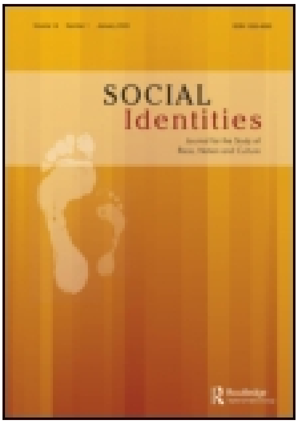

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The worker's voice in post-1968 Argentine political documentary

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In the late 1960s, the political cinema of Latin America gave relevance and a prominent place to the voices of the people. In the case of Argentina, the worker's voice increased its presence in the films during a period of militant cinema that began in 1968 with the legendary *La hora de los hornos* [The Hour of the Furnaces]. Later films also incorporated the voice of the workers who played a central part in the largest popular uprising of the period, the *Cordobazo* (1969) and those of the militants in the so-called Peronist Resistance (1955 onwards). Amid criticisms of 'the limits of direct cinema' and the proposal of 'giving voice to the people' or of directly 'seizing the right to speak,' the worker's voice began to share the textual authority of films, an authority hitherto given almost exclusively to an omnipresent voice-over, typical of one important documentary tradition. If in many cases the voices of the people were connected, if not subordinated, to the theses of the filmmakers, they were nevertheless elaborated in all their complexity, with their place negotiated into the ensemble of the film's textual authority. This article analyses various ways of configuring working class voices/testimonies (those of the *workers*, the *farm workers*, and the *Resistance*), and considers the dialogues and negotiations between these voices and the revolutionary theses and imaginaries that were widespread in this period, as put forward in films concerning social protest and class identity in Argentina.

Keywords: Argentina; political cinema; documentary; direct cinema; 1968; working class

Introduction

As a politically militant cinema began to emerge in Argentina in the late 1960s, debates about so-called 'direct cinema' were the order of the day among film critics, cultural organizers, and filmmakers around the world. Spurred by increasing political radicalization following the Cuban Revolution as embodied in revolts of great international impact, such as Paris in May 1968, questions about the limited capacity of direct cinema to explore in-depth social problems and their causes were widespread. In Argentina, militant film directors drew instead on the broad tradition of political art known as *agit-prop* (agitation and propaganda) and rather gave a more prominent place to montage and archival film when the purpose was to construct political meaning on screen. Although some combined documentary observation with interviews, recycled material, and classical expository strategies, the resulting films looked very different from the more orthodox documentaries of direct cinema. Neither observation nor investigation for their own sake, nor the ambiguity

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of an unscripted – unpredictable or uncontrolled – cinema, nor sobriety or objectivity could be adequate values for Argentine political filmmakers in the late 1960s, when the premise was intervening in and transforming reality.[1]

As the use of testimonies was gaining ground in Latin America among those committed to the project of 'giving voice to the people,' the agitation of 1968 in major Western cities – with repercussions in the world's main film festivals: Cannes, Pesaro, Venice – foregrounded the discourse of 'seizing the right to speak' by workers, young people, and students.[2] Although political discourses such as 'the limits of direct cinema', 'giving voice to the people', and 'seizing the right to speak' can be differentiated in so far as they possess a certain autonomy in their gestation and development, all were already in full circulation by the time Argentine militant cinema came into being. The aim of this essay is to explore the presence of these discourses in the Argentine political documentary of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The essay seeks to show that, despite the criticisms made of direct cinema at the time in the most prominent Latin American documentary forums,[3] Argentine political films of this period combine the distinguishing traits of both direct and militant cinema.[4] I will discuss the simultaneous presence of forms of expression of direct and militant cinema in two key Argentine films of the 1960s: *La hora de los hornos* [The Hour of the Furnaces] (Solanas, Pallero, & Cine Liberación Group, 1968) and *Ya es tiempo de violencia* [Now is the Time for Violence] (Juárez, 1969). At the same time, I will examine how both in these film works and in another three Argentine films of the 1970s – namely, *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* (Cine Liberación Group & Vallejo, 1971), *Operación Masacre* (Cedrón, 1972), and *Los hijos de Fierro* (Solanas & Tercine, 1975) – the discourse of 'giving voice to the people' concedes a new political value to the testimony of the subjects who appear on screen. I will evaluate this proposition in relation to the importance that the 'seizing the right to speak' discourse assumed circa 1968 in those regions around the world toward which the militant Argentine cinema looked.[5] However, at the same time I will explore the meanings, scope and limitations that the expression of subaltern voices had in the militant films. I will do this, firstly, by discussing the ways in which working class testimony is configured in these Argentine films (that is, the testimony of both industrial and farm workers, as well as of the militants of the so-called Peronist Resistance). Secondly, I will consider the dialogue and negotiations between these voices and the theories and representations of revolution that were widespread in films concerning social protest and class identity in Argentina during this period.

The irruption of the worker's voice: Toward *La hora de los hornos*

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer an exhaustive definition of direct cinema, and a genealogy of the concept and its various uses in Argentina and elsewhere.[6] It is important, however, to remember the reasons why direct cinema can be associated with the interests of militant filmmakers, its observation of marginal realities, its attempt to get closer to working class subjects and settings, and its incorporation of disenfranchized voices, which in the 1960s became a necessity for filmmakers inclined towards a social and political cinema.

In his study of the Latin American documentary, Paulo Antonio Paranaguá observes that a great revolution came about with the advent of direct sound, with the resulting possibility of access to the voice of the *other*, more or less in parallel with the advent of 'light-weight cameras or recorders' and 'high-sensitivity film' (Paranaguá, 2003, pp. 53–54). Although technological developments (lighter and inexpensive equipment, light-weight cameras, synchronized sound) played a decisive role in these investigatory efforts, in Latin America such equipment was rarely available during the 1960s. Yet even if many Latin American filmmakers did not manage to incorporate the new technologies (in particular synchronized sound), they were not unaware of the general change implied by their appearance elsewhere, for instance, in tendencies such as direct cinema and *cinéma-vérité* (Barnow, 1993) or in observational and interactive forms of documentary (Nichols, 1991). In this way, the impact made by the technique of recording people speaking spontaneously in their own voice, as Barnow attests, could no longer be ignored.

During the 1960s and 1970s this novelty spread in Latin America amid political radicalization, as did the irruption of the testimony of common people, in particular the poor, in literature and the social sciences and humanities. *The Children of Sanchez* [*Los hijos de Sánchez*] by the US anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1961), for example, enjoyed wide circulation as a key reference in Latin America. Another important antecedent in those years was the study of traditions and experiences by Cuban writer Miguel Barnet, recognized for his *Biografía de un cimarrón* [Biography of a Fugitive Slave] (1966). As Claudia Gilman observes, Barnet is 'practically a founder' of the testimonial genre, one that was to occupy a central place in Latin American intellectual and literary debates in the 1960s. All this occurred in the context of a general move towards new formats and genres valued for their communicative dimension, such as testimony, the protest song, and, notably, political cinema (Gilman, 2003, p. 342).[7]

In this context, despite the technological limitations referred to above, working class and other disenfranchised voices irrupted on to the screen during the 1960s. In the case of Argentina, even before the appearance of militant cinema, various documentaries that oscillate between the ethnographic and the sociological already incorporated marginalized or working-class voices. In this sense, we can follow a route from the end of the 1950s in the earliest initiatives of the Escuela Documental de Santa Fe (created by Fernando Birri with a dual affiliation to Italian neorealism and Grierson's British documentary school) to *La hora de los hornos* in the late 1960s.[8]

La hora de los hornos, the best-known film in Argentine political cinema,[9] is the documentary that most openly interrogates the nation's neocolonial condition. Together with the famous 1969 manifesto, *Toward a Third Cinema* [*Hacia un Tercer Cine*] by Solanas and Getino, this film symbolizes an alternative Third-World cinema in a vein influenced by the work of Frantz Fanon, among others.[10] As the existing scholarship on *La hora de los hornos* is abundant, it is not the purpose of this essay to offer a new analysis of this highly influential documentary (see Mestman, 2003; Ortega, 1999; Pick, 1993; Prédal, 2001; Stam, 1990; Wolkowicz & Trombetta, 2009, among others). Rather, in order to contextualize the analysis of later Argentine political films that follows, I will outline the presence of the worker's voice in this film's second part (there are, in fact, no studies that focus on this issue whether in relation to this or other Argentine political films). The first part of *La hora de los hornos* comprises various strategies to attack the viewer's passivity (a 'big hammer', 'a big machine-gun' provoking the viewer to a violent response, as Solanas would assert),[11] where daring montage is combined with counter-information and agitation.

The film's second and third parts, however, present classical documentary narration with a predominant voice-over in the manner of an institutional newsreel, with plentiful use of archival material and testimonies. The second part of the documentary is divided into two sections: the 'Chronicle of Peronism' (1946–1955), and the 'Chronicle of (the) Resistance' (1955–1968). This part of the film, on the one hand, puts into play a reservoir of archival images about the government of Juan Domingo Perón as an audiovisual memoir of the lower classes of Argentina; on the other hand, it gives space to the voices of both workers and leaders of the movement against the anti-Peronist governments that followed Perón's civic-military overthrow in 1955.[12]

In an interview given to the Venezuelan journal *Cine al día* in 1969, during the above-mentioned Mérida screenings, Solanas underscored the presence of testimonies and reportage in the latter two parts of the film, emphasizing the recourse to direct cinema and characterizing the filmic discourse in terms of this cinematic tradition. In the interview he speaks about a 'fundamentally knowledge-orientated film'; a 'cold' and 'objective' discourse; a 'simple,' 'direct' and 'ascetic' cinematographic form; and films that allow viewers to think calmly and draw their own conclusions.

In this sense, the 1960s wager of 'giving voice to the people' seems to find its most genuine expression in the second part of the film, in which we hear the testimony of workers, delegates and activists. These testimonies are made in the settings these subjects frequent or in which the conflicts unfold: the workplace, the café, the union headquarters, the assembly, and the street. Whether these historical subjects find themselves in an interview situation, address the viewer directly or speak among themselves, the film shows them and allows us to hear their voices, at times directly – either through synchronic equipment or postsynchronization – or at times indirectly. Although these scenes may prompt the perception of fully giving authorial voice to the protagonists of the struggles of the period, the issue proves to be more complex.

The film's archival images and reconstructions function to illustrate the statements of those interviewed and, in so doing, are used as proof of what has been said about the occupation of factories, the demonstrations, and the repression. Yet, at the same time, the testimonies themselves function as proof of the argument that is presented through the voice-over. This can be observed in various chapters of the second part of *La hora de los hornos*, such as the well-known 'Factory Takeovers,' which refers to the period of workers' occupations of industrial establishments in the 1960s, actions that between 1963 and 1965 were integrated into the agitation plan of the General Labor Confederation of Argentina.[13] In this and other similar cases in the film, the voice-over performs extrapolations from the concrete examples offered: a strike stands for every strike and a factory occupation for every factory occupation. Also, toward the end of the second part of the film, some militants of the Resistance describe their methods of fighting. When further questioned about them by the interviewers, in line with the position that the film's voice-over will take later, they acknowledge the limitations of their methods. For example, in one of the film's testimonies a young man describes their inefficient use of 'miguelito' nails to sabotage public transportation vehicles during general strikes. In another case, a woman remembers how they used to throw pepper at police horses every time they were repressed, and how the powder got finally swept away by the wind. In these and other similar cases, the off-screen commentary develops the idea that, in spite of their courage, members of the Resistance had reached their limit in their struggle against repression and, that, in consequence, it was time for them to shift from isolated sabotage actions and strikes to more sophisticated forms of organized armed struggle.

While the textual authority of the film in these and other scenes has seemingly shifted toward the depicted social actors (because their commentaries and answers offer an essential part of the film's argument), they are at the same time incorporated and articulated through the narrator's commentary. In this way, be it through the narrator's voice-over or that of the filmmakers' off-screen commentary, the people's voices are almost always intermeshed, and to a great extent subordinated, in a persuasive textual logic that orchestrates them in the direction of the film's key theses, namely, the limitations inherent in spontaneous political action and the need to organize in the contest for power.

Sugar plant workers and rural culture: *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales*

The experience of the factory takeovers constituted a fundamental topic for the Cine Liberación group in its aim to have a dialogue with the Peronist proletariat, to whom the second part of *La hora de los hornos* was dedicated. The same historical experience is focused on – because of its 'exemplary' and 'disalienating' character[14] – in another Cine Liberación feature-length film: *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* [Old Man Reales' Way Toward Death] (1971), directed by the Tucumán filmmaker Gerardo Vallejo. However, in this film the staging of the clash of labor and capital required a different approach to that of *La hora de los hornos*. This is because, even if an important part of Vallejo's film is devoted to the workers' conflict in the sugar plants of the province of Tucumán, the film portrays the life of a single rural family.[15] Consequently, the shaping of the worker's voice in this film contemplates the particularity of the speech and culture of those inhabitants, with their specific inflections and idiosyncrasies. Although it can be considered as a documentary film, *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* is one of many examples in the New Latin American Cinema in which the boundaries between documentary and fiction are blurred.[16]

El camino is organized around documentary depictions of the life of sugar industry worker Gerardo Ramón Reales (Old Man Reales) and his sons: Angel, a *golondrina* (swallow) or migrant worker; Mariano, a former sugar-cane worker who has become a policeman; and El Pibe (The Kid, henceforth referred to as 'Pibe'), the youngest sibling, a sugar plant worker, whose character in the film is a fiction-reality composite. Although at the beginning of the film the focus on the testimony of Old Man Reales facilitates an immediate identification of his social condition (recognizable in the precarious setting, the expression on his face, and his poor, rural accent), as it develops the film's narrative increasingly concentrates on the representation of each of the man's three sons. Through this structure, Vallejo's film synthesizes the scant options in life this empoverished rural, proletarian scenario allows, and it elaborates these options in their complexity.

In relation to the periods mentioned above, it is interesting to note that although there are differences between the protagonists of Vallejo's film and the subjects studied by Oscar Lewis, various elements of a 'culture of poverty' (a life style transferred over generations that the poor can transcend through class consciousness) are present in this film.[17] In addition, in both Lewis's book and Vallejo's film we are provided with the vivid testimony of the respective subjects, without being denied their more complex and conflict-laden aspects. In fact, it is precisely this contestatory potential that Lewis identifies in the 'culture of poverty' that Vallejo elaborates in his film. For example, in Pibe's coming to class-consciousness and social praxis, one can recognize the transition out of a 'culture of poverty,' as Lewis conceived it, even if the material conditions of poverty endure (as is the case in the film).

While Vallejo's film constructs Angel's and Mariano's screen characters purely from elements taken from these individuals' real personal and social condition (for example, as a migrant worker and as a policeman), the character of the third brother, Pibe, is shaped as an ad hoc screen character, that is to say, one constructed from a combination of aspects of the real Pibe's personal history and the lives of other Tucumán young people who take part in union politics. In this sense, Pibe is represented as a typical rank-and-file union activist of the FOTIA, the Federación de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera (Federation of Sugar-Industry Workers). According to Vallejo, while the real Pibe was not all this in reality, he may well have been at that particular time and place.[18]

While the screen representation of Pibe's brothers, Angel and Mariano, remains encapsulated in fragmentary tales that incorporate their own poorly recorded and hardly expressive voices, the chapter devoted to Pibe has greater narrative articulation and his dubbed voice allows his testimony greater fluidity. If his brothers' voices fail to escape a verbal language strictly connected to their material and cultural conditions of existence, Pibe's voice, on the contrary, is mediated by the discursive register of the experience of union and political activism.

As a result, the character of Pibe in the film stands for a political project to be constructed rather than representing the real, historical subject on which it is based as referent. It is in this sense that Vallejo bears testimony to the 'motor' of the working class movement in Tucumán, that is, the rural working class (in particular the sugar-harvest worker, both the factory worker and the worker in the furrow), differentiating it from other urban regions with a more developed industrial working class. At the same time, as Vallejo points out, it was not simply a matter of the testimony of the life of a rural proletarian family, but rather of 'synthesizing' the political process with which 'the rural folk of Tucumán' could identify.[19]

The explanation of this political process unfolds in the segment of *El camino* dedicated to Pibe, where he exposes his thoughts in an intimate, reflective account made during a train ride. But this process is also explained in one of the appendices of the film devoted to the workers' struggles in Tucumán (two autonomous appendices of the film are composed with archival material or footage recorded ad hoc, incorporated into the final film cut in 1971). It is in the second appendix that we are presented with the struggles of the people of Tucumán, in part from an expository voice-over, in part through the reflection of Pibe, and at moments turning away from textual authority to the testimonies of the actual workers and their leaders. They speak about contentious themes, such as the extent of the FOTIA's power, the differences between factory and field workers, the takeover of factories, the repression and death of workers, the student struggles, and the guerrilla. In this way, the appendix allows for the various ideological positions of the Tucumán workers' movement to emerge. Thus, while the filmmaker is interested in the authenticity of the living conditions and socio-cultural features of this rural family, he also reshapes the character of Pibe almost entirely according to the political agenda of Cine Liberación, as well as including direct testimonies of workers' leaders. And, although Cine Liberación's militant objective is preponderant, Vallejo does not shift the focus away from his ethnographic investigation. Perhaps the most interesting aspect in this sense is precisely the co-presence of the political and the cultural, in an articulation that leaves space for the exploration of important areas of the characters' lived experience.

In this way, if the film's 'giving voice' to union leaders and rank-and-file workers allows for the exposition of an experience of exploitation and daily confrontation (especially in the tales of the workers who suffered repression), alongside a more general characterization of the conflict (especially in the tales of the leaders), the film in its entirety takes up the challenge of connecting the conditions and aspirations of this particular rural family to the historical project for social transformation proposed by the militants and to the theses of the political cinema itself.

Thus, in this film the character of Pibe represents the search for the 'New Man,'[20] yet this is a search presented in all its contradictoriness between the personal and the political. Indeed, the hesitant and reflective Pibe functions in counterpoint with another character, his workmate Ramón, a more assertive and politically-aware militant. It is interesting, then, to observe how, by locating the aspects of greater ideological and argumentative firmness in Ramón, the filmmaker gives complexity to the film's political wager through Pibe. It presents him as a worker who participates in union activity, who even manages to become a delegate, but who is not a leader and who, on the other hand, temporarily abandons the struggle and leaves the province. Vallejo constructs Pibe as a political subject who is skeptical of his situation, although not resigned to it as are his brothers. This sets him apart from more committed workers, such as Ramón, and makes him say that in reality he isn't too different from his brothers; it also identifies him with old Reales, his father.

In consequence, Vallejo constructs the character of Pibe (and his voice) in an intermediate place between the 'real' younger son of old Reales and the activist or union leader who, as the film suggests, he 'could have been.' In other words, Pibe is presented as a character who has detached himself neither from his family's culture and politics nor from the limitations derived from their material conditions of existence, but who, all the same, should distance himself from his family in order to fashion himself into a political subject.

The strategy of using a composite screen construction for the character of Pibe served Vallejo's purpose of showing the film to working class audiences outside the conventional film distribution circuits: more precisely, in Tucumán's sugar plants, union headquarters and universities. As a result, numerous worker and political groups campaigned for the legalization of the film, which the military government rejected. As a direct effect of this prohibition, these groups began to develop alternative exhibition methods similar to those that *The hour of the furnaces* had inaugurated three years earlier, including the abovementioned notion of 'film-act.'

The *Cordobazo* and the worker's voice: *Ya es tiempo de violencia*

On 29 and 30 May 1969, the largest popular uprising of the period, known as the *Cordobazo* took place in Argentina. The event occurred in the city of Córdoba, a center of recent, abrupt industrial development headed by the automobile sector, with a largely young industrial working class. The *Cordobazo* uprising consisted of a strike and street protest led by workers and students (with the support of the general population) for better working conditions and against the military regime in power at the time; it included the occupation of some zones of the city by the demonstrators until their recuperation by the army the following day.

It was during this key episode in Argentine political history that a convergence took place between militant cinema and direct TV recording. In actuality, the images captured by the cameras of Argentine television – especially those of Channel 13, the most important and most widely seen nationally at the time – brought into people's homes the violent irruption of the protest, giving an account of the disorder and reigning confusion as the clashes took place in the center of the city. The fast, confused movement of cameras perched on the shoulders of cameramen placed at the very center of those clashes, amid the showdowns and running exits, tear-gas and shooting, transmitted the dizzying, unpredictable, and out-of-control aspects of the event through TV.[21]

Yet from the very moment of recording, the images captured by the TV cameras were turned into disputed representations. In fact, Argentine audiences did not see the footage of the protests in live broadcasts but progressively as edited and commented-upon newsreels broadcast over subsequent days. While the TV images of these events have been read in their own way by the framing commentary of reporters, in their later appropriation by the political cinema, these TV images were re-signified by the films' sound track. This was achieved not only in the voice-over narration or in the music track but also through the voices and testimonies of the interviewed protesters.

For all its material and symbolic importance, the *Cordobazo* was considered a point of inflection in the struggles of that period, and so almost all subsequent political films alluded to it. What is more, the majority of them used the same fragment of TV footage to represent that historical moment and proclaim that, from that moment on, anti-dictatorial protest would spread and the lower classes would make a qualitative historical leap. The TV fragment included in the films lasts only a few seconds and shows the demonstrators moving through a street and hurling stones at the mounted police who, in an abrupt and disorderly way, turn around and retreat. Inserted in the most varied ways in both documentary and fictional films, and generally giving a defining epic tone to the narrative, these images sought to symbolize the people's advance over the military regime, which would in fact be toppled shortly after.

This use of archival documentary images accounts for the functioning of militant cinema in the face of the possible limits of direct cinema. The militant cinema was interested in the 'direct effect' of TV images (possibly due to the authenticity and identification effect they contributed to the workers' struggles and mobilizations) and, at the same time, it was concerned with reducing ambiguity as much as possible. Both the selection of the emblematic newsreel fragment that shows demonstrators forcing the mounted police to retreat, and the anchoring of its meaning in the voice of authority of the political films were indispensable for the militant interpretation of the *Cordobazo*. Thus, political cinema came to reframe and give a new ideological meaning to these TV images.

Elsewhere I have presented a broad comparative study of the use of this TV fragment in the militant cinema of those years.[22] Here, I'd like to focus on one of those documentaries: *Ya es tiempo de violencia* [Now is the Time for Violence]

(Juárez, 1969). Made immediately after the *Cordobazo*, Juárez's film was the first to incorporate the abovementioned TV sequence. *Ya es tiempo de violencia* begins as a typical expository documentary in which an omniscient voice-over develops an argument about the *Cordobazo* and the broader political situation in Argentina. The images of the people's uprising show workers in the streets making barricades and setting fire to shops and cars, alongside policemen who suppress these actions. These images counter the authorities' official statements about an alleged rapid return to normality in Córdoba, and function as proof of the claims of the documentary's voice-over regarding the protest and its historical meaning.

Yet, unlike other films of this period, direct testimonies are not captured at the site of the events in *Ya es tiempo de violencia*, nor, for that matter, is its third-person voice-over, the only central voice. Rather, from the outset, part of the film's textual authority is the testimony of a participating worker, who reconstructs his personal experience. In this way, the third-person rhetoric of the commentator's argument is modified by the testimony of a 'compañero' (comrade), who addresses the spectator informally and colloquially. All the same, this is a testimony given by a witness who remains off-screen, while his voice relates the facts illustrated by the TV images. This narration (which also refers to the country's recent history) goes through the three classical moments in terms of which the *Cordobazo* has often been explained. Firstly, it describes the workers' columns leaving their workplaces – the factory plants – to go to the center of the city on the morning of 29 May. Secondly, it relates the murder at noon of the worker Máximo Mena, the escalation to a full confrontation, and the defeat of the police by the demonstrators. Finally, it describes the irruption of the army and the emergence of militant snipers. Once this worker's first-person testimony ends in the second half of the film, the third-person voice-over reappears, characterizing and generalizing this witness' personal experience.

Although the passage from the worker's testimony to the generalizing voice-over is similar to that which occurs in other films of the period, here the worker's voice is significantly more central to the presentation of the film's thesis and its interpretation of events. For instance, the idea that the *Cordobazo* would have been a 'spontaneous reaction of the people of Córdoba' to official accusations of the presence of 'foreign agents' among the workers is not only supported by the voice-over but reinforced by the protagonist's account of the events. Similarly, other topics surrounding the *Cordobazo* are constructed by this voice; one such topic is the 'political maturity' of the demonstrators, which is represented through scenes of the occupation of the city, whereby besides the barricades, fires, and havoc, there is also a deliberate selection of objects, and there is no looting. Further topics include the key role of the worker-student alliance, the problem of unity, labor-union democracy, and the slain martyrs. In other words, if, on the one hand, the explanation of the *Cordobazo* is the domain of the dominant voice-over and its generalizing discourse, on the other hand, the worker's voice participates in the interpretation of the *Cordobazo* through the shaping of the topics that endowed this event with insurrectional symbolic power.

Furthermore, it is the function of the worker's off-screen voice to anchor the meaning of those aforementioned emblematic TV sequences, which, as stated, recur in all the political films of the period. In *Ya es tiempo de violencia*, the image of the retreat of the mounted police under a shower of stones matches the worker's words. After telling of the advance of the demonstrators through the city ('we passed them a number of times till we got to the square and they were waiting for us') and the assassination of a worker, as the relevant images are introduced the demonstrator states: 'Minutes went by and we were starting to be the ones in charge of the situation. We even had time to make barricades.' However, this worker's voice is a figure constructed by the film: indeed, its content was written by director Juárez on the basis of interviews with participants in the *Cordobazo*, and then it was dubbed using an actor's voice. Inasmuch as this narrative tends to be perceived as authentic as it is derived from actual testimonies relayed by some of the protagonists of the event, in its final form the film articulates a singular identity construct; one that has been selected from the universe of ideologies and union identities and politics found at the time in the streets of Córdoba. The voice thus constructed, therefore, represents more closely the political position of the filmmaker.

The discourse of 'seizing the right to speak' – as it was conceived around the world in relation to the events of 1968 – is also present in Argentina during the *Cordobazo*. In fact, the masses in the streets of Córdoba occupying the city and erecting barricades express themselves bodily and vocally. In setting fire to certain economically powerful stores and not others; in smashing certain show-windows but not looting them; in hanging up certain signs and speaking out in assemblies, they effectively irrupt on the political scene, 'seize the right to speak' and signify their protest. But when mediatized by the political cinema, the workers' voice can follow various forms of expression: on the one hand, it can be expressed directly, that is, through its direct recording, as occurs in many films of the period (where it may end up articulated, if not subordinated, to the militant theses) or as occurs in the recordings of the TV correspondents in Córdoba (where they are generally intercut and linked by the commentaries of journalists on location or in the studio). In these cases, even with those limits, the worker or student protagonists of the *Cordobazo* would express themselves in their own voices. On the other hand, those voices can be expressed; as in *Ya es tiempo de violencia*, where a worker's voice speaks at length, with more time and coherence than any TV testimony would have ever allowed. This is a voice that constructs a sustained discourse, articulated with rhetorical inflections that help it to present itself as everyday, spontaneous, and less elaborate than the authoritative voice-over of traditional documentary. However, this voice is made up: not only dubbed but also scripted by the filmmaker from witness testimonies.[23] Yet despite this voice's constructedness, the working-class voice shaped in the documentary is not too different from that of director Juárez, who was himself a union leader and activist.[24]

The testimony of the witness and the voice of the resistance: The case of Julio Troxler

A final form in which the worker's voice has been present in the films is the one visible in the case of Julio Troxler, a survivor of a massacre of 1956. During the 1960s, Troxler became a leader of the Peronist Resistance, participating in three different films of the period, in which he was granted the 'right to speak.' And he achieved this not only through his testimony (direct recording), but also through his acting as a non-professional actor. References to and testimonies about the so-called Peronist Resistance (formed after the fall of Perón's government in September 1955) were present in the work of the majority of filmmakers tied to the Cine Liberación group and others allied with Peronism. In this context, the testimony of Troxler occupies a central place. A Peronist militant, Troxler was one of the few survivors of the shootings of civilians in the José León Suárez dumping grounds (in the province of Buenos Aires) in June 1956. That year, a group of military men loyal to the deposed president Perón attempted an uprising with civil support, which was discovered by the dictatorial government and repressed with executions. His testimony – as a survivor of the events – was incorporated first into *La hora de los hornos* (1968), and later in *Operación masacre* (1972) by Jorge Cedrón, a film inspired by the famous non-fiction book of the same name by Rodolfo Walsh (1957). Troxler was also one of the main figures in the film *Los hijos de Fierro* [Children of Fierro], begun by Solanas in 1972 and finished on the eve of the military coup in 1976.

In *La hora de los hornos*, Troxler's testimony takes place at the actual dumping-grounds. His words come in response to questions by Octavio Getino (a co-director of the film with Solanas). Presented as a 'comrade' ('compañero') at the start of the chapter of the film entitled 'The executions of 16 June 1956,' Troxler speaks while the camera follows him as he walks through the dump. His account is presented as personal experience both as a survivor and a witness to the executions. Troxler, in fact, explains that he considered the massacre predictable after also having experienced personally the Navy's aerial bombardment on Plaza de Mayo – directly opposite the presidential palace – against the government of Perón a year earlier. In addition, he points his finger to those responsible for the violence and refers to his militancy within Peronism, his arrest, and the torture he suffered. His narrative closes with a statement proclaming the heroism of Peronists and the legacy of their saga for the struggles of the Third World. In this sense, his voice shifts from the description of events – his own testimony as a witness – to the interpretation of the events – the voice of the militant or member of the Resistance. The difference between the two figures that Troxler's voice assumes (the *witness* and the *militant*) becomes particularly meaningful when one considers that while his testimony stresses that none of the detainees expected a massacre (since they thought they would be moved to a detention center), it simultaneously insists on the predictability of the event, as if this latter statement derived from the political interpretation of the event in light of other repressive actions taking place at that time.

In *Operación masacre*, Julio Troxler has an even more central role. At the beginning and end of the film his testimony is illustrated with archival newsreel material about the military coup against Perón, the bombings of the civilian population in Plaza de Mayo, the celebrations of the wealthy and the middle classes in the days following the coup, and working-class demonstrations in the years to follow. As with the worker of *Ya es tiempo de violencia*, here it is Troxler who bears the responsibility of signifying the images of the demonstrators running towards the mounted police in the *Cordobazo*. What is more, it is he who defines Peronism as a synonym for the working class, an expression of resistance of the exploited, a hub of the national liberation movement, and a motor of the revolution. However, between this documentary's beginning and end, where Troxler addresses the viewer directly, we see a narrative fiction in which he represents himself. And here too, through his performance in the fictional recreation of the events of 1956, he elucidates his militant activity.

Finally, *Los hijos de Fierro* can be described as a testimonial fiction that blends genres into a filmic poem about national history, in the manner of the canonical text *Martín Fierro* by José Hernández (1872 and 1879), yet transposed to the period of Perón's exile: 1955–1973. Troxler's presence in this film also functions to reference recent history, even if in this case he does not represent himself (in the hybrid testimonial-fictional text) but rather another Peronist militant: Fierro's eldest son, a factory worker who started out as a militant in the first Resistance (after Perón's downfall), and who spent much of his time in prison enduring torture. Between the conspiracy and arrests that this character suffers, *Los hijos de Fierro* constructs an epic figure that accepts persecution as an inherent aspect of the emancipatory ordeal.

In this way, between the testimonial force of an eyewitness account and the epic nature of a militant narrative, Troxler's voice acquires a truth value that, from the intersections between the documentary and the fictional text, takes shape as representation of a collective historical consciousness.

Conclusion

This discussion of examples of Argentina's militant cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, which ventured to shape the voice of a collective subject, enables us to observe that the operations put into play are more complex and dynamic than frequently believed. In fact, the militant filmmakers of this period sought to posit their political theses in the face of the limits that direct cinema posed to political filmmaking. On the one hand, they resorted to applying elements of the direct cinema tradition when this helped to facilitate the emergence of the worker's voice. On the other hand, even if this voice was often articulated by, if not subordinated to, the theses of the filmmakers, it was nevertheless elaborated in its complexity, with its place negotiated in the ensemble of the film's textual authority.

However, whenever these filmmakers represented the worker's voice in their films or promoted its self-representation, they also showed awareness about the difficulties of their project. It is perhaps for this reason that from the very beginning of Argentina's militant cinema with *La hora de los hornos*, the Cine Liberación group propounded the concept of film-act, a category that fostered debates around film screenings and established that more important than the film itself was its capacity to generate discussion and action after its projection. According to this notion, the film-act should let the voice of the people (that is, of the members of the audience) emerge directly, both in the debates as well as in the political action that would provoke the screening of a film in working-class and marginal areas. But beyond this initiative, the awareness of the inherent distance between the worker's voice and its film representation can be traced, as I have done in this essay, in the films themselves. Nevertheless, this is a distance that should not be confused with otherness since cultural and political bonds were often forged between the militant filmmakers and the working-class sectors given voice to in their films.

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Notes

1. On direct cinema, see Barnow (1993) (chapter 5); Nichols (1991) (chapter 2); Allen and Gomery (1985); Saunders (2007); and Ortega and García (2008). Also, consider the use of these concepts in a 1969 interview with the Argentine militant filmmaker Fernando Solanas, see above.

2. Toward the end of 1968, Roland Barthes viewed the students' rebellion in Paris as a 'taking of the word' ('prise de la parole'), a dispute over the meaning of events (Barthes, 1968). Also see the work of Michel De Certeau (1968), written in the heat of protest.
3. One of these was the first Mérida Documentary Film Exhibition held in Venezuela in 1968. The debate in Mérida asked what kind of documentary was appropriate to that particular juncture, from the proposal to move from a phase of testimony of misery to one more agitational, that is, of accusation and deeper analysis. Within that framework, one tendency, emerging shortly before and known as *Brazilian direct cinema*, received 'militant' objections and was revised by its own creators, such as Sergio Muñiz. This director distinguished the use of the direct technique in France, Canada, and the US from that of Brazilian and other Latin American filmmakers. Direct cinema, said Muñiz, was 'filmed investigation' into the problems of underdeveloped societies in order to serve consciousness-raising (Muñiz, 1969).
4. If the phrase 'political cinema' is broadly used to refer to the content of a film (although it has sometimes been understood as a film genre), 'militant cinema' has a more discreet definition. In Argentina, the main political cinema group, *Cine Liberación*, made a distinction between 'Third Cinema' and 'militant cinema.' Third Cinema referred to a cinema of 'cultural decolonization' for the Third World that was defined in opposition to Hollywood (First Cinema) and sought to overcome the limitations attributed to 'auteur cinema' (Second Cinema). Militant cinema, by contrast, was conceived as the most advanced category of Third Cinema and was defined as a direct cinematic intervention intended to generate discussion at a political event, during or after the film projection. Thus, the notion of 'film event,' as a tool to convert the passive cinema spectator into a protagonist of the public screening and a militant actor of the political process, acquired a fundamental role. The principal hypothesis of militant cinema also followed from this notion: on the one hand, the necessary involvement and integration of the cinema group with specific political organizations; on the other, the instrumentalization of cinema in the process of liberation; for a full discussion of militant cinema in Argentina, see Mestman (2011). On the relation between 'militant cinema' and 'direct cinema' in other contexts, such as France, the US, and Latin America, see Maria Luisa Ortega's (2008) introduction to her compilation on direct cinema, in particular, pp. 22–23.
5. After the influential premiere of *La hora de los hornos* at the turbulent Pesaro Festival in Italy in June 1968, almost all these films passed through this highly politicized event. In addition, an important dialogue developed between the Argentine filmmakers and prominent European figures, such as Joris Ivens and Jean-Luc Godard. On the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema movement and its efforts to achieve pan-Latin American unity, see Ana López (1997).
6. On this subject, see the references in note 1.
7. The notion of testimony has been at the centre of ongoing debates in postcolonial and Latin American subaltern studies since the 1980s, particularly in the work of John Beverley, George Yúdice, Hugo Achúgar, George Gugelberger, Elzbieta Sklodwska, Javier Sanjinés, and Margarett Randall. Nevertheless, there are important differences to be noted between the publication of complete literary testimonies and the use of testimonial fragments in Latin American political films during this period. While critical attention given to the use of testimony in 1960s political films is scarce, publications that focus on 1980s testimonial films that thematize political repression and human rights are more frequent (for the Argentine case only, see Aprea, 2012; Feld, 2009; Oberti & Pittaluga, 2006; Sarlo, 2005, among others). Elsewhere, I have discussed the ways in which Latin American films between 1968 and 1972 incorporated elements from well-known titles in 1960s and 1970s testimonial literature (Mestman, 2013). In that article, I highlight a distinction made by John Beverley: 'Testimonio began as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World in the 1960s. But its canonization was tied even more, perhaps, to the military, political, and economic force of counterrevolution in the years after 1973. It was the Real, the voice of the body in pain, of the disappeared, of the losers.' And Beverley adds: 'Testimonio was intimately linked to international solidarity networks . . . but it was also a way of testing the contradictions and limits of revolutionary and reformist projects still structured in part around elite

assumptions about the role of cultural vanguards' (Beverley, 2004, p. 77). In the present article I focus on the latter aspect of Beverley's distinction, namely, the relationship between testimony and film vanguards. Therefore, in so far as the attention is devoted here purely to Argentine films in which mostly urban industrial workers are the ones giving testimony – in cities convulsed by intense processes of industrialization during the late 1960s – the notion 'subaltern' is used here sporadically and only in a general sense. Guha's influential definition describes the basic condition of subordination, 'whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha, 1988; cited in Beverley, 2004, p. 8). A general use of the term 'subaltern' allows me to discuss diverse modes of articulation of the worker's voice on screen, where subordination is simultaneously economic, political and cultural. This article does not seek to mount a theoretical discussion of the subaltern character of the Argentine worker as a historical subject, but to analyse this problematic in terms of a historically situated experience. It also seeks to distinguish, as already stressed, the various modes in which Argentine film vanguards incorporated the voice of the workers into their films.

8. Two cases are of particular importance: a classical New Latin American Cinema documentary, such as *Tire dié* (Birri & Universidad Nacional del Litoral, 1958) incorporates testimonies of Santa Fe's lower class through voice dubbing by actors. The actors repeat the words of the marginal people and the audience hears both with a very short temporal displacement. In the second case, Jorge Prelorán made 'ethno-biographical' documentaries focusing more on singular persons or families than on social groups. During the 1960s, he tried to achieve the most authentic documentation of ordinary lives through the incorporation of common people's testimonies. As even in his well-known film *Hermógenes Cayo* (Prelorán & Fondo Nacional de las Artes and Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 1969), synchronic sound technology wasn't available to him (as indeed it was not for most Latin American filmmakers), Prelorán created the 'técnica subjetiva del relato en off' (subjective technique of the voice-over narration). In the mentioned 1969 film, for example, he organized the narration by following the protagonist's memory and testimony, while substituting his voice with an actor's.
9. With this film emerges the Cine Liberación group, whose founding members – Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino – were to move from the intellectual left to Peronism. In 1971 they filmed a series of interviews with Juan Domingo Perón in his exile in Madrid, later converted into two feature-length documentaries used in the campaign for the ex-President's return to Argentina. Whilst this was happening, in 1973, Getino had a post in the Ente de Calificación Cinematográfico [Film Classification Board] for a few months. With the death of Perón in July 1974, and the increase of repression before the military coup of 1976, the founders of the group and many others would go into exile.
10. The political-ideological perspective of the film mainly combined a historiographical revisionism, which contested the liberal version of Argentine history, with the main issues discussed in the Havana Tricontinental Conference and an uncompromising Fanonian Third-Worldism. Frantz Fanon's influence was remarkable: in every screening of the film, a sign with his motto 'Every spectator is either a coward or a traitor' hung below the screen. In the prologue a torch appears on the black screen and is followed by intermittent shots of street protest and repression scenes that match the increasingly louder percussive rhythm of the sound track and are accompanied by legends and intertitles with quotes from Cesaire, Fanon and Che Guevara, as well as from Argentine national thinkers, such as Scalabrini Ortiz, John William Cooke and Juan José Hernández Arregui, and political leaders such as Perón, Mao and Castro. On Fanon's influences in the film, see Campo (2012).
11. Interview in the Venezuelan journal *Cine al día*, no. 7, March 1969; p. 17.
12. The period between 1955 and 1973 in Argentina was characterized by political instability, with a succession of civil and military governments during that 18 years of continued electoral ban on the majority political force, the Peronist party, and the exile of its leader, Perón. With Perón's downfall in 1955, the workers' movement was reorganized into the 'Peronist Resistance', which realized a broad range of activities, from agitation and union activism to sabotage of production and armed struggle. During the 1960s, this early resistance movement was divided between those who maintained a revolutionary stance and a powerful union bureaucracy. Both were united only due to Perón's leadership. The

latter negotiated with successive military governments and even attempted to replace the leadership of the exiled Perón; see James (1988).
13. 1963–1965 saw a process of discrete occupation of factories, which were qualitatively distinct from previous actions of this type due to a series of features: their mass character, national scope, centralized direction and planning, and common program; see Bisio and Cordone (1989); Bourdé (1978).
14. These expressions are used in *La hora de los hornos* to characterize the experience of factory takeovers.
15. Tucumán in that period was the main province of Argentina's northeast, with a very dense population, an important cultural tradition with a well-known university, and economic development dominated by the sugar industry. In the mid-1960s, the social problems that arose with the closing of the sugar plants, the resulting unemployment and the protests of the population headed by a combative union sector, led to the public visibility of the sugar industry, which turned into one of the most difficult fronts for the military regime established in 1966.
16. This film will henceforth be referred to as *El camino*.
17. The phrase 'culture of poverty' was used for the first time by Lewis in 1959. Some of the texts in which he defines his method and his ideas are the prologue to *The Children of Sánchez* (1967), the essay 'The Culture of Poverty' (Lewis, 1966) and the collection *Anthropological Essays* (Lewis, 1970, 1982). For a study that calls attention to the 'forgetting' of Lewis in cultural studies, see Gruner (2001).
18. *Notas de Cine Liberación*, no. 8, mimeo, circa 1971 (material of the Cine Liberación group).
19. *Notas de Cine Liberación*, no. 8, mimeo, circa 1971 (material of the Cine Liberación group).
20. This phrase alludes to the project inspired by Ernesto Che Guevara in the 1960s.
21. As Mirta Varela observes, when the extraordinary and unexpected events of Córdoba occurred, 'television had an immediate reaction that projected the *Cordobazo* nationally in instantaneous form' (2005, p. 236). Television in Argentina began in 1951, with one state-funded station. Three new private broadcasters (channels 9, 11 and 13) began their operations in Buenos Aires in the early 1960s. During this decade, numerous regional television stations appeared in association with those in Buenos Aires. Thus, by the end of the 1960s, there were three large national television networks connected to channels 9, 11 and 13. The largest one was the Channel 13 network. At the same time, some universities created public television stations, such as University of Córdoba or University of Tucumán. For a discussion of the political economy of television in Argentina during that period, see Mastrini (2001); on the special place occupied by the *Cordobazo* television images in Argentina's television history, see Varela (2005).
22. See Mestman and Peña (2002).
23. This alternative is also found in other films, for example, Pablo Szir's short film on the *Cordobazo*, included in the collective feature-length film *El camino de la liberación* [The Path of Liberation] (1969) by the Realizadores de Mayo [May Directors]. This group, rallying around the events in Córdoba, Rosario and elsewhere, produced ten shorts.
24. Enrique Juárez was a Buenos Aires union militant at Segba (a state electric service corporation) and later became the founder and one of the main leaders of the Juventud Trabajadora Peronista [Peronist Workers Youth], the union tendency linked to the politico-military organization known as *Montoneros*. This organization was the main urban guerrilla of Latin America during that period. Created in 1970 with the abduction and execution of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (one of the figures of the coup de état of 1955 against Perón), Montoneros fought against the 1966–1973 military dictatorship and supported the return of Perón to Argentina in 1973; see Gillespie (1983).

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