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BETWEEN POLITICAL FILM AND MILITANT VIDEO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE *RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES POUR UN NOUVEAU CINÉMA*, MONTREAL, 1974

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ABSTRACT

Montreal, June 2–8, 1974: Over 200 representatives of political cinema from 25 countries gathered at the *Rencontres Internationales pour un Nouveau Cinéma*. Among the participants were militant filmmakers, members of 1968 film groups, producers, distributors, film critics, and historians, as well as film institute delegates from Europe, Latin America, Africa, and North America. Even though this was one of the most important worldwide events in the field of political cinema at the time, it has been largely overlooked by film historians. Between 2012 and 2013, Argentinian researcher Mariano Mestman located and digitalised numerous video recordings of the presentations and debates that took place at the *Rencontres*, which until now had remained largely unknown. In this article, the author analyses the video record of one of the conference's key political and theoretical debates, which concerned the relationship between audio-visual technology and social change. Given the markedly transitional character of the social use of media technologies during that period—from political film to militant video—and the diverse backgrounds of the participants, the discussion of experiences of activist media moved in multiple directions. Among these, the article highlights the debates around the crucial case of Canada's National Film Board's Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle documentary film and video project. The article's analysis of the discussions demonstrates that in spite of the diversity of their experiences and backgrounds, Canadian, European, and Third World participants were all looking for an alternative international political cinema greatly influenced by the ideas contained in Third Cinema.

Keywords: National Film Board (NFB); Challenge for Change; audio-visual technology; social change; political film; militant video; Third Cinema; 1960s



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The use of audio-visual media as a political tool has been expanding around the world since the end of the 1960s, when filmmakers promoted transnational exchanges in political cinema and the use of film and video to achieve social and political goals. During this period of political transition, technology was also changing, as the use of lighter cameras became widespread and video began to emerge among filmmaking groups in the so-called developed countries. The use of these technologies for reformist or revolutionary projects, coordinated between filmmakers and local communities or “the people”, yielded dense interventions and debates on media and social change during the *Rencontres Internationales pour un Nouveau Cinéma* (International Gathering for a New Cinema).¹ Held in Montreal in June 1974, the *Rencontres* was organised by André Pâquet and Quebec’s Comité d’Action Cinématographique (Committee for Cinematographic Action). With some 200 participants from 25 countries, this international gathering can be recognised as the most important political cinema event of the 1960s and 1970s to consider the convergence between political filmmakers from the First and Third World in view of an alternative political cinema.²

Elsewhere I have written about the ways in which the discussions at the *Rencontres* reveal not only the intensity of the meeting but also the strong presence of third-worldist cinema (Mestman 2014; Mestman and Salaskina 2015). In this article, I will focus, firstly, on the discussions by the North American and European audio-visual groups at the Montreal meeting regarding the political uses of cinema as well as the transition from political film to militant video, and, secondly, on some of the ties to Third World filmmakers and their experiences.

I

The *Rencontres* revealed the strong connection between world political cinema and the cinemas of the regions then identified as the Third World. “New Cinema”—a term that features in the event’s name—functioned as an umbrella coinage for diverse cinematic renovations and ruptures spreading across the world throughout the 1960s. At the Montreal meeting, participants concurred that the primary goal of cinema was to promote decolonisation, seeking its correlate in a new kind of national cinema that

1 Hereafter “the *Rencontres*”.

2 I located 48 video tapes of 30 minutes each containing records of the *Rencontres* at the Cinémathèque Québécoise (a film conservatory in Montreal) in 2011. The transfer to digital was done between 2012 and 2013 and it was financed by the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), Argentina, as part of the research project “Historical Inflections in the Images of Masses: Issues on Visual Representations and Archives” (directed by the author). The digital material contains video recordings of talks, workshops, and discussions at the *Rencontres* and is now available at the Cinémathèque Québécoise and the Audio-visual Archive of the Instituto Gino Germani (University of Buenos Aires)—see Mestman (2014); Mestman and Salaskina (2015). These video tapes constitute the sources for all references and quotes from talks discussed in this article. Translations from French and Spanish are by Diego Guerra and the author.

aimed to democratise film industries and institutional structures, a goal consistent with the concept of Third Cinema. Perhaps the gathering's boldest and most ambitious goal was to forge or strengthen ties among politically committed cinemas around the world in the wake of the 1968 protests in France and other European countries as well as the emergence of third-worldist filmmaking. The idea of "The Estates General of Third Cinema" (which combined the experience of *Les états généraux du cinéma français* of 1968 with the Third Cinema project) was adopted by the conference's participants and incorporated into its documents.³

Yet, given that technologies and media were undergoing a transition and that the participants hailed from diverse national and political backgrounds, the experiences discussed in Montreal took different directions. First, I will analyse the discussions surrounding the intense Canadian experiences and film and video practices of those years. Participants from the host country—particularly critics, independent filmmakers, representatives of government-sponsored film projects, and people working in social media and oppositional cinema across Quebec—naturally outnumbered those of any other nation. The wide spectrum of attendees shows that although certain government officials were present at the conference, it was designed as an "autonomous" gathering, open to independent entities, radical groups, and government institutions alike, right from the beginning.

One of those institutions was Canada's National Film Board (NFB), particularly the programme Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle (ChfCh/SN).⁴ Started in 1967 as part of the Canadian government's broader policy against poverty and social inequality, this programme's purpose was to use film and video to foster awareness and mobilise public opinion about the needs and rights of the underprivileged, while also involving communities in development and social justice efforts and in the filmmaking process. By the end of the 1970s, when the programme was discontinued, it had produced over 250 recordings, with regional distribution centres and a newsletter that permitted exchange and reflection.⁵ Systematic work was done to evaluate the programme's impact on communities and many progressive filmmakers and social motivators (*animateurs sociales*) aligned with the Left got involved. One of the first projects sponsored by the programme, Fogo Island, yielded nearly thirty documentaries over the course of three years. In this pioneering use of documentary film for community development, the community's economic and social problems were presented and the island dwellers were encouraged to discuss them (Wiesner 1992). Some of the *Rencontres* debates were in fact focused on this experience.

3 Present at the *Rencontres* were European and North American filmmakers, producers, distributors, and 1968 film groups; members of the Third World Cinema Committee of 1973; Latin American filmmakers and new African cinema representatives; film critics and historians; authorities from national film institutes; and the conference's Canadian organisers.

4 ChfCh refers to the English-language section and SN to the French-language section.

5 On the ChfCh/SN programme, see Waugh, Baker, and Winton (2010).

The question of diverse types of community intervention—educational, cultural, political—through film and video was addressed during the *Rencontres* at a workshop entitled “Social Intervention through Film”. The workshop’s debate mainly focused on the issue of censorship by the NFB, although it also touched on the scope and limitations of the ChfCh/SN programme. Jean Marc Garand, who was there as an SN representative, was challenged on many issues, not regarding the programme—which was, on the whole, deemed positive even by its critics—but about the NFB’s actions against certain political filmmakers from Quebec, sparking accusations of censorship. Gilles Groulx, a key political filmmaker and one of the conference’s organisers (who had himself experienced censorship), asked Garand how the ChfCh/SN programme managed to avoid the ever-increasing sanctions and censorship that the NFB, which oversaw the programme, imposed on any politicised initiative. Françoise Girault, who represented the Comité d’Information Politique (Committee for Political Information) (CIP/Champ Libre), a group that had undertaken a vast amount of political work, including screenings, debates, and dissemination of information about liberation movements, took an even more radical stance against Garand. Founded in 1971, the CIP operated in Quebec and had promoted the Argentine third-worldist film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (dir. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968), among others. Girault characterised the policy of the NFB and its programmes as part of a strategy of “depoliticisation” characteristic of the “cultural apparatuses of advanced capitalist society”. According to Girault, this policy was “highly effective” for the establishment in so far as it kept people believing in their ability to express themselves or improve their lot without ever articulating policies that would allow them to do so.

During the same workshop, the speech by Carl Svenstedt from Stockholm’s Film Centrum⁶ centred on the contradictory nature of film and video projects that encouraged people and communities to discuss their problems and identify solutions but did not effectively create the conditions to implement these solutions. According to Svenstedt, there was a myth involved in the notion of information as power: having information about one’s own problems—or the media to discuss them—was not enough. For him, having the political power to act on them was key. In this, Svenstedt was referring to the US film *Attica* (dir. Cinda Firestone, 1974) about repression and rebellion inside a US prison of the same name. The film had been screened at the *Rencontres* the previous evening and the US group Third World Newsreel had focused on it during its presentation at a Grassroots Participation workshop. Svenstedt compared the experience of this group to his own work in Swedish prisons,⁷ inspired by his trip to Canada five years earlier when he had seen SN’s work, especially the Fogo Island pilot project. After conducting interviews in 1969 and 1970, Svenstedt had taken issue with this

6 Svenstedt played an important role during the conference, where, as one of the five members of the final plenary panel, he spoke in the name of the so-called small countries.

7 *The Prison Suite*, 1971/1972.

project, believing it focused too much on the local without addressing structural issues or actually empowering the island dwellers (Svenstedt 1970).

In a recent article about the Canadian groups participating at the *Rencontres*, Vincent Bouchard and Marion Froger (2015) discussed the diverse media programmes and the rift among filmmakers associated with Canada's NFB. On the one hand, they point out, Fernand Dansereau and other SN and ChfCh programme directors involved people in the creation of audio-visual work, fostering community use of film and video in order to garner new political understandings of their social condition and procure new ways of dealing with it (an issue I will return to later). On the other hand, Bouchard and Froger continue, filmmakers such as Gilles Groulx promoted a Marxist, militant national cinema that should foster the desire to change the course of the history of Quebec. While the NFB programme directors were focused more on individual groups or communities than on unifying the various groups they worked with, in the absence of a clearly defined profile of class or nation, Groulx and others like him worked to find a common identity in order to construct a liberated national cinema (Bouchard and Froger 2015, 21–22).

By the end of the 1960s, the search for a common national political cinema could be seen especially among Quebec's filmmakers, sometimes in connection with third-worldist films. Accordingly, national film and media projects were an important focus of the discussions at the *Rencontres*. The few Latin American countries that by 1974 had nationalist or socialist governments, as well as recently independent African countries, such as Algeria, promoted national policies on social communication and culture. In fact, some of these countries had already started to nationalise their audio-visual industries either in part or entirely. In addition, in certain First World countries, the idea of partial or total control of film industries by the government, public institutions, or film workers was high on the agenda of political film groups.⁸

In this context, the NFB's public audio-visual policies became an interesting topic of discussion at the *Rencontres*. During the debate, Simon Hartog recalled a movement in England to instate a project similar to ChfCh. At that time, Hartog was working on a proposal to nationalise the British film industry in conjunction with worker unions (Chanan 2015, 102–5). However, he too grilled Jean Marc Garand about the NFB's censorship of leftist filmmakers. As a response, Garand turned to the topic of the new technology of video: "Video is one way of getting people seriously involved without any censorship," said Garand. And he added: "The work on videotape starts with the ONF [Office National du Film; or National Film Board] and a community committee that decides how to get the locals to participate through the medium. From there, we work

8 A year after the gathering in Montreal, the idea of decolonising the film industry had already spread. The Canadian group that organised the *Rencontres* demanded a new cinema law (*loi-cadre*) with the Association des réalisateurs de film au Québec (Quebec Filmmakers Association) (ARFQ). After a sit-in at the Bureau de Surveillance du Cinéma (the censorship bureau in Quebec) in November 1974, a new cinema law was enacted the following year.

on the principle of zero intervention in the content, giving them full responsibility for what they want to include. And they have the video copyrights; the ONF programmes do not hold any copyrights on these materials.”

II

Beyond the question of censorship, it is interesting to note that Bouchard and Froger (2015, 22) make a stimulating suggestion regarding the emphasis that NFB social motivators placed on grassroots groups and communities. Instead of focusing on the film collectives hailed by political cinema or adopting the reformist perspectives that political filmmakers disdained, they suggest that the focus on groups and communities can be attributed to the minor technical revolution of the mid-1960s that took place in Japan and the USA with the Portapak, the first portable video camera, which became available at the NFB by the end of that decade. In this regard, Peter Wiesner (1992, 80) suggests that “with the advent of video technology, communities were able to assume technical control, as was demonstrated in numerous community video projects. The shift from film to video made it possible to eliminate the technical services of the filmmaker-cum-artist by equipping and training communities to produce their own videos. So when Hénaut and others at the NFB introduced video to communities, the overriding goal was to empower them.”⁹ While I’d like to avoid *a priori* technological determinisms, because it is apt to assume that the decision to “enable a voice” or facilitate community participation in filmmaking always depends on objective conditions and political decisions, it is evident that this period was a momentous historical phase where new visual and sound technologies played an important role in media projects of social intervention.

Furthermore, during the *Rencontres*, both public institutions and independent filmmakers brought up the task of social motivation (*animation sociale*). This notion allows the exploration of the connection between film/video and the people; the role of the auteur; and the activist’s work in communities or at the grassroots level. As noted by Zoe Druick (2010, 340), in the 1960s Quebec “[led] the way in the field of *animation sociale*.” Unlike social workers or “social welfare officials”, social motivators were “social organizers who attempted to bring people to an awareness of the issues that affect them and the things they can do about their situation” (Druick 2010, 340). As facilitators of community participation, motivators had an important role to play in programmes such as ChfCh/SN, according to Druick.

In considering the notion of social motivation during his address at the *Rencontres*, Fernand Dansereau was specifically referring to the connection between the auteur (the filmmaker/video maker), the community, and the people’s participation in the production of the films. He spoke from his own experience, which constituted a point

9 On the early video work of Dorothy Hénaut with the St. Jacques Citizens Committee in opposition to mass media, see Hénaut and Klein (1969); Rusted (2010).

of reference in the recent history of intervention documentary film in Canada. In 1967, in the framework of the NFB, Dansereau created the Groupe de Recherches Sociales (Social Research Group), generally considered the predecessor of the Société Nouvelle and of Vidéographe (a group I will return to at the end of this article). Scott MacKenzie (1996) discusses Dansereau's thoughts on the control of the audio-visual medium by filmmakers and types of community intervention during the transition between his social films *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) and *Saint-Jérôme* (1968). To some extent, MacKenzie (1996) argues, Dansereau's transition also marked his passage from "auteur/director" to "facilitator" of participation among the population involved. It was no longer about merely obtaining the authorisation of the people filmed in order to use the material (as required by Canadian law), but about granting them the right to participate in the process of making the film right through to the final cut, and letting them censor or remove their images if they so desired.

Although Dansereau made no explicit reference to these films, his talk at the *Rencontres* was clearly based on them and other films and videos he had made. He insisted on the necessity of giving "true power" to the people at production level, even if this meant forfeiting the filmmaker's control and authorship (aspects which Dansereau vociferously rejected). Yet he also questioned whether these participatory initiatives were truly capable of generating interactivity. He referred to cases in which community members were given handheld cameras to express themselves; although he acknowledged a certain creativity in their work, he also noted "conflicts of ambition" and films that were merely "copies of [hegemonic] models". In this regard, he proposed that the professional's presence was of the essence to "truly set the [native] voice free" in the face of sophisticated devices such as cinema and television and the technological problems they entailed—problems that in many cases Dansereau himself had been unable to resolve. Although he had successfully shared the work of scriptwriting, shooting, and producing a film with the community, he claimed it had been much harder to share the editing work with them.¹⁰

III

Speakers from countries other than Canada also made reference to many of the issues associated with the Canadian experience during the *Rencontres*. Several key figures from French post-1968 political cinema, for example, participated in the conference's

10 Dansereau had also attempted to generate more interactivity by creating 26 "satellite films" with material taken from the main feature-length film's original audio-visual material. These were utilised to interact with spectators, delving deeper into the problems addressed in the main film. Dansereau stated: "During the discussion following the screening of the main film, for instance, the animator, according to the questions that are asked, can refer to one of the satellite films and in this way complement the first perception of reality that the main film had offered" (1968, 37). On Dansereau, see MacKenzie (1996, 325–6). On the Groupe de Recherches Sociales and the francophone experience, see Froger (2010).

workshops and discussions (Del Valle Dávila 2015), linking film and video experiences and discussing the use of both tools with working-class and political activists. French Communist Party member and film critic Jean Patrick Lebel, as representative of a militant film collective, led a talk and actively debated, coming up against Italian Marxist film critic Guido Aristarco. The film critic Guy Hennebelle, undoubtedly the most active third-worldist film promoter in France, was also in attendance at the conference, along with militant filmmakers Serge Le Péron (Cinélutte) and Marin Karmitz. The latter discussed his acclaimed films *Camarades* (1970) and *Coup par Coup* (1972), as well as his experience with political film at his new film distributor, Mk2, and the circuit of theatres it owned. Three representatives from militant film collectives, namely Sylvie Jezequel from CREPAC/SCOPCOLOR,¹¹ Inger Servolin from Slon/Iskra, and the aforementioned Lebel from Unicité,¹² were the main participants in a debate concerning the confluence of filmmakers with workers and local communities. Their discussions brought up several of the issues pointed out by Dansereau, although the French representatives were more focused on the struggle of the workers and the lower classes since 1968 than on working with communities.¹³

Chris Marker and Mario Marret (Slon/Iskra group) captured the then well-known strike at the Rhodiaceta textile factory in Besançon in *À bientôt, j'espère* (1967). However, workers who saw the film reported a certain romanticism in the depiction of the strike and the filmmakers' ignorance of many aspects of the workers' daily lives and struggles. In response, Marker asked them to take the cameras and film both their experience as labourers and their struggle. For a year, he accompanied them in this work, which resulted in the film *Classe de lutte* (Medvedkin Group, 1969) about a radicalised worker at the Yema watch factory in Besançon. These two films are indicative of the shift from "a militant film about workers" to "a militant worker film", to quote Bernard Benoliel (cited in Layerle 2007, 151–4). During the *Rencontres*, another important member of the Slon group, Inger Servolin, shared the story of her group's initiation through the production of the collective film *Loin du Vietnam* (1967) as well as films made by workers with the assistance of the aforementioned Medvedkin Group, such as *Classe de lutte* (1969) in Besançon, and *3/4 de la vie* (1971) and *Weekend à Sochaux* (1972) in Sochaux. Servolin also spoke about a counter-information newsreel consisting of three short films, entitled *Nouvelle société*, made by the Besançon workers, before leading the discussion into the new filmmaking formulas being explored by the Sochaux Group, which had detected limitations in the traditions of direct cinema and film reportage. Instead, the film group had sought to incorporate fiction, dramatisations, and satire.

11 Centre de Recherche pour l'Éducation Permanente et l'Action Culturelle and Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production.

12 Unité Cinéma/Télévision/Audio-visuel was founded in 1971 with support from the French Communist Party. It has its origins in the Dynadia group, founded in 1968.

13 See Mestman (2014, 158–72 and 189–96).

Finally, Servolin argued, the experiences of the two Medvedkin groups could be seen as an alternative formal/linguistic experience from that of trained or auteur filmmakers.

CREPAC and Unicité had brought together workers and social movements for collaborations, even though their politics were not as radical as Slon's and they did not directly hand cameras over to the workers.¹⁴ Rather, these groups encouraged teams of directors and technicians to make films based on the demands of unions, political parties, or communities. CREPAC was created by journalists and technicians who had been dismissed from ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française)¹⁵ or who had left on their own after the events of May 1968, particularly Roger Louis. The objective of the new centre, according to Sylvie Jezequel's account of it during the *Rencontres*, was to collaborate with three sectors—unions, the group for secular public education, and the movement for producer and consumer cooperatives—on the use of audio-visual media. According to Jezequel, together these three collectives had thousands of private screening rooms, most with 16 mm equipment, at schools, youth shelters, neighbourhood associations, city halls, business offices, union premises, and other locations, and attracted a highly diverse public. In the case of Unicité, Lebel explained that his objective was to make films to “serve” working-class organisations, particularly films commissioned by the Central Workers' Union and the French Communist Party. Lebel insisted that Unicité had political ties to these organisations and that film collaborations, beyond the production house's technical support, focused on the two-way critical exchange within the creative process.

Jezequel and Lebel explained that between 1968 and 1974, their respective groups went from working purely with film to using diverse media, including video, slides, records, audio cassettes, and print, often more adequate options for the political work of the organisations with which they collaborated. Lebel explained that Unicité's work usually commenced with the demand expressed by these groups and the initial definition of the objectives and target audience of the audio-visual materials in order to later determine their form, language, and content. According to Lebel, what mattered was not so much the film itself but that its screening was an excuse for subsequent political action.

Jezequel and Lebel also addressed the crucial topics of authorship, as already mentioned with regards to Dansereau, Servolin, and others, and the incorporation of unions, political parties, and communities into the filmmaking process. Jezequel spoke of how the almighty auteur had given way to a multifaceted figure who not only makes the film but also brings in a copy, presents it, screens it, and leads the post-screening debate. Both Jezequel and Lebel made explicit reference to the importance of editing, which had often limited community involvement, as Dansereau had also noted. Jezequel

14 Radical groups such as Slon viewed the denomination “grassroots” as limited to radical workers and militants, a politically more “advanced” people (as described by Girault of CIP, Quebec), and therefore excluded unions and parties (as argued by Servolin).

15 The state-owned organisation for French public radio and television from 1964 to 1974.

explained that for CREPAC, the people's involvement included not only the choice of topic, creative approach, or locations, but also a joint discussion on the montage/editing, based on a pre-edit done by CREPAC's team. Lebel also claimed that no one was chosen for the editing phase until after Unicité and the organisation that had commissioned the audio-visual had jointly defined what type of film they would make.

Throughout the discussions at the *Rencontres*, we can therefore identify the persistence of a critical interest in the concept of film authorship and the extent of a protest movement's involvement in making a film. Participants in the debates were clearly interested in whether the audio-visual producers were simply providing a technical or professional service or whether their involvement with grassroots or workers' organisations turned political at some point during the process: from early discussions about goals to decisions regarding the content of the films and the use of the equipment by the workers themselves. In their screenings and interventions, the film groups shifted between pedagogy, the promotion of debates, agitation, and the encouragement of film-acts or film-events. The concept of film-act or film-event involved turning film screenings into political occurrences, as proposed by Argentina's group Cine Liberación with the film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (dir. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Argentina, 1968) and by other third-worldist filmmakers.

Both Jezequel and Lebel noted at the *Rencontres* the expanding use of video in their respective groups.¹⁶ Lebel discussed Unicité's rapid integration of this new technology for the political work of the Communist Party when organising grassroots assemblies at unions or in regions. "We have tried to use video as part of this motivational work, to make it as effective as possible," said Lebel. As an example, he cited his own week-long experience in a French city, where he used a video camera to record testimonies at a market, at schools, and outside factories. Later, he would return with an initial edited version of the material to discuss it with the community, rallying and debating with the people originally interviewed, for example factory workers. Lebel elaborated: "This isn't about just revising what we had filmed but also incorporating material filmed elsewhere that provides additional details or reworks the issue. Later, the whole thing is edited and the film is screened for a political debate organised by the unions themselves." In turn, Jezequel explained that CREPAC intended to equip the offices of its affiliates with Super 8 film equipment and, preferably, video cassettes, since such equipment "simplified screenings" by allowing material to be shown in more locations. In this regard, she said that CREPAC chose non-professional half-inch video in order to shoot "mobile productions in vehicles that can be made available to anyone." As an example, she cited a well-known worker conflict with the watchmaker Lip in 1973, when the worker leader Charles Piaget called on CREPAC to make a film about the incident. In Jezequel's recollection: "We sent a motivator with video equipment for the workers to use and a series of documentaries were shot. This allowed the Lip workers to send tapes (audio cassettes) to other factories to show what was really happening there."

16 Within Slon there was the video group Slon Vidéo, started by Anne Papillault and Jean François Dars with a camera given to this organisation by J. L. Godard.

In other words, the workers used video and audio cassettes as counter-information tools, said Jezequel, alluding to the process of diversification of media mentioned above.¹⁷

A few days after the *Rencontres*, Sylvie Jezequel wrote to the organisers to acknowledge their efforts but also to note certain critical issues, such as the “notable differences” between the participating groups, which, according to her, could lead to mutual “incomprehension” (Jezequel 1974). Jezequel identified at least “two distinct trends” associated with content, financing, dissemination, and objectives: that of groups from Latin America versus that of groups from the First World. Whereas the Latin American groups had to deal with repression and growing fascism in their home countries, according to Jezequel, First World groups such as CREPAC or those from Quebec interacted with “more open” societies, although these had their own repressive aspects. In the First World, she argued, the main problem had to do, firstly, with “making information into an instrument of knowledge, a way to understand the world”, and, secondly, with working to transform it (Jezequel 1974).

Although the differences that Jezequel noted are political and also logistical—affecting access to audio-visual technology in the unique context of the mid-1970s—numerous political film collaborations still occurred between the First and Third World during those years. Equally important was the fact that the groups gathered in Montreal had seen that others shared their quest. Transnational cultural and political links of the period that started around 1968 and lasted into the 1970s thus sparked a common hope that these tools could facilitate intervention by the people or the community in film production. In fact, some of the expectations surrounding the use of video in the early 1970s were similar to those tied to the newly developed portable film equipment of the 1960s.¹⁸

17 The 1973 Lip strike received a great amount of attention by audio-visual activists in France because of its scope and the workers’ radicalisation. Almost all the groups mentioned here (as well as others) made films about the strike, generally on 16 mm. Many were financed by the workers themselves and their production was overseen by worker leaders such as Charles Piaget. Among the works on video, the group Vidéo Out—founded by Carole and Paul Roussopoulos and Hélène Chatelain, and one of the first French groups of its kind—made the three-part series *Chronique des Lip* in 1973. Meanwhile, CREPAC produced a 50-minute film on 16 mm entitled *Puisqu’on vous dit que c’est possible* (1973), for which group members Roger Louis and Sylvie Jezequel are listed among the participants/directors, as is Chris Marker, whom CREPAC entrusted with the final montage. In addition, Carole and Paul Roussopoulos are also listed as participants in the reconstructed credits of a 2003 version of this film. I am indebted to Sébastien Layerle for giving me a copy of this film and plenty of references.

18 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” (2003, 53–54). It must be noted, however, that although technological developments (lighter and inexpensive 16 mm equipment, light-weight cameras, and synchronised sound) played a decisive role in numerous social or political films, in Latin America such equipment was rarely available during the 1960s, and neither was video during the first half of the 1970s. In any case, the impact of the technique of recording people speaking spontaneously in their own voices could no longer be ignored. In this context, despite technological limitations, the voices of subaltern, working-class, or common people erupted onto the screen (see also Ortega and García 2008).

In an essay on people's participation in militant film and video between 1968 and 1975, Guy Gauthier (2004, 62) noted specific methods or searches for transformation in the "cinematic apparatus" among various international groups. It is no coincidence that, to provide examples of these common quests, Gauthier cites three of the key experiences that came together at the *Rencontres*, all of which have been mentioned above: the Fogo Island project, created by Colin Low at the NFB; the proposal of the film-act by Fernando Solanas and Cine Liberación; and the experiences of Chris Marker's Slon/Iskra group with the films *À bientôt, j'espère* and *Classe de lutte*. Although their objectives ranged from reform to revolution and their degree of involvement with communities or people varied in the making of their films, Gauthier (2004) claims that they all shared the idea of shaking the spectator out of a passive position. All of them hoped to move the spectator away from a fascination or sense of impotence before the film "spectacle" and get him/her involved, first by giving a voice to the people and later by getting them directly involved in the filmmaking process. And the ultimate goal was to use film as a medium to shift into action. In the same vein, Goffredo Fofi, a key figure of the Italian cinema protests of 1968, also linked the film-act proposal to the theoretical thinking on video and free radio (*radio libere*) of the 1970s and 1980s in Italy (Fofi 1985, 215).

IV

The 1974 international film gathering in Montreal may thus be seen as the last attempt in the "long sixties" (Jameson 1984) of bringing together political film groups from the First and Third World to share their experiences and seek out ways to forge a place for themselves within the geopolitics of world cinema. Participants had questioned the notion of auteur—which corresponded to the *nouvelles vagues* (new wave filmmakers) of the 1960s—replacing it with the collective authorship proclaimed by militant film groups around the world. In fact, they were interested in finding ways to directly incorporate communities into audio-visual production, which was partly facilitated by access to lighter, handheld equipment, especially video cameras in First World countries.¹⁹

To conclude, I will offer a few observations about the relationship between film and early militant video in those years, which has recently become a topic of academic study.²⁰ The *Rencontres* was part of a larger international network of leftist cinema culture that had taken shape at several film festivals during that period. One of the most

19 In other regions, such as Latin America, video arrived slightly later and its use as a political tool did not expand until the 1980s, a decade more associated with transitions to democracy in the Southern Cone. In Chile, where the transition only started with the end of the dictatorship in 1990, video, together with popular music, became during the 1980s one of the most important tools and arenas for anti-dictatorial contestation (see Margulis 2014; Traverso and Liñero 2014).

20 In terms of France, see the significant activities carried out in recent years by the research group Vidéo des premiers temps (Alain Carou, Hélène Fleckinger, and Sébastien Layerle, among others) and its project "Cinéma/vidéo, art et politique en France depuis 1968. Dispositifs, archives, numérique" (<http://earlyvideo.hypotheses.org/>).

important was Italy's Pesaro Film Festival (Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro), which had welcomed filmmakers and political cinema groups from different countries. In fact, the 1974 Montreal gathering had close ties to Pesaro's 1973 edition,²¹ which included a major exhibition of Latin American political films and a special conference entitled *L'altro video* (The Other Video), with around twenty First World video groups, mostly Italians and other Europeans, in attendance. However, although film and video groups were present at the Pesaro festival, this did not lead to a common discussion of militant practices in video and film, in spite of the fact that many of the European film and video groups, as I have shown here, utilised both formats for their productions.²² Incidentally, militant video also expanded in Italy at the beginning of the 1970s (Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, 1973, 53–114; Uva 2015, 89–168).

Although none of the Italian video groups attended the *Rencontres*, one of the groups that were at Pesaro '73 was the Canadian group Vidéographe, created in 1971 by Robert Forget, an NFB producer who had founded the Groupe de Recherches Sociales with Dansereau (among others) and who had brought the first Portapak to Canada from New York in the late 1960s (MacKenzie 2010). A few days before Pesaro '73, the Comité d'Action Cinématographique of Quebec (the group that made the *Rencontres* possible) discussed their proposed Montreal film gathering and the persons and institutions to be invited.²³ André Pâquet spoke there about the importance of incorporating national officials or independent cultural groups or institutions, including people from the NFB's ChfCh/SN programmes and from the independent group Vidéographe. However, he said that when he asked Robert Forget to get involved in organising the event, Forget offered to shoot the meeting on video (and Vidéographe ultimately did so), but was reticent to participate in the organising committee with Pâquet's cinematic group, as Forget believed that cinema and video were to some degree incompatible.

One of the final proposals of the Montreal meeting involved grouping First World militant cinema within an umbrella organisation. Their idea was to follow the examples of Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI, or the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers) (founded in 1969) and the Comité de Cineastas de América Latina (Committee of Latin American Filmmakers), which Latin American filmmakers discussed in Montreal and later formed in Caracas, Venezuela, in September 1974. In the years following the *Rencontres*, several participants of the gathering in Montreal promoted a series of similar meetings in various European countries. At one of these meetings, the *Rencontres Européennes pour un Nouveau Cinéma* (The European Meeting for New Film), organised in 1976 in Stockholm by the Sweden Film Centrum,

21 Important films screened in Pesaro in 1973 would also be shown in Montreal in 1974 and issues discussed in the Italian encounter would also be key topics in the Canadian meeting. What is more, Lino Micciché, the Italian festival's director, played a leading role in some discussions in Montreal.

22 On militant video practices and their relationship with militant cinema, see, for example, Hennebelle (1976); Hennebelle and Hennebelle (1975); Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema (1973).

23 "Rencontres. Procès verbal de la réunion du 6 septembre 1973", reproduced in Mestman (2014, 96–107).

the participating video-workers made several proposals. They proposed, for example, using the term “audiovisual workers, rather than just film worker”, because they felt that “in many cases media other than film such as slide-tape productions and video are more appropriate to foster goals set at the conference” (Film Centrum 1976). They also listed the “advantages” of video over film technology (16 mm) “when it is our goal to democratize the use of the media.” Within this framework, they asked for “adequate” representation of video workers in the common federation and for a “specific space devoted to video (e.g. a regular column)” in the newsletter “to improve the communication between filmmakers and video workers” (Film Centrum 1976). In this sense, the first half of the 1970s continues to be an interesting period to explore the dialogue between political audio-visual practitioners in different regions of the world as well as between political filmmaking and early militant video.

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