

ALGIERS-BUENOS AIRES-MONTRÉAL: THIRD-WORLDIST LINKS IN THE CREATION OF THE LATIN AMERICAN FILMMAKERS COMMITTEE (1974)

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Résumé : À propos du Nouveau cinéma latino-américain, les documents et les enregistrements audiovisuels des *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma* (Montréal, 1974) renseignent sur cette période d'organisation des cinéastes dans cette partie du monde. Jusqu'à maintenant, la plupart des travaux qui se sont penchés sur cet événement historique ont ignoré ou accordé peu d'intérêt à trois aspects clés révélés par les Documents de Montréal, notamment : a) le fait qu'au cours de ces *Rencontres*, les cinéastes latino-américains avaient donné corps à un premier groupe qui fut le prédécesseur immédiat du célèbre Comité des cinéastes latino-américains créé en septembre de la même année (1974) ; b) le fait que les relations politiques entre les figures d'Amérique latine les plus en vue (telles Solanas, Pallero, Achugar, Littin, García Espinosa) étaient minées par de multiples tensions et conflits ; et c) le fait que, dans le but d'organiser et de former un groupe de cinéastes d'Amérique-latine, les tendances tiers-mondistes observées lors des réunions du Comité du cinéma du Tiers-Monde, organisées dans le cadre des rencontres d'Alger (décembre 1973), Buenos Aires (mai 1974) et (dans une certaine mesure) Montréal (juin 1974) avaient pour objectif de créer la Fédération latino-américaine des cinéastes (FELACI) qui fonctionnerait conformément au modèle du FEPACI (Fédération panafricaine des cinéastes), ou qui suivrait son exemple. Le présent article examine ces questions qui ont été largement ignorées dans l'historiographie du cinéma politique dans le monde.

The paper and audiovisual records of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma* held in Montreal in June of 1974 provide insight into many aspects of a particular moment in international political cinema. One of the insights that emerges is the influence of a sort of “cinematic Third Worldism” on the way Latin American filmmakers in particular organized themselves—an influence that can also be seen more broadly within an extensive region of political filmmaking in the First World. Remember that during 1973-1974—the years when, according Fredric Jameson, the “long decade of the sixties” came to an end¹—the Third World was highly visible in international geopolitics, as “Third Worldism” was in the focus of political filmmaking. Two events indicative

of this are significant here: the Third World Filmmakers Meeting in Algiers in December 1973, whose goal was to form a committee (partially a corollary to the Fourth Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries in September of the same year); and the second meeting of that committee, held in May 1974 in Buenos Aires, that is, just a few days before the gathering in Montreal in June.²

When we speak of “cinematic Third Worldism,” we are referring to a sort of political-cultural-cinematic trend that was adopted (with variations) by filmmakers and groups from different countries. In each national case (or even within each group), this trend often coexisted and was articulated with others (like Latin Americanism, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism, Guevarism, Maoism, etc.), whose variations had extended to political cinema around the Third World and whose influence also extended to international political filmmaking. Cinematic Third Worldism was highly emphasized during the Montreal gathering, one of the most representative events of those years due to the quantity and quality of global political cinema groups present at the meeting.

In the years previous, the films and political cinema documents of Latin Americans, Arabs, and Africans had forged an important niche for themselves in the film scene and in Québec politics. This could be seen, for example, in the way the journal *Cinéma Québec* promoted the writing of André Pâquet (and others) on Third Worldist cinemas, which he had encountered at different festivals (Berlin, Carthage, Leipzig, Mannheim, Pesaro, etc.). Several aspects of Third Worldism were emphasized in various issues of the journal as parallel with conditions of local cinema: an explicit outline of what problems they had in common, such as the “colonial” issue.³ In a dossier about African cinemas in Arabic, for example, Tahar Cheriaa (the founder and director of the Carthage Film Festival in 1966, the first dedicated to Arabic and African film) had justified the long-term solidarity and converging interests between Québécois and African cinema, as both had suffered “the same conditions of foreign domination” and were in “the same situation of underdevelopment and economic dependence” (beyond the obvious differences in Québec’s favour, of course).⁴ Just after the Conference, Fernand Dansereau made reference to the “colonial” nature of Québec film,⁵ an interpretation that was adopted to a certain extent by the *Comité d’action cinématographique* (CAC), organizer of the *Rencontres*. Some months later, when many of CAC’s members debated who should control Quebec film (as film institutions and laws related to the industry were being challenged), Pâquet drafted a long document whose very title evoked a deep national problem: “Pour une décolonisation du cinéma québécois.”⁶ Adopting a program similar to that which had been debated a year earlier at the Montreal conference, the paper situated Quebec as one of the so-called “small countries” (like those of northern Europe) and stated that it had to defend its cultural/film production against domination by large international companies in the industry as well as the Canadian government.

From the very invitation to the Montréal conference, the strong influence of Third Worldism on the project is evident. The search for “transitory mechanisms towards a socialization of cinema” described in the program asks whether the Third Cinema alternative is a possible avenue for change, an idea that had already been suggested by Pâquet during the planning stage of the conference.⁷ The first line of text (caption) on the program is a quote from the manifesto “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969) by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, a paragraph connecting the struggle of Third World people with their “equivalents” in the First World, that is, the idea of the *états généraux* of Third Cinema:

The anti-imperialist struggle of the people of the Third World and of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today the axis of the world revolution. Third Cinema, is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of construction a liberated personality with each people as the starting point—in a word, the decolonisation of culture.⁸

In the same vein, a few days after the meeting, the French Third-Worldist critic Guy Hennebelle wrote that in order to understand the significance of the Montreal conference, it was imperative to understand the basics of Solanas and Getino’s theoretical writings on Third Cinema.⁹ Bearing this connection in mind, it is interesting that a few years later, when Hennebelle organized a well-known dossier on the global influence of the manifesto “Towards a Third Cinema” and *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas and Getino, 1968), André Pâquet wrote (in the chapter on Canada) of the affinities between the film and the progressive filmmakers from diverse backgrounds in Québec.¹⁰ Yet at the same time, Pâquet complained about those within the militant circuit who believed that an “ideal” associated with the climate of ’68 could be found in the Argentine film and thus tried in some way to impose this ideal to the detriment of progressive films of Quebec. Pâquet believed that these progressive films in some way reflected the spirit of the Argentine film. The example he gave was Arthur Lamothe’s important movie *Le Mépris n’aura qu’un temps* (1970), which in fact had been unfavourably compared to *The Hour of the Furnaces* in Canada by groups like the *Comité d’information politique* (CIP-Champ Libre) of Yvan Patry and others.¹¹

If one of the objectives of Pâquet and the organizing committee was to create a dynamic in which Third World filmmakers could speak “on equal terms” with those of the core countries,¹² the role of African and Latin American filmmakers during the conference was an impressive success. This can be noted not only in the list of invitees, but in the closing statements, the adopted political resolutions, the chosen panel members, and the dynamics of the final plenary session.

One initial fact to consider in this regard is that the Tunisian Tahar Cheriaa was the one to call on speakers and speak on behalf of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI). Along with Cheriaa, the final plenary panel included Pâquet, Carl Svenstedt (Filmcentrum, Sweden), and Lamine Merbah (Algeria) and Jorge Giannoni (Argentina), both on behalf of the Third World Film Committee created in Algiers. In addition to this strong Third Worldist presence on the final panel, there were more references to Third World film and politics in the approved resolutions, and the debate itself mainly focused on the demands of these peripheral cinemas. In fact, throughout the plenary (which lasted two days, June 7 and 8), the discussion returned several times to a suggestion made at the start by Merbah: the idea of putting together an organization, a committee (similar to the Third World Cinema Committee that he represented) comprised of the progressive filmmakers and groups from Europe and North America in attendance.

The goal of this proposal was first to bring together a global anti-imperialist cinematographic front that could, in principle, be articulated through either Pâquet or the Canadian committee; and on the other hand, in the short term, to move forward on “effective agreements” of cooperation among First World distributor groups and Third World filmmakers. Throughout the plenary session, while the closing statements were read, the discussion returned to this and other issues associated with Third World cinema. The same would occur during the debates that took place after talks and in the workshops.¹³

In the years that followed, other global meetings brought together political filmmakers from different regions across the world, and it is well-known that Third Cinema was the topic of many debates and conferences.¹⁴ Yet never again would there be a gathering of so many important figures and such a variety of forces aiming to challenge the structures of traditional cinema in order to make it more democratic. Nor would cinematographic Third Worldism recover the same force or influence that it had achieved around 1974.

In terms of the so-called New Latin American Cinema, the audiovisual records of the *Rencontres* reveal important insights into this period of filmmaking in the region and the relationships between its groups and filmmakers. The first was a controversy that arose after a talk by Fernando Solanas, Edgardo Pallero, and Humberto Ríos, who spoke together in the name of the *Frente de Liberación del Cine Argentino* (Argentine Film Liberation Front). This broad group had been promoting a bill for a new film law after President Juan Domingo Perón had returned to power in 1973 (and especially since Octavio Getino had been appointed head of the Film Rating Office for three months) and in the first half of 1974. Although the talk focused on the past experiences of the *Cine Liberación*

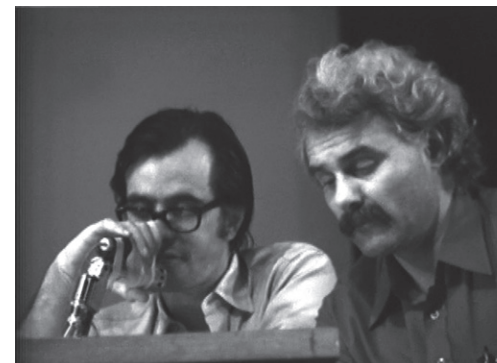


Fig. 1: Walter Achugar (Uruguay) and Edgardo Pallero (Argentina) during the Final Plenary. (Image capture from the video recording of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*. Cinémathèque québécoise.)

group (Solanas) and on a current film project (Pallero and Ríos), the debate quickly turned to a political discussion on the Peronist government and then to the complicated issues facing Latin America. While several of the filmmakers in attendance at the Montreal conference were living in exile (Chileans, Uruguayans, Brazilians, Bolivians), others were trying to develop public film policies under nationalistic/populist or radical regimes (Argentines, Peruvians, Panamanians). Besides the Argentines on the panel, key figures intervened in the discussion, including the Pesaro Film Festival director, Lino Micciché, the Uruguayan Walter Achugar (then living in exile in Argentina), the Chilean filmmaker Miguel Littín (the head of Chile Films during the administration of Salvador Allende), and the Cuban filmmaker (and one of the heads of the ICAIC, Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfica) Julio García Espinosa.

A summary of the discussion is as follows: Solanas talked about a “new period” beginning in the Argentina of 1973 with the return of President Perón to the government, a period of “National Reconstruction” where political cinema—now with intervention from the state—had to “fill the screens” of the film exhibition circuit. In tune with the conference paper delivered by García Espinosa, Solanas proposed the transformation of cinematic genres without destroying them, and he revived the “decolonization of taste” proposal of Third Cinema. Later on, Edgardo Pallero read the proposed law of the Argentinean cinema liberation front for the regulation of the cinematographic market (*Proyecto de Ley del Frente de Liberación del Cine Argentino para la Regulación del Mercado Cinematográfico*). Finally, Humberto Ríos explained the film rating policy during Octavio Getino’s management of the Film Rating Office, where Ríos had worked as his assistant.

Solanas also talked about Perón’s government politics vis-à-vis the Third World and Latin America. This last discussion aroused a strong controversy amongst participants. Lino Micciché emphatically asked him “not to conceal” the contradictions of Peronism, and told him instead to further explain the strong

Fig. 2: Walter Achugar.
(Image capture from the video recording of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*. Cinémathèque québécoise.)



dispute between the right and the left in this political movement. Speaking with prestige as the director of the Mostra del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro (the most important Film Festival of those years for Latin American political cinema, where *The Hour of the Furnaces* had premiered in 1968), Micciché also criticized the arrest of Uruguayan exiles in Argentina, as well as the meeting of Perón with Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet after the military coup of September 1973, which had overthrown the socialist Salvador Allende. Uruguayan Walter Achugar—in a very pointed and reflexive intervention—and an enraged Miguel Littín from Chile also strongly criticized the Peronist government, but Solanas replied firmly to all these accusations.

In the midst of these allegations, Cuban Julio García Espinosa managed to reorient the debate by warning that they were all falling into a “trap.” He suggested participants look for common ground without positioning themselves in favour of or against Peronism (which according to him still warranted support regardless of its contradictions). Instead, he suggested analyzing whether the new cinema law proposed by the Argentineans was “the most advanced possible,” taking into account the political context of the country. One way or another, this intervention reorganized the debate. Achugar (another important leader of the NCL during the 1960s who was very active during the Montréal conference) had previously described Peronism as a complex phenomenon, but in no way a socialist one—or moving in that direction—but on the contrary, as a process moving towards the right. He observed that the Argentinean cinema law project proposed by Solanas and Pallero had no official support—a statement refuted by Solanas—and also mentioned the censorship of Cuban and Chilean films in Buenos Aires during the second meeting of the Third World Cinema Committee (*Reunión del Comité de Cine del Tercer Mundo*), mentioned above. Although Achugar didn’t endorse Micciché’s accusation against Octavio Getino (and even described his three months of management as positive), he reminded panelists that Getino was not in this position anymore, and that it had been taken over by people who had previously enforced military censorship.

Following García Espinosa’s suggestion, Edgardo Pallero asked for a “constructive” (productive) discussion, pressing participants (especially Achugar, with whom he had shared many years of friendship and work in the production and distribution of Latin American cinema around the world) to address the same question raised by García Espinosa: whether the cinema law proposed by the Argentineans was the best possible option at this stage. To this, the Uruguayan replied affirmatively.

Although the political tensions described above would reappear at the end of this debate when Miguel Littín took issue with Solanas’s comment about ultra-left provocations (which according to the Chilean raised doubts about the possibility of ever finding common ground), the final plenary session of the Montréal meeting would find all Latin American participants united in the creation of a common association. And, in spite of the intense confrontations during the debate, Pallero and Achugar gave a joint presentation on the formation of a so-called Latin American Filmmakers Association during the final plenary of the conference.¹⁵

The audiovisual records of these two moments in Latin American film—that of harsh confrontation at first, followed by the proposal to form a regional association—are indicative of two very different climates. In some way, the



Fig. 3: Miguel Littín (front) and Edgardo Pallero (back) of Argentina, during the Final Plenary.
(Image capture from the video recording of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*. Cinémathèque québécoise.)

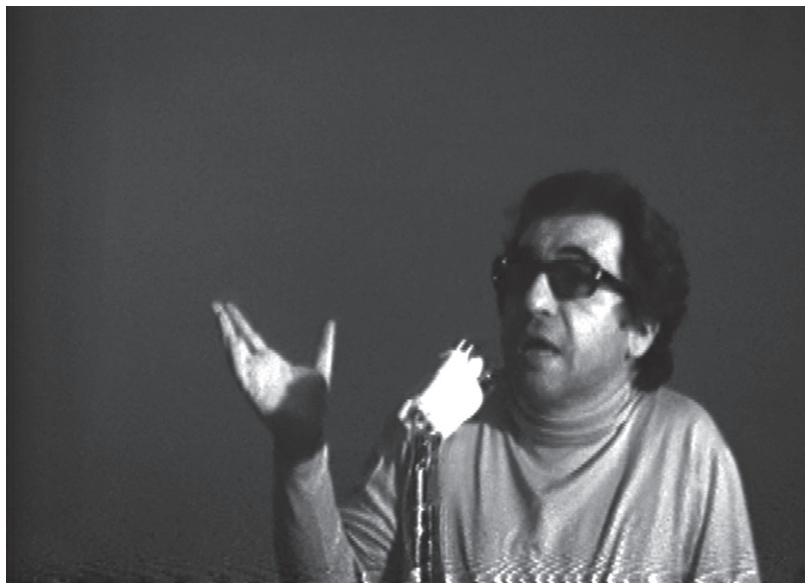


Fig. 4: Lino Micciché. (Image capture from the video recording of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*. Cinémathèque québécoise.)

consensus on Third Worldist film hegemony as expressed during the final plenary meeting seemed to have put the disputes to rest. However, the severity of these arguments left their marks.

In the most common accounts of this moment in Latin American political cinema, three key aspects revealed in the Montreal documents are often ignored or considered to be of little importance: a) the fact that Latin American filmmakers had given shape to an initial group that was the immediate predecessor of the renowned Latin American Filmmakers' Committee created in September that same year in Caracas; b) that the political relations among the most well-known figures were wrought with tensions and conflict; and c) that within the goal of organizing and forming a group of Latin American filmmakers, the Third Worldist trends seen in the gatherings in Algiers, Buenos Aires, and (in some way) Montreal were aimed at forming a Latin American Filmmakers Federation (FELACI) that would operate under or follow the example set by the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI).

These last two aspects became even more important before the Latin American Filmmakers' Committee was founded in Caracas, as seen in a relevant source from the same period that the Montréal Documents help us to interpret: a letter sent by Alfredo Guevara (the legendary director of the Cuban ICAIC) to Edgardo Pallero on August 9, 1974, that is, after Montréal (June) and before

Caracas (September). After expressing his desire to see Edgardo soon to "talk at length, debate, clarify so many things; and confirm one thing I am sure of: that nothing divides us," and pointing out that the Caracas event will be "something akin to the III Viña del Mar Festival," (which had been cancelled after the Chilean coup), Alfredo Guevara finally insists how important Pallero's presence will be in Caracas:

Caracas is an opportunity for Latin American filmmakers and we should not let it pass. The clearest evidence that there is still much to discuss is the division that unexpectedly threatens us from time to time; the misunderstandings; the inhibitions; the exclusions. I trust that Edmundo Aray or Carlos Rebollo has called you. It would be unfair of you to refuse to come. At least you should not do it because of the supposed incompatibility with the meeting planned for Lima in Buenos Aires, and along the same lines established in Algiers. We do not believe in incompatibilities. That is why we were in Algiers and in Buenos Aires. We are debating and we will continue to debate....¹⁶

It appears evident that the misunderstandings and threatening divisions referred to in the letter are, or at least allude to, the harsh confrontations Pallero experienced a few weeks earlier in Montreal (though Guevara does not mention them specifically). Yet the mention of a "supposed incompatibility" (which Guevara claims not to share) with the Algiers-Buenos Aires alliance reveals a focal point of conflict that could be "set off" by the preparations for a meeting in Lima, Peru, in October.

The connection between the Montreal conference and the meeting in Caracas appears evident not only due to the strong presence of Latin Americans in Montreal and the decision to form an association just three months earlier, but because the five members of the Latin American Filmmakers' Committee



Fig. 5: Fernando Pino Solanas. (Image capture from the video recording of the *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma*. Cinémathèque québécoise.)

founded in September in Caracas were the same ones to sign the document on the Latin American Filmmakers Association at the *Rencontres* in Montreal, where three of them were especially active (Miguel Littín, Edgardo Pallero and Walter Achugar).¹⁷ It is equally interesting that the creation of the Filmmakers Committee in some way acknowledges that this was a process begun a year before the Caracas meeting, a process involving many well-known Latin American political filmmakers—perhaps the “principle” filmmakers at this point in time—who discussed Third Worldism, a topic that had become extremely relevant during the Algiers, Buenos Aires and Montreal meetings. Since December 1973 in Algiers, those involved had been pushing to create FELACI (following the name and the example set by the FEPACI), which was planned for October at the Lima meeting during the second meeting of the Third World Film Committee in May of 1974 in Buenos Aires.¹⁸ And although the association proposed in Montreal now had another name (Latin American Filmmakers Association), the name FELACI continued to circulate in the collective imagination of many of those involved, as seen in the statement proposing its creation by the Third World Film Committee in Montreal and several articles in international film journals where the same group is referred to as FELACI. This is the name also used by more than one speaker at the final plenary meeting in Montréal; for example, the meeting coordinator Tahar Cheriaa (director of the Carthage Film Festival) gives the floor to Achugar and Pallero for them to present the association by referring to the “FELACI statement.” This shows that the Third Worldist connection was present in the collective imagination of several of the participants and critics when thinking about the creation of a Latin American association that would be configured later that year at the Latin American Filmmakers’ Committee in Caracas.

The statement made in Caracas returns to the precedents of Latin American participation at the Algiers, Buenos Aires and Montréal meetings, but then relegates them to a secondary place behind the tradition of the Viña del Mar Film Festival (Chile, 1967-1969) and the Merida Latin American Documentary meeting (Venezuela, 1968). Yet, the documents and audiovisual records of the Montreal meeting allow us to understand the importance of the Third Worldist trend that since Algiers (or perhaps even earlier) influenced or at least entered into the dialogues of Latin American filmmakers.

FURTHER READING

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NOTES

1. Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” in *The 60s Without Apology*, eds. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 178-209. (The volume corresponds to a special issue of *Social Text* 3.3-4.1 (1984).
2. Mariano Mestman, “From Algiers to Buenos Aires. The Third World Cinema Committee (1973-1974),” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 1.1 (2002): 40-53.
3. *Cinéma Québec* published two dossiers on African cinemas with notes by Tahar Cheriaa, André Pâquet, Gilles Marsolais, 1.10 (1972), 2.1 (1972): 23-31; a special issue by Pâquet (with collaboration of Guy Hennebelle) on films from Senegal, 2.6-7 (1973); a note about Third World Festivals (“Afrique et Francophone” 3.1 1973: 37-39); and a note by Hennebelle on Palestinian cinema, 3.6-7 (1974). For other notes after the Montreal meeting see Férid Boughedir, 3.9-10 (1974) or Pâquet, 4.2 (1975), among others.
4. *Cinéma Québec* 2.1 (1972): 36.
5. “Cinéma québécois: Un cinéma colonisé,” *Cinéma Québec* 3.9-10 (1974). In 1967, within the framework of the National Film Board, Dansereau had created the *Groupe de recherches sociales*, generally considered the predecessor of the *Société Nouvelle* program and of *Vidéographe*. During the 1974 Montréal Conference, Dansereau coordinated the Workshop (Atelier) titled “People’s Participation.”
6. *Cinéma Québec* 4.4 (1975).

7. See the ideas and discussions of the *Comité d'action cinématographique* during 1973 in the documents: "Project de Manifestation. 3 Févr. 1973," par André Pâquet; "Rencontres Internationales du Québec pour un Nouveau Cinéma. Procès verbal de la réunion du 6 septembre 1973"; "Rencontres Internationales du Québec pour un Nouveau Cinéma. Procès verbal de la réunion du 3 octobre (1973)."
8. *Rencontres internationales pour un nouveau cinéma, Cahier 1. Projets et Résolutions*. Montréal, 1975: 3.
9. *Afrique-Asie* 61: 53.
10. André Pâquet in Guy Hennebelle, "L'influence du Troisième Cinéma dans le monde," *Revue Tiers-Monde* 20.79 (1979). See the text of Pâquet at 627-629.
11. The *Comité d'information politique* group had been doing a vast amount of work (information, screening and discussions) since 1971 for *The Hour of the Furnaces* in Québec: it was the film they promoted the most during their first years as a group, the members would later recall. (See the group's magazine, *Champ Libre*, Montréal 3 [1972]: 97-99; and no. 4 [1973]: 83). During the *Rencontres* at the Workshop entitled "Cinema as tool for social change," Françoise Girault spoke as representative of the *Comité d'information politique-CIP* / *Champ Libre*, but Patry and others members also participated in the debates.
12. Unlike what was perceived as occurring at other festivals where there was a sort of "ghettoization" of the Third World presence (in the "information" sections), as noted in a text by Pâquet with regards to Senegalese cinema shown at the Manheim or Dinard Festival. *Cinéma Québec* 1.10 (1972): 28.
13. During the workshop on distribution and circulation of films, for example, there were severe tensions among Latin American producers and filmmakers accusing certain distributors of not fully reimbursing them for the profits obtained from their films and instead using this money to strengthen their own alternative circuit of film distribution. In addition, the film distributors or film centers of the so-called "small countries" (like the Filmcentrum, from Sweden) reproached the stronger distributors (like the French MK2, founded by Marin Karmitz) of "brokering" the circulation of Third World films in the first world. Other discussions during the workshops or at the debates after the main conferences also focused in Third World cinema questions.
14. See Michael Chanan, "The Changing Geography of Third Cinema," *Screen* 38.4 (1997): 372-88.
15. See the objectives, resolution and signatories in the document of the *Rencontres* included in this volume.
16. Alfredo Guevara, *¿Y si fuera una huella? Epistolario* (Madrid: Ediciones Autor, 2008), 305-306.
17. The other two members of the committee after the Caracas meeting are the Venezuelan Carlos Rebolledo and the Cuban Manuel Pérez, who did not attend Montréal but was an active participant at the Algiers and Buenos Aires meetings.
18. The choice of Lima, promoted by Jorge Giannoni among others, might have to do with the fact that Peruvian filmmaker Federico García was at the Buenos Aires meeting. At that time, García was the head of the Film Department at SINAMOS, under the nationalist government of General Velasco Alvarado. The fact that this meeting never took place may have to do with the fact that 1974 marked the start of the administration's debacle (or at least problems).