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Future Experiments from the Past: Third Cinema and Artistic Research from Below

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Abstract: *This article examines possible articulations of artistic praxis and research in relation to social conflict and political struggle. Taking some of the guiding principles of Third Cinema, which we will consider here both a film strategy and an epistemic project "from below", our aim is to provide elements for discussion to the current debates on art-as-research. Third Cinema, despite its specificities and differences with current times, provided a dialectical and dialogistic approach to artwork, which was conceived as an open realm for criticism, discussion, and struggle, inscribed within a radical political agenda. This article aims at recovering the importance of this critical movement in the arts and uses it as a source of inspiration to propose a series of insights on artistic research, in relation to contemporary interests in collaborative, long-term projects and the third wave of institutional critique. We seek to challenge commonsensical notions around four fundamental axes—experimentation; temporality; public sphere; and institutionalism—by confronting dominant views on these topics through what could be called a Third Cinema politics of artistic research from below—namely, from the perspective of those who embrace research as an intrinsic part of the creative and emancipatory potential of the arts.*

Artistic Research from Below

In 2010, critical thinker, artist and filmmaker Hito Steyerl published the article "Aesthetics of Resistance? Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict". The text was a critical reflection on the foundations of artistic research becoming an academic discipline. For Steyerl, the very idea of discipline might be opposed to art's constant struggle against normalisation. Thus, if normalisation of artistic research served to *discipline* the arts as emancipatory praxis, perhaps the arts should better turn their gaze towards the projects, attempts and genealogies of resistance to that disciplinary logic as historical examples of organised research practices for emancipation and what Steyerl called "epistemic disobedience" (34).

This shift should also attend the geopolitics of resistance: if artistic research as discipline had been commonly thought by and for the interests of the Western countries, it could then respond, to some extent, to the needs of "advanced First World capitalism" (Steyerl 32). By embracing a conceptual fault line between West/North and East/South as a route, the text operated a displacement of the hegemony of Western countries to look at the counterhistories of artistic research coming from the Global South. In these counterhistories, a prominent space was given to the histories of political film practice and, especially, to the revolutionary experiences of the New Latin American Cinema. For Steyerl, those cinemas were fundamental examples of epistemic constructions aimed at social transformations born out of conflict and resistance.

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"Aesthetics of Resistance?" was thus an intervention into contemporary debates around the transformation of artistic research into an academic discipline and the "educational turn" in the arts, that saw many artistic research programmes appearing in the US and European academia, followed by universities around the world. As art historian and curator Irit Rogoff stated, this mutation of the academic landscape was a direct consequence of the bold neoliberal reforms that were—and still are—transforming the shape and goals of higher education institutions into a "monitoring and outcome-based culture" ("Turning" 4). Thus, while hegemonic views of cognitive capitalism over education systems in the West have imposed the urge to train so-called creative citizens ready for the challenges posed by "creative societies" (Kačerauskas)—and thus the implementation of more robust and disciplined university tracks on the arts—we are also facing a countermovement coming mainly from student associations and the public and educational programmes of museums that stress indisciplinarity and decolonial approaches to art curriculums and practices.[1] In this manner, as Rogoff stated, the inscription of education systems into capital economies "is only one side of these developments. The other is the politicization of 'education' to an extent we have not seen since the late 1960s" ("Education" 2).

Given the Western-centred origin of these debates—especially due to the enormous impact of the Bologna Accord—there is nonetheless a lack of understanding of how divergent traditions of critical thinking, education and art may contribute to this conversation. Therefore, Western-based debates on art, research and the academy may fail to provide a comprehensive consideration of the conditions under which cognitive capitalism and immaterial labour, and therefore the central role of the artist-as-researcher under neoliberal economies, may function in peripheral countries. In this sense, a different approach to art as research, one that springs in dialectical terms from, and with, the Global South, may serve to resituate current debates on the arts and their role in the social realm.

Steyerl's double movement—from the displacement of Eurocentric narratives to the foregrounding of histories of film as research and locus of a political practice—makes the argument stand aside from hegemonic conceptualisations of art as research, and of art and education at large. As we will see, the tensions that originally defined political cinemas in Latin America, and which have remained pertinent in subsequent retheorisations, are strongly related to the questions that artistic praxis as research currently raises in the sphere of the arts, especially in relation to social practice, collaborative projects, indisciplinarity, and the role of education as a public matter aimed at emancipation.[2] Despite the historical specificity of this radical cinema's political strategy and cultural action, we understand that the artistic experiences it evoked are still of great relevance to contemporary reflections on the arts as research practice.

This article takes Steyerl's proposal as a point of departure from which to outline a series of thoughts on artistic research that are rooted in the Latin American radical film practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and find continuation in more contemporary approaches to artistic practices. In this sense, we will reclaim an expanded notion of Third Cinema as a way to refer to a wide range of political cinemas that were first developed and theorised in Latin America. A Third Cinema model of artistic practice can thus serve as an inspiring praxis and theory from the past for embracing a radical epistemology that might help rethinking the future of artistic research.

A Third Cinema Model

Throughout the long 1960s, a series of collaborative and politically engaged film practices emerged in different parts of the world, in connection with other literary and artistic experiences that aimed in a similar direction. Mainly between the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the violent counterrevolutions of the mid 1970s, this internationalist, Third Worldist movement of film practice was placed at the centre of a series of cultural and political struggles, affecting not just its formal or stylistic conventions, but moreover its praxis and epistemological dimension. As Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino stated in 1969, when first coining the term "Third Cinema" in opposition to the hegemonic Hollywoodesque films and arthouse cinema, this notion referred to a "cinema *that recognises in* [the Anti-imperialist] *struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time*, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point—in a word, *the decolonisation of culture*" ("Towards" 233; emphasis in original). Argentinian scholar Mariano Mestman explains that, despite the diversity of approaches to form, in this context a film was considered a "a piece of research into the predicaments of underdeveloped societies to achieve fuller political awareness" ("From Italian Neorealism" 172). Third Cinema was, above all, an epistemic project exercised from and by the South—a holistic praxis aimed at transforming the interrelated dynamics between cultural practices and political thought and action.



Figure 1: *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Grupo Cine Liberación, 1968). US Poster.

Third Cinema was originally just one of the various terms coined to reflect on these new approaches to filmmaking. Thus, Brazilian Glauber Rocha talked about "An Aesthetics of Hunger", whereas Cuban Julio García Espinosa called "For an Imperfect Cinema" and Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés claimed for a "cinema with the people" (*Teoría*). Under the general name of New Latin American Cinema, all these movements found a key institutional arena for debate in the revolutionary Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), headed by Alfredo Guevara. While different in many respects, all these experiences challenged traditional divisions between opposites—including theory and practice, legibility and form, autonomy and heteronomy, site-specificity and internationalism, and institutionalisation and marginality—with the purpose not so much of solving these tensions satisfactorily, but of underscoring their significance as dialogical processes through which praxis acquires social and cultural weight.

The notion of Third Cinema was later spread in Latin America as a way to refer to politically engaged film practices in the continent due to the activity, in international encounters, of different actors connected to the New Latin American Cinema scene (Mestman, "From Algiers"; Híjar). And in the 1980s and 1990s, the notion continued to be expanded thanks to the work of a number of film theorists, mainly within the Anglo-Saxon context. Thus, these scholars saw in Third Cinema—despite the collapse of the Second World (that is, the Soviet bloc)—"a cinema of change" and "the guardian of popular memory" beyond its original geographical limits and the Eurocentric categorisation of World Cinemas (Gabriel). Third Cinema as a praxis appeared to some "far more relevant to contemporary cultural issues than any form of [...] 'post' theory" in times of neoliberal advance under the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Willemen 7). Since the turn of the century, as resistance to neoliberal globalisation took new political and cultural forms, Third Cinema has continued to be debated and rethought. As Mike Wayne stated, "Third Cinema is a concept in need of development in the face of its underdevelopment; a concept in need of clarification in the face of confusion and misunderstanding; a concept in need of defence in the face of contesting and indeed hostile theories and politics" (*Political Film* 5). As a methodological framework, and for epistemological purposes, we embrace Wayne's expanded approach to Third Cinema as a critical "revolutionary praxis" within a broader constellation of radical artistic practices (*Political Film* 5).

Following the dialogical approach that structured a great part of these practices, throughout this article we seek to debate commonsensical notions around four fundamental axes: experimentality, temporality, the public sphere, and institutionality. By re-examining the notion of experimentality, we claim that, despite discrepancies and dissonances of the epoch, Third Cinema can be seen as an attempt to overcome the traditional divide between political and formalist practices. As for temporality, we suggest that the intersection of the critique of progress, the temporal dimension of the Revolution, and the medium's need for long processes of production gave shape to a Third Cinema politics of time that problematised both the rhetoric of progress and the rhetoric of political intervention as standstill. Thirdly, we claim that Third Cinema practices proposed exemplary modes of organisation of the public sphere, stressing the need for dissent and confrontation it fostered, and not its commonsensical, consensual definitions. Finally, we will discuss the consequences of Third Cinema politics for artistic research in its tensions with educational and cultural institutions, and in relation to the much-debated concept of indisciplinarity.

Experimentality

As Helga Nowotny has noted, "experimentation is frequently mentioned [as] one of the oldest methods with which artists have always worked, as central for them as it is for scientists" (xxiv). Under the paradigm of Western High Modernism, experimentation was aligned with an autonomist drive, understood as the unrestrictive exploration of the formal specificities of the medium. As many of the heated debates from the 1960s and 1970s show, even Political Modernism (Harvey) was always suspected of being no more than an aestheticised reading of Brechtian theses without actual political effects (Wayne, "Tragedy"; Rozsa and Salazkina). In other branches of Modernism—especially in design and architecture—experimentation was subordinate to functionality, and was soon deprived of its universalising horizon, co-opted by problem-solving goals sustained by the ideology of progress. Following this genealogy, current mainstream trends of artistic research tend to engage with experimentation in ways that recall the claims on uncertainty common to current neoliberal times (Nowotny xviii). As a result, this position is expressed through a terminology that goes from the liquidity and the lack of definition of contemporary times, to the endorsement of risk and innovation in search of solutions to abstract needs disguised as specific material problems.

Although diverse in goals, modes of production and aesthetic strategies, the radical proposals of Third Cinema departed from this conceptualisation of knowledge production to embrace, recognise and reshape the former tensions between autonomy and heteronomy as the core of every artistic process. Thus, Third Cinema reformulated the old dream of combining "radical aesthetic practice with radical social effects" (Harvey 48), albeit through a deep reformulation and challenge of Western paradigms of both "aesthetic practice" and "social effects". Artistic processes appeared then as spaces open for constant struggle, which could offer new perspectives on political awareness and action. Following Frantz Fanon's epigram used by Getino and Solanas at the opening of their seminal text "Towards a Third Cinema", "we must discover, we must invent", experimentation was to be understood as the playing of the tension between autonomy and heteronomy—that is, as the site of a reinvention of film as aesthetic practice and the discovery of new ways to discuss, engage, affect and help to transform the social order within a revolutionary project.[3]

By considering experimentation in this expanded sense, it could be distinguished from textual, functional and culturalist paradigms. On the contrary, form was to be considered the materialisation of social and political engagement, enacted through a nonprescriptive aesthetic practice. Experimentation emerged thus as the dialogical "production method" from which the film would spring as one of many outputs. Therefore, the efficiency of a project would be qualified through the popular recognition of the historical and social significance of it within a broader political realm.

This notion of experimentality is best exemplified in those historical cases in which film practice engaged fully in processes of collaboration and cooperation between filmmakers and nonspecialists. The cooperative work carried out by collectives and communities, as it is illustrated in the radically different Latin American cases of Grupo Cine Liberación in the late 1960s and Grupo Ukamau in the 1980s, show how experimentation was not so much linked to formal

inquiries per se as it was oriented to the exploration and invention of critical formations—that is, critical dispositifs.[4]

The idea of film-act developed throughout the clandestine life of *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Solanas and Getino, 1968) is seminal for this consideration of experimentality. The overriding performative character of the film, for which Solanas and Getino encouraged rearranging its parts according to the goals of each screening, defined the film as a "pretext for dialogue, for the seeking and finding of wills" (Solanas and Getino, "Towards" 248). This openness was thus a consequence of the quest for specific social dynamics during the projections—seeking the consciousness-raising of the audiences faced with their own colonial history of subjugation—and not an outcome derived from formalist counter-strategies of estrangement. In this way, and despite the nonformalist approach to the idea of open structure, it had a formal impact on the filmic experience and on the film text: intertitles were added to warn audiences, a dialectic between continuity and interruption was constantly at play, projected images and heated discussions were part of the film event, etc. In short, an expanded sense of film form was the consequence of practical and political goals.



Figure 2: *La nación clandestina* (*The Secret Nation*, Jorgé Sanjinés, Ukamau, 1989). Production still.

The collective experience of Jorge Sanjinés and Grupo Ukamau, while being radically different to the formal strategies developed by Grupo Cine Liberación, exemplifies a trend of investigative, experimental practice that enacted a dialogical relation between French classical film theory and Andean aesthetics. As Paul Willemen noted, Ukamau developed a practice of "stress on the vernacular" as the path to build a project leading to the creation of a new national culture (29). Sanjinés' "all-encompassing sequence shot", best exemplified in *La nación clandestina* (*The Secret Nation*, Jorgé Sanjinés, 1989) and in its concomitant theoretical text (Sanjinés, "All-Encompassing"), was not only an aesthetic intervention into debates on film form—that is, a reformulation of Bazinian realism and a nuanced critique of the montage techniques of estrangement and shock. It was also the crystallisation of a filmic dispositif aimed at giving cinematic expression to Bolivian national identity as a traumatic ethnic encounter between Aymara

traditions and their contemporary effacement (Wood). This formal dispositif, then, was the outcome of an exploration of the political, cultural and epistemic problems faced by the cinematic representation of Andean cultural paradigms that could also serve to challenge Western epistemologies of time.

These two examples show that the lack of any formalist-textualist approaches to film form implied that varying and, at first sight, even opposite aesthetic dispositifs—from the standpoint of Western formalism—could coexist within the same model of Third Cinema. This view on experimentation as an always "site-specific" fertile tension between autonomy and heteronomy reflected a series of other shared tensions that were a common concern to the Third Cinema practitioner, such as the unresolved tension between history and memory. Both *La hora de los hornos* and *La nación clandestina* show this central concern and how questions of temporality emerge, even through different inflections, as one of the main areas of investigation of Third Cinema.

Temporality

In 1960s Latin America, anticolonialism took the critique of modernisation and developmentalism as one of its main arenas of struggle. Beneath the articulation of counternarratives to the discourse of developmentalism lay a radical questioning of modernity as a homogeneous and universalising concept, anchored in the transformations of the epistemology of time under Western capitalist societies. As has been widely discussed, the rationalisation of time that characterised industrialisation and the expansion of capitalism gave form to an "homogeneous, empty time" of progress during the nineteenth century (Benjamin 395). This, as Mary Ann Doane suggests, led to the transformation of time into value, thus sharing "the logic of the monetary system—a logic of pure differentiation, quantifiablity, and articulation into discrete units" (8). In its delusional abstractness, the teleological conception of time under capitalism would therefore apply equally to all humankind. Following this conception of time, underdeveloped Latin America was urged to go through the same kind of reforms imposed by Western policies for putting its countries on the tracks of History.[5]

In line with dependency theories of the time, most of the Third Worldist film manifestoes and practices openly criticised this conception of time as instrumental in supporting the neocolonial interests of the West (Baugh). Fernando Birri's "Film and Underdevelopment" (1962) and García Espinosa's "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1969) highlighted how the category of underdevelopment could not be forced into the progressive drive of modernisation but, on the contrary, should be considered as a structural condition to overcome, in the cultural field, by way of turning "scarcity of means into a channel for aesthetic experimentation" and political awareness (Xavier 1). While Cuban filmmakers such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea or Julio García Espinosa developed a film practice concerned with history as a realm of struggle—as a site where hegemony should be disputed for the sake of a "popular history" (Landy 1)—other filmmakers adopted the literary strategies of *testimonio* as a way to confront the exclusions of history through the traditionally marginalised and fragmentary memory of the subaltern sectors.

In the late 1960s, a more radicalised position embraced by artists and filmmakers, mainly coming from Argentina, took hold of the idea of art as guerrilla warfare, and of cinema as a weapon for revolutionary struggle. Around this conception of political intervention, the idea of the "now" was stripped from its associations with novelty and newness. On the contrary, it was understood as the radical point of emergency and rupture that revolution demanded, adding a violent inflection to Walter Benjamin's messianic conception of the "Now-time" as the "fleeting interruption of historical continuity, a break in the heart of the present" (Löwy 101). Other filmmakers, such as Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés or Brazilians Glauber Rocha and Ruy Guerra, developed a film practice that explored non-Western conceptions of time expressing cyclical movements, rituals, overlapping tenses and anachronisms, exemplifying what Willemen, following Bakhtin, described as an extensive use of chronotopes (Willemen; Stam).

Nonetheless, the complex temporality that a revolutionary practice demanded determined the politics of time in Third Cinema and its fate in contemporary criticism (Debuysere). As Claudia Gilman has noted (150–158), a sense of in-betweenness permeated most of the debates of the era, which explains to some extent certain contemporary scholarship that sees in the cultural practice of the long 1960s traces of "Hegelian conceptions of time" for which "revolution presented itself as the imminent future to come" (Vindel and Longoni 312). But contrary to other forms of cultural practices, such as the nonobjectualisms of public demonstrations, performances, ambients, or happenings—which flourished in the epoch as politically committed art practices dominated by the Benjaminian concept of standstill as strike—the specificities of filmmaking gave way to more elaborated, research-based and long durational projects. Thus, the idea of films and filmmaking as guerrilla-style intervention, even if constituting a dialectical limit for film practice (exemplified in Grupo Cine Liberación's film-act), it was always in tension with the temporal dimension needed for every film project, which involved extensive preproduction, production, postproduction and distribution processes that often were carried out under clandestine or semi-clandestine conditions.

For this reason, this in-betweenness also implied an organisation of the cultural work for which the ideas of newness, innovation, and technical development were challenged, alongside the fetishistic quest for quality as cutting-edge technology. Scarcity was thus understood as an advantage for developing a new way of understanding film practice, as Third Cinema placed the democratisation of the means of production and the engagement with the people in the centre of its practice. Low budget and lightweight equipment, such as Super 8 and 16mm cameras and film stocks, were used despite their technical virtuosity. This approach transformed the low-res, uncertain, blurred, and often failed "poor image"—to use Steyerl's term—into the cipher and condition of possibility of a large transnational network of radical filmmaking.

This insight on time challenges dominant trends within artistic research that emphasises a philosophy of time based on the unforeseeable and the uncertain (Nowotny xviii). Some of these approaches underscore transdisciplinary research not for the demands of a holistic, totalising and critical thinking, but rather for students and scholars to be "flexible" and ready for the contingencies of a changing world, particularly in regard of its labour market (Nicolescu 22). Ultimately, the unforeseeable and the uncertain appear as a call for adaptation to the needs of capital that is held by functional thought. Contrary to this, what we understand as a Third Cinema politics of time situates the present as "a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future"

(Groys 4) where the new must be shaped accordingly to "reintroduc[e] [the whole of] mankind into the world" (Fanon 105).



Figure 3: *La Commune* (Peter Watkins, 2000). Production still.

For this reason, local and national histories of struggle were often thematised.[6] Film practice was prone to transform past history into experience, and experience into political action. Consequently, some of the most compelling examples of Third Cinema made use of strategies of re-enactment to recreate former episodes of social and political upheaval or repression.[7] In all these cases, re-enactments are to be seen as collective-research dispositifs into historical and cultural—but often buried—memories, that deal with the affective, the ethical and the relational as much as with the factual, thereby stressing the political potential, in a Benjaminian sense, of any traumatic event of the past whose energy is summoned and brought back to the present. Contrary to historical representations within mimetic realist paradigms, those re-enactment films brought to the fore the Brechtian urge to strip fictional or documentary modes from illusionism, in order to turn them into exemplary sites of action extracted from counter-histories (Margulies).

This approach to temporality saw a continuation at the turn of the century in projects such as *La Commune* (Peter Watkins, 2000) and Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), which draw on different histories of social upheaval of the working class in Europe in the face of neoliberal reforms. When read alongside their Latin American predecessors, these films seem to

share the common goal of desublimising history through the reactivation of political unrest, by revisiting crucial moments of defeat for the oppressed. If Watkins's film is a thorough exploration of the dialogical dimension of arguably the first proletarian revolution in Europe, the Paris Commune of 1870, which ended with the slaughtering of over thirty thousand Communards (Wayne, "Tragedy" 62), Deller's project explored the clash between miners and policemen that took place in Orgreave in 1984 as one of the most violent episodes of repression against the miners prompted by Thatcher. These two projects engage with an idea of the present as a realm of constant conflict, and of memory of past struggles as the fragmentary locus that may encourage political action in the future.[8] But more importantly, both of them take filmmaking as a research practice that spans in time to give space for more complex and stronger political awareness—for practitioners, collaborators and potential audiences. Filmmaking appears as a social research practice that intervenes, through specific strategies towards history, memory, technology and collective action, in the construction of a diverse, plural, and always-in-dispute public sphere.



Figure 4: *The Battle of Orgreave* (Jeremy Deller, 2001). Production Still.

Public Sphere

Third Cinema engaged in a notion of public sphere consistent with more recent critiques of the concept coming from the "epistemologies of the South". Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes these epistemologies as knowledges "born in struggle [...] developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (x). As Sousa Santos observes, even if the idea of public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas has been widely used for thinking the relationship between the state and civil society, it also contains a series of unsolved problems related to social, historical, political, racial and gender-based exclusions in regard of dominance, representation and visibility. The original idea of public sphere appears then as a reductive notion that has imposed a bourgeois Western-based view on the matter, limiting "the epistemological and theoretical tasks in creating new possibilities of progressive social transformation" (Sousa Santos 62) for and from the Global South, against all forms of social domination. And therefore, while the idea of public sphere does not need to be rejected, it must be problematised to fully develop its degree of inclusivity and transformative potential.

Third Cinema anticipated this critique in several ways. In fact, one of its main arenas of struggle was the confrontation with Western binary thought—reworked by Sousa Santos as "abyssal thinking" (118)—which, dominating the established assumptions of the public sphere in the arts, split subjects and objects of representation, as well as authors and spectators. In this manner, the reconstruction of the public sphere was deeply related to what Borys Groys has called the "ideology of modernity"—namely, contending against contemplative spectatorship and the passivity of the masses, "paralyzed by the spectacle of modern life" (9). In the context where Third Cinema emerged, this was a key part of a broader cultural and political agenda aimed at fighting the reification of the public sphere and the conception of the spectatorship as passive receptor of "hermetic structures that are born and die on screen" (Solanas and Getino, "Towards" 51). Therefore, conventional ideas of spectatorship and cinemagoing as a leisure activity, resulting from a consistent self-constituted public realm, were fiercely attacked.

In these cinemas, the challenge to debunk binary distinctions between filmmakers and spectators took different forms: a radicalised stance, such as the one implied in the use of Frantz Fanon's motto "Every spectator is either a coward or a traitor"—as written on a blanket that was draped over the screen before projections of *La hora de los hornos*—, that provocatively challenged the subject's spectatorial realm and activity; a more nuanced perspective on the problem of spectatorship within revolutionary urgencies, such as Gutiérrez Alea's distinction between the popular—where the people appear as the revolutionary subject of the revolution—and the "popular"—where the "people" are the passive target of the commodified productions of culture industries;[9] and an effort to neutralise the difference between audience and participant in the filmmaking process, as in the cinema of Sanjinés and Grupo Ukamau from *El coraje del pueblo* (*The Courage of the People*, 1971) onwards.

This radical position in relation to the public sphere was part of an ongoing struggle in the forging of a genuine popular culture, in opposition to a notion of popular culture shaped by the culture industries. Third Cinema's emphasis on the centrality of the people as political subject and the authenticity of its culture underscored a specific statement: that the status quo could be solely overcome by popular, collective and imaginative projects of change. Therefore, it was necessary to challenge the authoritative voice linked to authorship and other hierarchical modes related to film production (Sanjinés, *Teoría*; Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialéctica*). A public sphere from below (or counterpublic sphere) would necessarily reflect the constant struggle for inclusion and visibility of those historically excluded, allowing these tensions and antagonisms to spring up.[10]

These concerns were common to other radical approaches to filmmaking outside the Latin American scene, as it is the case of Alexander Kluge, who had elaborated broadly, along with social philosopher Oskar Negt, against the restrictions of Habermas's notion of public sphere in regard to the proletariat and its experiences, needs and fantasies (Kluge and Negt; Koivisto and Valiverronen). In a conversation between Kluge and Klaus Eder, Kluge evokes an experience during the shooting of *In Gefahr und größter Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod* (*In Danger and Dire Distress the Middle of the Road Leads to Death*, Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz, 1974). Kluge was trying to film the imminent eviction of individuals living in a squat in Frankfurt, but was refused permission to film by the squatters. As he recalled, the squatters told him it was *their* fight, "and we will not allow our fight to be filmed by anyone who does not live in the house and fight with us" (Kluge 212). Considering the possibilities for increasing a public articulation of the

experience, Kluge stated that, in order to create an "oppositional public sphere"—that Eder defined as an "authentic" public sphere (Kluge 212)—artists and communities alike might abandon the claim for private ownership of their experiences, which simply replicates the dominant ideology—that of the entrepreneur's defence of private ownership itself. Kluge's reflection on the dynamics of negotiation between the artist-director-producer and the communities involved in a given project aims at the dialectics and dialogism between inside and outside, private and public, and the need to reconsider the authenticity of public sphere as an expanded realm for intersubjective confrontation.

Despite their different mechanisms, these films expose the need for activating a transformative public sphere as a relevant feature of a radical artistic praxis. Research always implies a fundamental struggle for social and intersubjective transformation, not simply as a means of individual adaptation or success within the existing living conditions, but as a chance to break, question and, ultimately, deal with the naturalisation of these very conditions. In this regard, artistic research could thus be considered not just a process of experimental production of artistic forms, representations, or models of production and exhibition that might meet some kind of abstract needs or unknown yearnings, but also an inquiry on the potential of the arts—along with other actors, strategies and projects—for contributing to social change and emancipation. Artistic practice becomes then the *room-for-play*—to use a Benjaminian expression—within this quest.

This need to maintain a dialectical tension—first of course within oneself as an artist, filmmaker and/or researcher, but also with the community *in* and *with* which the artistic project is shaped—also relates to a tension between institutionalised sites of research and other spaces of cultural production increasingly pervading and transforming the former. Consequently, a consideration of the institution as an *other space* may well challenge, not just this implied notion of the public sphere, but also the very idea of the disciplinary logic.

Institutionality

As for these *other spaces*, it is necessary to explore the tensions between the public sphere, artistic praxis and the realm of politics and governance, especially in relation to how these tensions are materialised under the consensual, yet problematic, form of the institution. For this reason, and in a more expanded level, museums and universities, for example, are seminal in challenging established assumptions of disciplinarity within and outside the arts, as well as in questioning how these relate to other realms of knowledge and critique.

Certain contemporary inquiries on the future of critical institutions can be traced back to a case of radical rupture and debate within the academic life of the 1968 revolts. As a case study, this has the Mexican student movement and the role of UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) in the revolts at the centre of its framework, and its theorisation by professor, militant and philosopher José Revueltas as the seminal approach to its critical understanding, through consideration of notions such as "self-management" (*autogestión*) and the "critical university".

As Revueltas noted in July 1968, in the very first days of the protests, the academic *autogestión* of UNAM was the main goal of the movement. Revueltas referred to *autogestión* as

the "proper praxis of the movement" (137), which redefined "autonomy" as a revolutionary academic praxis within the university. This particular view on "autonomy" would call for an openness to the "outside", challenging the normalised and hierarchical construction of knowledge. Thus, in terms of the actual revolt, Revueltas's *autogestión* understood the need for "continuing with the courses both inside and outside the [academic] plans", but conducted by the students and those professors supporting the movement (38). Revueltas acknowledged that the student strike, organised by the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH), should not be cancelled—"the strike will continue, but inside *autogestión*"—but should be conducted through the "symbolic reclaim [of] the university", in order to "preserve *our house of studies* ... from the coup of annihilation that is being prepared" (60–61, 48). Revueltas's approach to *autogestión* can be then read as a counterhegemonic move that, nonetheless, incorporates the academic institution—the "critical university"—as the primary *locus* of "knowledge as transformation" (101). Thus, this "critical university" was a crucial component of a qualitative, "cognitive democracy" that conceived "knowledge as confrontation and contestation, a re-enacting (an enduring enacting) of its own processes: a constant recreation" (155).

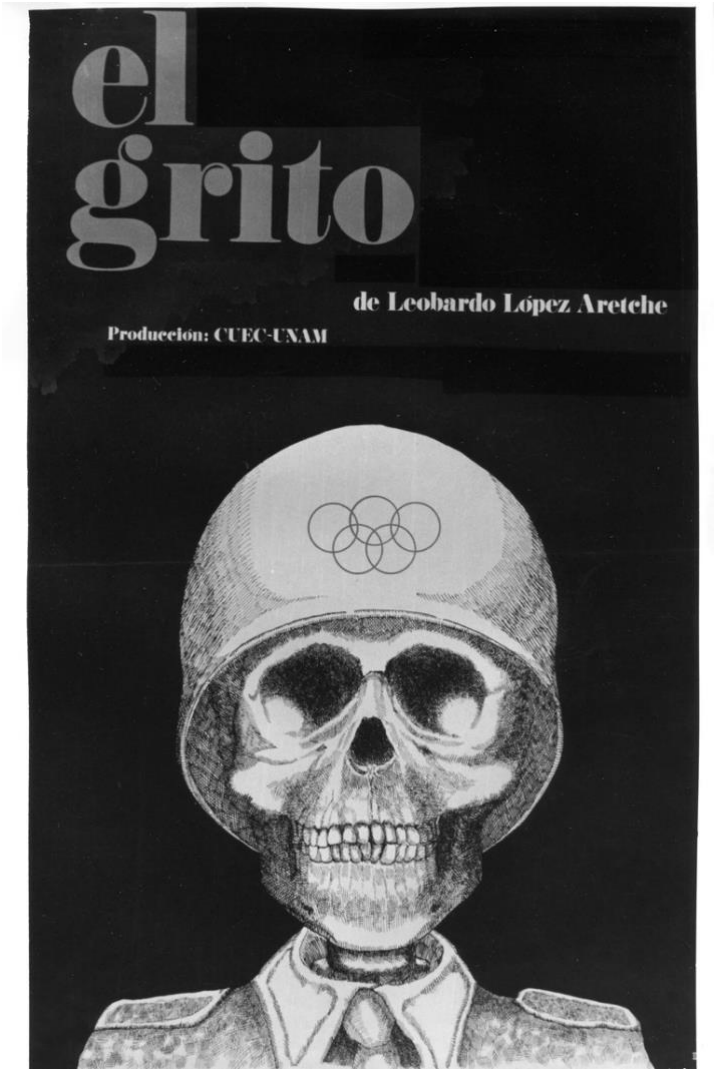


Figure 5: *El grito* (*The Scream*, Leobardo L. Arretche, 1971). Original poster.

Taken as the recurring *ethos* of the Mexican student movement, this dialectical interplay between inside and outside the institution, between cancelling the ordinary functioning of the university and preserving its regulatory frame (Revueltas 61), was also in dispute in the organisation of the film work that took place in the summer of 1968. As the CNH supported the film documentation of the protests in August and September, a film brigade of students from CUEC (UNAM's University Centre of Film Studies) was established for that purpose, led by Leobardo López Arretche. González Casanova, director of CUEC, helped to organise the film crews, giving institutional support through the provision of cameras, 16mm stock and audio recorders. This also meant the suspension of ordinary classes but the continuation, by other means, of its functioning. As a result, the film *El grito* (1971) was made—which today is arguably the most important example of political cinema in Mexico, while also being one of the major historical achievements of the CUEC-UNAM.[11] The involvement of UNAM in this militant production and the suspension of everyday ordinary academic life signified the irruption of an indisciplinary moment of great relevance.

This disjointedness could be understood as one of the many possible early manifestations of what W. J. T. Mitchell has defined as indiscipline in the academic world—namely, "the moment of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is interrupted and the practice is put into question" (1027). Taking into account the key differences marked by its own specificity, this Mexican case might help to situate the debates on the role of universities within the longstanding dialectics between academic institutions and their radical emancipatory potential in pedagogy and praxis. Additionally, it might also serve to rethink the discussions on the relevance of disciplinary education and the significance of indisciplinarity, which could challenge conformist approaches to the production of knowledge.

Disciplines are sets of norms meant for the reproduction of collective practices and knowledges, which, in the West, emerged from the separation between the intertwined spheres of arts and sciences. But if, as György Lukács stated in 1923, Fordist capitalism and its division of labour served to increase disciplinary divisions for the demanded specificities of applied functional knowledge, contemporary criticism of disciplinarity has become today a well-established stance within arts and humanities, even by hegemonic standards (28). It is in this sense that, as Peter Osborne underscores, "the rhetorical political progressivism of anti-, in-, de-, inter- and transdisciplinarities in academic politics since the 1960s", acts as a totalising, holistic approach to knowledge, echoing the Marxist totalising stance on the necessity of surpassing the division within and between intellectual and manual labour (8).

But besides its liberatory potential, the pervasiveness of inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge is not solely a humanist, progressive political reaction to certain rigid views on disciplinary divisions and functional knowledge. On the contrary, its emergence within other hegemonic positions seems to respond to the contemporary needs of post-Fordist corporate capitalism, acting as a source of "higher education's responsiveness to external corporate markets" (Slaughter and Rhoades 203). This interest in interdisciplinary programmes is in harmony with Maurizio Lazzarato's reflections on work, under postindustrial knowledge capitalism, as the management of productive cooperation, where the worker, in transition from blue-collar to service, knowledge or cultural sectors, appears less as a specialist than a "polymorphous self-employed autonomous" coordinator of a whole process of production (134–139). Submerged in immaterial

labour, this new worker is urged to be fully involved—in a subjectivising process—in the production of value.

This immaterialising process of labour fits, thus, the perceived sense of deskilling and contestation of "quality" which became normalised in the art world with the advent of nonobjectualist practices of the 1970s and the "social turn" of the 1990s (Bishop 7). According to Simon Sheikh, there would be a direct relation between this originally radical gesture of "exodus from the commodity form" and "the institutional re-inscription and validation of such practices as artistic research"—thus, as knowledge commodity (6).

We are thus facing a radical clash between two opposite ways of considering artistic research within higher education. This clash, intrinsically, points at the way knowledge itself is understood: on the one hand, as a kind of functional thought that, as noted, helps to shape knowledge according to the hegemonic commodity of current dematerialised production under post-Fordist capitalist conditions, and, on the other hand, as a kind of critical thought that could help challenge the very conditions in which artistic research is conducted—as part of wider constructions of social life—for engaging with collective agencies and processes of social change. In terms of the latter approach, indisciplinarity springs as an emancipatory feature of the epistemological challenge that critical thought casts on knowledge, as, in the words of Jacques Rancière, it calls to "escape the division between disciplines" in order to "question […] the distribution of territories" and intellectual qualification, legitimation and authority—thus "reclaiming thought as something belonging to everyone" (3).

Consequently, and in relation to Mitchell's insights, the collision between these two models could thus be summarised as the conflict between two opposite views on the problems of artistic research. The first one would be a "top-down" model that seeks a corporate organisation of artistic production, where creativity is led by problem-solving dynamics. For this, research outputs as commodifiable knowledge respond to demands of social efficiency, improvement, innovation and progress. In opposition, the second view is a "bottom-up" model, socially motivated, politically engaged and responsive of specific emergencies related to social change and resistance. Therefore, this latter approach could engage, as we have seen, with other radical historical concerns, as those exposed by Revueltas in regard of the Mexican case or others related to the radical artistic experiences studied above.

To a certain extent, these debates informing emancipatory politics in the arts have been more common to contemporary approaches to the role of art institutions, mainly in relation to the public programmes of museum and curatorial studies, and art projects related to institutional critique. In these realms it seems relatively common to hear authoritative voices requesting a "new institution of critique" that would promote and propagate "its participation in (semi-) public space" free from corporate influence and any other dependency; spaces that could inspire active exchange between diverse publics and individuals, "counter[ing] the corporate globalization that neo-capitalism created" (Möntmann 158).

While such positions have not been so openly found within the academy, several experiences suggest that this field is becoming more open to them. Thus, for instance, a student campaign under the name UAL So White in 2016 led to a vibrant debate between the Student Union and University

of the Arts London (UAL)'s Teaching & Learning Exchange, which materialised in the zine "Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education", in order "to address disparities in experience and attainment for international students and students of colour" (Decolonising the Arts Curriculum). UAL students and staff collaborated to produce multiple texts in which one could easily find an open criticism to UAL's curricular bias and references to key texts from figures such as Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James or W. E. B. Du Bois, to name a few (Singh 1). As one of the contributors stated, this campaign presented "the rethinking of the curriculum" as a site of heteronomic tension from which to confront the "structural disadvantages posed to those who historically are 'without' the Art industry" (Deshpande).

This case shows how, despite the mainstream trends, discussions on artistic research within academia can challenge the nature of praxis in a vigorous, critical and radical manner. These debates, which address the foundations of institutions in the social order, emphasise how a constructive, critical moment of indisciplinarity may cause "lines of flight and utopian questioning" (Sheikh 6) within every field of the arts. The past and present histories of radical artistic experiences, like those related to Third Cinema, can be profoundly inspirational in inflecting these contemporary debates.

Postscript

The Portuguese film *A fábrica de nada* (*The Nothing Factory,* Pedro Pinho, 2017) mixes neorealist and documentary modes in a collage of generic codes that expand from drama to comedy, even extending to musical scenes, to reflect on the conditions of the working class in economic crisis and its capacity to self-organise its struggle. The film took the 1997 play *De Nietsfabriek* by Dutch poet Judith Herzberg as a point of departure. A long process of artistic research by the filmmakers in communities in Lisbon profoundly affected by unemployment was conducted and many nonprofessional actors were involved in developing the script. This strategy mirrored many of the questions previously explored by other radical film experiences. Terratreme, the production house behind *A fábrica de nada,* makes this connection explicit from the choice of its name: a reference to *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles,* 1948), the film by Luchino Visconti in which a group of fishermen buy a boat together to quit their dependency from a shipowner. Working as a cooperative, Terratreme, in its own words, "came out of the urge of a few young filmmakers to find a production model [for] articulat[ing] research and creation in a work method where each film's needs would determine the production model" (Terratreme). Production operates then as "a fundamental aesthetic variable"—or in other words: it makes the autonomy of financial resources essential to achieve "the desired results" (Terratreme). As Pedro Pinho, the director of the film, has stated, there is a need for "the lost collective energy of the 1970s [because] if we are not capable to organise ourselves at our own level, along with the closest ones, someone will do it for us" (Pinho; our transl.).

A fábrica de nada is a compelling contemporary example of what Hito Steyerl's was reflecting upon when she explored artistic research as a praxis of resistance. But the film also posits the current relevance of such debates, especially in a time in which a thorough reassessment of questions of class and commonality is more urgent than ever, in the face of the undisguised shared interests between neoliberal politics and the resurgence of fascism all around the world.



Figure 6: *A fábrica de nada* (*The Nothing Factory*, Pedro Pinho, 2017). Screenshot.

When facing this current scene, the collaborative, site-specific and politically engaged artistic approaches of Third Cinema that we have explored throughout this text, may help to re-evaluate radical cinemas and their contribution to broader projects of resistance and social change. The thorough exploration of the links between arts and politics that these practices carried out remains a great inspiration for rethinking every issue related to the artistic field, in critiquing the social status quo as well as in subverting it. Thus, the methods and proposals elaborated by Third Cinema still offer today a useful approach for contemporary academic art practice on a wide variety of levels—namely, in relation to its permeability to interact between inside and outside the academic realm, for engaging with nondisciplinary knowledges seminal to nonacademic practices, for challenging teleological and problem-solving cognitive views, and for inquiring artistic practices as processes and fields that, beyond the production of artifacts, spring seminal unsolved tensions specific to our time. As such, Third Cinema can be understood as a call to rethink the possibilities of modern academia to radically resist and dispute, through research and praxis, the social order established from top-down, and all the naturalised assumptions that derive from it. Taken as a social, political and aesthetic practice opened to the imminent future, Third Cinema can be considered a model of artistic research from below: one that embraces research as an indivisible part of the emancipatory potential of the arts.

Notes

[1] The Public Activities of the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid (MNCARS), conducted by Argentinean scholar Ana Longoni from the research network Conceptualismos del Sur, are a good

example of this trend. For a discussion on the role of the Museum as "critical institution", see *Carta*.

[2] We borrow the notion of indisciplinarity from W. J. T. Mitchell, who refers to it as "moments of breakage, failure, or deconstruction of existing disciplinary structures accompanied by the emergence of new formations" in the field of visual studies (Grønstad and Vågnes).

[3] Most English versions of the text read Fanon's epigram as "we must discuss, we must invent". The quote had been added to the second and definite draft published in *Cine Club* no. 1 in 1970, as the first version, which was published in 1969 in *Tricontinental*, appeared without it. Thus, the English versions change "discover" ["*descubrir*"]—which also appeared in the parts of *The Wretched of the Earth* that were used as intertitles in *La hora de los hornos* (Part 1, chapter "The Models")—into "discuss". Fanon's original text in French reads "*il faut inventer, il faut découvrir*".

[4] This stress on collaboration has recently gained critical attention within the "collaborative" or "social" turn in the arts (Bishop).

[5] For recent considerations of critiques of underdevelopment within the arts of the long 1960s in Latin America, see González et al.

[6] Cases span from the sociological and documentary approach of early New Latin American Cinema, such as *Tire dié* (*Toss Me a Dime*, Fernando Birri, 1958) or *Maioria absoluta* (*Absolute Majority*, Leon Hirszman, 1964), to the imminent transformation of revolts into its own archive of dissent, as in *El grito* (*The Scream*, Leobardo L. Arretche, 1971); the long history of colonialism and the urge to confront it in *La última cena* (*The Last Supper*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1976); or the failure of recent histories of Latin American revolutions, from the Mexican Revolution in *México: La revolución congelada* (*Mexico: The Frozen Revolution*, Raymundo Gleyzer, 1973) to the annihilation of Chilean socialist project in Patricio Guzmán masterpiece *La batalla de Chile* (*The Battle of Chile*, 1975).

[7] See *El coraje del pueblo* (*The Courage of the People*, Jorge Sanjinés, 1971) to *Vendedores ambulantes* (*Street Vendors*, Arturo Garmendia, 1974) or *Mueda, memória e massacre* (*Mueda, Memory and Massacre*, Ruy Guerra, 1979).

[8] Recent films that have worked with similar approaches to historical time and re-enactment include *S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge* (*S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, Rithy Panh, 2003), *Serras da Desordem* (*The Hills of Disorder*, Andrea Tonacci, 2006) and *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012).

[9] The best-known translation of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's book *Dialéctica del espectador* into English, where his ideas are elaborated, was made by Julia Lesage and published in *Jump Cut* as *The Viewer's Dialectic*. The chapter we refer to is translated as "'Popular' Film and People's Film". Nonetheless, the original title read "Cine 'popular' y cine popular". In order to better

underpin the nuances in the distinction that Alea was originally trying to make we opted for a straight translation from Spanish.

[10] However, the pervasive dominance of a masculine view throughout the history of NLAC, in which women played an underrated but fundamental role, underscores the internal contradictions in regard of the alleged anti-auteurist, collective and nonhierarchical filmmaking. For a feminist approach to political filmmaking in Latin America, especially on the role of Beatriz Palacios and other women in Grupo Ukamau, see Seguí.

[11] Film historian of Third Cinema Mariano Mestman considers *El grito* an exemplary case of Latin American political cinema of *testimonio* (*Estados Generales*). Nonetheless, the film was not widely available in Latin America until the I Festival of New Latin American Cinema held in La Habana, 1979, even if the first two of the former *Comunicados del CNH* (*Filmtracts*)—whose footage was reused in *El grito*—were screened in the I Muestra de Cine Documental de Mérida (1968).

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