THE CHANGING GEOGRAPHY OF THIRD CINEMA

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IN 1968, after two years work, a group of film-makers in Argentina calling themselves Grupo Cine Liberación, radical in both politics and their approach to cinema, completed a mammoth three-part political film running almost four and a half hours entitled *La hora de los hornos* (Hour of the Furnaces). [1] Constrained by the conditions which followed the military coup of 1966, but bolstered by the growth of organised resistance, the film was shot semi-clandestinely in conjunction with cadres of the Peronist movement (the negative was smuggled out to Italy where the film was finished). In short, as the North American critic Robert Stam has put it, it was a film made 'in the interstices of the system and against the system...independent in production, militant in politics, and experimental in language'. [2]

Setting out with the intention of making a social documentary in the manner established in Argentina ten years earlier by Fernando Birri and the Documentary School of Santa Fe (of which one of the group, Gerardo Vallejo, had been a member), the project underwent an organic transformation as a result of the conditions in which it was made. In particular, its most famous trait - the 'openness' of its text - derived from the experience of the film makers in the organisation of political debates around the screening of films from Cuba or by film-makers like Joris Ivens:

> We realised that the most important thing was not the film and the information in it so much as the way this information was debated. One of the aims of such films is to provide the occasion for people to find themselves and speak of about their own problems. The projection becomes a place where people talk out and develop their awareness. We learnt the importance of this space: cinema here becomes humanly useful. [3]

Accordingly the film was constructed in a highly idiosyncratic manner: prompted by intertitles posing questions like 'Why did Perón fall without a struggle? Should he have armed the people?', it was designed to be stopped in the projector to allow for discussion and debate - designed, in other words, to disrupt the normal passive relationship of the spectator to the screen.

The end product amounts to a militant poetic epic tapestry, weaving together disparate styles and materials ranging from didacticism to operatic stylisation, direct filming to the techniques of advertising, and incoporating photographs, newsreel, testimonial footage and film clips - from avant-garde and mainstream, fiction and documentary. But the film-makers described it as a 'film act', rather than a film in the conventional sense (which indeed it wasn't): 'an unfinished work, open in order to incorporate dialogue and for the meeting of revolutionary wills'. [4]   Stam has pointed out the paradox which resulted: where 'openness' in art is usually understood in terms of plurisignification, polysemy, a plurality of equally legitimate readings offered to the contemplation of the receiver, *Hour of the Furnaces* 'is not open in this sense: its messages are stridently unequivocal'. [5] The openness of the film lies elsewhere: in the *political* relationship between the film and the viewer - at least, in the clandestine circumstances in which the film was necessarily viewed in Argentina itself in the years before 1973, when the Peronists won a resounding electoral victory, the political conditions of the country were transformed, and a version of the film was put on commercial release. Those clandestine audiences were not insignificant: with some fifty prints in circulation, the film

makers estimated 100,000 viewers over the five years in which the film led its hidden life. [6]

FOLLOWING the completion of the film, two members of the group, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, wrote a manifesto based on the experience entitled *Hacia un tercer cine* (Towards a Third Cinema). [7] Subtitled 'Notes and Experiences on the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World', there is a doubtless deliberate ambiguity in the term 'Third Cinema' which requires explication. The wordplay comes from the analogy with the term 'third world', meaning the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This term had its origins at the Bandung Conference of 1955, the founding conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, when China promulgated the theory of the three worlds. The first world consisted in the advanced capitalist countries of the West, including North America and Australasia; the second world comprised the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe; the countries of the remaining continents were thus the third world, to which China declared its allegiance. [8] On the one hand, therefore, the term corresponds to what Solanas and Getino referred to as 'a new historical situation': 'ten years of the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese struggle, and the development of a world-wide liberation movement whose moving force is to be found in the third world countries'. [9] On the other, third cinema is not restricted to the third world, even in the original conception of the idea, for in order to illustrate what they meant, they immediately cited examples which come from the first world, namely, 'Newsreel, a US New Left film group, the cinegiornali of the Italian student movement, the films made by the Etats Généraux du Cinéma Français, and those of the British and Japanese student movements'. [10] A few paragraphs later, they add the experiments carried out by Chris Marker in France when he provided groups of workers with 8mm cameras and basic instruction in their use.

The explanation of this apparent contradiction lies in their argument that the restitution of the real place and meaning of the most diverse phenomena, though experimental films which challenge orthodox representation and establish a new relation with the audience, is eminently subversive both in the neocolonial situation to be found in the countries of the third world, and in the consumer societies of the first world. They might have added, but they didn't, in the second world too. In whichever world, 'every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or penetrates the truth of a situation is something more than a film image or purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the system finds indigestible'. [11] Notice that 'experimental' here means something a little different from its traditional use in the context of, say, underground or avant-garde film. The Argentinians suggest a position in which, to fulfill the criteria of third cinema, there can be nothing in political terms which is tentative or hypothetical about the content or signification of the images concerned; whereas the avant-garde or underground notion of experimentalism defends the notion of a space which is untouched by these considerations (without thereby becoming reactionary). The idea of third cinema, in which the camera is often equated, albeit somewhat rhetorically, to the gun, restores to the term avant-garde something of its original meaning, which as Baudelaire once remarked, was probably due to the French predilection for military metaphors.

Geographical confusions dissolve when the two Argentinians explain what they mean by First and Second Cinema, which correspond not to the First and Second Worlds but constitute a virtual geography of their own. First Cinema is the model imposed by the American film industry, the Hollywood movie - whose domination is such that even the 'monumental' films, like Bondarchuk's *War and Peace* (ussr, 1967), which had begun to appear in Second World countries, submit to the same propositions. Even when they only adopt the language of the American model, and not its themes, this still corresponds to an ideology which posits a particular relationship between film and spectator, where cinema is conceived as pure spectacle. This kind of film, made for exhibition in large theatres, with a

standardised duration (feature-length or blockbuster) and hermetic forms that are born and die on the screen, is not only designed to satisfy the commercial interests of the production companies: it also leads to the absorption of forms which necessarily imply a bourgeois *Weltanschauung* inherited from the nineteenth century, in which the capacity of the subject to participate in making history is denied to all except the heroic and exceptional individual, and history is present only as an external force and an object of contemplation.

Moreover, American cinema not only imposes its models of form and language, but also industrial, commercial and technical structures which include the festivals, magazines and even film schools which perpetuate its values. Here the Argentinians speak from their own perspective as third world film-makers. This institutional structure, they explain, guarantees the hegemony of the films made by the imperialist countries, because the film industries of dependent countries like Argentina are too flimsy and underfinanced to compete effectively, even in their own markets.

The first serious alternative to arise in these countries was the kind of film subsequently known as *auteur* cinema, art cinema or, in a later phase, new wave cinema. However, although the comparison suggests itself immediately, Solanas and Getino refrain from identifying the model for this Second Cinema as European, which would be inaccurate both historically and conceptually; I shall come back to this below.

This alternative, they say, represented an evident advance in terms of the freedom of film-makers in a country like Argentina to express themselves outside the standardised form and language of the regular commercial movie, with the consequence that the directors involved - they mention Del Carril, Torre Nillson, Ayala, Feldman, Murua, Kohon, Khun, Birri - constituted at a certain moment the vanguard of Argentinian cinema. Indeed, given the cultural hunger which these films began to satisfy, this Second Cinema began to produce its own structures, its own patterns of distribution and exhibition, its own ideologies, critics and reviews. But it also generated, they say, a misplaced ambition to develop a parallel film industry to compete with First Cinema, and this could only lead to its own institutionalisation within the system, which was more than ready to use Second Cinema to demonstrate the democratic plurality of its cultural milieu. In the process, however, the vanguard was defused and became a cinema made by and for the limited social groups characteristic of what the Argentinians call the dilettante elite. These groups were politically reformist - for example in opposing censorship - but incapable of achieving any profound change. They were especially impotent in the face of the kind of repression unleashed by the victory of reactionary, proto-fascist forces.

A real alternative in this situation was only possible, they said, if one of two requirements were fulfilled: 'either to make films that the system could not assimilate because they are foreign to its needs, or to make films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the system'. [12] The latter - as they specified in 1969 at the Latin American Film-makers Conference at Viña del Mar in Chile, the year before the election of Allende - constituted militant cinema proper, an internal category of Third Cinema.

Militant cinema, said Solanas and Getino, or guerrilla film-making, as they called it, was a collective endeavour which opposed itself not only to First Cinema but also to the prevailing Second Cinema notion of the film *d'auteur*. In order to accomplish their task, the film crew needed to operate with a radical conception not only of the content of the film but also of the production process, including the team's internal relations, the role of the producer or director, and of individual skills. For example, 'every member of the group should be familiar, at least in a general way, with the equipment used, and must be prepared to replace each other in any phase of production. The myth of the irreplaceable technician must be exploded.' [13]

Despite the rhetoric about the camera as a gun that can shoot 24 frames a second, the projector as weapon of images, this conception of militant cinema was not entirely voluntaristic. For one thing, explaining why guerrilla film-making had not been possible

previously, Solanas and Getino mentioned the technical advances in film gear which occurred at the beginning of the 60s, consisting in the introduction of lightweight hand-held cameras and tape-recorders, fast film stock that could be shot in available light, and associated equipment (the same factors that were responsible for the appearance of the movement known in France as *cinéma vérité*, and in the United States as 'direct cinema', whose practitioners were also opposed, at least to start with, to established forms). For another thing, as Getino pointed out some years later, the original manifesto was not a formulaic speculation but the product of a concrete experience: 'It is difficult to imagine the subsequent international exposure of these theories had the film [*Hour of the Furnaces*] not existed. It was only through the existence of the film that we were able to refute the opposition of critics to our theories.' [14]

THE clarification proposed at Viña del Mar was necessary not only because of certain ambiguities in the original formulation, but also because of the discovery that others were thinking along similar lines. In Cuba, for example, Julio García Espinosa had written his own manifesto, also based on his film-making experiences, under the title *Por un cine imperfecto* (For an Imperfect Cinema). Both the context and the objective were different - it was intended in the first place as a warning against the technical perfection which after ten years of practice by the revolutionary film institute, ICAIC, now began to lie within the reach of Cuban film-makers. But certain aspects of García Espinosa's thesis were directly comparable, including his argument that any attempt to match the 'perfection' of the commercial movie of the metropolis was mistaken, and contradicted the endeavour implicit in a revolutionary cinema, because the beautifully controlled surface of commercial cinema was a way of lulling the audience into passive consumption. (Also, a film industry in a third world country could hardly afford such luxurious ambitions.) Clearly there is a similar evaluation here of what Solanas and Getino call First Cinema.

Furthermore, there is a certain homology between the two manifestos, not only when the Argentinians write that 'The effectiveness of the best films of militant cinema show that social sectors regarded as backward [by dominant ideology] are perfectly capable of grasping the precise meaning of a visual metaphor, a montage effect, or some linguistic experiment as long as it relates to a determinate idea', but also when they continue that 'revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which passively illustrates or documents or registers a situation, rather it attempts to make an intervention which impels a response' [15] - in other words, the active involvement and subsequent political participation of the viewer.

In certain respects, however, the Cuban manifesto was less restrictive and more open about the type and range of films which would conform to its criteria, for it clearly includes films which Solanas and Getino place in the Second Cinema category, such as the work of Fernando Birri, or much of Brazilian *Cinema Novo*. In fact, there was a certain slippage in the Argentinian manifesto between the categories of Second and Third Cinema. As long as *Hour of the Furnaces* itself was taken as the very model of Third Cinema, rather than an exemplar of one of its options, Second Cinema could be taken to include certain attempts at an alternative type of cinema which from a more comprehensive perspective are more correctly seen as alternate models of Third Cinema. Getino recognised this ten years later when he wrote that 'We didn't fully realise at the time the extent to which the Argentinian reality of the late 60s defined the content and form of our work and its parallel theoretical elaboration'. [16]

This is connected with a second problem. At one point the Argentinian manifesto makes the claim that the clearly differentiated national characteristics typical of early cinema have since disappeared. This is a highly tendentious assertion - especially with regard to Second Cinema - which is subsequently contradicted in the manifesto itself, at any rate by

implication, when it says that while guerrilla cinema didn't yet have enough experience to lay down general standards, 'what experience there is has shown, above all, the ability to make use of the concrete situation of each country'. For this 'concrete situation' necessarily includes the individual susceptibilities of different national cultures, which in turn implies that even an oppositional cinema is likely to want to cultivate national cultural traditions.

Both Solanas and Getino later revised their positions to take account of this. Getino effectively criticises their earlier formulation when he continued, in his later article, by observing that the value of a theory such as theirs is always dependent on the terrain in which the praxis is carried out, and any attempt to offer universal prescriptions 'would be erroneous without consideration of the national context at its root'. [17] Solanas admitted something similar in 1978 when he commented that 'third cinema is also aligned with the national culture', adding that 'By national culture we mean that of the ensemble of the popular classes'. [18]

At the same time, Solanas modified the original definitions of the three types of cinema in order to correct two misinterpretations of the thesis. If the three types are summarised as

(i) large-scale production, big budget;

(ii) independent production and auteur cinema;

(iii) films made by collectives of militants;

then the first misinterpretation consists in taking every big budget movie automatically as first cinema, every auteur film as second cinema, and every collective film as third cinema; while the second consists in classifying first cinema as the big spectacle, second cinema as intimate or intellectual, and third cinema as political. The real state of affairs was different, a question of political and ideological function, not of purely filmic categories; in other words, a matter of the interests to which the films answer. First Cinema responds to the interests of transnational monopoly capital, be it movie as spectacle, auteur cinema, or film as information; and Solanas is undoubtedly correct when he adds that even the scientific documentary is susceptible to the aspirations of big capital.

Second Cinema, on the other hand, expresses the aspirations of the middle layers, the petty bourgeoisie. Consequently Second Cinema is often nihilist, pessimist, mystificatory. Here too, all categories of films may be found, including the political, though at the same time, 'In neocolonial and dependent countries, the middle sectors are generally aligned with the thinking of the metropolis.'

Third Cinema, however, is the expression of a new culture and of changes in society. In a general way, third cinema renders account of reality and history. Here too all types of film are possible:

What determines third cinema is the conception of the world, and not the genre or an explicitly political approach. Any story, any subject can be taken up by third cinema. In the dependent countries, third cinema is a cinema of decolonisation, which expresses the will to national liberation, anti-mythic, anti-racist, anti-bourgeois, and popular. [19]

EVEN this later reformulation of the thesis retains some of the more idealist and voluntaristic aspects of the original; but this is expectable, and not necessarily critical.

Meanwhile, as the concept was taken up more widely, connections were made with parallel movements not only elsewhere in Latin America but other continents too. An anthology which appeared in Mexico in 1972, for example, reprinted the original manifesto alongside writings and interviews covering developments in Mexico itself, in Uruguay (by Mario Handler), Brazil (Glauber Rocha), Colombia (Carlos Alvarez), Bolivia (Jorge Sanjinés) and Chile (Miguel Littin), as well as an interview with the Senegalese film-maker Ousmane Sembene, a collective statement from Vietnam, and an encounter between Solanas and Godard. [20] Similar stirrings had begun in other parts of the world, especially the Arab world, where the first manifestos appeared in 1967/8 in Cairo and Morocco; and at the end 1973, a General Assembly of third world film-makers was held in Algeria, to consider the role of film in the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism and the problems of international co-operation. The Committees appointed to report on these questions included representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Colombia, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Senegal, Congo, Mali, Tunisia, Palestine and Mauritania, with observers from Britain, France, Sweden and Italy. The presence of these observers confirms that Solanas and Getino were not mistaken to include certain sectors within the first world in their account of Third Cinema - on condition, of course, that these sectors did not attempt to exercise any kind of political or ideological hegemony.

By now, it was becoming clear that another aspect mentioned by Solanas and Getino was at play, the question of the possible 'transnational' function of Third Cinema, so to speak. 'Testimony about a national reality', they had written, can be 'an inestimable means of dialogue and knowledge on a global scale. No internationalist form of struggle can be carried out successfully without a mutual exchange of experiences between peoples, if peoples cannot manage to break out of the Balkanisation which imperialism strives to maintain...' [21]

Here, however, Solanas and Getino were *not* being idealist: they were perfectly aware that the reading of a film depended upon the conditions of its reception, and these were vastly different in the first and third worlds: 'A cinema which in the consumer society does not attain the level of the reality in which it moves can play a stimulating role in an underdeveloped country, just as a revolutionary cinema in the neo-colonial situation will not necessarily be revolutionary if it is mechanically taken to the metropolitan country.' [22] In 1978, Solanas cited as an example of the former, the reception of Monicelli's *Les Camarades* (*I Compagni*/*The Organiser*, Italy, 1963) in Argentina. [23] They were also aware that the system was perfectly capable of absorbing the most dangerous impulses, that virulence, nonconformism, plain rebelliousness and discontent can easily be turned into products on the capitalist market, into consumer goods. Nevertheless, they were prepared to put their faith in the sheer power of the medium. A film on the Venezuelan guerrillas, they maintained, would say more to a European public than twenty explanatory pamphlets, especially in a situation where third world struggles were increasingly related to those unfolding in the metropolitan countries, as in those years they seemed to be.

If this was not idealistic, it was still somewhat optimistic. It is not just a question of the state of ignorance in first world audiences - even sympathetic ones - about third world conditions and struggles, succoured by the neglect and disinformation of the dominant media, then as now. There were also wide differences in aesthetic and cultural susceptibilities which began to emerge as the circulation of third world films in Europe and North America began to improve; principally, just as Solanas and Getino predicted, through the 16mm film circuits.

These differences were especially pertinent in the United States, with its large communities of Latinos and growing numbers of immigrants from other parts of the third world, and it is no accident that an Ethiopian scholar, Teshome Gabriel, who taught film studies at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), turned his attention to the study of Third Cinema in the late 70s, at a time when the third world began to make its presence felt in the United States from within, and a new Chicano cinema was first appearing.

THERE are two main thrusts in Gabriel's work, one theoretical, one critical. With his concern to interrogate third world cinema on its own ground, his theoretical project is the reinterpretation of Third Cinema in terms of the genealogy of third world culture proposed by Frantz Fanon in his seminal book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon identifies three stages in the cultural development of the colonised people, for which Gabriel finds homologies within cinema. Gabriel first draws attention to the comparison in his book, *Third Cinema in the Third World, The Aesthetics of Liberation*, [24] and then develops it in a subsequent essay, 'Towards a critical theory of third world films'. [25] The present account draws mainly on the latter.

While Gabriel downplays the comparison which can be drawn between Fanon's three phases and the concepts of First, Second and Third Cinema proposed by Solanas and Getino, nevertheless the degree to which the one can be related to the other is quite remarkable, and gives a significant reading of the development of film culture in countries in all third world continents. There is another very interesting homology to be found in a work by the Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui, his *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* ('Seven Essays of Interpretation of Peruvian Reality') of 1928, which critiques the orthodox Marxist periodisation of art on the basis of the history of class struggle in Europe on the grounds that this is hardly appropriate to a continent like Latin American. For Mariátegui, instead of the feudal, the aristocratic and the bourgeois, a country like Peru experiences the colonial, the cosmopolitan and the national. In the first of these periods, the literature of the country is not that of its own peple, but of the conquistador, an already evolved literature transplanted into the colony, where it usually continues to exert an influence beyond the overthrow of the colonial power. During the second period, which is ushered in by the establishment of the independent republic, elements from different foreign literatures are assimilated simultaneously, and the unique cultural hold of the original colonial power is broken. Finally, in the third period, which only properly arrives with economic as well as political independence, a people 'achieves a well-developed expression of its own personality and its own sentiments'. [26] Obviously this is not a scheme which can be directly applied even in general terms to countries as diverse as Argentina, Egypt or India, which each have different histories of colonial domination. But cinema, which belongs to the twentieth century and employs a technology invented in the metropolis, produces a much more similar situation in all continents.

The first phase everywhere is that of the uncritical assimilation of the product of the dominant culture, marked by dependency on the Hollywood model, submission to its values, concepts and practices. This does not necessarily mean direct imitation of Hollywood genres, so much as the elaboration of new genres appropriate to the national realities concerned, like the Mexican *ranchera* or the Indian 'Bollywood' musical. These cinemas are usually only sustainable in the larger countries with sizeable internal markets (although subsequent examples like the Hong Kong film industry depend on the exploitation of a niche within the international market).

The second phase is the indigenist, or remembrance phase, marked by nostalgia for a legendary or folkloric past, which thus produces a break with first cinema first and foremost in terms of themes and subjects. National third world cinemas which have entered this phase may thus begin to promote the process of decolonisation, but without any real challenge, at least initially, to the orthodox film language of first cinema in which audiences have grown up. This phase provides a different reading of second cinema, especially given that Gabriel cites the example of early films by Rocha (*Barravento*, Brazil, 1961) and Sembene (*Mandabi*, Senegal, 1968). There are also variants, which pick out themes that are not exactly folkloric but exoticist and exploitative. Babenco's *Pixote* (Brazil, 1980) is a particularly notorious example.

The third phase, in which the aims of decolonisation, both cultural and politico-economic, become primary, can be called the combative. This is third cinema proper. Here, of course,

Gabriel includes the example of Solanas and Getino, who after all adopt Fanon's criterion themselves when they declare that in the service of liberation, aesthetics is dissolved into social life - because 'only in this way, as Fanon would say, can decolonisation become possible, and culture, cinema and beauty...become *our* culture, *our* cinema, *our* beauty'. [27] However, Solanas and Getino are for Gabriel only one example; in general he tends towards the broader conceptualisation of García Espinosa's concept of imperfect cinema, and cites other examples of films which the Argentinians would originally have placed in the second cinema category, if only because they still testify to the qualities of individual authorship. This, of course, is one of the reasons why the original definition of third cinema, with its emphasis on collective authorship, needed revision, or at least clarification. It is necessary to allow for the kind of film - the outstanding example is the work of Sanjinés - which in stylistic terms retains all the marks of individual authorship, but in the process of of its creation incorporates the values of the collectivity within which it is made. Indeed it is possible to argue that this is also the condition of much African cinema, and clearly applies to directors like Ousmane Sembene, Souleyman Cissé and many others.

This in turn exemplifies a tension which reflects back on the whole theoretical endeavour. Unless these categories - whichever set we use - are comprehended dialectically, their application will inevitably be mechanical and sterile. Gabriel is keenly aware that the whole approach tends towards schematicism, and he therefore emphasises that there are intermediate positions, 'grey areas', between each phase. Not only that, but a film which occupies such a grey area may face in either direction - indeed it may be contradictory, and face in both directions at once (even deliberately - the Cuban film *Lucía* by Humberto Solás (1968) is a case in point). Only a dialectical understanding allows for this. At the same time, says Gabriel, it demonstrates precisely the fact that the idea of third cinema is not a set of discrete products but *a process of becoming.*

There is no space here to deal with the critical thrust of Gabriel's work. Suffice it to say that he demonstrates considerable critical acumen, and an admirable methodology. In his book on the aesthetics of liberation, for example, he not only surveys some of the major themes of third cinema, but adopts a comparative method for examining style and ideology, setting against each other first and third Cinema films on the same subject, or the work of a European director against that of a director from the third world. In the essay 'Towards a critical theory of third world Films', he advances a set of interlocking components of critical theory which give him real purchase on crucial topics like the radically different representation of space and time in a cinema based not on literary culture, as in the first world, but on the oral cultures of the third world populace. Gabriel himself explains the importance of this critical work when he remarks that in the same way there is a history of unequal economic exchange between North and South, there is also unequal symbolic exchange. The difficulty which radical third world films present to Western interpretation is at least twofold: the result of the film's resistance to the dominant conventions of metropolitan cinema in its own territory, and the loss by first world viewers of their normal priveleged position as the decoder and ultimate arbiter of meaning.

CRITICAL work like Gabriel's is essential in the face of the growing confusion of signs that now besets us. Without entering into a debate about postmodernism, and the way that images are now produced, recycled, received and then recycled again, it is enough to point to the advances over the last decade in video technology. These advances have not only served to expand and accelerate the circulation of visual materials. In the same way that third cinema (as Solanas and Getino observed) was in many ways a by-product of the development of 16mm film at the beginning of the 60s, the advances in video in the 80s have expanded the possibilities for all sorts of 'guerrilla' film-making. Back in 1981, the present writer was able to use a modest commission (£5000) from a West German television station to go and shoot a 16mm documentary on the guerrilla forces in El Salvador, but only because collaboration with both the FMLN and a militant film collective back in Britain

enabled us to minimise the costs. Five years later, it was possible for us to produce a solidarity video on Chile with even less money, in less time and without even going there, because Chilean film-makers were able to supply a ready-edited video for incorporation in a project produced in London.

Developments in video technology are intimately connected with the expansion of television broadcasting and especially the development of cable and satellite transmission. Between the means of delivery and the means of production the relationship is complex and full of tensions, but even in the United States, the heartland of first cinema, and what we might call by extension first television, this process creates new opportunities for activities we could similarly call third television. I am referring here to the provision of access channels on the cable networks, which activists have been able to use in order to transmit not only their own independent programmes, but also videos collected from third world countries, especially Latin America. Indeed one of these groups, Paper Tiger Television based in New York, was been able to organise the distribution of compilation tapes by satellite, for retransmission by access groups across the country. [28]

During the Gulf War, Paper Tiger produced a compilation video of coverage of anti-war demonstrations by different access tv groups across the country, which was shown on Channel Four in Britain. In Britain, where cable and satellite have been much slower to develop, the introduction of Channel Four in the early 80s, with a remit to provide minority programmes, provided new opportunities not only for the broadcast of films and videos from the third world, but also for the development of new strands of independent production at home. This included a number of collective workshops which had grown up during the 70s, which were formally recognised in the Workshop Declaration signed by both Channel Four and the ACTT (Association of Film and Television Technicians, now known, since the merger of several of the entertainments unions, as BECTU). The collective practices of these workshops correspond in great measure to the production strategies proposed by Solanas and Getino for third cinema. Importantly, they included Black and Asian film and video collectives, who were thus able to present for the first time on British television programmes authored by British third world minorities.

The comparison is hardly so simple, of course, for reasons of both theory and praxis. Producing work for a public corporation in a (more or less) liberal democracy with the remit to provide certain spaces for it, is not the same as militant film-making within a populist or military dictatorship destined to be viewed in marginal spaces; nor, if this comparison seems dated, is it the same as video-making by the indigenous peoples of Northern Brazil, for distribution in alternative circuits, which is not clandestine but still part of a life-and-death struggle. The new configuration which came about with Channel Four in this country's independent film culture was addressed by a conference at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1986 on the theme of Third Cinema. Here it became clear that the situation was replete with deep contradictions. In the 70s, the left was still strong, vociferous, and demonstrative. New initiatives were launched across the field of cultural politics, drawing on the lessons to be learnt, for example, from Chilean refugees and the revolution in Portugal, both of which provided powerful instruction about the media, and helped to inform the positions which were recognised in the Workshop Declaration. The paradox of Channel Four - doubtless expectable from the perspective of third cinema - was that official recognition threatened to institutionalise an oppositional film movement which was one of the strongest in Europe. It forced the new programme makers into corners, raising expectations at the same time as imposing new conditions of competition over funds and air space. Moreover, the initial efforts of the new programme makers often betrayed the difficulties of adapting to what was, even if the ratings were pretty negligible, a mass audience, whose anonymity demanded different strategies from those appropriate to the direct encounter with an audience at a small politically motivated meeting. And of course, overshadowing all this activity was the electoral defeat of the established left, and the consequent neo-liberal offensive of the new Tory Government, soon bolstered by the jingoism of the South Atlantic War. The result was fragmentation and demoralisation.

The Edinburgh Conference brought out all the nerviness of this situation, which quickly polarised the participants, including speakers who came from abroad. David Will, who wrote a lengthy report on the event for the journal *Framework*, [29] detected a strong opposition between pluralist positions on the one hand, and populist tendencies on the other, which he roundly criticised. He also reported a split between those he called Afro-American populists, and Asian speakers who appealed strongly to Western ideas.

That this account, if biased, was accurate, was demonstrated by the extremely irate response it provoked from a Black American participant, Clyde Taylor from New York, who objected to being labelled as a populist simply because he had argued that it was necessary to interrogate the Western concept of aesthetics, as Nietzsche and Foucault had, and to recognise the determination of specific historical experiences and cultural differences. 'The suppression of my opposition to Western aesthetics makes me out to be a different kind of barbarian than I am willing to admit', he wrote in reply. 'My quarrel is not with "art" nor with the theoretical assumptions behind it...but with the pre-emptive European metatheorising that has been placed on these activities.' [30]

Will also identified a third and much more pertinent area of discussion, namely the two sessions directly concerned with 'Third Cinema in the Black British Context'. Here the debate was focused on the question of the 'community' which supposedly made up the audience which these film-makers addressed, including their response to the exhortations frequently directed at them not to produce negative images of this community. The British Asian film-maker H.O.Nazareth spoke directly to this question in a paper which considered the objections made by members of the Pakistani and Bagladeshi communities to films like *My Beautiful Launderette*, or the television drama series *King of the Ghetto*. These, in the terms proposed by Solanas and Getino, are successful examples of Second Cinema and its counterpart, Second Television; they use a conventional narrative language to explore themes which, especially in the case of the former, are decidedly risqué. Nazareth argued that the Afro-Caribbean or Asian film-maker should not for a moment contemplate compliance with such objections, which were patronising and protectionist, and could only lead to 'sentimental impoverishment' of the media. [31]

But did this notion of 'community' have any real meaning? Taylor criticises Will's report for Eurocentric anxiety about the question, since 'connectedness to communities struggling against oppression is an essential characteristic of Third Cinema and its symbiosis with the third world'. [32] However, it is exactly the nature and quality of this symbiosis which becomes the problem, especially when trying to achieve Third Cinema from within the first world. There is no question, from the gist of what he says, that he believes this is perfectly possible. The example he mentions is Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers (Italy, 1966)*.

However, I suspect that Taylor's bewilderment over the proceedings at Edinburgh, which was shared by other participants from North America, both black and white, reflects a crucial difference between British and North American political culture. In the United States, the weakness of national leftist traditions corresponds to a much greater sense of community on the local level. Doubtless, given the sheer size of the country, this is not so surprising. In Britain, a much smaller country, national traditions of left political culture are both much stronger and more centralised. Even though they long ago became ideologically compromised and diluted, the result is a certain fear of the divisiveness of appeals to the rights of different communities. For immigrant peoples, the assertion of community becomes a political necessity, and rewards the cultural activist who is able to mobilise it. Unfortunately, this produces anxiety in the white native, who is suffering from problems like the break up of communities by post-war urban redevelopment and increasing social disintegration. This rebounds on the political sensibilities of the immigrant communities, which reproduce the gamut of positions to be found in the wider body politic.

Will reports that two different positions had emerged in the Black film community about how to deal with this situation. For the Afro-Caribbean video workshop Ceddo, the concept posed no problems; their strategy was to address a community which they saw as homogenous. Nazareth and the Black Audio-Film Collective, on the other hand, argued that the Black and Asian communities were not homogenous, and the idea of reflecting or addressing them was illusory. It is not an accident that this position corresponds to a film like *The Passion of Remembrance*, a critical study of the subordination of the issues of sexual politics to anti-racist struggle, which employed an experimental style that reminded many viewers of Godard. Will's commentary on this film is pointed: it evokes 'one of the distinctive characteristics of Third Cinema as defined by Gabriel: a cinema which cannot be fitted into traditional categories'; accordingly, it resoundingly justifies the contention that Third Cinema could indeed be made in Britain. [33] Taylor thought Will was rather too ready to make the claim, and he may be right. *Passion of Remembrance* is one of those films which occupies what Gabriel calls the grey area somewhere between Second and Third Cinema, a film which doesn't quite connect with a community it cannot quite identify, whose strengths are closer to the avant garde than popular sensibility.

THE contradictions which surfaced at Edinburgh partly came from the way the conference was set up. Will reported the distress expressed by the North American critic Julianne Burton on her discovery that there were no Latin American film-makers at the conference to speak for themselves. It is symptomatic of this omission that Will was able to begin his report with the claim that the term Third Cinema was coined by Teshome Gabriel; while Homi Bhabha delivered an extraordinary piece of metatheorising, addressing the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference from a perspective derived from Derrida, which betrayed complete ignorance of the history of third cinema in both practice and theory. One is reminded that this very journal managed for many years to ignore the existence of both the theory and the practice of third cinema; and since many of the positions advanced at the conference were informed by the traditions of this journal, the conclusion follows that the conference was indeed, in certain measure, as Clyde Taylor maintained, a belated and confused attempt by Eurocentric theorists to come to terms with a cultural force which they had always found somewhat awkward and slippery.

In light of the development over the last few years of 'post-colonial' theory represented precisely by figures like Bhabha, this judgement might now seem too hasty. The real issue lies elsewhere, in the perennial problem about the relationship, or rather mismatch, between theoretical endeavour and the terrain of praxis. This issue is part of the problem: if the question is the practice of third cinema, then this is not conducted according to a theory; it responds directly to everyday circumstances. And this applies to both means and ends, both the political target and the route taken by the process of production.

These circumstances, at the end of the 1990s, are the fin-de-siècle world of a new world order which is not really new at all, but more like the old one with a part chopped out. Communism has fallen (except in Cuba) and the Cold War is over but it still hurts, like a phantom limb. At the same time, globalisaton, for vast swathes of the world, is not experienced as a new world ethos, but as the intensification of a process which has been going on ever since they first entered into a colonial state. However, the last few decades have seen the technological explosion in communications and the media which now goes by the name of convergence, and in this process, in which dominant information and audio-visual production becomes both more embracing and self-referential, the means of production have become cheaper, more accessible and easier to operate, and have altered the conditions for creation in both the margins and the interstices. The means for producing third cinema, third video, even third television, are much greater now than when the praxis first appeared; the political context, however, has been transformed.

The original third cinema was premised on militant mass political movements of a kind which hardly exist any longer, and upon ideologies which have taken a decisive historical

beating. Third cinema can only survive if it recognises that it comes from the margins and the interstices. Margins and interstices are different but closely related spaces. They are also global in their interconnections. A successful writer, say, from an African country, who is exiled by the regime and comes to live in London, has been politically marginalised but has entered the interstices of cultural life in the metropolis. A successful Caribbean writer who having lived London chooses to return home is returning from the margins within the metropolis to the margins beyond. On the other hand, in the universe of representational spaces in which their work is received, the point of reception is polyvalent. The global conditions of postmodern culture make it possible for margins and interstices across the globe to become aware of each other. This is even more acute in the case of, let us say, a North African film-maker exiled in Paris who makes a film about the marginality of his fellow exiles which is then seen, sporadically and intermittently, on screens all around the world. Or an Argentinian exile who returns to make a film funded by a European television station about the course of the continents political aspirations. The result is perhaps the extension of third cinema into a new space akin to what Teshome Gabriel has recently called nomadic cinema.

This much is theory. Perhaps it is necessary to reiterate the point which Getino made in his 'Notes on Third Cinema' written ten years after the original manifesto: the value of theory is always dependent on the terrain in which the praxis is carried out. Which suggests that what we need now is a new geography.

References

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4 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *Cine, cultura y descolonización*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1973, p.10, quoted in Ana López, 'Argentina, 1955-1976: The Film Industry and Its Margins', in John King and Nissa Torrents, eds., *The Garden of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema*, London, BFI, 1987, p.67.

5 Stam, 1990.

6 *CinémAction* No.1, p.61.

7 The essay first appeared in the journal *Tricontinental*, published in Paris in October 1969, and has been republished several times since, in different languages and in different versions, some abbreviated. For the purposes of the present article I have used the version published in Michael Chanan, ed., *Twenty Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, BFI/Channel Four, London, 1983.

8 For a more detailed account, see Roger Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, 'Three World Theory'.

9 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, 1983, p.17.

10 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, 1983, p.17. This slightly begs the question of which world Japan belongs to.

11 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, 1983, pp.22-23 (translation revised).

12 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, 1983, p.21 (translation revised).

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14 Octavio Getino, 'Some Notes on the Concept of a "Third Cinema"', excerpted from *Notas sobre cine argentino y latinoamericano*, Edimedios, Mexico, 1984; in Tim Barnard, ed., *Argentine Cinema*, Nightwood Editions, Toronto, 1986, p.102.

15 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, ed., p.23 (translation revised).

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17 Barnard, p.102.

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19 *CinémAction* 1, p.66.

20 See Alberto Hijar, ed., *Hacia un tercer cine*, Cuardernos de Cine No.20, UNAM (Mexico), 1972.

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24 UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1982,

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26 José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, Casa de las Americas, 1975, p.21.

27 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan, 1982, p.20 (translation revised).

28 See Michael Chanan, 'Playing the access card', *New Socialist* No.50, June 1987, p45.

29 David Will, 'Edinburgh Film Festival, 1986', in *Framework*, 32/33, London, 1986.

30 Clyde Taylor, 'Eurocentrics Vs New Thought at Edinburgh', *Framework*, 34, London, 1987, pp.141-2. I can only declare a certain sympathy with Taylor's arguments, even though he perhaps overstates the case.

31 Will, 1986, p.206.

32 Taylor, 1987, p.144.

33 Will, 1986, p.203.