

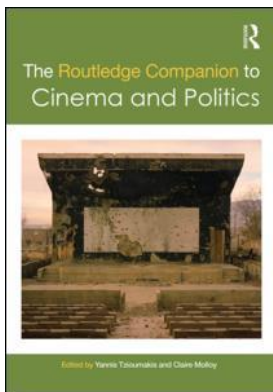
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.104

On: 21 Oct 2021

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics

Yannis Tzioumakis, Claire Molloy

The Dialectics of Third Cinema

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315678863.ch1>

Mike Wayne

Published online on: 30 Jun 2016

How to cite :- Mike Wayne. 30 Jun 2016, *The Dialectics of Third Cinema from:* The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics Routledge

Accessed on: 21 Oct 2021

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315678863.ch1>

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THE DIALECTICS OF THIRD CINEMA

Mike Wayne

Introduction

Third Cinema is an appropriate place to begin an anthology on the intersection of politics and cinema. The term refers to a body of filmmaking practice and a series of manifestoes and essays by the filmmakers themselves that emerged in the 1960s. Territorially, its epicentre was Latin America, although important examples of Third Cinema were also produced in Africa and Asia. This tri-continental context was not of course accidental. For Third Cinema was powerfully marked by the political context of the struggle for decolonization and national liberation from the remnants of European settler colonialism and the even more powerful forces of North American Imperialism. The term 'Third Cinema' was coined in 1969 by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino to define, in a non-prescriptive manner, a cinema that was emerging out of this struggle and which other writers/filmmakers had called a Cinema of Hunger (Glauber Rocha), a Revolutionary Cinema (Jorge Sanjinés), an Imperfect Cinema (Julio García Espinosa) and a nationalist, realist, critical and popular cinema (Fernando Birri). For Solanas and Getino, Third Cinema emerges as a critique in theory and practice of First Cinema (mainstream, commercial cinema, both Hollywood and its national imitators around the world) and Second Cinema. Second Cinema is the cinema of institutionalized national culture, the cinema of authorial expressivity, the cinema of the middle class, the cinema of psychological crisis or, in its more outward facing, externally orientated 'realist' modes, the cinema of poverty as a great *moral* question (rather than a question of socio-economic relations), and sometimes the cinema of poverty as aesthetic beauty as in Margot Benacerraf's gorgeously shot, and for that very reason, problematic, Venezuelan documentary, *Araya* (1959).

For Solanas and Getino, the prerequisite to imagine and produce a cinema that breaks with the two existing dominant models of cinema, was the Tri-continental movements of the masses that were demanding change:

[T]he revolution does not begin with the taking of political power from imperialism and the bourgeoisie, but rather begins at the moment when the masses sense the need for change and their intellectual vanguards begin to study and carry out this change *through activities on different fronts*.

(Solanas and Getino 1997: 35, original emphasis)

So cinema contributes to the struggle for liberation by intervening in what turns out to be one of the most important fronts: the front of consciousness, culture and identity. It is this focus in fact that means Third Cinema is not merely the subordination of film to a pre-existing political programme or ideology. Third Cinema is orientated towards the everyday life of the people struggling for change, it is, as the Argentinian director Raymundo Gleyzer, killed by the military after the 1976 coup, put it, a “cinema of the base” (Gutierrez 2004). The *aesthetic* dimension of Third Cinema is as important as the political. Third Cinema was characterized by Robert Stam as the conjoining of the two avant-gardes: the political and the artistic, a rare coming together indeed (1998). Stam was specifically discussing Solanas and Getino’s film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) and in that context, the artistic vanguard that meets the political is indeed the avant-garde. But the avant-garde is only one specific aesthetic strategy and not all of Third Cinema can be said to draw on the resources of European modernism. The key feature of Third Cinema is that as a politically questioning cinema it is also more than merely an instrumentally political cinema. Some aesthetic dimension – where the medium itself poses questions concerning the role of perception, consciousness and culture in the struggle for change – is as essential to it as an ambition to intervene in the struggle for political change. Birri described the new Latin American cinema in a way that underlines the importance of the aesthetic dimension to Third Cinema and why that aesthetic dimension is itself deeply political. It has, he writes, “a poetics of the transformation of reality ... it generates a creative energy ... to modify the reality upon which it is projected” (Birri 1997a: 96). This modification may occur because consciousness has been invited to modify its relationship with existing practices, and from that, perhaps, eventually, develop new practices. This aesthetic dimension means that the great Third Cinema films are simultaneously uniquely *singular* and at the same time saturated with the need to communicate truths about social, political, economic, cultural and military domination.

Third Cinema, as a cinema of liberation must pose this aesthetics and politics of transformation at several different levels. They are:

- 1 At the level of representation – the films themselves, who is represented and how (textual strategies) and with what tacit intention and effects?
- 2 At the level of working practices – how a production group works, its internal structures and what scope there is to break down hierarchical modes of working and develop collaborative models. Crucially how does the production group – especially the ‘intellectual vanguards’ as Solanas and Getino call them, relate to the people the film is about? What feedback mechanisms or possibilities of participation exist and how are these balanced against the exigencies to actually produce a ‘finished’ film? Here there is a whole deeply complex set of issues regarding the relationship between middle-class professionals and their relationship with groups who have not had the cultural and educational benefits of their upbringing. Many, although not all of the Third Cineastes came from such middle-class backgrounds, and if Third Cinema is a cinema that involves a break with the traditional institutional home of the middle-class filmmaker-artist – Second Cinema – then that must involve a continual process of critical self-reflection on the part of those filmmakers. Third Cinema filmmakers were indeed aware of this, more so than most Western filmmakers had been hitherto, but the difficulty and complexity of this question may be signposted by just noting that the very concept of ‘vanguards’ that Solanas and Getino invoke above, both artistic and political, has come under intense critique in the last thirty years, first with post-modernism and second with new digital technology facilitating and promoting more spontaneous and apparently more leaderless revolt.

- 3 At the broader level of the industry within which the working practices of a production operates – what is the relationship of a production to the industry in terms of its structures of production and practices of distribution and reception? Apart from fairly brief moments, such as Soviet cinema in the 1920s and Cuban Cinema in the 1960s and early 1970s, when, on both occasions the energies of a popular revolution were still coursing through the new institutions of cinema set up by the state, Third Cinema has been very largely a de-institutionalized cinema, sometimes even a guerrilla cinema, shot on the run from a state that would like to shoot the filmmakers. This de-institutionalized cinematic practice has brought it into conflict with states and has made its viability vis-à-vis the dominant cinemas of One and Two, highly problematic.
- 4 At the level of the wider cultural, political, economic and military forces at play – what is the relationship of Third Cinema to the concepts and realities of nation, class, race, gender and imperialism?

The posing of political questions by Third Cinema around these four levels is reason enough to return to Third Cinema. But there are other reasons as well. For Third Cinema comes out of the context of decolonization to teach us, here in the West, some crucial lessons regarding the bloody history of our states and the rapacious business interests they defend, which our own education systems and dominant media, routinely hide. The ‘moment’ of the first wave of Third Cinema more or less ended (with the exception of some significant individual filmmakers, such as Patricio Guzman or, until his death in 2007, Ousmane Sembéne) in the mid-1970s. For that was the period in which coups and ensuing military dictatorships around the world became the favoured means by which the dominant classes in the developing world, and the business and political class in the West, put a stop to the rising aspirations of the masses for radical change. The outcome of that story also forms the prelude to and foundation of our current historical context, one that includes the West as well, namely the rise of neo-liberal capitalism. The 1973 coup in Chile which overthrew the democratically elected Marxist President Salvador Allende, provided the opportunity to test-run the neo-liberal policies that had been developed by the North American Chicago School economists, through the barrel of a gun (Klein 2008). These experiments in privatization, deregulation and opening economies up to international competition and business interests, were then imported into both America and the UK during the 1980s and subsequently exported the world over through powerful supra-national institutions such as the European Union, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and various trade treaties. This is why anyone interested today in the possibilities of a political cinema that contests this global trajectory, will find a return to Third Cinema instructive and inspiring.

Writings

The Third Cineastes were writers, thinkers and advocates of cinema and its role within the struggle for liberation. The strong division between critics and filmmakers which we are used to in the West, was not for them. For the Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, “solid theoretical judgment” is a must for the filmmaker because they are “immersed in a complex milieu, the profound meaning of which does not lie on its surface”. Filmmakers cannot simply go out in the world “with just a camera and their sensibility”. They need to “promote the theoretical development of their artistic practice” (1997: 109–10). For Fernando Birri in his essay “Cinema and Underdevelopment” the task was to develop a cinema that “awakens consciousness; which clarifies matters ... which disturbs, worries, shocks ...” (Birri 1997b: 86).

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea elaborates on this in his important, but largely under-appreciated essay “The Viewer’s Dialectic”. Film for Alea ties emotional engagement to “the *discovery* of something” (1997: 120) by capturing fragments of reality (as images) and reordering and sifting those fragments to create new relations and associations that produce a rupture with our habitualized responses to the everyday environment (122–3). Getino and Solanas concur. Third Cinema does not passively illustrate a situation: “it provides *discovery through transformation*” (Solanas and Getino 1997: 47). At the same time, this is a cinema that rejects the bifurcation of cinema-going into distinct markets. Birri castigates commercial cinema and what he calls the cinema of expression – referring to the Argentinian art cinema which had been established in the 1940s and 50s. The former abandons any cultural goals, the latter abandons the mass audience. The commercial cinema dominated the market back in the 1960s as it does today and the commercial cinema is in turn dominated by Hollywood. “Of about 500 films shown in 1962, 300 were in English, and most of them North American, while some 30 were Argentinian” (Birri 1997b: 91). When one country or region is able to get its media (film, television, radio, music, etc.) into another country or region to the extent that that country or region has difficulty producing and/or circulating its own media in those forms, then we have what is called media imperialism. Understandably in the context of decolonization, media imperialism was often seen as leading to or fostering cultural imperialism. This implies that the media of the dominating country carry with them values, norms, beliefs and perspectives that start to break down and disassemble the *cultural* values of the country whose media are so dominated. As Herbert Schiller notes:

U.S. films and TV programs are the chief fare of national systems in most countries. News programs, especially CNN, offer U.S. perspectives, sometimes the only perspective provided, to world audiences. U.S. recorded music, theme parks, and advertising now comprise a major part of the world’s cultural environment.

(2001: 160)

Such concerns about cultural imperialism were subsequently critiqued on the basis that audiences were not passive dupes of media imported from elsewhere, that unequal trade flows were in any case evening up in some media, such as television, with the development of cable and satellite, and national cultures were always more mixed and heterogeneous than the nationalist-orientated critiques of media and cultural imperialism suggested (see Tomlinson 1991). However, the Third Cineastes were not petty nationalists. Their goal was social and political consciousness of the political and economic conditions of the nation. They were well aware that cultural identities did not neatly line up with national borders artificially drawn up, usually by colonialists of yesteryear. They were also intensely aware of how diverse their nations were. The Latin Americans needed no lessons from western cultural theorists on hybridity and *mestizo* culture. Neither were they against cultural exchange, but instead they were demanding a fairer basis for exchange. Tomlinson argues that the discourse of domination that the cultural imperialism theses use does not square with the fact that “plenty of people in the ‘undeveloped world’ are enthusiastic about the cultural products of the West” (Tomlinson 1991: 94).

Birri encountered the same argument in the 1960s, formulated as “the spectator’s right to choose But this free-market sophism omits one small detail: that for an audience to choose a film, it must first be exhibited, which generally does not happen with national films” (Birri 1997b: 91). Nor did the Third Cineastes see their audience as dupes. How could they when their audiences were engaging in mass social movements of protest and revolution? But the

capacity for audiences to indigenize cultural materials from elsewhere and transform their meanings into the cultural frameworks relevant to them, rather than have such media-cultural products break down their own cultural frameworks, is likely to be best protected if cultures not only receive but also *produce*. The right to be a cultural producer, and to have access to your own national market, is fundamental to the protection of cultural rights. If a society lacks a productive capacity of its own in a given media and perhaps across many media, then it is reasonable to argue that its ability to sustain a cultural identity rooted in its own immediate conditions of existence and thus also its ability to transform foreign media in ways that still connect with those conditions on the terms decided by the social audience, may be harmed. Today Cubans have a great love of classic Hollywood cinema. But they also have the productive capacity to produce their own cinema. Thus the presence of Hollywood in Cuban film culture means something very different than when, as is often the case, Hollywood dominates foreign markets and thus cuts off access of local producers to their own audiences.

Given the situation that Birri confronted in the 1960s, he argued that filmmakers must embrace low-budget production in order to make it easier to recover costs and attract small capital independent of the state, with its tendency to censor. Birri saw low-budget production as a way of transforming “technical limitations into new expressive possibilities” (1997b: 92). Similarly, Garcia Espinosa over in Cuba argued for what he called ‘imperfect cinema’. The term imperfect cinema was meant, at one level, to be ironic and playful. Aesthetically it is counterpoised to the ‘perfect’ cinema of the west, technically polished, resource rich, complete as a narrative in every way. The problem with such ‘perfection’ in the aesthetic is that it is closed to the spectator. Perfect cinema is a cinema happy with the world as it is and thus against this model ‘imperfect cinema’ is far more preferable. In part this involves a riposte to big budgets and overconsumption, so that a cinema of the oppressed has the infrastructure that enables it to democratically engage with the real-life conditions of the people it represents. Imperfect cinema revels in and bears the marks of its difficult conditions of production because this brings it closer to the people it is trying to represent. Espinosa’s argument finds an echo in Adorno’s musings on the possibilities of film in the context of the New German Cinema in the 1960s escaping the apparently all-powerful influence of commodified cinema: “works which have not completely mastered their technique, conveying as a result something consolingly uncontrolled and accidental, have a liberating quality” (1981–2: 199). But for Espinosa (and this is the thrust of Adorno’s point as well) ‘imperfect cinema’ was never a hymn to ‘bad’ filmmaking, only a rejection of the dominant models that unquestionably make their standards, the universal ones.

There is another dimension to Espinosa’s argument that is rarely discussed. On the one hand he argues for a partisan and committed cinema. But this ‘committed’ cinema, when measured against the utopian injunction for art to transcend immediate social interests and overcome social divisions, must recognize itself as an ‘imperfect cinema’. At this ethical level of the argument, Espinosa means the term ‘imperfect’ quite literally, judged against the normative standard of an art free of social division. Espinosa insists that the aesthetic must be committed to advancing the social interests of the excluded majority (or minorities without power). At the same time he recognizes that this relationship is problematic – it speaks of divisions (including those that structure access to filmmaking) that have yet to be overcome. It is indicative in representatives who speak on behalf of or instead of others, both political cadres and filmmakers speaking for the people. This critical reflection on the role of the filmmaker and intellectual was widespread amongst the Third Cineastes despite the vanguardist politics of the time. Birri invited the shanty-town dwellers of his first documentary *Tire Dié* (1960) to view a rough cut of the film and give him feedback on it and he toured with the film outside

the established venues of exhibition. Jorge Sanjinés, who worked with the indigenous people of Bolivia, wrote of the need to break down the bourgeois ideology of the artist, to work collaboratively and to integrate the people who the filmmakers are attempting to represent, into the filmmaking process itself:

Today there are many group efforts and collective films, and, what is very important, there is the participation of the people who act, who come forward, who create directly, determining the form of the film in a process where the immutable script is disappearing or where the dialogue, during the act of filming, spontaneously issues from the people themselves and from their prodigious capacity.

(Sanjinés 1997: 62–3)

Espinosa wonders if the conditions for overcoming the division between elite artists/intellectuals and the broader population can be laid with the universalization of college-level education, a reduction of the working day and evolution of film technology that cheapens production and dissemination technology that facilitates distribution (Espinosa 1997: 72). Of the three, only the technological conditions have been met today.

The ritualized gesture

Hanoi Martes 13 (1968) by Cuban documentary filmmaker Santiago Alvarez was shot in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. The film is a symbol of solidarity across two continents between two countries in their shared struggle against North American Imperialism. In the film Alvarez alternates between charting the everyday life of the North Vietnamese in Hanoi and the surrounding countryside interspersed with their preparations to defend themselves against the aggression of North America. This structure culminates in a shot of what appears to be some sort of live theatrical performance: we can hear singing on the soundtrack but the visual track shows a hand making a Buddhist gesture as part of the performance. The film then cuts to an explosion which visually and aurally takes us to another location – the American bombing which the film has been preparing us for, has begun. After a sequence showing the battle between the airplanes and anti-aircraft fire and ground-to-air missile replies by the North Vietnamese, the raid finishes and Alvarez's camera surveys the damage, the death and the destruction. The camera settles on the remains of a Buddhist statue in the rubble: the hand again is making the Buddhist gesture, the Vitarka Mudra (a symbol of teaching and reason). The message is clear: the North Americans want to destroy a peaceful culture and a way of life that has been conveyed through everyday rituals (fishing, rice cultivation, eating, cycling, taking photos in the park, etc). This is emblematic of a good chunk of Third Cinema: exploring confrontation through the ritualized gesture; that is the gestures of life that become pregnant with social meaning. The aesthetic dimension that Birri noted was central to Third Cinema, here isolates one gesture in particular (the Buddhist one) as a symbol of everything that has gone before. Brecht called this the *gest* (1978: 198–201).

The same ritualized gesture pregnant with social meaning is there at the conclusion of Birri's *Tire Dié*, as the train, that symbol of modernity and communication enters Santa Fe chased by shanty-town kids risking life and limb in a well-rehearsed encounter between the middle-class Argentinians and those that have been excluded from 'progress'. The ritualized gestures of the Argentinian middle class in their leisure and business activities are mercilessly satirized in Solanas and Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces*. Even their cemetery is a site of interrogation, for the statues and tombs are rituals frozen in stone that act to extend (and thus

reinforce) their order from earth into heaven. Another form of interrogating the ritualized gesture is the (re)use of the products of mass culture – the ritualized gestures embedded in a pre-existing piece of film, a photograph, a piece of music, which the viewer can then think about in new ways, and rethink their relationship to this type of material, thanks to its recontextualization in a Third Cinema text. Alvarez uses this technique in *Hanoi Martes 13* to get us to rethink uncritical media coverage of the US President Lyndon Baines Johnson. He uses this technique more extensively in films such as *Now!* (1964) and *LBJ* (1968).

In trying to explore these questions of cultural politics, the thinker who informed the work of the Third Cineastes most directly was probably Frantz Fanon, the African revolutionary originally from Martinique, who went on to join the Algerian revolutionary struggle against the French colonizers. Fanon identifies three typical cultural positions that are taken up by the colonized in the struggle for decolonization, and with suitable modifications, these positions correlate to the positions marked out by First, Second and Third Cinema. Although these three positions may be characterized as three phases through which the colonized can go through – and which Fanon himself did go through at a biographical level – they are best viewed not as a linear process which a people go through once and for all but rather a triangle of positions which a struggle may revolve through according to circumstances and social interests. The main social interests at play in Fanon's argument are the colonialists, the native middle class, who after independence transform themselves into a new bourgeoisie, the intellectuals and the people, themselves divided between urban workers and the peasant rural workers. When the colonialist colonizes, taking land and resources and dismantling the communities and institutions of the colonized, they always also attack the culture of those they dominate. For the culture is the last front of resistance to the colonizer, less tangible than land and resources and more powerful as a way of retaining identities, value systems and consciousness that is differentiated from the colonizer. This is a threat which the colonizer seeks to break down: the destruction of the distinct life-world of the dominated becomes paramount so that the colonizer can say that before their arrival there was merely “barbarism, degradation, and bestiality” (Fanon 1963: 211). Within the force-field of colonial power, the cultural traditions of the people solidify into a formalism “which is more and more stereotyped” (236). Lacking the capacity to innovate, it freezes, becomes inert, even though at the same time, it is taken by the colonialists as “a refusal to submit” (237). The middle class and the intellectuals, however, adopt the first position on offer within these power relations: that of assimilation to the culture of the colonizer.

Later, however, a fraction of the intellectuals break away from this position and adopt a second strategy of survival. Their training and profession is more removed from the direct economic interests which keep the native middle class more or less permanently tied to assimilation. This fraction of a class fraction turns to the frozen culture of the people in an attempt to recover a cultural identity that existed before the arrival of the colonialist. This strategy plays an important role in the struggle for decolonization, building up the resources for the coming struggle: “it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory, and solemnity” (Fanon 1963: 210). But Fanon is critical of this recovery of tradition because it is purely defensive and above all static, fixed and not profoundly grounded in the movements of change, not profoundly grounded in the *historical* dimension of culture. Instead there is a turn to “customs, traditions, and the appearances of ... [the] people”, but this becomes a “banal search for exoticism” (221). This return certainly has an impact on the colonizers, who fear this recovery of lost cultures because it undoes their work of domination – but that in itself is not for Fanon reason enough to uncritically endorse this second position. Instead he criticizes it as a mirror opposite of the

“unqualified assimilation” (222) of the middle classes and intellectuals which characterizes the first position. It is a superficial engagement with the culture of a people which the intellectual now endorses and thus betrays an outsider position that often accumulates no more than “a stock of particularisms” (223). The intellectual “wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments. And these outer garments are merely the reflection of a hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion” (223–4). Thus the intellectual misses “a much more fundamental substance which itself is continually being renewed” and instead, intellectuals satisfy themselves with “mummified fragments which because they are static are in fact symbols of negation and outworn contrivances” (224). This second position correlates to a significant chunk of Second Cinema – where exploring the culture of the people comes to be characteristic of a national cinema differentiating itself from commercial cinema or Hollywood domination. But the culture of the people tends to be viewed by filmmakers insufficiently engaged with the culture, as residual, exotic and always to be seen in the rear-view mirror of history. However, only on the surface does tradition appear to be fixed and static. In reality, the meanings of traditions are continually undergoing change and in the context of a revolutionary struggle of national liberation – even more so. Tradition at that point becomes “fundamentally unstable” and “shot through by centrifugal tendencies” (224). This is what Fanon calls the third position – one which correlates closely with Third Cinema. It is the fighting stage, the combative stage. This is the stage where there is a heightened awareness of the relationship between culture and the struggle for change. Now everything is open to question, nothing can be taken for granted. This is the “zone of occult instability” (227) which Fanon recommends the struggle and particularly the intellectuals, to enter, because that is where they will find the people in their real life.

Dialectics of cinema

Fanon’s grasp of the dialectics of culture and its relationship with broader political struggles helps us think the typologies of First, Second and Third Cinema as having a dialectical relationship. These categories refer to cinematic practices that are constantly aware of each other and are in a continual process of dialogue, critique and appropriation. The categories refer to a spectrum of possibilities within each type of cinema rather than a fixed homogeneous list of pre-determined characteristics. With Fanon, even the dominant culture that demands assimilation in the context of colonial power, has within it critical sub-currents that Fanon drew upon to critique colonialism (Marx and Hegel for example). Likewise First Cinema, the cinema of commerce, profits, the cinema dominated by Hollywood globally, has critical currents within it that are attuned to the themes of Third Cinema: imperialism, political authoritarianism and capitalist class power (Wayne 2001).

In *Three Kings* (Russell 1999) set as the first Gulf War between America and Iraq in 1991 comes to a close, Mark Wahlberg plays American soldier Troy Barlow who is captured by Iraqi troops. In a key scene Troy is having wires attached to him for some electric-shock torture. In an ordinary First Cinema film, this sort of scene is used to turn the Arab into the Other – an evil, irrational, hate-filled figure who threatens the innocent and the heroic. Yet in *Three Kings*, a Third Cinema moment occurs when the Other now talks back and starts asking some hard questions as to why exactly American troops are in the Middle East. Troy’s interrogator asks “What is the problem with Michael Jackson?” before going on to answer a bemused Troy by linking Jackson’s well-known surgery that changed the structure of his face and complexion of his skin to a racist United States, which then plays itself out in imperialist adventures abroad. This linking of culture to politics and subversion of the usual frameworks of ideology

through which American stars are presented in Hollywood film, shows *Three Kings* to be in some sort of dialogue with Third Cinema.

Nor should we assume that Third Cinema and its themes and strategies are only relevant to contexts involving the struggle against colonial and imperial power.

Andrew Nichol's science fiction film *In Time* (2011) may be read as a blockbuster version of the film Sergei Eisenstein never made, despite plans, namely a film based on Marx's *Das Kapital* (Eisenstein 1976). *In Time* imagines a future where people are genetically coded to drop dead at 25 unless they have time on their genetic clock. The majority literally have little time on their clock, living day to day while prices, controlled by the elites are constantly rising. Meanwhile the rich have hundreds of years available to them and can theoretically live forever. This is virtually a popular culture version of Marx's critique of how a ruling class controls the labour time of the working class and accumulates the fruits of their labour as its own surplus (Wayne 2012).

Of course, with First Cinema films, there are problems in the strategies deployed. That is why they are First Cinema films, but equally, in all cases, a dialogue is going on with the thematic concerns and strategies of Third Cinema. Although a prime motivating force for the development of Third Cinema in Argentina in the 1960s was a deep dissatisfaction with a thoroughly incorporated Second Cinema sponsored by the state, Second Cinema cannot be reduced to these specific circumstances. Like First Cinema it is instead best understood as a spectrum of possibilities that vary according to historical circumstances and personnel. There are plenty of examples of Second Cinema being pushed right to the borders of its own category and opening up a dialogic 'trade' in ideas and concerns with Third Cinema. Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972) is clearly cognizant of the revolutionary films of the same period as it savagely attacks the madness of colonialism and the hypocrisy of the Church with its tale of Spanish conquistadors searching for the mythical El Dorado. There are times when the film blurs its fictional register with documentary modes, thus destabilizing any complacent sense the viewer may have that this is a story that belongs solely in the sixteenth century. This mixing of documentary and fiction is a recurrent one in Third Cinema. It is a way of opening up the fictional "hermetic structures that are born and die on the screen" (Solanas and Getino 1997: 41–2) to history, while at the same time the fictional register within documentary works to remind audiences that this is a story told from a point of view: it has a subject(ivity) attached to it. This mixing of registers can also be found in the Second Cinema film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004), a biopic based on Che Guevara's diaries that recounted his journey through Latin America with his friend Alberto Granado. The film may be viewed as the story of someone undergoing a journey of political awakening and the film itself travels in the direction of Third Cinema as a result. The documentary style register which the film draws on here and there reminds the viewer again, that this is not a story that exists only in the past, but that the difficulties and injustices that Che encountered back in the 1950s were also discovered by the filmmakers in the course of making the film in the 2000s. Thus Third Cinema is best understood as the dialectical synthesis, that is, the critical sifting and reconfiguration of First and Second Cinema according to the needs of contemporary struggles.

Conclusion

As a critical category Third Cinema remains crucial to understand those examples of First and Second Cinema that are pushing against the limits of these cinematic practices by engaging with the themes and strategies of Third Cinema. Those themes and strategies associated with the first wave of Third Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s left their indelible mark on

world cinema. Their grasp of cultural politics and its shaping within the force-field of brute power remains exceptionally sophisticated. Their poetic-political use of the cinematic form is virtually unparalleled. The Third Cinema challenge to cinema at the level of production practices helped forge new modes of working, new goals for distribution and exhibition and new ways of thinking about what the experience of cinema could be. Their attempt to develop alternative modes of distribution and exhibition for example is now becoming more and more possible with the development of digital media and the internet. This has helped revive a growing alternative film culture as what Solanas and Getino called parallel circuits of exhibition now open up in multi-purpose spaces. Cafes, libraries, museums, community centres, clubs, independent cinemas and so forth are now increasingly venues where a film culture is being watched and discussed that is outside First or Second Cinema and outside the corporate news information media. The documentary genre has been the big winner here. From Michael Moore's *Capitalism, A Love Story* (2009) through to low-budget guerrilla filmmakers on the front line of revolutionary struggles and insurrections around the world, from Greece to Egypt. Third Cinema, despite premature obituaries, is not dead. It will continue to emerge in new and changing forms, tied to the specificities of the struggles it is exploring, as long as the political-ethical imperative for those struggles exists: that is as long as capitalism and its offshoots in imperialism continue to exist.

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