

Documentary film: Latin America

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1.

THE earliest manifestation of the documentary instinct in Latin America occurred in Mexico before the First World War, during the Revolutionary years following the uprising of 1911, when the immediate success of actualities depicting the momentous events of the day helped to stimulate the early growth of Mexican cinema. In the absence as yet of any dominant international cinematic model for political reportage – newsreels were only in their earliest stage and hardly provided models for events like those in Mexico – these actualities developed along their own distinctive lines. According to the account of Aurelio de los Reyes (1995), film-makers stimulated by an eager urban audience took to the battlefields, where their instinct was to pursue a positivist belief in the camera's objectivity and to eschew a political agenda of their own. A film of 1912 by the Alva brothers, for example, *Revolución orozquista* (The Orozco Revolution), attempts to report the events from both sides of the battlelines – the film-makers were even caught in crossfire which damaged their equipment – and it is difficult, says de los Reyes, to tell where the authors' sympathies lay; an objectivity which he adds does not survive the imposition of censorship by the Huerta regime in 1913. But in this brief period, Mexican film-makers quickly developed greater skill in the construction of a documentary narrative than film makers north of the border, and the results are what de los Reyes calls 'a local vernacular form of representation of contemporary happenings'.

This early flowering was exceptional, the result of opportunity, initiative, and a brief absence of repressive authority. The subsequent evolution of cinema as a commercial institution under the tutelage of Hollywood, which was nowhere auspicious for documentary, was compounded in Latin America by the conditions of underdevelopment, which stunted growth and resulted only in a series of medium to small, sometimes tiny, local film industries, all of them plagued by structural weakness and small markets. If early documentary in Europe was succoured by the film society movement, born in Paris in 1924, and the first art-houses, these did not appear in Latin America (apart from Brazil) until somewhat later (the 1940s in Uruguay and Argentina, the 50s in countries like Chile, Bolivia and Cuba). Nor were there para-governmental agencies and corporate commercial interests to develop 16mm distribution of educational documentary as happened, for example, in Great Britain, where a strong documentary movement grew up in the 1930s as a result. It is therefore hardly surprising that throughout the rest of the silent period and beyond, until the rise of a new film movement in the 1950s, Latin American documentary was confined, with little exception, to minor examples of conventional subgenres like the travelogue or the scientific documentary. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a documentary instinct at work in isolated examples uncovered by scholars. Agustin Mahieu (1966) speaks of an Argentinean film of 1916, *El último malón* (The Last Indian Uprising), shot in the province of Santa Fe by an anthropologist called Alcides Greca, which he describes as a kind of documentary reconstruction of an uprising that took place at the beginning of the century, filmed in authentic locations with the indigenous Indians as protagonists of their own story. Paulo Antonio Paranagua (1984) speaks of a documentary made for a copper company in Chile in 1919 by an Italian named Salvador Giambastiani which places on display faces marked by the grim conditions in the mines, including a number of scenes of the men at work.

Occasionally new finds appear. A documentary of 1993 by the Venezuelan Alfredo Anzola, *El misterio de los ojos escarlata* ('The Mystery of the Scarlet Eyes'), provides a rare glimpse of unseen images of Venezuela in the 1920s and 30s: footage shot by the film-maker's father, who made documentaries and two silent feature films, now lost, in the 1920s, then acquired a 16mm camera and filmed mostly documentary footage throughout the 30s and 40s,

while working as the director of a radio station - a radio serial written and produced by Anzola père provides the title of his son's film about him, a film which prompts several questions: How many others among the all but nameless Latin American filmmakers of the early years had similar careers? And may have left undiscovered archives? And how many of these aficionados have not even left their names behind? And another thing: Anzola, as portrayed by his son, was clearly no intellectual, but a keen cineaste, an aficionado who took his camera with him to events where he had entry as a radio producer. The point of view is uncritical and marked by his social class. But aficionados of the same class in succeeding decades were the very people whose first filmmaking efforts represent the initial stirrings of the powerful new movement in Latin American cinema which emerged in the late 50s.

A singular example from 1930s Mexico points in another direction. The film historian Georges Sadoul calls *Redes* (Nets, aka *The Wave*, 1934) a semidocumentary, which uses non-professional actors in real locations, in the manner of the German film *Menschen am Sonntag* (People on Sunday, dir. Robert Siodmak) of 1929, to recount a story taken from everyday life, which in this case deals with the struggle of Vera Cruz fishermen against exploitation. In short, an extraordinary piece of neorealism *avant la lettre*, as well as a precursor of what will later become a major tendency of politically committed film making in every corner of Latin America. A rare example, too, of collaboration as equals between North and South, the film was made at the invitation of a progressive politician, Velásquez Chávez, in charge of public education, who wrote the original script, by a team headed by the Mexican Emilio Gómez Muriel, which included two foreigners: the New York photographer Paul Strand and a young émigré from Austria, Fred Zinnemann, Siodmak's assistant director on *Menschen am Sonntag*. In sum, *Redes* is one of those films, like *Kuhle Wampe* by Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht (1932), or Jean Renoir's *Toni* of 1934, which impress themselves on the imagination as spectres of a different kind of cinema that might have been, where the simple opposition between fiction and documentary is transcended.

2.

THE emergence of Latin American documentary in the 1950s/60s marks the appearance of a new generation of film-makers, who benefit from a new economic and political conjuncture. Cinema was already thoroughly dominated by Hollywood product, which easily commanded 80% or more of the market, while postwar modernisation extended the US presence in the expanding domains of radio and television. It also brought a drive to open up markets among the Latin American bourgeoisie for the appurtenances of the 'American way of life', which naturally included amateur cine, for which official Washington publications like the *Industrial Reference Service* (later called *World Trade in Commodities*) recorded increasing sales in several countries. The spread of film clubs and magazines, art-houses and festivals, was part of the same process of cultural modernisation, but produced a sting: the new generation rejected both what they saw as the cultural imperialism of the *gringos*, and the crass commercialism of local film industries, where they existed, which together prevented the emergence of authentic autochthonous voices. Instead they looked to new film movements in Europe for orientation. Several of the pioneers of the 50s and 60s had taken themselves to Italy to study cinema in Rome, bringing back with them the ideals of both neorealism and the social documentary - whatever would help them in the endeavour to discover the social, economic and political undertow in the sight of immediate reality, whether in the form of neorealist fiction or documentary.

Documentary is a marginal form of cinema, and some of first initiatives occurred in out-of-the-way places like Cuzco in Peru, where a film club was set up in 1955 and Manuel Chambi and others started making short documentaries on ethnographic and sociocultural themes -

Sadoul called them the Cuzco School. They were not unique, but represented a new desire to be found throughout the continent for self-expression beyond the bounds that were sanctioned by the ruling creole elites. Several such groups were linked to social movements which espoused leftist and Marxist principles, like the cultural club *Nuestro Tiempo* run by the Young Communists in Havana in the 50s, which harboured several future Cuban directors. The first international meeting place for the young filmmakers was a film festival in Montevideo, set up in 1954 by the SODRE, Uruguay's national radio station and a progressive cultural promoter. Among the film makers attending in 1958, when John Grierson was the guest of honour, were Chambi from Peru, and Fernando Birri from Argentina. The film exhibited by Birri and his students, *Tire Die* ('Throw us a dime'), a collaborative social inquiry into the shanty towns around the city of Santa Fe, later came to be celebrated as the founding social documentary of the new film movement. Known simply as *el nuevo cine latinoamericano* (the New Latin American Cinema), the designation dates from a meeting in 1967 of filmmakers from across the continent hosted by a film club in the Chilean seaside town of Viña del Mar, which had been running a festival of 8 and 16mm with a strong documentary emphasis since 1963. Documentary, for this movement, was far from marginal, even if documentarists everywhere (except Cuba after 1959) were forced to work in the interstices of the system. In the desire to turn the cameras on the actuality of the external world, to escape the distorted imagery of the dominant cinema's imaginary, fiction was necessarily inflected by documentary and shared the documentary vocation to witness and testify to social reality. There is a long list of dramatic films, from Nelson Pereira dos Santos in Brazil in the 1950s, by way of Sanjinés in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador in the 60s and after, to the recent work of Víctor Gaviria in Colombia, which represents the persistent pull which the documentary instinct and its disciplines have exercised on the Latin American fiction film.

New paradigms of political documentary now appeared, and a stream of films, in a variety of styles and approaches, which attested to the conditions of life from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego. As one commentator has put it, 'The rise of Marxist-inflected ideologies in Latin America prescribed a dual quest: for a less stratified socioeconomic system, and for authentic, autonomous, culturally specific forms of expression' (Burton, 1990). Among the films shown at Viña in 1967 were no less than seventeen from Brazil, where film-makers in São Paulo were stimulated by the arrival in 1963 of Birri and several of his associates, who had been forced to flee their country. Benefiting from more up-to-date equipment, Brazilian documentary established a particularly strong line in political reportage, exemplified by films like Geraldo Sarno's *Viramundo* (1964) on internal migration, which constructs a montage of multiple voices that juxtaposes the aspirations of peasants from the drought-ridden northeast who migrate to São Paulo in search of work with what they find when they arrive there. A distinctive feature of these films is the dissolution of the authoritative monologue of voice-over narration in favour of a dialogical form of construction which allows the film-maker to apply a dialectical, and hence highly politicised, interpretation of the subject matter. Other film-makers, working without the benefit of synchronous sound recording, found imaginative solutions to the construction of the soundtrack which also displace the voice of authority, like the Uruguayan Mario Handler's *Carlos: Cine-retrato de un caminante* (Carlos: Cine-Portrait of a Walker, 1965), which combines patiently filmed images of a vagabond's life with his edited speech, recorded afterwards, on the soundtrack. Here, through the aesthetic construction of the subjectivity of an individual discarded by society, the film exemplifies another fundamental impulse of the new documentary, that of giving voice and image to those who have been condemned to silence and invisibility. In this way, Latin American documentary share the aim defined by the Brazilian radical Christian educationalist Paulo Freire as breaking 'the culture of silence' to which underdevelopment condemned the subaltern classes.

Among the films on show at Viña in 1967, and the following year at another international meeting in Merida, Venezuela, were several from Cuba. If the politicisation of the 60s received a strong fillip from the Cuban Revolution, Cuban documentary contributed powerfully to tendency to combine explicit political content with an experimental aesthetic, above all in the work of Santiago Alvarez, who reinvented the newsreel, the compilation film, the travelogue and every other documentary genre he laid hands upon in an irrepressible frenzy of filmic bricolage licensed by that supreme act of bricolage, the Cuban Revolution. Cuba became unique in Latin America in the status it awarded to its own cinema, including documentary. Cuba was the one place in Latin America where local documentaries were widely seen in the cinemas, since distribution was controlled by a state film institute (ICAIC, the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry), which had been created by the Revolution within three months of taking power in 1959. ICAIC set out to supply its own documentaries and a regular newsreel with every feature film, foreign or domestic, which it distributed. Newsreel and documentary became the requisite form of apprenticeship for new directors, a philosophy which also succoured a critical realist approach to fiction. (Although Cuban fiction films are made with professional actors, the directors quickly abandoned the studio, and even their comedies and genre films are remarkable for the documentary value of their mise-en-scène.) The euphoria of revolution imbued the institute's films with an experimentalist aesthetic, and no-one was more audacious than Alvarez, who headed the newsreel unit, which he turned by his own example into a school for militant documentary. Employing every kind of visual imagery, from newsreel footage to stills, archive film to cuttings from magazines, combined with animated texts and emblematic musicalisation, Alvarez amalgamated revolutionary politics and kleptomania to reinvent Soviet montage in a Caribbean setting. Best known abroad in those years were his montage films on racism and politics in the USA, *Now* (1965) and *LBJ* (1968); the lyrical Vietnam films, *Hanoi Martes 13* (Hanoi Tuesday 13th, 1967) and *79 Primavera* (79 Springs, 1969), and his eulogy for Che Guevara, *Hasta la Victoria Siempre* (Always Until Victory, 1967).

In the 70s, researchers at ICAIC found that people sometimes went to the movies because they wanted to see the new Alvarez, and would then stay and watch whatever feature was put on after it - a complete inversion of normal cinema-going behaviour. Alvarez began making feature-length documentaries at the start of decade, and their success prompted ICAIC to produce a whole series of feature documentaries for cinema distribution by different directors, at a time when commercial cinema in the West had abandoned making documentaries for the cinema altogether. Particularly notable are two films by Jesús Díaz. *55 Hermanos* (55 Brothers and Sisters, 1978) follows a group of young Cuban-Americans, children of émigrés returning to their country for the first time, on a highly charged three-week trip which ends with a meeting with Fidel. *En tierra de Sandino* (In the Land of Sandino, 1980), is probably the most penetrating study of the Sandinista revolution by a foreign filmmaker. ICAIC's policy produced a paradox: Cuba, where according to its enemies, the public sphere had been replaced by the totalitarian control of the Communists, maintained a space on the cinema screen for the documentary encounter with social reality which was not to be found on the screens of the democracies, where commercial criteria drove them out. Nor were Cuban documentaries, or even newsreels, by any means limited to political propaganda. The newsreels were often investigative (especially compared to the conformism of broadcasting and the press), while many of the documentaries were broadly didactic and to that extent Griersonian. Others were poetic, many were devoted to celebrating different aspects of Cuban culture. Several are portraits of individuals, which recover their memories for the collective. Notable directors include Manuel Octavio Gómez, Octavio Cortázar, Pastor Vega, Sara Gómez, Melchor Casals, and Luis Felipe Bernaza. Whenever their films were seen in Latin America, in film festivals and film

clubs, they powerfully encouraged the ambitions of documentarists who had none of the access to an audience which their Cuban compadres enjoyed.

3.

If the surge of Latin American documentary went together with social ferment in countries where political upheaval was on the agenda, this was nowhere more true than in Chile in the late 60s, where a small tribe of young film-makers formed a committee of support for the left-wing coalition of Popular Unity, and its Marxist presidential candidate Salvador Allende. Both before and after his electoral victory in 1970, they engaged in a cinema of urgency, producing a range of highly inventive films from campaign propaganda and agitational shorts to investigations of the political process and full scale neorealist dramatisations denouncing the ills of underdevelopment. This was the milieu in which Raúl Ruiz, who would later make his career among the French avant-garde, first discovered his talent for improvisation – the improvised fiction of *Tres Tristes Tigres* (Three Sad Tigers, 1968) and the improvised documentary in the case of *La Expropiación* (Expropriation, 1972). The most extraordinary film to emerge from this period, however, was Patricio Guzmán's three-part chronicle *La batalla de Chile* (The Battle of Chile), a record of the tumultuous months leading up to the coup of 1973 in which Allende was overthrown. A fertile mixture of direct cinema observation and investigative reportage, the footage was smuggled out immediately after Allende's fall and edited in Cuba at ICAIC, the final part appearing in 1979. The result is a work of historical testimony unique in the annals of documentary for its scope, density, and poignancy.

As with other countries which fell to the right, Chilean filmmakers were among those who were forced into exile disappeared (the latter included Guzmán's cameraman Jorge Müller). Thanks to international solidarity, Chileans became the leading practitioners of a cinema of exile which grew up in the 70s and contributed a new genre to the history of world cinema, as a number of films took the experience of exile as their subject matter, including Ruiz's semidocumentary *Dialogo de exilados* (Dialogue of Exiles, France, 1974), and Marilú Mallet's highly personal *Journal inachevé* (Unfinished Diary, Canada, 1982), an early paradigm of a new mode of feminist autobiographical documentary just then emerging in first world film-making.

Dictatorship and repression also hit Brazil after the *golpe de estado* of 1968, and Argentina after that of 1976, which brought the *guerra sucia* (dirty war) against the left in which thousands disappeared – among them Raymundo Gleyser, leading member of the militant group Cine de la Base. At the same time, authoritarian rule often had the counter-intentional effect of stimulating self-activity among those it held down. Across the continent, as military regimes took power, popular organisations developed at community level to deal with the problems of inadequate housing, food, health care, water and electricity, and became the locus for resistance to military repression, or simply the practice of popular democracy by those neglected by the state. Film-makers, seeing these organisations as the natural audience for their work, created alternative exhibition circuits using portable equipment, on the rural model established in the 60s in Bolivia by the Ukamau collective, or the urban form of independent distribution collectives like Zafra in Mexico, supplying films to groups like film clubs and shanty town residents. In short, Latin American documentary became involved in the creation of an alternative audio-visual public sphere parallel with popular organisations within the community, and sharing the same preoccupation to give voice to people normally excluded from public speech and outside the political power structures. In some cases, films were made and exhibited within the orbit of particular political groups, sometimes banned ones. The most famous example is a mammoth three-part, four-hour political testimony called *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968), a product of the Peronist movement in Argentina. The

film was accompanied by a manifesto, *Hacia un tercer cine* (Towards a Third Cinema), by two of its makers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, which offers a blueprint for militant filmmaking and was rapidly reprinted across the world.

La hora de los hornos was not only filmed clandestinely, it was also shown clandestinely. It was designed for an audience of the politically engaged, and while it might seem to be lecturing at them, it included strategically placed intertitles inviting the projectionist to pause the film to allow for debate among the audience. It thus exemplifies another essential characteristic of the movement to which it belongs, the intentional mode of address. Where independent documentary remains outside the world and discourse of television, and alternative distribution constructs a parallel public sphere for its circulation, the documentarist has the advantage of a direct relationship with small but particular sectors of the public. In Latin America, this was reflected in the elaboration of a distinct vocabulary for the discussion of documentary in the journals and publications of the film movement they belonged to: terms like *cine didáctico*, *cine testimonio*, *cine denuncia*, *cine encuesta*, *cine rescate*, and not least, *cine militante*. This list is not exhaustive or definitive and there is no single source from which it is drawn. These are only the most frequently used of a series of terms which occur across the whole range of radical Latin American film writings which express its preoccupations and objectives. They are found in film journals from several countries, with titles like *Hablemos de Cine*, *Cine al Día*, *Primer Plano*, *Octubre* and *Cine Cubano* (from Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico and Cuba respectively). The distinctive feature of all the terms listed is precisely their intentional character. They indicate a variety of purposes which can all be construed in political terms: *cine didáctico* is to teach, *testimonio* to offer testimony, *denuncia* to denounce, *encuesta* to investigate. *Cine rescate* is to bring history alive, *celebrativo* to celebrate revolutionary achievement. *Cine ensayo* is the essay film, to provide space for reflection. *Cine militante* or *cine combate*, militant cinema or cinema of combat, is the most explicit expression of the revolutionary imperative of those years.

If the politics of the movement were voluntaristic, the films generally paid scant attention to political programmes, but rather evince an anthropological respect for their subjects combined with a sense of aesthetic search for anti-authoritarian modes of address. The film-makers understood well enough that this required them to radicalise their own practices and develop collective working methods. It is no accident, but one of the features that justifies the designation of this variegated activity as a movement, that a strong tendency can be found from one end of Latin America to the other to work in groups, who often adopted declarative names like the two which called themselves Grupo Cine Testimonio: the first founded in Mexico in 1969 by Eduardo Maldonado, the second in Argentina in 1982. There was also a strong propensity to individual experiment, which might take several forms. The anthropological method is taken furthest in *Chircales* (Brickmakers, 1972), by the Colombian documentarists Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, who spent all told six years – a period of time extended through lack of resources – to achieve a quite exceptional fusion of politics, poetry and visual anthropology in the portrayal of workers in the brickyards on the outskirts of Bogotá. Even the most idiosyncratic experiments remain rooted in political reality, like the Mexican director Paul Leduc's *ABC del Etnocidio* ('ABC of Ethnocide', 1976), an A to Z of indictments against the modern Mexican state which breaks completely with the conventions of documentary exposition. Another tack is represented by Ciro Durán's *Gamin* (1978), a provocative and interventionist version of direct cinema which uses the technique to reveal what is under everybody's nose but is never seen: the private life of the Bogotá street urchin.

The 80s brought a renewal of the political documentary across the continent, but in less strident forms. The forms of documentary that were cultivated in Nicaragua, where the Sandistas took power in 1979 and immediately set up a film institute, and even El Salvador in the early 80s, where a military junta was challenged by a guerrilla movement with its own film-

makers, gave considerable latitude for poetic expression. Elsewhere, liberalisation brought a new thematic – documenting the repression of the years of military dictatorships. One of most thoughtful testaments of this history, its repressions and aporias, can be found in Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (Man Marked To Die, 1984), which is not only an investigation into the assassination of a peasant leader in the north-east of Brazil twenty years earlier, but a film about its own history, recuperating the first abortive attempts to make the film over twenty years earlier, juxtaposing actuality footage from 1962, re-enactment from '64, and contemporary testimony from the early 80s, all showing the same social actors at different ages and in different roles. As reflexive an aesthetic as anyone could want, the result was a documentary about documentary with few to compare.

Another context was provided by the rise of feminism, which allowed a new generation of women film-makers to transcend class barriers through the solidarity of gender, for which one of the first paradigms was an Argentinian film memorialising the victims of military neofascism, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, 1985) by Lourdes Portillo and Susana Munoz. Meanwhile, women's film groups appeared in countries like Mexico and Brazil, producing work on feminist themes like the struggle for abortion. Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s, the movement as a whole found itself in a growing crisis of both confidence and identity. For a cinema founded on a political conception of itself, the transformation of the political space in which it operated as a result of the democratic turn of the decade, threatened to cast it adrift. Revolutionary militancy and its rhetoric was slipping away, even before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union shifted the balance of global power. Convictions remained, but the old prescriptions no longer served. Some Latin American documentarists were now in receipt of funding from European television stations, which also required a shift in the mode of address. Britain's new Channel Four, for example, supported a film by the exiled Argentinean Jorge Denti, *Malvinas, Historia de traiciones* (Malvinas, Story of Betrayal, 1983), which made a strength of conforming to British requirements of political balance by comparing the adventurism of Galtieri and Thatcher. A few years later they supported two films by the Chilean Ignacio Agüero: *100 niños esperando un tren* (100 Children Waiting for a train, 1989), which discovers an entrancing world among children in a shanty town learning about the invention of cinema, and *Sueños de hielo* (Dreams of Ice, 1992), a remarkable fantasy documentary about the lump of Antarctic ice which Chile sent to the World Fair in Seville.

But there were also other developments, in the shape of video, where once again Latin America would discover new forms of practice which punctured repression and the norms of representation. Indeed video was put to such uses in Latin America with no greater delay than community video experiments in first world countries, and usually at much greater risk. In Chile, for example, the early 80s saw clandestinely shot videos reporting on mass opposition to the rule of the junta which would have been otherwise impossible to produce. The paradox is that video technology arrived in Chile as part of the neoliberal modernisation of the country's economy which included investment in the advertising industry. In Argentina, the Grupo Cine-Ojo (in salute to Vertov's Kino-Eye), which began working in 1982 in Super8, made their first video documentary in 1984 (though they continued to work on 16mm as well). In Brazil, by the end of the decade, video was being taken up by indigenous groups in order to document their traditions and organise themselves in the face of the indifference of the wider society. The indigenous video movement, which organises regional and national meetings and has spread to other countries including Bolivia, constitutes a new catalyst within both documentary and the public sphere, as it enables its participants to speak to each other, and sometimes to their Others, in a direct mode of address. This is not documentary in the old sense, but its extension into new collective spaces, where the former subjects of anthropological and political documentarists now wield the camera themselves and assert ownership of their own image.

Stereotypical notions of cultural and technological backwardness are exploded by the speed with which indigenous video established itself, and even started inventing new genres and tropes of video-speech.

A final example is the renaissance of documentary in Argentina in the midst of the country's nightmare collapse. Once again we see the same phenomenon, the rapid adoption of the newest technologies for purposes still best described by the old-fashioned word 'liberating', in a way that demolishes the notion that underdevelopment means backwardness in anything other than an economic sense. Thus, the same global capitalism that produces computerisation and digital telecommunication, also produces the digital video cameras and computers which, during Argentina's neoliberal experiment of dollar parity, found eager buyers among a new generation of aspiring film-makers. Came the collapse of the banks and the result was that documentary was boosted by an explosive reality. Film-makers, many of them trained in the film schools which blossomed in Argentina during the preceding decade, and often militants of one or other political association, now in full possession of the means of production, needed no funding or commissions to go out on the streets and film. Spontaneous and uncredited videos, recording popular mobilisations and *cacerolazos* (casserole-bashing), were sold on the streets from stalls piled with copies, while others rediscovered a certain Argentinean documentary tradition going back to the work of Raymundo Gleyser in the 60s. The upsurge began before the economic collapse of December 2001. Earlier that year, at Mar de Plata, an alternative festival of contemporary political documentary attracted the attention of Solanas, who withdrew from an official screening of *La hora de los hornos* to join the counter-event, calling the new groups the heirs of third cinema. Political opportunism? Wishful thinking? A year after the bank collapse, as many as forty groups of video film-makers were working alongside the assemblies and *piqueteros*, the women's movement, and the workers co-operatives who were taking control of bankrupt firms. Their work is shown at factories, community movement assemblies, and festivals, but not on television or in the cinemas. The world's eyes, or rather, the global media, may have turned away from Argentina's plight, but not the new documentarists, for whom their cameras are once again weapons in a struggle of survival which testifies to resistance in the face of adversity.

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