *Nuestro Cine* 89, September 1969, p 45.

12. Interviewed by Louis Marcorelles for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1969, Solanas retraced the historical significance of Peronism, the place of nationalism in the Latin American liberation struggles, and noted that many people had not understood the critical analysis and these formulated in the film: the limitations of bourgeois nationalism, the impossibility of the bourgeois-democratic revolution if it is separated from a Socialist revolution; the Latin American perspective of the national struggles; see *Cahiers du Cinéma* 210, March 1969, pp 39–44 and 58–64.
13. There were two Perón governments between 1946 and 1955 until his overthrow by a civilian-military coup.
14. Cooke had been in Parliament during the government of Perón and was subsequently his first 'delegate' in Argentina during the exile of the former President Cooke argued that Perón's exile should be in Cuba, not in Spain during Franco's regime.
15. Solanas was linked to the cultural work of the Argentina Communist Party from which he distanced himself at the beginning of the 1960s. Getino participated in pro-Peronist Trotskyist groups during his union militancy when working (as a white-collar worker) in the metal industry at the end of the 1950s. At the beginning of the 1960s, both shifted from the left toward Peronism. In 1972 they said 'General Perón knew the trajectory of each of the members of Cine Liberación; he knew that we came from the left, intellectual middle class.

During the 1960s in Argentina there was a reconsideration of the historical phenomenon of Peronism, and Solanas and Getino participated in that process.<sup>13</sup> After 1955, many union leaders, community activists and young people participated in the so-called 'Peronist Resistance'. During the 1960s, while a powerful Peronist union bureaucracy was forming in the largest industrial enterprises and in public services, other union leaders, young people and students, together with political leaders and some intellectuals, formed the so-called 'Revolutionary Peronism'. With some variants, this tendency identified with the radical positions promoted by the Cuban Revolution in Latin America. One of its leaders was John William Cooke who, during the 1960s, had close relations with Cuba and was a personal friend of Che.<sup>14</sup> In this context, sectors of the middle classes, intellectuals and students signed up to this Peronism which, under the influence of many political thinkers and activists, moved towards a radical position on the left. Cooke was only one of them, but one of his statements set out the newly constructed identity of Peronism: 'In Argentina, the communists are us (the Peronists).' In large part these analyses were based on the massive loyalty of the Argentinian proletariat to Perón and as well on the public pronouncements made by the leader in exile in the second half of the 1960s.

In the late 1950s or early 1960s, Solanas and Getino came to 'discover' a different Peronism for themselves which was now – when they made *La hora de los hornos* – a revolutionary stance, influenced by the positions taken by Cooke and other intellectuals of 'the national left' such as Juan José Hernández Arregui, Arturo Jauretche, Rodolfo Ortega Peña, among others, or activist groups such the Movimiento Revolucionario Peronista led by Gustavo Rearte. Years later they maintained that during the process of making the film they underwent a 'transition' from the intellectual left to Peronism.<sup>15</sup> This can be seen explicitly in the second part of the film in which the historical Peronist process, referred to as the 'Justicialist Revolution', is considered as 'one more instance of the continental revolution', following an interpretation that takes into account the events just before or after the fall of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala or of Getulio Vargas in Brazil, or the revolutions in Algeria and Cuba. In this sense, for *Cine Liberación*, Peronism was proposing a type of Socialism at times called 'national', different from that postulated by the classical Marxist left but no less revolutionary. In a way, Peronism was perceived as the 'national way' to Socialism, a path taken at the same time by national liberation movements in many countries of the Third World.

In this period Perón presented himself as developing a 'pendular' politics in relation to diverse tendencies in his movement, each tendency finding something to hang onto in Peronism. To the extent that from the mid-1960s his public positions were considered to be on the 'left', the eloquent conclusion to the first part of *La hora de los hornos*, with its still image of Che's dead body sustained for several minutes, was consistent with this position. Despite oscillations, this posture was maintained up to Perón's return to Argentina in 1973. When *Cine Liberación* filmed the interviews with the leader in exile in 1971, his harsh criticisms of the military government were combined with his recognition that political prisoners were being jailed and that all forms of struggle, including



We never hid our political past... We were part of the middle intellectual sectors coming from the left in a process of nationalisation which ended by converting us definitively into Peronists.' Mario Roca, 'La película de Perón...', in *Cine y Liberación 1*, Buenos Aires, 1972, p 42.

guerrilla activity, at its height at that moment, were considered legitimate to secure his return to Argentina. For all of these reasons, the position of Cine Liberación was always identified as a revolutionary, one might say leftist, position with the particularity this Peronist left took on. But already in 1971, when Cine Liberación decided to film the testimony of Perón for screening in Argentina as part of the political work supporting his return, the group was tightening its links with the leader and with his Movimiento Nacional Justicialista Peronist Party. To this end, the group always maintained that these materials should be used by 'all'

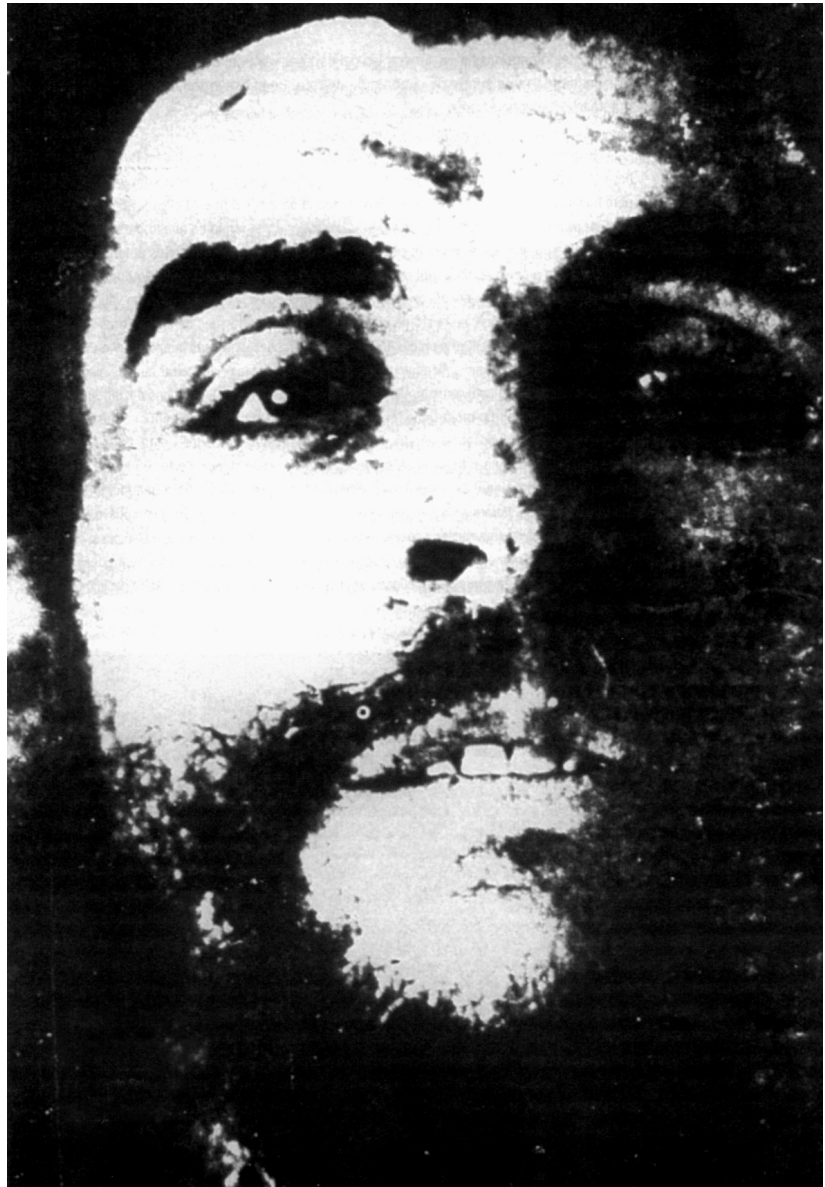


Image of Che Guevara after his murder, taken from television footage and used in *La hora de los hornos* (directed by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968). All rights reserved. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder.

sectors of the movement, those aligned with a more 'orthodox' Peronism as well as those representing Peronist tendencies of the newly forming left of Revolutionary Peronism. In fact, when Solanas began shooting his film *Los hijos de Fierro* (*Sons of Fierro*, completed in 1975), he included both militants of the largest Peronist left group, known as the Montoneros, an urban guerrilla group, and orthodox Peronists, known as the Guardia de Hierro, among others.

A posteriori characterisations of the political terrain at the time risk oversimplifying the fluidity of the situation on the ground. Speaking very roughly then, the classical left, represented by the Communist and Socialist parties, became increasingly marginal in the years leading up to Perón's return, as splinter groups broke off from that traditional left and developed their respective rationales for attaching themselves to the increasingly militant and *sometimes* armed new leftist (including Peronist left/revolutionary) movements struggling against the dictatorship in power from 1966 to 1973. Cine Liberación followed this political path, hence the importance of positioning the evolving theoretical statements of the group in the constantly fluctuating political context. Appreciation of that evolution helps explain the tendency noted above to screen the second part of *La hora de los hornos* for worker audiences, and the extended elaboration of the concept of militant cinema in the years immediately after the completion of the film.

In this last period, after 1971, the political-military organisations of the Marxist (PRT-ERP) and Peronist (Montoneros) left took shape. While the Cine de la Base group led by Raymundo Gleyzer arose in the cinema camp linked to the first of these organisations (PRT-ERP), Cine Liberación continued its commitment to Perón and its dialogue with the various sectors of the Peronist movement, without boxing itself into a corner with any of them.

This political position of Cine Liberación, which grants Perón an essential place as the incarnation of the synthesis of tendencies in the Peronist Movement, is explained more fully in these pages than in any of their other writings. Similarly, this recognition of a single political direction embodied by Perón expresses the link that the group had formed at this moment with the leader in exile. This also explains why, despite the explicit subordination of the cinema group to a political organisation proposed in this document and summarised in the first definition of militant cinema noted earlier, the earlier and later experience of the Cine Liberación group acknowledges a much greater degree of autonomy in relation to the Peronist Movement and its various tendencies; including the time of their direct relation with the leader, whether in exile until 1973 or during his brief return to power between 1973 and 1974.

#### IV

One aspect, perhaps paradoxical, of 'Cine militante: una categoría interna del Tercer Cine' is that even though it was written in the midst of a period of intense radicalisation and political polarisation, which can be seen in the hardening and Manicheism of some positions taken, it expresses an experience in flux, a real consideration of the topic, of its

16. 'A cinema of destruction and construction. Destruction of the image that neocolonialism has presented of itself and others. Construction of a living, breathing reality, salvaged from the national reality in any of its expressions', 'Cine militante, una categoría interna del Tercer Cine' (1971), p 128.
17. 'A common political situation, a liberating ideological project links the production of Cuban cinema with many works of the Brazilian *cinema novo*, the recent films of the new Chilean cinema (Littin, Ruiz, Chaskel, etc). And the critical or militant documentaries from Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, in addition to the young cinema in Algeria and Africa, and the cinema of militants who are working already in places like South Vietnam or in the very center of the First World (Zengakuren, 'militant collective cinema', Newsreels, etc). *This cinema is all the same cinema*, even if it is not shown in the same theater, or does not have the same cinematic trajectory or the same length, differing in the concrete objectives to be fulfilled in each work, whether made as a musical comedy, political essay, epic drama or agitational pamphlet', 'Cine militante, una categoría interna del Tercer Cine' (1971), p 128.
18. In addition to references to the Argentinian situation, there is also consideration of the national in Latin American liberation struggles. The pages devoted to the assertion that *all* Cuban cinema is 'militant cinema', following from the creation of the Revolutionary State by the people, exemplify the path of 'affirmation of a national culture' 'Cine militante, una categoría interna del Tercer Cine' (1971), p 128.
19. 'The work of the militant film-maker is not only to

difficulties and possibilities. In this sense, some examples give an idea of the 'openness' of the idea of Third Cinema and of militant cinema even with the demanding conditions that define it.

From the point of view of a cinematic geopolitics, it is interesting that if, on the one hand, the postulates associated with Third Cinema (cinema of destruction and construction; decolonisation of taste, and so on)<sup>16</sup> are presented here in a dichotomy linked to a first broad categorisation or 'vertical separation' that divides two types of cinema ('our cinema'/'Third Cinema' vs 'their cinema') corresponding to the two large ideological conceptions of the Cold War at the time, on the other hand the document highlights the existence of expressions of Third Cinema and militant cinema not only in the Third World but also in the First World, and ultimately calls for a strengthening in the latter parallel circuit of distribution.<sup>17</sup>

In this formulation, while the politics of the 'classical' left in Argentina was denigrated by the Cine Liberación group for its reformism, its lack of contact with the masses or its opposition to Peronism, there is also an explicit recognition of the cinematic politics of the masses of the Italian or Chilean (under Salvador Allende) Socialist and Communist left, even if it is differentiated from the Argentinian situation of military dictatorship in their institutionalised, reformist function.

In relation to Argentina, in spite of the harshness with which the 'developmentalist' project of modernist cultural expression (which for its critics had a 'depoliticising' effect), or the work of 'committed' Latin American writers associated with the 'boom' are viewed, that is, all the phenomena linked to 'Second Cinema', it is noteworthy that Solanas and Getino recognise that the bases of decolonisation of the Third Cinema ('our cinema') were already present in the First and Second Cinema and also that the militant cinema picks out 'the threads of a national cinema' already present in these earlier cinemas. The question of the *national culture* (a national and popular culture 'in construction') in Argentina and the question of *the people* as instance of the legitimisation of militant cinema and of renovation, revolutionary in its language, are two issues discussed in the 1971 essay.<sup>18</sup>

Some pages translated here correspond to the second part of this document, referring to the practice of militant cinema, questions about elaboration-production and distribution-instrumentalisation. In the first case, there is a general interrogation that, rejecting any rigid aesthetic prescription, reviews different possibilities, including the expression of apparently incompatible ideas; in the last instance Solanas and Getino reject the autonomy of the production of militant cinema which, for its formal choices of language, depends on the conjuncture and context in which it is made. Thus, based on the need for communication with the people, the authors accept the use of a language 'qualifying as archaic', while also postulating the aggressive need to revolutionise the language. But, as they say, 'a language is not revolutionised within the language itself, but from its instrumentalisation for the transformation and liberation of our peoples'.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the process of reflecting on their previous experience and the films made led the Cine Liberación group to attempt a preliminary classification of 'genres' of militant cinema in relation to the types of strategic and tactical objectives. And with this revised vision, illustrated

insert a voice that speaks of “revolutionary ideas” or images that show a cop beating a woman. Above all part of the task is to rethink the very forms of the existing expression and language, for they have been created not for a *revolutionary cinema*, but precisely to satisfy the needs of the proprietors of cinema. This does not justify the director in having to invent artificially a “new or original” language to be faithful to the revolutionary ideas to be transmitted. *A language is not revolutionised by language itself, but from its instrumentalisation for change and liberation of our peoples.* It’s precisely this instrumentalisation and verification that help to liberate specific situations, making a language new, original and revolutionary.’ Ibid, p 155.

with their own examples and those of other Latin American groups, a better sense emerges of their ideas about uniting cinematic creation with political intervention. There is also an analysis of two key ideas of the time, ideas especially important for this Argentinian group: the value of documentary cinema in the ‘unliberated countries’ for its contribution of ‘testimonies’ and ‘irrefutable proofs’, that is, the priority of the documentary/document in the neocolonial situation; and the idea of ‘inconclusive’ open cinema that, as cinema-event (‘cine-acto’), can serve to mobilise the masses and convert the spectator into a co-author of the work.

## V

This final point is the challenge addressed in the last pages translated, referring to distribution. While they recognise that still at the beginning of 1971 the moment of the instrumentalisation that constitutes the event is ‘the weakest part of militant cinema’, a terrain ‘yet to appear’, and the space dedicated to this task still small, these pages argue for distribution as an essential part of militant cinema. And, fundamentally, it expresses a synthesis of concerns to improve this rich and intense experience of hundreds of screenings and distribution events that had taken place between 1968 and 1970 throughout the country.

If the practical experience of distribution is one of the aspects of the history of political cinema most difficult to reconstruct, and other sources such as internal documents or recollections remain essential, the essay ‘Cine militante: una categoría interna del Tercer Cine’ retains its interest because – even without the details that these other sources might provide – it refers to various aspects of the instrumentalisation of political cinema in Argentina and other places.



Still from *Camarades* (directed by Marin Karmitz, 1970). All rights reserved. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder.

This experience remains without a doubt essential to think the history of this type of cinema beyond the definitions that have circulated concerning Third Cinema, for it dealt with a practice of intervention, of cine-acción with *La hora de los hornos* that in its time transcended national borders to enter the catalogues of alternative distributors that supplied the parallel circuits of militant cinema in United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, and many other countries.

At the moment of narrating the history of Cine Liberación and its theoretical elaboration, an anecdote, also from 1970, demonstrates the reach and centrality of the militant distribution of the film. While the Unidad Móvil Rosario (the Rosario Mobile Cinema Unit, one of the most active groups of Cine Liberación in the city of Rosario, Argentina) extracted and used the famous chapter of 'The Factory Occupations' from the second part of the film for political work with workers in the area surrounding the Swift industrial plant outside Rosario where the confrontation with management was taking place, at the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, the militant French film-maker Marin Karmitz was incorporating this same chapter of 'the factory occupations' for his fiction film *Camarades* (1970) to show how the young French militants and workers were debating their own labour conflicts on the basis of the screening of the Argentinian film.

*Translated by Jonathan Buchsbaum*