

COMMON INTERESTS, COMPETING SUBJECTIVITIES: U.S. AND LATIN  
AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE FILM THEORY AND PRACTICE

By

Sarah Louise Childress

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Approved:

Dana D. Nelson

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Paul Young

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D.N. Rodowick

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Gregg Horowitz

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Date:

6-15-09

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6-15-09

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6-15-09

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For my Dad, who knew I'd make it

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Subject of new American cinema

This study focuses on seven canonical filmmakers of the 1960s: Fernando Birri (Argentina), Stan Brakhage (United States), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba), Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (Argentina), and Andy Warhol (United States). By reading their film manifestos and interviews in conversation with their films, we can see how these public statements about their filmmaking serve as a place of epistemological reflection. The filmmakers ponder what we know, how we know it, the implications of this knowledge, how new forms of knowledge can be created, and what role film plays in the process of knowledge formation. Their films enact these questions while also portraying alternative forms of knowledge and presenting perspectives that challenge established ideas. Central to these epistemological investigations is a focus on subjectivity. The filmmakers' concepts of subjectivity influence their film practice. In contrast to political modernism, which emphasizes how films determine subjectivity by reproducing a critical consciousness in spectators via self-reflexive theoretical practices that expose the ideologies inherent in dominant cultural forms,<sup>1</sup> I examine how filmmaker concepts of subjectivity shape their formal experiments.

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<sup>1</sup> According to D.N. Rodowick in *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, the discourse of political modernism, how those involved in political modernist theory and practice describe their projects, tends to consist of three basic principles: the development of an avant-garde representational strategy that emphasizes the materiality of the film in order to combat the illusionism of dominant ideological forms that repress their communication of conventions, norms and values; the attempt to produce a critical subjectivity capable of breaking an identification with dominant ideology by redefining the relations between spectator and the cinema; and emphasis on an epistemological break, a sort of before-consciousness and after-consciousness, which results in the organization of concepts and rhetoric grounded in sets of binary oppositions. The formal relations within the political modernist text are seen to reproduce these dualisms. Thus, they are

I also read the manifestos, interviews, and films of these seven filmmakers in conversation with one another. By doing so, I have discovered a variety of common interests and shared influences that connect them. Subjectivity is certainly one of those concerns, since these filmmakers frame their inquiries and envision their formal experiments by thinking through how systemic pressures shape subjectivity, and Hollywood and its filmmaking model serve as the primary ideological instrument that detrimentally shapes subjectivity. It is also the economic and aesthetic monolith that these filmmakers think themselves through and against, and they take pains to place their own filmmaking in contrast to it. Such common concerns and shared influences unite them, as does the flow of their discourse about film and filmmaking. Through the discourse of these filmmakers, we can trace out the existence of a discourse network that connects these filmmakers to one another and that produces a North-South flow of information, ideas, and practice, which begins in Hollywood, spreads out to Europe, then to the independent filmmakers in the U.S. and Latin America, and finally back to Europe and Hollywood when filmmakers there begin turning to Latin America and the U.S. for inspiration.

The formal experiments of the Western hemisphere filmmakers begin with their common interest in how various systemic influences detrimentally shape subjectivity. U.S. filmmakers concern themselves with the loss of individuality in contemporary society, a loss precipitated by consumer culture and the culture industry. Warhol talks about the erasure of particularity and the repetitive nature of thought and action: everybody looks alike and acts alike, doing the same thing day after day. Brakhage

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generally conceived of as dialectical, both in terms of performing a negative-dialectical function of critique and in the ways that they link subjectivity to film form, since the dialectical function of the text is what generates a critical consciousness in the film spectator.

expresses his concern with a society “bent on destroying that which is alive within it, its individuals” so it can “run on and on like the machine it is.” The Latin American filmmakers focus their attention on neocolonialism and what Solanas and Getino call the “conceptual dependency” it generates. Solanas and Getino describe bourgeois art forms and concepts as ideological instruments that mediate the Argentine people’s ability to express their own thoughts, experiences, and creativity, thereby disrupting their ability to portray their unique experiences and conditioning them to inaction through the acceptance of imposed beliefs. Likewise, Birri sees neocolonialism blinding individuals to its workings through cultural products, like film, which present a false appearance of reality; this false reality prevents the Argentine people from realizing they share a common experience and forecloses the potential for an Argentine nation. Gutiérrez Alea and Rocha similarly highlight the connection between appearance, belief, and action. Gutiérrez Alea describes the Cuban people as appearing to support the revolution, yet in their everyday lives, they succumb to counter-revolutionary attitudes and actions – the memories of underdevelopment. Because the people cling to these memories, they have not yet caught up to the radical political change that surrounds them and the Cuban nation remains an ideal rather than a reality. Rocha characterizes the Brazilian people as also deriving their identities from colonial power relations. They do not break free from the conceptual and material systems that subordinate them because of the limits put in place by neocolonial structures but also because they believe they are powerless.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These descriptions occur in: Andy Warhol’s interview with G.R. Swenson. “What is Pop Art?” in *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*. Ed. Kenneth Goldsmith. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004; Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, New York: Film Culture, 1963; Fernando Birri, “Cinema and Underdevelopment,” *New Latin American Cinema: Volume One: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, Ed. Michael T. Martin, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997; Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the

Each filmmaker foregrounds the relationship between system and subjectivity but also proposes a way that film can create an autonomous subjectivity, one free from systemic mediation. In their descriptions, the cinematic experience serves as a location where difference thrives and where challenge and change can occur, and thus serves as a free space where autonomy becomes possible. In political theory, “free spaces” are locations where people draw on existing traditions to generate unconventional values, beliefs, behaviors, histories or versions of community. These revised worldviews produce subjects focused on change and capable of significant action (Evans & Boyte 17-19). Free spaces often refer to actual spaces, small-scale settings within a community or movement removed from the direct control of dominant institutions that allow for the cultivation of autonomy necessary for political mobilization. But as Francesca Polletta points out, while the physical settings of the free space are important to the establishment and reaffirmation of social relationships capable of bringing autonomous subjects into existence, it is the relationships among values, ideas, experiences, and the subjects themselves that are most important (12). Thus free spaces can be material and conceptual. Exhibition spaces screening films that represent alternative views and non-conforming or marginalized subjects become material free spaces, locations where spectators can openly draw on their unique perceptions, experiences, and knowledge – and engage with one another – to respond to the films and the issues they raise. Likewise, several of the filmmakers, most notably Birri, Warhol, and Solanas and Getino, use the spaces of

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Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World,” Michael T. Martin (Ed), *New Latin American Cinema: Volume One: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997; Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s interview with Julianne Burton, “Beyond the Reflection of Reality,” Ed. Julianne Burton, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. This reading of Rocha’s attitude toward the system is derived from my analysis of *Terra em Transe* and B. Ruby Rich’s “An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema,” Ed. Michael T. Martin, *New Latin American Cinema: Vol. 1: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997.

exhibition and production to enact a participatory creative process where all who are present share in the production of meaning by contributing to the film. They use collaboration to invite active participation, rather than passive consumption, from everyone involved with the film and to open the film up to other points of view. But filmmakers can also draw on dominant forms of knowledge and belief systems to construct alternative models of subjectivity. The various theories of autonomous subjectivity that the filmmakers describe in their manifestos and interviews become free spaces where they reconfigure conventions and knowledge to produce alternatives that challenge established norms. Filmmakers like Rocha, Brakhage, and Gutiérrez Alea create protagonists who, as allegorical figures, represent historical, national, or social issues. The filmmakers use these allegorical figures in an attempt to place spectators into an analytical position by engaging their particular experiences and understanding to decode the references presented in the film. Interestingly, the films of these three filmmakers encourage spectators to analyze their historical context while also asking them to examine their own subjectivity and subject position in relation to the context presented.

Such a twofold critique – that takes in the context as well as the subject within that context – gives us our first indication that the free spaces envisioned by these filmmakers do not remain free. These filmmakers need to produce a model or an ideology that allows them to liberate subjects from the socio-political and epistemological systems they question, but the models and ideologies they create end up producing ideologies that arguably become as limiting as those they challenge. The free spaces these filmmakers open up rigidly define difference and thus limit, and sometimes even eliminate, the

possibility for other expressions of difference to exist, ones not included within the total view. The delimitation of these free spaces occurs through the filmmakers' construction of total views and ideal subject positions in their manifestos and interviews and in their films.

In their manifestos and interviews, the filmmakers define concepts relating to subjectivity, the nation or national ideals, systemic influences (which include aesthetic principles and historical narratives), and autonomy. They do so to establish their filmmaking objectives, which involve the production of autonomous subject positions, and to carve out a finite area of practice that is separate from but related to the larger realm of commercial cinema, which they challenge as an instrument of systemic influence. By defining their free space and the autonomous subjectivity it produces, they circumscribe the freedom and autonomy their theories and practice make possible.

At this point, it will be helpful to mention these filmmakers' views on the relationship between theory and practice, since they see them as interrelated and mutually constitutive, and thus working together to realize a common goal. The Latin American filmmakers Birri, Rocha, and Solanas and Getino wrote their manifestos as they engaged in filmmaking, often releasing them in conjunction with their films. They refer to their manifestos as theory and explicitly state the importance of interrelating theory and practice to produce formal experiments that are new and different when contrasted with classical or commercial practices. Rocha refers to the relationship between theory and practice as "learning at work," while Birri prescribes a "hand-in-hand" relationship between the two, and Solanas describes his and Getino's attempt to make a "cinema of ideological essay" that corresponds with their groundbreaking manifesto "Towards a

Third Cinema.”<sup>3</sup> Though Brakhage, Warhol, and Gutiérrez Alea do not refer to their manifestos or interviews as theory and they do not specify the interrelatedness between their public statements and their practice, they tend to use their manifestos and interviews as spaces of reflection or institutionalization. Brakhage begins writing *Metaphors on Vision* as an apologia for *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), but then uses it to elaborate his theory of film and to reflect on how his practice attempts to produce a film form that expresses an unmediated way of seeing. In contrast, Warhol and Gutiérrez Alea use their statements to establish their film practice as a viable alternative to other practices and to maintain control over the interpretation of their work as critics publish essays that purport to describe their intents and processes. Warhol did not write manifestos during the 1960s (though he published his “philosophy” in 1977), but we can see in his interviews a clear intention to use his public statements about his filmmaking to define his practice and to set it as an alternative to the New American Cinema. Gutiérrez Alea came late to manifesto writing, publishing “The Viewer’s Dialectic” in 1982, over twenty years after the release of his first film. In his 1979 interview with Julianne Burton, he claims that he has decided to write a manifesto to answer the question “What is Cuban cinema?,” to respond to the ways U.S. and European critics position his practice, and to participate in the “current stage of institutionalization” in Cuba, where state and cultural authorities analyze the past in order to plan for the future instead of relying on spontaneous solutions (127-128).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These references can be found in Glauber Rocha, “Beginning at Zero: Notes on Cinema and Society,” Trans. Joanne Pottlitzer, *The Drama Review: TDR* 14.2, Latin American Theatre (Winter, 1970): 144-149; Fernando Birri’s interview with Julianne Burton, “The Roots of Documentary Realism,” *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Ed. Julianne Burton, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986; and Fernando Solanas’s interview with James Roy MacBean, *Film Quarterly*, 24.1 (Autumn, 1970): 37-43.

<sup>4</sup> These references are derived from: P. Adam’s Sitney’s analysis of *Anticipation of the Night* in *Visionary Film: the American Avant-garde, 1943-2000* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 160-168 and in Stan Brakhage’s 1959 letter to friends regarding the reception of *Anticipation of the Night*,

These filmmakers interrelate theory and practice and I have taken my cue from them: I base my methodology on theirs and put their manifestos, interviews, and films into conversation with one another. By doing so, I am able to uncover the reasoning behind their various formal strategies, the nature of their epistemological commitments, as well as the influences they draw upon to develop their own ideas and approaches. Chapter 1 provides a close reading of filmmaker manifestos and interviews in order to understand how these filmmakers describe their intentions and processes and what influences shaped their thinking and their work. I then apply this information to my analysis of their films in Chapters 2 and 3 to examine how their films concretize, develop, and open up their theories of film. However, we would also do well to look at this close connection between theory and practice to investigate how the filmmakers' theories of subjectivity and their practice, which strives to bring these theories to life, work together to produce a specific version of autonomous subjectivity, one carefully defined as part of each filmmaker's overall theory of film and filmmaking objective.

The intertwining of theory and practice makes possible the free space and autonomous subjectivity envisioned by the filmmakers. Theory and practice working in concert generate a space that exists in its own right as an explicit challenge to dominant forms of knowledge as well as aesthetic norms and conventions. The filmmakers establish the territory of their free spaces by defining their constituent elements and outcomes – thereby creating a total view (a term I borrow from Brakhage) that can stand as a distinct alternative to a dominant total view. The total views produced by these filmmakers makes

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collected as part of *Metaphors on Vision*, New York: Film Culture, 1963. Several of Warhol's interviews can be found in Kenneth Goldsmith's edited anthology *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004. And Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's interview with Julianne Burton, "Beyond the Reflection of Reality," is in *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Ed. Julianne Burton, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

challenge and change possible, but they also rule out the possibility for difference to exist since the subject defined as part of each total view must conform to this view in order to achieve autonomy. The pressure these total views place on subjectivity is focused on the spectator and manifests itself in three ways. In the manifestos and interviews, spectator subjectivity becomes conceived of as: 1. a product of formal experimentation, 2. the key to bridging the gap between aesthetics and politics, and 3. something to be brought into conformity or alignment in order to realize the autonomous subject positions envisioned by the filmmakers' theories.

Subjectivity becomes a product of formal experimentation when film form is believed to shape subjectivity. Following this line of thought, the filmmakers conceive of subjectivity as a product of film form or they describe how formal experiments give expression to autonomous subjectivities. These approaches tend to ignore historical, socio-political, or individual influences when considering subjectivity and look instead at how films determine subjectivity. Filmmaking becomes a battle for the hearts and minds of theoretical spectators: commercial film pulls them one way by promoting identification with dominant values while experimental film tries to break that identification by promoting a critical consciousness. In either of the cases described above, spectator subjectivity becomes inextricably linked to film, with each reflecting the other. The former approach holds that spectator subjectivity is materially determined by the internal dynamics of film form and that strategic changes in these internal dynamics will produce equal material changes in subjectivity. In the latter approach, which Brakhage and Solanas and Getino adopt, where a particular film form is given to express an autonomous subjectivity, the notion of subjectivity as a general concept collapses into a particular

definition, one folded into the formal project through usurpation (i.e., Brakhage takes over the role of spectator to construct his lyrical films) or collaboration (i.e., Solanas and Getino make them equal participants in creating the film), and so subjectivity remains a aspect of formal experimentation. Such a conception, which intertwines film and subjectivity, becomes useful when attempting to bridge the gap between aesthetics and politics. Unless film can affect subjectivity, for example by promoting a critical consciousness that inspires spectators to work for socio-political change or by encouraging spectators to live and act resistantly through the contravening of social or political norms, then the political agendas of these filmmakers would remain unfulfilled.

All of the filmmaker manifestos and interviews considered here could be seen as falling into this model, which conflates actual and theoretical spectators. Spectators become a theoretical construct within the total view constructed by the filmmakers' theory and practice since they are necessary to the overall project as embodiments of autonomous subjectivity and as instruments for social and political change. This model of subjectivity has long ago been discounted, as what gave rise to the crisis of political modernism and what may very well have contributed to the post-theory bent in film studies.<sup>5</sup> We all understand that actual spectators can and do resist positioning and identification.

Spectators do not have to do what films want them to do.

But these seven filmmakers knew that back in the 1960s. They learned it the hard way. Close reading of the filmmakers' manifestos, interviews, correspondence, and essays reveals an evident frustration with actual spectators, especially those spectators that

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this crisis please see D. N. Rodowick's *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, especially pages xiv-xv and 24-28. And for more on post-theory, check out *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, Eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

comprise popular audiences. The trouble with these spectators is that they don't do what the filmmakers want them to do. They don't go to see their films, and thus stop the process of challenge and change before it can begin. Or they go to see the films but then reject them. Or they go, seem to get the message, but then don't do anything as a result. Their behavior remains unchanged and society remains unchanged. Each of these filmmakers wants their films to engage spectators and thereby produce participatory spectators rather than ones that passively consume film and its ideology. But their anxiety about spectators arises from the spectators' ability to participate, and to participate according to their own views and tastes, which may (and do) deviate from those of the filmmaker. Though the filmmakers want the spectator to engage with the film through their own unique experiences and knowledge, they do not want the spectators to critique or challenge their films. They want them to accord their experiences, knowledge, and behavior with those represented in the films.

The filmmakers respond to spectator resistance by circumventing resistant spectators, defining their target audiences, or creating film forms calculated to appeal to popular audiences. Regardless of approach, however, each of the filmmaker's revised strategies is intended to bring spectators into the total views constructed by the filmmakers' theories and films. Brakhage circumvents resistant spectators by creating first-person film forms that present subjective perceptions of the objective world and thus fulfills his artistic objective outlined in *Metaphors on Vision*: to become more personal and egocentric to address the universal concerns of "all man." By looking inward, he intends to perceive the world without mediation and thus discover new truths that speak to universal concerns. He presents himself, his perceptions, his worldview, and his

conception of autonomous subjectivity as universal, and this presentation displaces spectators since they have no place in his self-centered worldview. Where Brakhage's films push spectators out, Gutiérrez Alea wants to draw them in, but does so in order to trap them (in his words) and thereby provoke them into a critical self-examination. He defines his spectators as neither counter-revolutionary nor revolutionary, a definition that echoes Fidel Castro's assessment of the Cuban people laid out in his "Words to the Intellectuals" (1960). In his film *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment* 1968), he constructs a conflicted protagonist who self-destructively identifies with a bourgeois worldview. As an attractive, wealthy, and cultured man, Sergio Carmona Mendoyo (Sergio Corrieri) invites identification and so is able to "trap" spectators into recognizing the contradictions he exhibits in their own thoughts and actions so they, unlike Sergio, can choose to adopt a properly revolutionary attitude. Rocha also wants Brazilian spectators to recognize the contradictory nature of their existence: they identify with a worldview and a colonial power structure that repress them and believe they are powerless to create change when they are the ones most capable of transforming Brazil's history and politics. Rocha's films are popular abroad, but virtually ignored at home, largely because he makes use of European cinematic modernist techniques that tend to estrange Brazilian audiences. This popularity disparity poses a significant challenge since Rocha targets his films to the Brazilian people. But over time, he addresses spectator resistance and attempts to broaden the popularity of his films by changing his film practice so it includes forms and techniques drawn from popular folkway traditions.

The other filmmakers, who rely on collaborative film forms, tend to define their audiences in order to achieve desired outcomes. Like Rocha, Warhol taps into popular

culture to produce a film form with mass appeal. Interestingly, he does not define his audience nor does he claim to want spectators to respond in a specific way. He wants anyone and everyone to see his films and any response, even a negative one, is acceptable. Yet Warhol constructs his formal project so the various spectator responses are folded back into his larger objective: to demonstrate that his film practice stands as a genuine alternative to other alternative cinemas, i.e., the New American Cinema. Warhol's anxiety does not arise from spectators, but from critics and filmmakers who interpret his works, intentions, and processes. By successfully screening his films for popular audiences, he gains authority and influence within critical conversations. Birri also attempts to establish an alternative cinema, first within his country and then across Latin America. Early in his filmmaking, he attempts to expand the popular appeal of his social documentary form by couching it within a fictional narrative. But his film, *Los inundados* (*The Flooded Ones*, 1961), does not attract a mass audience. So in his 1963 manifesto, "Cinema and Underdevelopment," he narrowly defines his target audience, which consists of people who are already coming to see his films. He also switches the address of his manifesto; in his two earliest manifestos, published in the programs distributed at the openings of *Tire dié* (*Throw a Dime*, 1958-1960) and *Los inundados*, he addresses the audience directly. But in 1963, he circumvents resistant spectators to share his ideas with other filmmakers in an attempt to create collaborative filmmaking ventures. Solanas and Getino also address their manifesto, "Towards a Third Cinema" (1968), to other filmmakers, but their film, *La Hora de los Hornos* (*Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968) explicitly addresses spectators. It addresses a specific kind of spectator, however, one that their manifesto defines as a "participant comrade, the man-actor-accomplice who responds to the summons of these

revolutionary times” (54). Solanas and Getino want their films to decolonize culture in order to transform spectators into liberated personalities who can serve as the impetus for revolutionary historical change (37), yet they address their films to those who share their desire for revolution, to the “new man” created in the tricontinental revolutionary movement. Their film is made by and for subjects who embrace the views of the film, partially because of the exigencies of the Argentinian political climate and partially because of the difficulty of decolonizing the minds of people who live in circumstances of cultural and material dependency (which Solanas admits in a 1970 interview).

In each of these examples, the filmmakers calibrate their manifestos, public statements, and formal experiments to realize the total views of their projects and the autonomous subject positions they envision. By circumventing resistant spectators, filmmakers insulate their total views in order to protect the free spaces and the autonomous subject positions they define from challenge. In defining their target audiences, they align spectators with the autonomous subject position they elaborate in their manifestos and realize in their films. And by revising their formal strategies, they attempt to appeal to resistant popular audiences in the hopes that they will eventually become accepting ideal spectators, and thus the autonomous subjects imagined.

In these filmmaker manifestos, interviews, and films, including the calibrations they make to them, we can also begin to see a clear network of common interests and shared influences. By reading their manifestos, interviews, and films in conversation with one another, I have discovered the existence of a discourse network that links these various filmmakers – in direct and indirect ways – to one another.

We can see a variety of common interests in their public statements and in their films. For one, they want to free subjects from systemic influences. Subjectivity becomes the field on which they contextualize, describe, and differentiate their approaches, since their concepts of the subject give tangible shape to their aesthetic concepts and potentially serve as proof for the accomplishment of their filmmaking objectives. Their concepts of subjectivity also serve as sites of negotiation where various traditions and ideologies encounter one another and struggle for expression and dominance. In their manifestos and interviews, these filmmakers form new associations from existing social, institutional, and transnational traditions in order to produce their ideal of a liberated subjectivity. In this exercise, subjectivity also gives expression to particular national and social ideals, which are related to particular notions of freedom and autonomy, and which clearly establish ties to national contexts in explicit contrast to imported or imposed values.

The filmmakers' definition of systemic influences on subjectivity also serve to signal their distinct filmmaking approaches, their socio-political and/or aesthetic agendas, and their belonging within the international community of thinkers and filmmakers. Hollywood becomes the symbol and the instrument of an ideology that detrimentally shapes subjectivity. Hollywood limits autonomy by transforming subjects into consumers of the bourgeois culture industry and its worldview. In this way, Hollywood conditions subjects to accept power structures that repress them. These filmmakers turn to European "new cinema"<sup>6</sup> practices to begin developing conceptions of cinematic free spaces that

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<sup>6</sup> The "new cinema" encompasses the various, though simultaneous, independent film movements taking shape in Europe, and then in Latin America and North America, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These movements declared their difference from the dominant cinemas of their countries and/or from Hollywood and worked to develop "new" cinematic languages and forms to signify this distinction; they include Italian neorealism, French *nouvelle vague*, the U.S. New American Cinema Group and the social documentary film movement, which eventually gave rise to the New Latin American Cinema. Each of these movements

have the potential to combat Hollywood's influence. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the filmmakers adapt the techniques and formal strategies of the Italian neorealists and the French *nouvelle vague* to their own uses. References to Jean-Luc Godard and the Italian neorealists appear in almost all of the manifestos surveyed in this study. Godard, especially, was a major influence on each of these filmmakers, even if some of the filmmakers only refer to him in order to distinguish their filmmaking practice from his. Birri, Rocha, and Jonas Mekas, an influential U.S. filmmaker and critic, translate these influences in order to institutionalize the New Latin American Cinema, *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema), and New American Cinema groups, respectively, and in this way signal their belonging to the international "new cinema" movement. Rocha openly states his interest in the techniques of Bertolt Brecht and Godard, using them to "begin at zero" and create a film form capable of breaking with dominant ideologies to analyze, expose, and describe the aspects of everyday life usually effaced in commercial cinema. In his 1970 essay, "Beginning at Zero," Rocha insists that he wants to create films that are "technically imperfect, dramatically dissonant, poetically rebellious, politically unsure, violent and sad" (146) in an attempt to break free completely from dominant cinema and aesthetic conventions. In fact, this emphasis on imperfection as an alternative aesthetic ideal occurs in the writings of the Latin American filmmakers and also in the essays and reviews of Jonas Mekas, as well as in Warhol's interviews, where he uses the concept ironically in order to distinguish himself from the New American Cinema group.

Interestingly, this emphasis on imperfection initially appears in the various manifestos to

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(and let's call them movements for the sake of this discussion, though their cohesiveness is still up for debate) attempted to institutionalize their difference from established industries and institutions by incorporating the descriptor "new" into the names of their movements.

signify a connection with the “revolutionary” work of the European new cinema movements.

However, as the 1960s draws to an end, the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers begin to distance themselves from the Europeans. Imperfection becomes a sign of their difference, largely because, in the mid-1960s, the European filmmakers viewing U.S. and Latin American “new cinema” films at film festivals deride their imperfections, dismissing these films as inferior to their own.<sup>7</sup> The Western hemisphere filmmakers begin to chafe at the ways the Europeans exert their dominance within the international movement. In 1963, Stan Brakhage offers up the example of Kenneth Anger to demonstrate how U.S. experimental filmmakers become paralyzed by the aesthetic conventions and institutional pressures of Europe. In his interviews, Warhol situates himself as an American filmmaker, explicitly denying any interest in French filmmaking. Jonas Mekas enters the 1960s trumpeting the new American cinema’s ties to the European movements, but by 1962 he is clearly frustrated by the response of European filmmakers and critics and begins coding the New American Cinema’s imperfect techniques as a point of distinction. Likewise, the Latin America filmmakers eagerly embraced the principles of Italian neorealism and the French new wave in the 1950s and early 1960s, but then their attitudes changed as they discovered that these “revolutionary” techniques were in fact not suited to their aesthetic and political revolutionary agendas. Fernando Birri and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea studied Italian neorealism at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*

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<sup>7</sup> In his film festival reviews in the mid-‘60s, Jonas Mekas often, and often regretfully, makes note of these dismissals.

(the Experimental Film Center in Rome) in 1952 But by 1968, when Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino write their “Towards a Third Cinema,” they are openly hostile to the European *cinema d’auteurs*, which they call the “*progressive wing of Establishment cinema*” (34, emphasis theirs).

Frustrated by a continuous lack of funding and in the absence of international recognition, the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers begin to develop more radical, home-grown versions of their film forms in an attempt to step outside of the Hollywood and European new cinema institutions. To do so, they begin to frame their film theory and practice in terms of nationalistic or national cinemas. Solanas and Getino draw on the unique history and revolutionary context of Argentina to craft “Towards a Third Cinema” and *La Hora de los Hornos*; Rocha works to create a uniquely Brazilian film form that draws on the historical experience of Brazil and its popular folkways; Gutiérrez Alea sets out to define Cuban cinema in “The Viewer’s Dialectic;” Brakhage turns to U.S. national myths and ideals to create his *Dog Star Man* films; and Warhol relishes bringing the queer culture of New York City and Hollywood glamour to the experimental film scene. When this happens, we can see these filmmakers begin to pay attention to one another. Though they may not mention names or directly address a technique, there are rhetorical similarities and subtle allusions that indicate an interest in their hemispheric compatriots, and a desire to learn from the errors and successes of one another. These conversations take place in published manifestos and circulated interviews, since as the 1960s draws to a close, these filmmakers become more discursive, using discourse to establish and define their work. In the early 1960s, manifestos might appear in film programs, local or national cinema publications, or be distributed by independent journals. But by the end of the

1960s, these filmmakers were sharing their ideas and their films at international film festivals and in journals with international circulations.

This web of influences, common interests, and shared ideas makes up a material discourse network that connects these filmmakers into a clearly distinguishable international cinema community. Though we have to respect and understand the national and historical contexts of these filmmakers, we cannot stop our investigation there. If we do, we risk leaving out a significant aspect of their work and their influence, and even potentially misreading their formal strategies. Given the presence of this discourse network, we must also begin to think about new cinema in the Americas as just that, new American cinema in the hemispheric sense.

The U.S. and Latin American filmmakers share a set of orientations, anxieties, influences, and distribution networks that are unique to them. For example, they orient their epistemological inquiries and their definitions of ideology and its negative influence toward Hollywood and they develop their formal experiments by adapting the techniques of European new cinema filmmakers. Both the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers share an anxiety of influence when it comes to European aesthetic and cultural ideals, and they increasingly come to equate European new cinema with bourgeois ideology or the commercial filmmaking model exemplified by Hollywood. As these filmmakers turn inward, toward their own national contexts, we can see them strain to conceptualize a vision of a new cinema that is neither Hollywood nor the European new waves. They may or may not notice one another, but they are looking to fulfill a similar objective: to create something new and unique to their own contexts. Also during this time, film festivals (most notably the New York Film Festival), the Newsreel Group and Rocha's distribution

company, Difilm, begin screening and distributing the work of Latin American and U.S. filmmakers who were previously unable to access distribution and exhibition resources. The discourse network becomes even more tangible and ideas begin to flow more freely and variously when this occurs.

We can see the success of these filmmakers in creating a uniquely “American” cinema as European filmmakers and critics begin to turn their attention to Latin America and the U.S. An interview published in 1969, “Godard on Solanas/Solanas on Godard” puts Jean-Luc Godard and Fernando Solanas into direct conversation, where Solanas challenges the revolutionary nature of Godard’s filmmaking. *Cahiers du Cinema in English* publishes “The Sub-New York Sensibility” and “Warhol’s Underground” in 1967.<sup>8</sup> In fact, once *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Screen* begin to take off in 1968, they “discover” the revolutionary cinema of U.S. and Latin America and begin canonizing these filmmakers as worthy of study.<sup>9</sup> Though these European journals “discovered” these filmmakers and incorporated them into the burgeoning field of political modernism, we now know from reading their manifestos and analyzing their films that their work and their ideas existed before this time. We can see in this “discovery” that though they once drew their inspiration from Europe, in their own turn, they become significant influences on European filmmaking and film scholarship. This event not only reveals the North-South flow of information and ideas, it also prompts us to capture more fully the ways the new American cinema serves as a site where existing epistemological frames are put into question and redrawn.

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<sup>8</sup> These interviews and articles can be found in: “Godard on Solanas/Solanas on Godard: An Interview (1969),” *Reviewing Histories: Selections from New Latin American Cinema*, Ed. Coco Fusco, Buffalo: Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, 1987 and *Cahiers du Cinema in English*, No. 8, February 1967.

<sup>9</sup> My thanks to David Rodowick for pointing this out.

By considering the common interests and shared influences of these filmmakers, we can rethink the epistemological frames in film scholarship that surround these filmmakers, their discourse, and their films. Political modernism shaped much of the initial work done on 1960s Latin American and U.S. new cinema, and its influence introduced oppositional trends into scholarly considerations. Scholars of Latin American cinema position it as opposed to U.S. cinema, and most U.S. new cinema scholars present their studies without considering other “American” influences; even the descriptor “New American Cinema” indicates a myopia on this account. Cinema scholars working on multicultural or Latin America cinema examine how these films “de-center” Euro-U.S. hegemony in the international cinema community and in cinema scholarship. They draw attention to the presence of a cinematic tradition outside of existing national-industrial or Euro-U.S. categories and introduce other national, cultural, and diasporic perspectives to the organizing theories expressed in and used to explain dominant cinema (Shohat 74). They also investigate how Latin American filmmakers use their films to create national or pan-Latin American identities that explicitly distinguish themselves from the principles and values imposed by the dominant political and cultural systems of the U.S. and Europe, but do not consider other movements within the U.S. that attempt to do similar work. These scholars do refer to U.S. film practices, but usually to establish their dominance and to show how the “other” films respond to that dominance. In these references, U.S. film is almost universally understood to be Hollywood film, with the post-war independent filmmaking tradition in the U.S. left outside of consideration. Robert Stam mentions U.S. avant-garde filmmakers, but does so to indicate how they

view non-Euro-U.S. practitioners as untouched by the same “avant-gardist modernism or mass-mediated postmodernism” that they engage in (Stam 36).

Stam has a point. Most film historians and film theorists who focus on what they term the American avant-garde do not refer to practitioners outside the U.S., preferring instead to keep their eyes firmly focused on defining the shape of experimental film practice in this country by historicizing the movement, establishing and interpreting its canonical works, theorizing the interpenetration of social-historical conditions and the development of various styles, or constructing film theories based on the works of individual filmmakers. Though these two fields have remained separated, they do share some interesting similarities. Scholarly work in both areas dwindled after the crisis of political modernism, but interest in them resurged in the 1980s and 1990s as scholars engaged with the work of independent filmmakers in Latin America and the U.S. that focused on identity politics and employed a focus on the personal to challenge exclusionary concepts of the nation or the artist handed down from filmmakers of the previous generation. The current transnational trend in cinema studies, which examines the effects of globalization on filmmaking practices, or how Latin American filmmakers or contexts influenced canonical filmmakers in other countries, breaks down these center-periphery oppositions, yet still tends to investigate transnational links that do not include the U.S. or that persist in characterizing U.S. filmmaking as a dominant force to be challenged.

Filmmakers within the U.S. also challenged Hollywood, and in ways very similar to those of Latin American filmmakers. As pointed out earlier, these filmmakers share an interest in questioning and challenging the influence of Hollywood films on subjectivity.

The filmmakers in the U.S. and Latin America also developed alternative production, distribution, and exhibition models to break Hollywood's monopolistic hold over them, and to circumvent a similar dominance enjoyed by the commercial cinema industries in Latin American countries, which took their cues from Hollywood. Though spectators did ignore or reject the films of these filmmakers, it was not always easy for popular audiences to have access to these films, which posed a major challenge for these independent filmmakers. Jonas Mekas and his New American Cinema Group established the Film-Makers' Cooperative to distribute U.S. new cinema films and the Film-Makers' Cinémathèque to exhibit them. However, as Warhol jokes, an "Underground Movie is a movie you make and show underground, like at the Film-Maker's Cinémathèque" (92). Though underground films came to denote experimental films with a political theme or intent, Warhol defines them here as films that are literally made and shown in ways that are invisible to the public eye because they are out of the mainstream. A 1967 *Newsweek* article affirms his ironic comment by describing the Film-Makers' Cinémathèque as "a converted downstairs auditorium in a dingy New York office building, where the screen is too far back on the platform, too many seats are busted, and the ticket-taker is sometimes too polite to ask for your money." Though he takes an ironic position in regards to the underground, Warhol himself was "underground" during the early part of his film career. When he began making his films in 1963, he had to sell his art to fund his projects, often having to rent equipment he could not afford to buy. His initial films were also made by Factory regulars and screened for them, since he could not gain access to distribution and exhibition outside of his own sphere. However, as his popularity grew, and *The Chelsea Girls* caught on, he became the first new cinema filmmaker to gain national distribution.

Latin American filmmakers also had to work outside of the mainstream, not only because they were denied access to resources by industrial cinemas but also because they faced government censorship, imprisonment, and even exile for making and showing their films. Underground cinema takes on an entirely different meaning in Argentina, especially when Solanas and Getino were making *La Hora de los Hornos*, which they were forced to show clandestinely in labor union halls, factories, universities and other safe havens. Fellow Argentine Fernando Birri studied film in Italy because he couldn't break into the business in Buenos Aires. When he returned to Argentina, he went to work for a university so he could borrow and raise the funds for his film stock and equipment. He also developed a mobile cinema to distribute his films to people otherwise unable to see them, so that they would have access to them and he would have an audience for them. He was forced to flee Argentina in 1963 to avoid arrest because his activities were seen as subversive. Rocha also faced increasing government censorship as power passed from left-leaning populist governments to right-wing conservative power structures. He creates the distribution company Difilm to ensure his films, and others like them, will remain in circulation at home, and abroad in Argentina and Paris. Unlike the other Latin American filmmakers, the government supported Gutiérrez Alea's filmmaking rather than censoring it. But his films have a distinctly revolutionary agenda; though he had no direct government censorship, he did face ideological pressures. He also received funding for his projects from the government, which also separates him from the other U.S. and Latin American filmmakers while connecting him with the European *auteurs*, who, as Solanas and Getino point out in "Towards a Third Cinema" and Mekas laments in his *Film Culture* essays, also received government funding. The other filmmakers had to rely on grants, co-

ops, university teaching, work in advertising, and other ventures in order to raise money for their films, and they also had to rely on film festivals, and later on universities, galleries, and museums, for their distribution and exhibition.

Besides drawing out such practical commonalities for further study, the intersections formed by the discourse network of these filmmakers also prompts alternative readings of their films and new considerations of their influence. We can consider the most obvious connection between Birri, founder of the New Latin American Cinema, and Mekas, co-founder of the New American Cinema group: both men who lobbied tirelessly to establish film movements distinct from the commercial cinemas that maintained dominance within their countries and regions. But the intersections go much further and deeper than this. For example, critics like Julianne Burton have tended to view Birri's *Tire dié* (1960) as a failed experiment. Though its objective of self-presentation works toward democratizing democracy (as Burton asserts), the film's voice-over dramatizations of the words originally spoken by the people interviewed on camera brings into the film an "unwanted stamp of residual authoritarian anonymity" that ultimately derails the film's objective (54). But when the film is read in conversation with Birri's manifestos and interviews, we can look at these voice-over re-enactments as a formal choice rather than a mistake. Birri's interviews reveal he had to find an alternative way to present the film's soundtrack. Since the film was a social survey film, what the people had to say was of utmost importance, but the substandard equipment used to record the voices had rendered the soundtrack virtually unintelligible. Birri made a choice to use voice-over narration to make the words discernible. His choice emphasizes the constructed nature of filmic reality by opening up a gap between the film's documentary images and its

soundtrack. Though Birri's documentary experiment may be on thin ice, the film does fulfill his stated desire to present "reality as it *is*" by self-reflexively indicating the constructed nature of cinematic representation.

This self-reflexivity becomes even more apparent when we compare this film to Warhol's early portrait films, especially the *Screen Tests*, which emphasize self-presentation and generate onscreen subjects who are aware of being observed. This awareness becomes communicated in exhibition through direct eye contact with the spectator, which asks the spectator to meet or refuse to meet the gaze of the onscreen subject. These moments subvert film's illusionism and call attention to the cinematic experience. In other words, the spectator is called out by these eye contact moments and becomes aware of him- or herself as well as the current experience of watching the film.

*Tire dié* is also a useful point of comparison with the works of other filmmakers since Birri created it through a collective filmmaking process, which Warhol and Solanas and Getino also engage in (and which Chapter 3 examines in great detail), and used it to promote the principle of the "total film-maker," which Solanas and Getino conceptualize in their "Towards a Third Cinema" as the antidote to the idea of the film director or cinema *auteur*. This total filmmaker, or film technician, is capable of handling all aspects of production (38). Besides providing a distinct contrast to Hollywood and European filmmaking modes, their concept also appears to build on Birri's *Tire dié* film project. Birri trained each of the students in his documentary film program at the National University of the Litoral in a variety of disciplines, and he expected them to handle a multiple responsibilities in the course of the two-year project. The challenge Solanas and Getino pose to the idea of the *auteur* points to a similar argument going on in U.S. new

cinema at the time. Since the late 1950s, Jonas Mekas had pushed for complete autonomy from what he called “official” Hollywood methods of production, which emphasized a division of labor that denied filmmakers a total understanding of the production process. He suggested an artisanal film practice where the film artist would control all aspects of production, a method exemplified by Stan Brakhage. But U.S. independent filmmakers working in the latter part of the decade, most notably Andy Warhol, specifically constructed a collaborative filmmaking mode inspired by the Hollywood model, and even adopted a star system, in order to challenge the New American Cinema’s emphasis on the film artist, or *auteur*.

Here we can see Warhol and Solanas and Getino both challenging the idea of the cinema *auteur*, though in different ways: Solanas and Getino through the “total filmmaker” and Warhol by resurrecting a collaborative Hollywood production model. These filmmakers specifically craft their oppositional models based on the focus of their challenge. Solanas and Getino go after the European cinema *auteur* who is given credit for crafting his films, even though he is a director in the traditional sense, and thus one of a collective who produces the film. They develop a Marxist model of filmmaking to oppose what they see as a bourgeois model. Warhol sets his sights on the New American Cinema filmmakers, whom he sees as engaging in exclusionary practices, and so he turns to their reviled Hollywood model for his inspiration, and his challenge. Also important to point out is that Solanas and Getino and Warhol share a common background: they each worked in the advertising industry. This experience shapes their interest in commodity culture and the culture industry, which becomes evident in Warhol’s films (and art work) and in Solanas and Getino’s *La Hora de los Hornos*, especially in the montage sequences that

point out the violence that commodity culture and the culture industry efface. By reading the works of these filmmakers in conjunction with one another, we can draw out further political resonances in Warhol's work and other aesthetic and institutional implications in Solanas and Getino's.

Brakhage, Gutiérrez Alea and Rocha point out to us the ideological and institutional implications of these filmmakers and their work during this time. Brakhage and Gutiérrez Alea both focus on freedom and autonomy in their manifestos, but they do so in distinct ways: Brakhage emphasizes individual freedom and autonomy to create a self-centered film form while Gutiérrez Alea defines freedom and autonomy as participation in a collective. He uses that definition to create films that prompt a critical self-examination in spectators so they can determine if they are contributing to the revolutionary collective instead of clinging to bourgeois ideals that separate them from the people. Both of these filmmakers integrate a specifically national ideology into their concepts and their practice, so though they claim to use their films to liberate subjects from the mediation of ideology, their films instead tend to institute an alternative ideology, one that arises from the total view they define. Though Rocha's work does not foreground the limitations ideology places on the work of these filmmakers as much as Brakhage's and Gutiérrez Alea's does, his work does draw our attention to the dual positioning of these filmmakers, who work to create national or nationalistic film forms, yet do so within the context of an international new cinema community. These filmmakers, perhaps necessarily because of the international networks of distribution (through film festivals) and discourse, tend to look outwards to filmmakers and thinkers in other nations as much as they look inwards to their own unique contexts and experiences. Perhaps more than any

of the other filmmakers, Rocha demonstrates this double vision in his manifestos and his films; he is constantly looking to the nation and to the international cinema community, even with his earliest manifesto, “An Aesthetic of Hunger,” in which he addresses U.S. and European filmmakers as well as Latin American filmmakers.

These new considerations are some of the fruits yielded by the discourse network of these filmmakers, and the common concerns and shared interests it foregrounds. This network also reveals the course of the North-South flow of ideas from Hollywood, through Europe, and then to the U.S. and Latin America, back to Europe and then to Hollywood, when *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Screen*, and the New Hollywood era, begins to take off. The place of the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers in this flow connects them into a unique hemispheric movement: though these filmmakers may not directly talk to one another, they share in similar struggles, similar limitations, but also in similar successes. As a result, we would do well to turn our attention to the influence of the new American cinema – to how they shaped our current notions of film theory, avant-garde film, and independent filmmaking practices, to how they might re-shape contemporary cinema scholarship practices, and to how they call out the fact that the Americas remain a space that has to be accounted for when considering the inclusiveness of epistemological frames and how well they work – or don’t work – as explanatory models.

*A note on terms:*

There are many ways to refer to the movements represented by these filmmakers – avant-garde film, experimental film, underground film, New American Cinema, New Latin American Cinema, Cinema Novo, *toma de conciencia* films, and marginal cinema, among others – and all of them are contested, as would be my use of the word “movement” to group the various constituencies together. I choose to use “new cinema” as a generic reference because some of the filmmakers use it, in one form or another; because it expresses their links to other “new cinema” movements around the world, links that they reference or reflect; and because it expresses a sentiment shared by all of them: the desire to create a new film form that does something unique and groundbreaking.

## CHAPTER I

### INSTITUTING THE SUBJECT IN NEW AMERICAN CINEMA

What role does film theory play in the work of Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol, Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Glauber Rocha, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea? Generally speaking, scholars tend to relegate the manifestos and interviews of these filmmakers to footnotes, anthologies, or historical surveys. This is not to say that critics, theorists, and film historians do not draw on this information, but they generally use sound bites from the theories to set up their arguments about the filmmakers' films or process: Warhol wants to be a machine, or a mirror; Brakhage seeks the untutored eye of childhood; Rocha wants to inspire horror through sad, ugly films; Solanas and Getino insist on making films with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other. These filmmakers, however, wrote their manifestos during crucial moments in their filmmaking careers. For example, Brakhage wrote *Metaphors on Vision* as a response to audience rejection of his first lyrical film, *Anticipation of the Night* (1959). Gutiérrez Alea decided to write "The Viewer's Dialectic" in 1982 to answer the inquiries of international critics regarding what constitutes Cuban film, and Rocha used "An Aesthetics of Hunger" to characterize the burgeoning Cinema Novo movement. Warhol uses his theoretical statements to institutionalize an oppositional experimental cinema, while Birri and Solanas and Getino also use their theory to introduce particular modes of filmmaking that stand as clear alternatives to established commercial and art cinemas. For all of these filmmakers, theory holds an important place in their creative process.

The Latin American filmmakers tend to be forthcoming on this particular topic since they position theory as crucial to their creation of new, nationalist cinematic forms, and they openly discuss the relationship between theory and practice in their manifestos. Rocha refers to this relationship as “learning at work” and Birri as a “hand-in-hand” relationship. In his later manifesto “Beginning at Zero” (1970), Rocha works through a crisis in Brazilian filmmaking. Cinema Novo films are well-received in art cinema circuits abroad but are consistently ignored or rejected by Brazilian audiences and, as a result, many Cinema Novo directors have turned to Hollywood themes to reach these audiences. Rocha contends that this strategy resembles populism’s tendency to manipulate the public: the people might like what they see, but what they see does them harm in the long term. Instead, Rocha maintains that Cinema Novo filmmakers must continue to develop their art by beginning at zero. Starting here, Brazilian filmmakers can embark on “the dangerous and revolutionary adventure of learning at work, of uniting the parallel activities of theory and practice, of reformulating theory at the outset of each practical move” in order to create a new kind of cinema. This Cinema Novo, or new cinema, breaks with the aesthetic and socio-political ideals of European and “American” (i.e., U.S.) culture<sup>10</sup> by being “technically imperfect, dramatically dissonant, poetically rebellious, politically unsure, violent and sad – much sadder than violent” (146). But theory and practice must be interwoven to achieve this goal, since the filmmakers are fashioning something that does not yet exist. Also, since these filmmakers want to

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<sup>10</sup> Though he doesn’t explicitly indicate this, Rocha emphasizes the negative influence of U.S. cultural and socio-political ideals as more intrusive and alienating than those of Europe, especially in his later essays. This emphasis likely comes from the influx of Hollywood films into the Brazilian market and the tendency of Brazilian industrial filmmakers to produce Hollywood-esque films. He first turns to filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard for inspiration in his own filmmaking (even going so far as to reference Godard’s ideolinguistic complex as a way to describe his filmmaking strategy), but as time passes, he turns to the Hollywood Western, and to Brazilian folk culture, as a way to reach out to the Brazilian people.

produce a style capable of analyzing, exposing, and describing the limits of demonstrating Brazil's truth, they have to define and represent this truth, and theory necessarily has a role in this exercise. In 1970, we can see Rocha's awareness of the difficulty of this project, and of the difficulty of inspiring action and transformation among the people and society, a theme of his earlier manifesto, "An Aesthetic of Hunger" (1965). As he admits, "[i]n spite of film's desire to be an agent more than a reflection, it is more reflection than agent." He wonders, how can cinema move from "cultural neurosis to cultural action"? (148).

Birri's manifestos also exhibit this swing between hope and frustration as he describes the objectives, first for his films and then for his proposed alternative cinema. Much of this shift can also be attributed to audience reception of his films and their lack of response to them. In his first manifesto, "Manifesto de *Tire dié*" (1958), he lays out his collaborative approach to filmmaking, which involves theory and practice working hand-in-hand to shape the methodology of the film project, and to emphasize the process over the final product. He directly addresses spectators in this manifesto, which appeared in the program at *Tire dié*'s premiere, telling them that he wants to awaken the social critic within them in order to inspire their search for justice. The audience for *Tire dié* was a small and motivated one, however, and when Birri expands his reach to a broad, popular audience in his next film, *Los inundados* (1961), a fiction film that takes a polemical stance, we can see his frustration begin to mount. Birri is frustrated because the people who see his films do not evince or act upon a critical consciousness; the social critic within them remains latent. He is also frustrated by the fact that his films are not attracting mass audiences. Basically, the Argentine people are not going to see his films.

As a result, his hope that his films can inspire a critical consciousness that leads to widespread work toward social justice becomes stillborn. By his 1963 manifesto, “Cinema and Underdevelopment,” he addresses Latin American filmmakers instead of spectators and sets out to define an alternative cinematic practice that sets out to contradict the images put forth in dominant cinemas by showing “how reality *is*.” Over the course of these manifestos, which are among the earliest examined here, we can see Birri working through three major themes that run through the theories of the Latin American and U.S. filmmakers: 1) how to overcome audience rejection of experimental works, which includes the corollary of how to reach popular audiences; 2) whether to create the sort of popular films that appeal to mass audiences by invoking familiar themes or devices, or to create popular films that arise from the people, from their presumed desires, needs, perspectives, folkways, or grassroots activities; and 3) how to institutionalize cinemas that stand as concrete and meaningful alternatives to existing commercial and art cinema modes.

Solanas and Getino, Gutiérrez Alea, and Warhol primarily focus on the latter two themes since they use their theory to establish clear cinematic alternatives. In “Towards a Third Cinema,” Solanas and Getino introduce their concept of third cinema, which they describe as a “nonconditioned cinema.” This nonconditioned cinema seeks to exist outside the capitalist systems that corrupt the industrial cinema of Hollywood and the European new waves, which they believe comprise the “*progressive’ wing of Establishment cinema*” (34, emphasis theirs) by deriving its form and content from the revolutionary, anti-colonial activities taking place in Argentina, as well as in other Latin American, Asian, and African countries more generally. They elaborate their theory and

associated film practice, which develop in tandem with one another, as a way to promulgate a revolutionary mindset and disposition for action among the Argentine people. By doing so, they hope to bring about a large-scale revolution, first in thought and then in society. They take Cuba as their example of what can occur when revolutionary social change happens but alienated thinking persists: even after the radical political changes brought about by the Cuban Revolution, the forces of colonialism persist in the thoughts and actions of the Cuban people. Radical political change does not necessarily guarantee a similar degree of change in the realm of the social. Gutiérrez Alea takes up this theme in his manifesto “The Viewer’s Dialectic,” which, unlike the other manifestos, was written over twenty years after he began making films (and thirty years after he travelled with Birri to study Italian neorealism at the *Centro Sperimentale* in Rome). Gutiérrez Alea addresses the challenge of institutionalizing a revolutionary mindset among people living in a post-revolutionary context. Cuban authorities can insist that the Cuban people adopt a proper revolutionary attitude and incorporate the principles of the revolution into their everyday lives, but the people can – and do – resist this mandate. In “The Viewer’s Dialectic,” Gutiérrez Alea presents his concept of the “open show” as a way to overcome this resistance. In the manifesto, he describes the Cuban people as having only an apparent belief in the Revolution; they go through the motions of Revolutionary rituals but do not live in accordance with its principles. He wants Cuban spectators to become aware of this gap between superficial, ritualistic belief and an active belief that guides thoughts and action. He also wants to prompt them to engage in self-reflection in this regard: what is the nature of their Revolutionary belief? He bases his concept of the “open show” on almost two decades of his own film practice and an

examination of the practices of other filmmakers in Latin America, Europe, and the U.S. The open show blends entertainment films, which attract popular audiences, with the socio-political agendas of political cinema. It is a fiction film with a pedagogical objective that presents a narrative to engage popular audiences and, through this engagement, prompts viewers to reflect on their own thoughts and actions.

While Rocha, Birri, and Solanas and Getino intertwine theory and practice, using their theory to reflect on their practice and their practice to test their theories, Gutiérrez Alea engages in manifesto writing from a desire to respond to questions about what constitutes a uniquely Cuban film form. As we learn in his interview with Julianne Burton, Gutiérrez Alea finally puts pen to paper in order to intervene in the public discourse of scholars, critics, and other filmmakers about his films, about Cuban filmmaking in general, and about making films in Cuba. The U.S. filmmakers Andy Warhol and Stan Brakhage also address critics and other filmmakers in their theoretical work and, also like Gutiérrez Alea, they draw on their knowledge of the international film scene to frame their discussions and their reflection on their own work.

Warhol primarily begins talking about his filmmaking around 1966, when he began working on *The Chelsea Girls*, and he draws on the discourse surrounding the new American cinema to describe his relationship to Hollywood *and* the New American Cinema, which had become the institution of experimental film. Warhol's theory, as he expressed it through his interviews during this time, serves as an experiment in its own right, as we will see, and it positions his work in terms of a larger institutional goal. He uses theory to position his film practice within a larger cinematic landscape. By doing so, he foregrounds how filmmakers, including the ones examined in this study, use theory to

position themselves and their work within public discourse and how they use it to institutionalize their theory and practice as autonomous alternatives to other approaches. Brakhage also uses theory to this end, but he primarily relies on his manifesto *Metaphors on Vision* to think through his lyrical film form, and then to begin describing his shift from the lyrical to the mythopoeic form. Brakhage's theory, like his filmmaking, is personal and introspective and attempts to provide insight into his view of film, and the world.

### **Stan Brakhage: The Myopia of the Filmmaker-Viewer**

According to avant-garde film historian and critic P. Adams Sitney, Stan Brakhage began to write his manifesto *Metaphors on Vision* soon after the release of *Anticipation of the Night* (1958). This film had been widely rejected, even by those who had embraced Brakhage's previous work. According to Sitney, what began as an apologia became a means for Brakhage to clarify his theory of film and filmmaking as he moved from producing psychodrama, or trance, films to the development of his own lyrical and mythopoeic film forms.

By 1958, Brakhage had made eighteen films, most of which focused on the depiction of an isolated protagonist who seeks meaningful interaction in a psychically charged environment. Maya Deren influenced Brakhage, as did other postwar psychodrama filmmakers like Kenneth Anger, James Broughton and Sidney Peterson, whose films dramatized the search for self-identity through a confrontation with the psychological self and past experience. In the late 1950s, experimental filmmakers began to shift away from representing the psychological self to exploring the relationship

between the self and vision. No longer did they produce dramas of the internal world; instead, they began creating subjective visions of the external world. Brakhage became a leading figure in this transition by shaping certain psychodrama techniques into the impressionistic lyrical film form, which had its debut in *Anticipation of the Night*. While psychodramas attempted to imitate the human psyche, the lyrical form was an attempt to express human perception and intelligibility.

Brakhage's lyrical film form expresses a self-contained view of the world by positioning the filmmaker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist of the film. The film's images are what the filmmaker sees and the juxtaposition of these images indicates how the filmmaker-viewer makes sense of what is seen. Brakhage explains the reasoning behind his desire for a formal change in his interview with Sitney, which opens the book of *Metaphors on Vision*,

I would say I grew very quickly as a film artist once I got rid of drama as prime source of inspiration. I began to feel that all history, all life, all that I would have as material with which to work, would have to come from the inside of me out rather than as some form imposed from the outside in. I had the concept of everything radiating out of me, and that the more personal or egocentric I would become, the deeper I would reach and the more I could touch those universal concerns which would involve all man.

Within the chapter entitled "Metaphors on Vision," which was written prior to the interview, Brakhage elaborates this egocentric dynamic:

To see is to retain – to behold. Elimination of all fear is in sight – which must be aimed for. Once vision may have been given – that which seems inherent in the infant's eye, an eye which reflects the loss of innocence more eloquently than any other human feature, an eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual toward death by its increasing inability to see. But one can never go back, not even in imagination. After the loss of innocence, only the ultimate of knowledge can balance the wobbling pivot. Yet I suggest that there is a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication,

demanding a development of the optical mind, and dependent upon perception in the original and deepest sense of the word

Brakhage begins here to outline the objective of his film theory: he strives to create a film form that enacts a type of knowledge grounded in perception and expressed through visual communication rather than a language-based film grammar. Individuals learn to classify sights in accordance with established categories and concepts. Similarly, a film form that works according to an established vocabulary and grammar, like classical Hollywood narrative, can predetermine the content and themes of a film by expressing them through a certain logic or in accordance with particular associations. Brakhage grounds his alternative film form in sight and insight, or, more specifically, in perception and what could be called a synesthetic thought process. He expresses sight and insight through what he terms visual communication, a relatively abstract concept that he explains in the “Camera Eye” section of his manifesto,

I have worked with difficulty at the problem of giving the visual impression of something (within the context of a drama) through film abstractions without depending upon showing that something documentarily. I am after feeling which film can express without depending upon reaction to something pictured.

Brakhage wants his images to exist in their own right as impressions of pure film meaning expressed abstractly and impressionistically rather than through documentary photographic images that provoke a reaction in the spectator. He feels better able to express the sight and insight of an individual (by which he means himself, as we will shortly see) through these impressionistic abstractions rather than trying to re-present them through the conventional photographic and cinematic method, which stimulates a reaction in the spectator through the presentation of an image.

Brakhage attempts to reunify the subjective and objective worlds through his lyrical and mythopoeic film forms, which he uses to create a space of free expression and perceptual emancipation. His films work to produce a balanced “sub-and-objective expression” where history, life and the external or objective world are passed through the subjective experience of visual perception. This passing through unifies the subjective and objective worlds and opens up the possibility for creating relationships between the individual subject and all mankind by means of visual metaphors. The “filmmaker-viewer,” which Brakhage designates as the subject of his films, becomes critical to enacting the sub-and-objective expression he theorizes. The filmmaker-viewer embodies what is seen and the sense that is made of what is seen. In other words, Brakhage’s lyrical and mythopoeic films present first-person, impressionistic images that provide a subjective view of the world: the images seen by the spectator appear to come directly from the eye of the filmmaker. Editing is then used to make sense of these images by placing them in a meaningful relationship to one another. The filmmaker-viewer not only determines what is seen, “he” also interprets the images by establishing the relationships among them. Brakhage is attempting to create an autonomous film form, one that stands outside of the conventional mode that relies on the relationship between spectator and film. He purports to do this in order to create an unmediated way of seeing and understanding the world. He wants to circumvent the response to images seen and thereby get around pre-determined meanings, which are imposed by society upon individuals and thus produce a lens through which the individual interprets and understands the world. Brakhage replaces this conventional cinematic model with an abstract, impressionistic mode that focuses on sense, affect, and revelation. However,

because his films rely on the subjective impressions of the filmmaker-viewer, that is Brakhage, the senses, affect, and revelations presented onscreen belong solely to Brakhage. His film form is autonomous and free because it is self-contained.

Essentially, Brakhage wants to exchange the imposed or pre-determined way of seeing that constitutes conventional film forms for an film form based in individual perception and apperception that makes internal and external revelations possible. The root of this subjective film form, and the source of the perceptions and apperceptions that drive it, is the individual filmmaker, which Brakhage conceives of as an artist. Artists are the last individuals in society and their sensibilities are the only ones acute enough to produce revelations about the world. One must understand his concept of the filmmaker as artist and individual in order to grasp the reasoning behind his film forms, which arise from a profound self-centeredness that Brakhage sees as directly related to the universal concerns of all mankind, but which appears to be motivated by a profound anxiety regarding spectators and critics.

In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage positions the artist in opposition to death, fear, and the machine-like workings of contemporary society, which “is bent on destroying that which is alive within it, its individuals (most contemporarily exemplified by the artist).” The artist takes a stand against these dark forces by addressing the universal human concerns of birth, sex, death, and the search for God, and through “becoming instrument for the expression of incomprehensible forces.” In a 1966 letter to Rona Page, Brakhage also discusses the artist’s capacity to intervene in the thought processes of a given culture. He explains that historical thought processes, which have been influenced by several centuries of cultural training, struggle with the needs of contemporary living

and thus produce a crisis that opens thought to change (80-81). However, Brakhage is careful to locate this struggle and potential for change within the artist and his work. He insists that his films arise out of personal necessity and through a process of free expression, of which he is an instrument. As a result

a work of art does never impress, in the usual sense of the word, but rather is free-express always – and it does, therefore, require some free space, some fragile atmosphere of attenuated sensibility, in which to be received...the social strength of the arts is rooted in human need to freely attend, which demonstrates itself over and over again in that people finally **DO** create such an **UN**likely (free of all likenesses) space wherein aesthetic (shaped with respect to his/somebody else's and history's means) can be received. (84, emphasis his)

Brakhage is an instrument of free expression and his films give expression to freedom. But he believes that these freedoms require a free space where they can grow. This free space takes the form of attenuated sensibilities and a location where people can congregate and make a place for art; people must be able to free up their senses and they can do this within the spaces where Brakhage's films are screened, which would include film festivals, cinematheques, universities, museums, and galleries. In making a free space, the artist and the people liberate themselves from likenesses by opening themselves to aesthetic forms that incorporate historical conventions *and* individual artistic interventions. Brakhage places his full faith in the power of aesthetics, or the aesthetic. In this same letter to Rona Page, he makes a clear distinction between the “socio-oriented effect-films being related to ‘The Cause’ rather than Aesthetics” in order to differentiate his work from that of other experimental filmmakers. He lambasts cause-related films for

causing sensibility-crippling confusions in the long run, because all are sailing into import under the flag of ‘Art,’ leaving that term bereft of meaning and those films which are simply ‘beautiful works’ (which will ‘do no work’ but will ‘live forever,’ as Ezra Pound says of his songs) lacking the distinction that there **IS** that possibility for cinema, as

established in all other arts, or works that *can* and *must* be seen many times, *will* last, *have* qualities of integrality to be shored against the discontinuities of fashionable time. (83, emphasis his)

Brakhage makes a case here for film as Art. He sees cinema as having the potential to expand and enhance sensibilities and produce works of art that are total and timeless, wholly themselves and unable to be transformed into social or political instruments. He goes on to explain the significance of this view:

I do not ever like to see a 'Cause' *made* of, or around, a work of art; and I strive to make films integrally cohesive enough to be impregnable to the rape of facile usage (shudder at the thought of Hitler shoveling eight million Jews into the furnace off the pages of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, et cetera, for instance). (83, emphasis his)

Brakhage's embrace of film as Art aligns with his objective to use film to shape thought processes. Instead of relying on imposed logics and associations derived from language and dramatic conventions, he works to engender revelations through the expression of sense impressions that arise from an exploration of the self and the world. Sub-and-objective expression is Brakhage's attempt to deepen individual perception and tap into personal perceptions and experiences as a way to reveal insights into the universal concerns of all man: birth, sex, death, and the search for God. The total view created by sub-and-objective expression permits freedom and autonomy for the individual artist, who is able to express himself, and maintain his individuality in the face of a mechanistic society. He can define his subjectivity and subject position according to his own consciousness of himself and the world in the free space created by this total view. The self-containment of the total view insulates Brakhage from any external interference, thus allowing him to practice art independently and to develop his artistic creativity through the autonomous cultivation of his own consciousness. The films that arise from this total view

are “integrally cohesive,” theoretically able to withstand external forces that transform art works in relation to a cause or attempt to restrict the artist through the imposition of particular aesthetic or structural conventions.<sup>11</sup> In order to shore up his case for his films as “integrally cohesive,” Brakhage insists that his films help make history, since “the living artist has the eyes of the age he lives in,”<sup>12</sup> yet they are also outside of history and not subject to “the dis-continuities of fashionable time” because they are self-contained. However, Brakhage does not see how this cohesiveness also eliminates the possibility for subjective difference.

Seeing himself as an autonomous instrument of free expression, Brakhage insists on giving spectators autonomy so they can engage in the same practice, yet his lyrical and mythopoeic film forms work to eliminate that possibility. He develops his film forms so they do not provoke responses in spectators, as conventional forms attempt to do. Instead, he wants his films to “sing to the mind so immediately” that they avoid making “puppetry of human motivation” and instead solicit the transformation of spectator consciousness (“Camera Eye” in *Metaphors on Vision*). But Brakhage’s relationship with spectators is obviously an anxious one. Like his description of himself as an artist, Brakhage’s

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<sup>11</sup> David James, in *Allegories of Cinema*, also interprets Brakhage’s self-contained position as allowing him to produce films independently, outside of the influence of the Hollywood industrial mode. James attributes this self-containment to Brakhage’s ties to film poets like Maya Deren who worked to create dense, short-form “poetic” films as antidotes to the linear, long-form Hollywood films. James sees Brakhage’s connection with poetry as “a cultural practice that, in being economically insignificant, remains economically unincorporated, and so retains the possibility of cultural resistance” (32). This connection with poetry, an “economically insignificant” practice that sees the final cultural product as an end in itself, positions Brakhage outside of the market and thereby provides him with the autonomy and the independence necessary to create a resistant art form. James sees this resistant form working to re-humanize the individual in the face of capitalism and the industrialization of consciousness, which fits with Brakhage’s lament in *Metaphors on Vision* that “the entire society of man is bent on destroying that which is alive within it, its individuals (most contemporarily exemplified by the artist), so that presumably the society can run on and on like the machine it is to the expense of the humans composing it.”

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is drawn from Brakhage’s 1955 manifesto “Make Place for the Artist,” which he wrote while he was at Dartmouth. In it, Brakhage identifies himself as an artist and proceeds to tell the university how to treat him and others like him.

insistence that spectators need to be transformed because they are incapable of seeing or understanding the world for themselves indicates a profound disregard for other subjectivities and subjective possibilities. Brakhage also explicitly demonstrates this disregard for difference in his correspondence. In a letter describing *Anticipation of the Night*'s first screening at a film festival in Belgium, he characterizes the film as a spark in the darkness and describes the darkness as the "pent-up rage of snobbish ignorance," the "dumbfounded animality" and the "superficial humanizations" of the "monster of the contemporary theater audience" as they reject his film. He does not attribute this ignorance or animality to the imposed ways of seeing that he critiques in *Metaphors on Vision*. Instead, he rejects the audience in their rejection of his work and finds satisfaction only later when a *Cinémathèque Française* audience more familiar with radical film experiments accepts the film.

This experience in 1958 may explain why Brakhage develops the concept of the filmmaker-viewer in his subsequent manifesto. He experiences the outright rejection of his work by spectators and critics. In his letter, which was written soon after the experience, he does not engage with their response, attempting to understand it, but dismisses it as "snobbish ignorance" and "animality." But we can see in *Metaphors on Vision* an explicit desire to circumvent spectator response. Brakhage's concept of sub-and-objective expression creates a hermetic formal system that centers meaning *and* interpretation in the filmmaker. According to *Metaphors on Vision*, the filmmaker must position himself as the viewer in order to generate the film's impressions of the objective world; basically, the filmmaker must become a spectator to his own images in order to make sense of them. This process of making sense allows the filmmaker to determine the film's structure,

where the images are juxtaposed according to the filmmaker's sense of how the images relate to one another. Brakhage becomes film, filmmaker, and viewer because his films represent what he has seen and his interpretation of what he has seen. This self-centered dynamic may explain in part why the spectators responded to *Anticipation of the Night* as they did. There was no place for them in this film. Brakhage's total view had usurped their own. Yet when the film was screened for "appreciative" audiences, those well-versed or perhaps primed to receive the film through the filmmaker's introduction to it (a common practice in experimental film screenings of the time) were more open to it and its project. But they were arguably open to it because they subscribed to Brakhage's total view, which includes his objective for the film.

Though this self-centered form creates a free space for Brakhage to exist as an individual, as an autonomous self and through his self-expression, such a tightly interrelated field tends to appropriate or exclude other subjectivities. By positioning himself as the filmmaker-viewer, Brakhage appropriates the encounter between the spectator and the film. This move places him at odds with every other director I examine here. The other directors want their films to provoke or shape a particular response in the spectator, and they rely upon a concept of the dialectical relationship between film viewer and film as part of this objective. But Brakhage absorbs that dialectic into the filmmaker-viewer and substitutes "pure film meaning," a self-contained meaning produced entirely by and within the film image, for the relationship between film and spectator. Brakhage feels the response to something seen has been pre-determined by imposed associations and through processes and thus must be avoided if an unmediated way of seeing is to be achieved. While the other filmmakers, who share his view, attempt to change those

associations and ways of thinking through their films, Brakhage works to circumvent this relationship altogether. Though he differs from the other filmmakers in his complete rejection of the dialectical relationship between spectator and film, he shares with them an anxiety about spectators.

As we can see in his letter about spectator response to *Anticipation of the Night*, Brakhage harshly critiques those spectators and critics who do not see his films in accordance with his vision. They reject his films, so he rejects them. But the spectators are freely expressing themselves, and since Brakhage is an apostle for free expression, he cannot condemn them for what he would see as their sins of rejection. One way to insulate himself from this free expression would be to create a film form that appropriates the spectator position for himself. Another would involve restricting individual autonomy and self-expression to the position of the filmmaker-viewer. Though spectators can and will have their own responses to the films, these lyrical films ultimately do not require this response to be complete or to fulfill Brakhage's theoretical objective. They are born total and self-contained; they require no additional input in order to exist as intended. In this way, Brakhage cuts out the spectator and any response that deviates from or contradicts his own vision and ideals. In this sense, the total view becomes a space where Brakhage can realize his ideals of living an autonomous existence and expressing his unique subjectivity through his art. However, the autonomy and individuality achieved in these films applies to only one person – Brakhage.

His films are also total because Brakhage incorporates other views and other subjects into his lyrical and mythopoeic films. He not only excludes other subjectivities, he colonizes them to create his sub-and-objective expressions. In the interview with P.

Adam Sitney that opens *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage attributes the progress in his filmmaking to the influence of his wife Jane, who provides inspiration as well as some of the content for his films. But he also carefully defines their working relationship: “So I tended more and more to give her any chance to add her view to mine for a more total view. [...] We were not making compromises, rather we were finding the one right path that would contain the total view.” This total view strikes a balance between their two views “meshed so carefully and so closely together that it does tend to be a balance, not collaborative, but true.” Brakhage gives Jane a chance to add her view by providing her with opportunities to film, but these opportunities are chances to film him and his responses to what he is experiencing as he experiences it. She films his face as they argue in *Wedlock House: An Intercourse*; she films his ecstatic response to the birth of their daughter in *Window Water Baby Moving*; and she films his progress up the mountain as he takes on the role of the Dog Star Man. In addition, the total view in his films consists of what he sees and how he experiences it. Though Jane provides footage for the films, she does not contribute to the editing of the films, so Brakhage completely controls the films’ consciousness through the ordering and layering of shots. Also Jane and their children appear in the films, but they become part of what is essentially Brakhage’s own process of self-discovery or self-recovery that he enacts through and in his films. For example, in the *Dog Star Man* films, the Dog Star Man (Brakhage) is only able to fulfill his ultimate self-realization by remembering the untutored eye of his infant son and by re-awakening his heart through sexual desire for his wife. Here, we begin to see how Brakhage’s films colonize other subjectivities for their totalized and totalizing form. In essence, his films give expression to an imperial dynamic that the other filmmakers,

especially the Latin American filmmakers, explicitly reject, since they see it as indicative of the bourgeois, first-world-centered thinking that contributes to the misery of underdevelopment.

Brakhage attempts to describe a film form that liberates consciousness and expression from the external forces that attempt to appropriate or delimit them. In writing *Metaphors on Vision* and his other essays, Brakhage works through a number of problematic issues that he has faced in his film practice: resistant spectators, institutional forces that attempt to influence or take over his work, and the general structure of production, distribution and exhibition in cinema. He claims to want to extend free expression to spectators, but that freedom allows them to condemn and reject his work, which he in turn rejects as a critical possibility. He works to create films that are timeless yet he also positions himself as the eyes of his age. He strives to become more personal and egocentric, but does so in order to address the universal concerns of all man. He insists on working autonomously, but film is tied to its means of production, since cameras, film stock, and development processes can be expensive. Also, the films made will not be seen unless the filmmaker can tap into an established means of distribution and exhibition, such as film festivals or film cooperatives. This particular issue creates a central paradox in considerations of Brakhage's theory and practice. Brakhage resolutely protects his autonomy, even fleeing the New York experimental film scene for the Colorado mountains as a way to maintain his independence. Yet he becomes an engine for the institutionalization of the New American Cinema. Jonas Mekas takes up Brakhage's work and his insistence on autonomy and focus on personal expression in order to give

shape to the principles and policies of the New American Cinema Group and its subsidiaries.

In Brakhage, Jonas Mekas saw a way to shape the New American Cinema according to his vision of it and he used Brakhage and his films to help institutionalize this vision. Mekas was and is arguably the most influential force in U.S. experimental film practice. Mekas's New American Cinema Group, Inc. and its Film-Makers' Cooperative and Film-Makers' Cinematheque became the avant-garde distribution and exhibition network on the east coast after Cinema 16 shut down in 1963. His essays and reviews in *Film Culture* and the *Village Voice*, and his participation in the completion and distribution of various manifestos on behalf of New American Cinema filmmakers also played a large role in shaping experimental film in the U.S. into a distinct institution. Mekas was not always a fan of Brakhage and his work, or of the other film poets who, along with Maya Deren, produced psychodramas. In 1955, Mekas wrote: "The film poets [...] are so fascinated by their personal worlds that they do not feel a need to communicate nor give to their characters or stories a larger, more human scope" (23-24). But Mekas's opinion changed when he saw *Anticipation of the Night*, which he describes as "an eye-opener and the beginning of a totally new, subjective cinema" in his history of The Film-Makers' Cooperative. Mekas decided to begin the Cooperative after Cinema 16's rejection of *Anticipation of the Night*:

I came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to create our own cooperative film distribution center, run by ourselves. When Cinema 16, at that time [1960] the most advanced avant-garde/independent film distribution organization, rejected Stan Brakhage's film *Anticipation of the Night* – an eye-opener and the

beginning of a totally new, subjective cinema – this was the signal that something had to be done. (1-2)

But the founding of the Cooperative, which Brakhage temporarily helped Mekas run, was not the only way the paths of these two men interconnected. In 1962, Mekas's journal *Film Culture* gave Brakhage its fourth Independent Film Award, which is given to "original and unique American contributors to the cinema." The rationale for the award focuses on Brakhage's poetic self-expression, his pursuit of his own personal vision, and the way he exemplifies "the absolute independence of the film artist" (*Film Culture Reader* 426). In 1963, Mekas and *Film Culture* again showed support for Brakhage by publishing his manifesto, *Metaphors on Vision*.

In Mekas's "Notes on the New American Cinema," which appeared in *Film Culture* No. 24 (published in the spring of 1962), we can begin to see why and how Brakhage had become so important to Mekas's institutional cause. In this essay, Mekas equates the New American Cinema with the human subject who defines and embodies the times: "The new cinema, like the new man, is nothing definitive, nothing final. It is a living thing. It is imperfect; it errs. Nevertheless, it is the artist, with all his imperfections, who is the antenna (e. pound) of his race" (88). Mekas describes this new cinema and this new man in almost child-like terms, echoing Brakhage's ideal of the untutored eye of the child, whose innocent vision does not distinguish, differentiate or categorize, but instead perceives the world through an "adventure of perception," however imperfect and faltering that adventure might be. Mekas appears to pick up on Brakhage's concept of the artist as the last individual in society, the only person remaining who possesses sensibilities and consciousness attuned enough to contemplate the issues of the age.

Though Brakhage and his theories were instrumental to Mekas's institutionalization of the New American Cinema, they were not the only influences he drew upon. For example, Mekas's emphasis on the living quality of the new American cinema echoes Brakhage's theory, but the imperfection he describes does not. Imperfection and error are qualities that Warhol will later embrace, and which the Latin American filmmakers will adopt as their point of differentiation. Mekas's description of the new American cinema draws on theoretical work done by U.S. experimental filmmakers like Brakhage, who was finishing up *Metaphors on Vision* about the same time Mekas was writing this essay. But Mekas draws on national and international discourse to shape his "Notes on the New American Cinema." Mekas appears to appropriate international critical discourse on new cinema and national manifestos, such as that of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in an attempt to distinguish U.S. experimental filmmaking as uniquely American but also to position it as part of this international new cinema movement. As he mentions in the essay, his manifesto-like description of the new American cinema comes in response to "the claims of foreign and local critics who reproach the independent filmmaker for what they call his escapism" (98). Mekas asserts that "the American cinema has never been so deeply grounded in reality, reacting to it, expressing it, and commenting upon it. All filmmakers discussed in this survey take their content and their form from the most direct stream of modern life" (98). Mekas attempts here to re-frame the significance of the subjective expression of the modern artist. He directly rejects a view of the new art that situates it as out of touch and ahistorical; he emphasizes instead how it gives expression to modern reality. In fact, Mekas grounds the significance of the new American cinema in the "personal statements about the world today:"

The artist is beginning to express his anxiety and discontent in a more open and direct manner. He is searching for a freer form, one that allows him a larger scale of emotional and intellectual statements, explosions of truths, outcries of warnings, accumulations of images – not to carry out an amusing story but to express fully the tremblings of man’s unconscious and to confront us eye to eye with the soul of modern man. The new artist is not interested in entertaining the viewer: He is making personal statements about the world today. (97)

Mekas positions the new American cinema as an alternative to the entertainment cinema of Hollywood. Instead of producing narratives that amuse and entertain, these film artists search for a film form capable of revealing truths about the world around them and the tremblings of man’s unconscious prompted by modern life. He establishes the new American cinema as a serious artistic and political movement and invokes themes that Brakhage also uses in his manifesto, such as the importance of the individual artist, of personal films that reveal truths about the world today (what Brakhage might characterize as universal concerns), and the development of film forms that break free from conventions like narrative. In this essay, personal, even self-centered, expression becomes an instrument for social change since these films have the potential to contradict authoritative cultural and political structures.

Though his rhetoric shares certain themes with Brakhage’s, it also seems to invoke the manifestos of the New Left and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), published around this same time, which work to address specifically U.S. issues, contexts, and challenges. In their manifestos, the New Left and the SDS were also interested in the ways a personal sense of moral outrage could find expression. In his “Open Letter to the New Left” (1960), C. Wright Mills critiques the intellectual celebration of apathy in Western societies evident in proclamations of the end of ideology and what he sees as a refusal to engage in public social criticism. He attributes much of

this apathy to “a disbelief in the shaping by men of their own futures” and to the apparent collapse of historic agencies of change in Western societies such as the working class, the peasantry, unions, and political parties. Mills suggests a reconceptualization of the left that is grounded in a belief that men and women are capable of understanding their circumstances directly and of changing those circumstances through their own agency. He suggests change be made that provides political support to the “young intelligentsia” currently engaged in a “moral upsurge” so those young people can consolidate their efforts.

The moral outrage of the young intelligentsia takes concrete form two years later in the SDS’s “Port Huron Statement.” The statement speaks of the disillusionment of youth who have come to see the U.S. ideals of freedom and equality for each individual and government of, by, and for the people as hypocritical given world and national events like the Cold War and Jim Crow, which test the nation’s commitment to democracy and freedom. The students attribute this breakdown in ideals to apathy, “the felt powerlessness of ordinary people” that results from the separation of the people from democratic power, relevant knowledge, and decision-making positions. For them, the U.S. had become “a democracy without publics” and the stated purpose of the manifesto is the “search for truly democratic alternatives to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation with them” by placing power in the hands of the people. The statement describes the SDS’s social values, which attempt to counteract the “depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things” by tapping into man’s “unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love” and “unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity.” The manifesto calls for a social order

that encourages independence so individuals can find “a meaning in life that is personally authentic; a quality of mind [...] which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences, one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved; one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.” Mekas seems to embrace the SDS’s call for an open and active quality of mind when he describes the New American Cinema’s focus on personal expression as a way to examine present and past experiences in the face of a depersonalizing society.

But these various theories also share another commonality: exclusion. Brakhage’s self-centered film form, Mekas’s cultivation of certain filmmakers and exclusion of others, with Brakhage and his films proving to be an important engine to this process, and the rhetoric of man, fraternity and power in the “Port Huron Statement” all conflate independence with separation. In other words, in each of these examples, the cultivation and expression of autonomous subjectivities, which have broken free from prevailing ways of thinking and being, pave the way towards realizing social, national or institutional ideals. But the personal expression of subjectivity, believed to be the right of all, can only be enacted by particular groups or individuals to the exclusion of others. These men define and divide the world into categories through their exclusions and thus retain the subject-object, dominant-marginal dynamics they critique. They swap out one form of domination for another and do so by asserting another view, their view, as the right one. This transfer of authority is crucial to institutionalization. In the case of Mekas and the New American Cinema, the creation of alternative distribution and exhibition channels, the cultivation of canonical filmmakers through critical discourse, and the

establishment of concrete principles and values that signify the New American Cinema allows him to posit a cinema that provides a genuine alternative to the Hollywood industrial model and that gives independent filmmakers the resources they need in order to create their art. In addition, Mekas attempts to characterize the New American Cinema as a uniquely American new cinema, thus tapping into an international film movement while also keeping sight of the unique ideals and values that come from the U.S. context. But not all U.S. experimental filmmakers agreed with Mekas and his definition of the New American Cinema. In fact, one experimental filmmaker in particular, Andy Warhol, took it upon himself to institutionalize another alternative cinema, one that stood in opposition to Mekas and the New American Cinema.

### **Andy Warhol: The artist in the age of mechanical reproduction**

In his 1970 essay, “Notes After Reseeing the Movies of Andy Warhol,” Jonas Mekas tells the story of Brakhage’s first experience with a Warhol film. As Mekas tells it, news of Warhol’s first film *Sleep* (1963) had traveled to the Colorado mountains and Brakhage decided to seek it out, sometime in 1965, to “find out what’s the noise all about” (28, [sic]). After viewing the film in its slow-motion projection speed of 16 frames per second, Brakhage conceded that Warhol was an artist taking a completely opposite direction from his yet achieving “as great and as clear a transformation of reality, as drastic and total a new way of seeing reality” as he was in his own work (30, Mekas paraphrasing Brakhage). Mekas attributes this new way of seeing reality to Warhol’s minimalist formal strategies and his obsession with grasping a more complete view of reality by capturing its phenomenal form, which consists of its human and material

aspects. Mekas interprets Warhol's films through the lens of his own values and principles. He brings out certain qualities that make them appear to resemble the work done by New American Cinema filmmakers like Brakhage. By claiming that Warhol's films attempt to grasp phenomenal reality in order to capture a more complete view of reality in general, Mekas emphasizes how they meld the subjective and objective realms in order to create a total view, a stance that could be drawn directly from *Metaphors on Vision*. Mekas places the Brakhage anecdote at the essay's beginning, requiring us to pass through Brakhage's appraisal of Warhol's work in order to get to Mekas's analysis of it. Yet at the same time, Mekas uses one of the metaphors Warhol employs to describe himself and his work – the mirror – when he discusses how these films confront the spectator with his own blank mind, which Mekas equates with looking into a mirror. In this way, Mekas incorporates Warhol's language and concepts into his own theory about the films and the filmmaker.

Warhol and Brakhage both protest against this positioning of themselves and their work by critics like Mekas. Brakhage insists that his "intentions and processes" are misattributed to political objectives that he, in fact, does not embrace. In his 1966 letter to Rona Page, Brakhage expresses his irritation at this misattribution:

Well, all of the above essaying (which grew way beyond any intended length) should at least serve to distinguish my intentions and processes, and whatever films of mine arise there-thru, from most of the rest of the so-called Underground Film Movement: and (as you asked specifically about this in your letter) I'll take the opportunity to emphasize that I feel at polar odds and ends therefrom whatever usually arises from that 'movement' into public print, especially when journalists and critics are presuming to write about myself and my work. (83)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interesting to note, right after Brakhage lambasts journalists and critics for presuming to write about him and his work, he says "I'm certainly nothing **BUT** uneasy about the any/everybody's too facile sense of mixed-media, which seems by report to be dominating the New York Scene, at the present" (83). One of the key figures of "mixed-media" in the New York Scene is Andy Warhol. Here Brakhage seems intent on

He mentions his desire to make his films integrally cohesive in order to avoid such positioning of his work and its incorporation into other movements or causes. Brakhage essentially takes up his protest on the periphery. He left New York City so he could keep his distance from these forces of incorporation; but physical distance has proven to be an ineffective strategy, since critics and journalists are still writing about him. He protests against their presumptions, but does so in a letter that begins by indicating Jonas Mekas has all of his notes, film clips, stills, and other materials in the Film-Makers' Cooperative files. Mekas has Brakhage, or almost everything that represents Brakhage, locked up in his files. Though Brakhage resents the lack of control over his public image and the representation of his works, he does not participate in the public discourse that frames, and essentially interprets, his intentions and processes. In contrast, Warhol leaps into the fray of public discourse and attempts to influence it so that he can retain some influence within it and thus retain some control over his public image and the representation of his work. Warhol is as invested in freedom of expression and autonomy as Brakhage is, but where Brakhage retreats to Colorado in order to retain a sense of freedom in his own work and in his self-understanding, Warhol immerses himself in the workings of public discourse to shape his public image so it reflects his objectives and to institutionalize his film practice as an alternative to the New American Cinema.

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distinguishing himself from Warhol's work, among others. In 1966, Mekas and *Film Culture* awarded Warhol their 6<sup>th</sup> Independent Spirit award; Brakhage had received their 4<sup>th</sup>. So we may conjecture that Brakhage felt that the New American Cinema, and underground films, was moving more in the direction of Warhol, mixed media, and documentary – and he wants to be sure to differentiate himself and his work from this trend. In any event, though neither Warhol nor Brakhage mention one another by name (except via Mekas in 1970), they both seem to have an awareness of one another's work and a clear desire to keep their approaches separate from one another – as we can see here in Brakhage's complaint about mixed-media and will see in Warhol's quip about painting on film.

Andy Warhol began making films with an awareness of recent developments in U.S. experimental cinema. Before he made his first film in the summer of 1963, Warhol had been regularly attending experimental film screenings organized by Mekas. Critics, including Callie Angell and P. Adams Sitney, agree that Warhol's first films were intended for experimental film audiences, and that they reflected the influence of other experimental filmmakers whose work he had seen, including Willard Maas, Kenneth Anger, and especially Jack Smith (Angell 124).<sup>14</sup> In his 1966 interview with Gretchen Berg, "My True Story," Warhol makes explicit reference to experimental filmmaking and to the New American Cinema. He does so in order to classify his films as experimental yet distinguish them from the films of the New American Cinema. He says he calls his films experimental "because I don't know what I'm doing" and then goes on to say: "I like the film-makers of the New American Underground Cinema, I think they're terrific. An Underground Movie is a movie you make and show underground, like at the Film-Maker's Cinémathèque on 41<sup>st</sup> Street" (92). Here, Warhol refers to Mekas and the New American Cinema filmmakers, but does so in terms of underground filmmaking. Though underground films came to denote experimental films with a political theme or intent, Warhol defines them here as films that are literally shown underground, in a shabby basement theater.<sup>15</sup> Warhol concludes with the assertion that "Art and film have nothing

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<sup>14</sup> Sitney even goes so far as to assert that Warhol turned his genius for parody against U.S. experimental film, and against the tradition of the psychodrama film in particular, which Brakhage also addressed in the development of his lyrical film form. Sitney sees *Sleep* as a direct response to the psychodrama, or dream, film as well as an attempt to explode the myth of compression and the myth of the filmmaker espoused by many New American Cinema filmmakers. For example, Brakhage insisted that a film must not waste a single frame and that the individual filmmaker must control all aspects of his creation. In contrast, Sitney believes Warhol defined his films against this tradition, making the extravagant use of footage a central value and proclaiming his fierce indifference to direction, photography, and lighting (349).

<sup>15</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, descriptions of the Film-Makers' Cinémathèque in "Up From Underground" affirms Warhol's reference: "the Radio City Music Hall of the underground [...] a converted downstairs auditorium in a dingy New York office building, where the screen is too far back on the

to do with each other, film is just something you photograph, not to show painting on” (93, [sic]). This last comment could have been directed at Brakhage, who was known to paint on film to express the closed eye vision he felt film was incapable of representing through its photographic properties. This shot at Brakhage and his faux-naïve quip about underground film makes the work of the New American Cinema filmmakers seem out of touch and out of sight in terms of mass audiences.

Warhol builds on this theme later in the interview when he once again takes up the subject of his films as experimental:

There’s nothing really to understand in my work. I make experimental films and everyone thinks those are the kind where you see how much dirt you can get on the film, or when you zoom forward, the camera keeps getting the wrong face or it jiggles all the time: but it’s so easy to make movies, you can just shoot and every picture really comes out right. (96)

Warhol clearly separates himself here from the New American Cinema and the critical establishment while aligning himself with mass cultural forces. His assertion that “[t]here’s nothing really to understand in my work” is a parodic reference to its minimalist quality, but it is also an attempt to break free from the critical establishment. If there is nothing to understand in his work, then it does not require interpretation. If it does not require interpretation, critics are not needed in order to understand it. This declaration liberates his work from the influence of critics while also making it appear more accessible to popular audiences. Warhol uses a mass cultural conception of

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platform, too many seats are busted, and the ticket-taker is sometimes too polite to ask for your money.” This description situates underground film far outside of the mainstream, in the realm of “art for art’s sake,” where value is calculated in aesthetic terms and comes in the direct experience with the film, and, in some cases, the filmmaker (since filmmakers were often on hand to present and talk about their films). The surroundings also underscore an indifference to commercial value; the “Radio City Music Hall of the underground” seems more redolent of shabby chic and bohemian decay than the comfortable, accommodating, for-profit movie houses that attracted 1960s mainstream audiences. Such surroundings would lend themselves to diehard fans only, such as those who made up the appreciative audiences Brakhage refers to in *Metaphors on Vision*.

experimental film in order to differentiate his filmmaking from that of other experimental filmmakers: *everyone thinks* these films involve errors like dirty film stock, shots that jiggle, and misplaced zooms. But Warhol insists movie-making is easy. He refers to film by its popular name, movie, and then goes on to explain why it's easy to make movies. The filmmaker simply sets up the camera and shoots, and every image comes out right. In this scenario, no special skills are needed to make films. The camera does all the work. Besides, even the *auteurs* of experimental filmmaking produce films that have errors or look amateurish; and Warhol claims not to know what he is doing when it comes to making films, yet he is a recognized filmmaker. In this short passage, Warhol describes and communicates the foundational principles of his filmmaking practice – and these principles express a system of value that contradicts those embraced by the New American Cinema filmmakers.

Brakhage sees the role of the artist as extraordinary and extraordinarily important, since the artist is the last individual left in a society bent on destroying the sensibilities and consciousness of its individuals. In *Metaphors on Vision* and his other writings, he consistently identifies himself as an artist in order to position himself in this authoritative role; he has sensibilities attuned enough to reveal truths about the self and the world. But Warhol refuses that self-definition. He insists that he is not an artist but is instead part of an automatic process, one that centers on mechanical reproduction. In “What is Pop Art,” an interview he conducted with his friend and art critic, David Bourdon, most of Warhol's responses to Bourdon's questions are ironic refusals to adopt the status of artist. Warhol says he simply tries to copy everyday objects exactly as they are. Bourdon responds to Warhol's claim by pointing out the imperfection of Warhol's copy method:

“But for all your copying, the paintings come out differently than the model.” Warhol retorts:

But I haven't tried to change a thing. It's an exact copy automatic reproduction. And still the human element creeps in! A smudge here, a bad silk screening there, an unintended crop because I've run out of canvas – and suddenly someone is accusing me of arty lay-out! I'm anti-smudge. It's too human. I'm for mechanical art. When I took up silk screening, it was to more fully exploit the preconceived image through the commercial techniques of multiple reproduction. (8-9)

Warhol denies his role as an artist who creates, who *tries* to transform the world through representation, and instead offers himself as a machine that reproduces exact copies of the original model. In fact, he contends that his paintings and silk screens are “an exact copy automatic reproduction,” a statement that rhetorically compounds descriptors in order to insist upon the truth of the assertion. He also defines his art form – mechanical art – by replaying the language of critics as a way to affirm his position. Critical claims become proof for his claims, as we see in his interview with Bourdon. By taking up critical discourse into his own responses and self-definition, he affirms their claims yet also uses them to achieve his own goals and interests, thereby maintaining a degree of autonomy within the discursive systems that attempt to define him.

But Warhol does admit that even in automatic reproduction, the human element creeps into the process. He equates the human element with art, and then rejects both. Warhol wants no part of art or of being human. Instead, he wants to be a machine. In “Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected,” Thierry de Duve argues that Warhol's oft-quoted assertion “I think everybody should be a machine” (Warhol “On Pop Art” 16) echoes a desire similar to that expressed by other artists like Piet Mondrian and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy who wanted the body of the artist at work and the artist's body of work to

be segmented, standardized, and mechanized so they would *be* the machine of the culture industry rather than its slave. These artists react to the challenge of industrialization with a paradoxical resistance: they became in theory and practice not the photographer but his instrument. They left in their work the marks of a desire to behave as if their hands, eyes, and entire bodies were machines for the recording and duplicating of images. By doing so, they challenged the fetishization of the handmade, which marked painting as a commodity, by insisting there was no longer a difference between the producer and his production. All were commodities, fetish surfaces (de Duve 11-12). De Duve sees in Warhol's work the perfection of the modern desire to be a machine. Warhol was not just a painting machine; he was also a filming machine, a printing machine, a recording machine, and the cash register of the art market. As such, he makes explicit the perfect mapping of the aesthetic field onto the field of political economy (13). He makes this mapping explicit in terms of the art market, but also for the realms of mainstream and experimental film. Stars are stars and films are commodities whether they circulate in the popular culture industry or the high art realm of experimental cinema.

But de Duve's comparison of Warhol's express desire to be a machine with that of other machine artists who challenged the commodification of painting by insisting that both producer and product were fetish surfaces provides an interesting foothold into thinking about how Warhol used public discourse for his own purposes. His career was born in advertising and came of age in the high art marketplace. By the time he begins making films, he is able to insert himself into the discursive networks of popular culture and high culture. And he is able to create a free space within them by appropriating and adapting their rhetoric, whether that rhetoric comes from fan magazines or from

highbrow art journals. He becomes part of the machine in order to influence his fetishization. But his ability to execute this influence only becomes possible through his other express desire – to be a mirror.

In 1966, Warhol declared “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it” (90). With this pronouncement, Warhol evacuates deep qualities, like emotions and consciousness, which make a subject a subject, opting instead for surface appearances: one is what one *appears* to be rather than what one *is*. Warhol further develops this thought in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* when he announces “I’m everything my scrapbook says I am” (10), an assertion that follows a laundry list of sound bites that describe his physical appearance and conjecture on who he is. He is who he appears to be in his public image; he is his public image, or so he says. Discourse has created a public image that circulates and transforms the bearer of the image into a fetish surface. In this process, the subject, or rather the subject’s subjectivity, is lost. The subject of discourse no longer reflects, as a conscious being, but instead becomes a reflection of discourse. The mirror and the machine intersect here. Warhol plunges into the midst of this process and appropriates discourse to fashion a public image for himself, for the Factory, and for the Factory superstars.

A mirror does not exactly reproduce what is before it; it represents what is in front of it and often distorts the original in its representation. In this sense, the mirror metaphor embodies Warhol’s “exact copy automatic reproduction” description of his Pop art aesthetic and the minimalist aesthetic of his experimental filmmaking. This distortion also occurs through his emphasis on improvisational performance, which, like a mirror,

often reverses – or otherwise inverts, subverts, or perverts – the perceptions of the beholder. Warhol’s approach to filmmaking in his early period (1963-1968), which he says is when he was making the films that he wanted to make,<sup>16</sup> is notable for its minimalist technique. Many of these films consisted of single, unedited reel-long shots recorded with a static tripod-mounted camera. These films are largely based on his principle of simply setting up the camera and shooting. But this description of his minimalist approach belies the actual complexity of Warhol’s filmmaking process. Callie Angell contends that, during this period, Warhol used his films to explore a new conception of film, not as a constructed, finished product, but “as a kind of delineated performance space, a specific temporal and physical framing within which planned or unplanned actions might or might not unfold” (130). In this scenario, the film would be planned in advance, with the creation of a preliminary concept, occasional writing of a script, casting, camera set up, lighting, and allotted number of film reels. But the filming itself would be left free enough to be affected by a variety of chance factors, including improvisation, errors, interpersonal tensions, and deliberately staged destabilizing elements.<sup>17</sup> Whatever happened would be recorded, and that recording would become the film’s final form. However, by late 1965, Warhol’s camera became an increasingly active participant in the films, as reframings, exposures, and in-camera edits became more and

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Annette Michelson’s “‘Where Is Your Rupture?’: Mass Culture and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.” He contrasts this period with his post-1968 period when he was making films that people wanted to see.

<sup>17</sup> Hal Foster, in “Andy Warhol, or the Distressed Image” also mentions the use of distraction in Warhol’s filming of the *Screen Tests*, almost 500 3-minute films made between 1964-1966: “Conceived as filmic portraits (they were initially called “stillies”), the *Screen Tests* are not screen tests at all—none was a proper audition for a scripted movie--but they were tests nonetheless. In fact they were pure tests of the capacity of the filmed subject to confront a camera, hold a pose, present an image, and sustain the performance for the entire duration, without the armature of character or the benefit of direction, and to do so, moreover, under the strain of enjoined immobility and in the midst of ambient distractions--sitters were frequently teased, questioned, or otherwise provoked by Factory onlookers, and sometimes they were simply abandoned by Warhol or whoever was nominally in charge” (18).

more common (Angell 130-133). With this shift, the camera appears to improvise along with the performers in front of it. It is no longer just a recording device or an inscrutable gaze that motivates performances; the possibilities of the camera, its zooms, pans, and tilts, participate in the unplanned actions that constitute the final shape of the film. For Brakhage the sub-and-objective expressions of the filmmaker-viewer produces film form, but for Warhol, the improvisational dialogue between camera and onscreen subject makes the film a film.

This addition of an improvisational camera underscores the ways Warhol prioritized improvisation and collaboration. As we will see in Chapter 3, by basing his approach on the industrial filmmaking model used by Hollywood, Warhol created a division of labor and a superstar system that allowed anyone to participate in the creative process, which, after all, required no special skills. Warhol's insistence that performances be improvised allowed him to avoid the limitations of dramatic conventions, like scripts, and the restrictions of imposed roles and identities. Warhol attempts to re-script public discourse in order to use it for his own purposes, and he works to revise systems of social classification by establishing the convention of improvisation. Through improvisation, even "leftovers" can become superstars. In *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, Warhol reminisces: "the people I loved were [...] the leftovers of show business, turned down at auditions all over town" (as quoted in Wollen 23). Yet these leftovers became superstars within the Factory milieu because of their capacity for improvisation. Throughout his interviews and writings, Warhol defines the superstar as someone who is capable of being their own script. In referring to the *Screen Test* films, Warhol hypothesizes "We attract people who can turn themselves on in front of the camera. In this sense, they're *really* superstars. It's

much harder, you know, to *be your own script*” (quoted in Foster 18). These superstars are not actors who perform but are instead being themselves in the presence of the camera. In Warhol’s early silent films, the onscreen subjects improvise through facial expressions, gestures, and actions. But in his later sound films, like *The Chelsea Girls*, Warhol expands the realm of improvisation to include freeform monologues and dialogues between individuals. This improvisation produces its own set of anxieties while also giving onscreen subjects the freedom to shape their own self-presentation.

Warhol was largely able to create his experiments in film and filmmaking because he established his own independent system of production and exhibition. When Warhol began making films in 1963, he financed his film productions through the sale of his art. Because of the popularity of his artworks, he was able to realize such ambitious film projects as the *Screen Tests* and *Empire*. By 1965, he was spending thousands of dollars each year to make noncommercial art films that were screened largely for Factory audiences or, increasingly, as part of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable multimedia shows. *The Chelsea Girls*, which opened at the Filmmakers’ Cinematheque in New York in September 1966, proved to be his first financial success. The film received rave reviews from avant-garde and mainstream critics and, after playing continuously at the Cinematheque and other New York theaters, it made a jump to commercial exhibition, going into national release in 1967 and 1968. The success of *The Chelsea Girls* sent shock waves through the New American Cinema, as avant-garde filmmakers worried that their projects would no longer be valued for their formal experiments but would instead be judged by their ability to achieve commercial success.

Their anxiety proves how successful Warhol was in creating a clear, and acknowledged, alternative to the New American Cinema through his Factory filmmaking. By 1966, Warhol and the Factory were forces to be reckoned with since they were well known in the experimental and pop culture scenes. By 1966, the New American Cinema was beginning to fragment as filmmakers began to explore different directions. At the same time, the underground cinema movement began to gain in strength as filmmakers and critics began to search for concrete connections between film and the contradictions of modern life. We can get a flavor for this cause-oriented direction in Mekas's review of *The Chelsea Girls*: "The terror and hardness that we see in *The Chelsea Girls* is the same terror and hardness that is burning Vietnam; and it's the essence and blood of our culture, of our ways of living: This is the Great Society" (257). Four years earlier, in his "Notes on a New American Cinema," Mekas had set out some of the key principles of what he then called new American cinema; since there was no clear sense of what constituted this new cinema, Mekas set about defining it. In the essay, which ran in *Film Culture*, he provides a descriptive overview and then uses his analysis of the work of key figures in the movement to provide evidence for his general claims. According to Mekas, the new American cinema is an independent cinema that rejects Hollywood cinema with its emphasis on perfection and professionalism. Instead of relying upon camera, narrative, and character conventions, these films express a personal style grounded in imperfection and improvisation, necessary byproducts of the first tentative steps toward a free cinema. These new cinema films also exhibit a "morality of the new," which questions ideologies, values, and ways of life (94-103).

By 1966, the new American cinema had begun to take a more overtly political direction, as we can see in Brakhage's letter to Rona Page and in Annette Michelson's lecture "Film and the Radical Aspiration." Brakhage distinguishes himself from mixed-media films, "all these socio-oriented effect-films being related to 'The Cause' rather than Aesthetics" and "The Old Doc-(umentary) school, with its 'spoon full of sugar help the medicine go down'" (83). Michelson's lecture corroborates Brakhage's thumbnail overview via her support of the intermedia movement, which she sees as the last gasp of cinematic radicalism. Since social and economic hierarchies in the U.S. are impervious to change, she argues, the attacks of certain filmmakers and artists on the hierarchical distinctions and barriers between media is the most effective way of challenging social and aesthetic values (420).

These descriptions of the New American Cinema reject Hollywood in order to maintain formal and structural independence; embrace imperfection as a part of that independence; esteem films that focus on self-exploration or a subjective examination of the world; and value "aesthetic-as-morality" films or those that exhibit a radical aspiration, where challenges to aesthetic and socio-political hierarchies become conjoined. In contrast, Warhol openly acknowledges his love of Hollywood film and employs an industrial model of filmmaking that relies on a division of labor and a superstar system. He maintains an independent production and exhibition system and insists that his films are also experimental, yet he pokes fun at the imperfect, or "shaky camera," aesthetic of the new American cinema and insists that movie-making is easy because all you have to do is shoot and every picture comes out right. He rejects the subjective cinema of personal expression in lieu of an improvisational cinema of self-expression that relies on the

improvisational performances of onscreen subjects; their exploration and performance of subjectivity appears to take precedence to his own. Finally, he has no interest in overturning formal or socio-political systems. In fact, he seems to do his work from within the belly of that beast, namely from within the culture industry. However, his work and the theories he promulgates about his work through his machine and mirror metaphors have their own socio-political valence since they shine a light on the workings of commodity culture and its effects on human beings. He works to create a free space within the public discourse that attempts to determine the value and characteristics of individuals in an attempt to influence public image and its associated social values. Though his films are an important part of his experimental stance, his manipulation of public discourse through his interviews is as important, if not more so, than the films themselves. Within his parodic play with discourse, he produces his most radical experiments, and his films take on a new and different life.

But Warhol pays a price when he becomes a part of the machine in order to create a free space within it for himself and for others who participate in the Factory. He knows he cannot vanquish the machinery of the culture industry, or even disrupt it; he plays by its rules in order to generate an aspect of autonomy within it. Because of this, he and the Factory remain firmly embedded within the culture industry and the values and principles it represents. As much as he and his superstars work to invert and subvert normative hierarchies and notions of value, they often end up recapitulating them, and the principles and values of the Factory become as repressive in many ways as the normative conventions he and his superstars attempted to escape. In these contradictions, however, we can see and analyze the dynamics of institutionalization at work. Perhaps even more

importantly, we can observe the workings of an institution that took on the machinery of the culture industry by creating eddies in its discursive flow, and did so in order to create an opportunity for subjects usually pushed outside the frame to come back into view.

**“[F]ilming underdevelopment with the optic of the people:” Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, and Glauber Rocha**

Like Brakhage, the Argentine filmmakers Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, and Octavio Getino and the Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha attempt to create film forms that circumvent the language of classical film in order to communicate a more profound knowledge of the subjects and subjectivity enmeshed within a system, neocolonialism, that seems bent on destroying all that is human within it. Like Warhol, they want to create an alternative experimental cinema grounded in ideals of collaboration and positioned as a genuine alternative to or within existing high art and mass culture cinemas. And like both Brakhage and Warhol, these filmmakers develop their film theories in accordance with a concept of subjectivity – the people – that represents for them a vulnerable humanity caught up in a dehumanizing and objectifying system that turns people into machines in the service of global capitalism. Though these similarities, and others, exist between the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers, and though they work in the same larger institutional context, that of the international new cinema movement, we must be careful not to ground these likenesses in generalized concepts because the filmmakers work in different historical, cultural, and national contexts. However, we can look to their similarities to see how these Americans adapted certain European art historical and cinematic modernist principles for their own uses and examine how the differences within their adaptations mutually illuminate one another.

In their film theories, these four filmmakers set up two goals for their practice: (1) to develop a film form that represents the nation and the people and (2) to use that film form to create a critical consciousness in the people. This critical consciousness will inspire them to engage with one another and the neocolonial political and economic systems that govern their daily lives so they can challenge and change the inequitable structures that promote underdevelopment. In essence, these filmmakers attempt to create a nationalist film form, one that gives expression to the potential inherent within national and cultural ideals and one that has the power to liberate the people from the conceptual and structural dependency of neocolonialism. However, they each have different conceptions of the “nation.” They also work from different positions within the international new cinema network. Just as they develop their film practice and their theories of film in relation to their unique historical contexts, they also respond to global and regional filmmaking trends. In their descriptions of their film practice, they explicitly position their work within this international cinematic context as well as within their individual socio-political contexts of underdevelopment.

***Fernando Birri: “Cinema and Underdevelopment” (Argentina, 1963)***

Fernando Birri belonged to the first generation of Latin American filmmaker-theorists who used manifesto writing to develop and extend their filmmaking projects. Birri began his filmmaking career in 1952, when he went to Rome – along with Cuban filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa and writer Gabriel García Márquez – to study at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*. While Birri was there, the school’s primary focus was neorealism, a film style characterized by stories that

feature impoverished or working class individuals and that contend with the difficult economic and moral conditions of everyday life in post-World War II Italy. The features of neorealism are the use of nonprofessional actors, location shooting, loose and episodic structures and a documentary visual style. Traces of Italian neorealism manifest themselves in Birri's theory and his work, most notably in his focus on people, places, and situations that are usually effaced in mainstream film forms.

Birri returned to Argentina in 1956, a period when a small group of Argentine filmmakers were beginning to dedicate themselves for the first time to a "*conexión con la realidad nacional*" (connection with national reality). Argentine filmmaker and critic Octavio Getino (who wrote "Towards a Third Cinema" in 1969 with Fernando Solanas) offers the *Taller de Cine* group and Fernando Birri as two representative examples of filmmakers working towards this *conexión*. Founded during Juan Perón's second term (1952-1955) and active until the late 1960s, the *Taller de Cine* group (literally, the Cinema Factory group, a name and concept that echoes serendipitously in Warhol's Factory) set forth their filmmaking objective in a declaration of principles: "*filmar películas que reflejen la vida argentina en todos sus aspectos (...) Propugnamos y defendemos la fisonomía nacional del arte como único camino hacia la trascendencia universal* [to produce films that reflect Argentine life in all of its aspects (...). We advocate and defend a national aesthetic in art as a unique road towards universal significance]" (Getino 47, translation mine). The *Taller de Cine* group proposes to create a national film form that reflects the life and lives that make up the Argentine nation to generate an aesthetic of universal significance, one capable of standing up to the well-established art forms and aesthetic principles of Europe. Also, by giving expression to the

life of the nation, they will make that life visible and meaningful to those who view these films; they would give that life a universal significance, or at least a universally understood significance. In either case, they strive to re-orient filmmaking so it reflects Argentine life rather than the aesthetic forms and narrative content imported into Argentina from Western Europe – forms and content which marginalize Argentine artists and the people. To this end, they focus on creating “*la fisonomía nacional del arte.*” *Fisonomía nacional* does not literally translate into national aesthetic, but more closely translates into “national appearance” or “national physiognomy.” They want to give the nation a face, an identity. In effect, they attempt to make the nation of Argentina appear and cohere as a specific community and identity through their film art. In this statement of principles, the *Taller de Cine* group lays out many of the issues and concepts that other Latin American filmmakers would struggle with in their own theory and practice.

Many critics of New Latin American Cinema emphasize the ways filmmakers such as the *Taller de Cine* group use their film art to give expression to a sense of national identity. This explicitly countercolonial strategy is designed to gather the citizens of a nation or other geographical group together into a collective that is conscious of its difference from the identity and values of the colonial power. For Birri, film in all of its aspects – production, distribution, exhibition, and as a cultural product – gives expression to the international system of neocolonialism that produces underdevelopment in Argentina. But Birri’s film theories also draw attention to the ways cinema can contribute to or undercut the workings of this system. He wants his films to reveal the circumstances of life in the shadow of neocolonialism and, by doing so, create a sense of a shared

experience and a critical consciousness of the system and its effects that provokes spectators to transform those circumstances that surround them.

Birri decided to leave Argentina to study film because he was unable to pursue his goal within the Argentine cinema industry. As Birri recounts in “The Roots of Documentary Realism” (1980),<sup>18</sup> when he traveled from his home city of Santa Fe to the capital of Buenos Aires where the commercial Argentine film industry was located, he discovered that all the jobs seemed to be controlled by what he describes as a kind of mafia. He was turned down everywhere. Frustrated by these refusals and inspired by the limited contact he had had with European cinema in the film society of his native Santa Fe, he decided to go to Italy to study,<sup>19</sup> and when Birri returned to Argentina in 1956, he decided to settle back in Santa Fe so he could start from zero and produce a kind of filmmaking that was different from the “mercantile-industrial setup in the capital” (4). Birri began working at his alma mater, the National University of the Litoral, when the Institute of Sociology asked him to organize a four-day seminar on filmmaking. As a result of the enthusiastic response from students, the Institute decided to establish an Institute of Cinematography, which eventually became its own school, *La Escuela Documental de Santa Fe* [the Documentary School of Santa Fe], under Birri’s direction. Birri had originally wanted to found a film school that would produce fiction filmmakers, but when he re-encountered the living conditions in Santa Fe, he decided such a school would be

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<sup>18</sup> This essay is the product of Julianne Burton’s interview with Fernando Birri at the First International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Havana in 1979; it includes an expansion from 1980.

<sup>19</sup> The draw of neorealism, a popular independent film form of the 1950s that was known throughout the world, was certainly a part of Birri’s decision to go to Rome. However, it’s also important to remember that Birri, a self-described “typical Argentine,” was a member of the second generation of an immigrant family. His “anarchist grandfather” had fled Italy around 1880 to settle in Argentina. He moved from the rural to the urban proletariat, and Birri’s father “moved up in the world, earning his doctoral degree in social and political sciences at the Universidad Nacional del Litoral (“Roots” 3-4). Birri’s trip to Italy can be seen as both a return to origins, evidence of the transnational ties between nations, and the culmination of a youth spent in educated, politically radical surroundings.

premature and instead worked to create one that combined the basics of filmmaking with the foundational elements of sociology, history, geography, and politics. As Birri remembers it, his change in strategy was based in a realization that Argentines, especially Argentine filmmakers, needed to understand the nature of the reality that surrounded them, and their relationship to and within it, so they could begin to transform it.

Birri focuses on documentary film in order to provide a real image of the Argentine people and their context of underdevelopment, since these were not represented in the two mainstream forms of Argentine cinema: commercial cinema and the cinema of expression. He attributes this effacement to the workings of the superstructure, which maintains a false worldview by eliminating anything that counters that view. Birri wants to develop a “realist, critical and popular” film form that provides an image of the people and the misery they experience in their everyday lives as a result of underdevelopment. Birri believes this film form would have the power to testify to how reality *is* rather than how the superstructure wants the Argentine people to believe it to be. Birri emphasizes film’s ability to document reality, but he is less interested in its indexical qualities than in the filmmaker’s ability to use film analytically, both to express the conflict between different versions of reality and to create a critical consciousness among spectators by making them aware of this conflict. However, Birri’s views on film create a conflict of their own, since his theory of film requires the medium to be able simultaneously to *present* – to show “how reality *is*, and in no other way” – and to *represent* – to testify critically to reality and, by doing so, denounce and reject it.

As Julianne Burton points out in “Democratizing Documentary,” politically committed Latin American filmmakers like Birri who came of age in the 1950s held an

essentially Manichean view of society. The world was divided into the haves and have-nots, with purity and authenticity possible only in the latter. Their view of culture and of reality expressed a similar dynamic. Filmmakers holding this view saw neocolonialism, with its class hierarchies, repressive tendencies, and artificial view of reality, corrupting the European and North American cultural products and institutions that dominated popular culture in Latin America countries. Only by decolonizing culture, through the discovery and presentation of an authentically national rather than a falsified universal reality, could the haves be driven from power and the have-nots finally receive their due. This move towards decolonization and the search for a national reality often involved an inversion: turning the official version of nationhood and national culture on its head to reveal what had previously been unseen, unheard, or regarded as unseemly (Burton 78).

This emphasis on inversion helps to explain why the *Taller de Cine* group and other Latin American filmmakers like Birri strove to re-orient filmmaking so it reflected the life of the people rather than the aesthetic forms and narrative content imported from Western Europe. Like Warhol, the Latin American filmmakers rely on inversion as a central part of their film practice. Warhol's parodic prowess and his cultivation of parodic improvisational performances among his superstars, allows him to invert social, aesthetic, and institutional conventions; he shapes discourse into a form that allows him to realize both an expanded autonomy and a more authoritative status and the parodic improvisational performances of the superstars subvert and pervert social conventions so they can redefine themselves and their social positions. In this model, leftovers can become superstars. Somewhat differently, in the Latin American model, the filmmakers invert the existing social structure within their films, but the onscreen subjects do not

generally participate in this inversion. The people become the raw material from which to enact this vision of a more authentic nation and they also become signs of the nation in the making. The desire of Argentine filmmakers with countercolonial agendas to turn the system on its head in order to do away with the misery of underdevelopment leads them to valorize the people through their representation of them while condemning those in positions of authority, believing that such an inversion, or such an inverted world view shown on film, will lead to a critical consciousness among spectators that will prompt them to enact such a view in the offscreen world. In some instances, images of the people serve as signs of possibility, in others they provide proof of the misery of underdevelopment. Birri uses images of the people as proof of misery. He does so in order to reveal the artificial nature of the images portrayed in dominant cinema to generate this critical consciousness in spectators, a critical consciousness that leads to social change.

In the early stage of his film career, which spans the creation of his first documentary realist film, *Tire dié* (1956-1960), Birri's theory and practice emphasized collaboration. The process, rather than the final product, was seen as the source for social change. Warhol established the basic shape of his early films, but then stepped back in order to make room for the improvisations, contingencies, and errors that filming generated to constitute the film's final form. In this scenario, the onscreen subjects, and even the spectators, were as responsible for the film's ultimate shape and meaning as was Warhol himself. Birri also opens up the creative process to his assistants, the onscreen subjects, and spectators. But instead of relying upon serendipity for the film's final form, he uses conversation, feedback, and social survey-type interviews to guide production and post-production decisions. Birri and his students worked for two years (1956-1958), going

into the shantytown featured in the film each day to talk with the individuals who lived there, to gather documentary footage of the shantytown and of the people's first-person accounts of everyday life. The first version of *Tire dié* premiered at the National University of the Litoral and then it traveled to the 1958 *Festival Internacional de Cine Documental Y Experimental* [International Festival of Documentary and Experimental Film], an important forum for Latin American films based in Montevideo, Uruguay, where Birri had been invited to speak and to screen *Tire dié* as part of a special program focused on documentary (John Grierson had also been invited). Birri and his students also developed a mobile cinema, consisting of a truck, a screen, and a projector, which allowed them to travel into the shantytown and other locales to show the film to those who did not have access to a theater. Birri and the students solicited feedback from these spectators (via interviews and written questionnaires) from 1958 to 1960 and used that information to create the film's final, thirty-three minute version.

During this four-year process, every aspect of film production, distribution, and exhibition involved collaboration, among Birri and his students and with the film subjects and its spectators. The film's subjects contributed their views, experiences, and their images to the film, even appearing on film and directly addressing the camera as they share their perspectives. In addition, the program that accompanied the film's premiere in 1958 distributes credit equally between Birri and the Students of the Institute of Cinematography at the National University of the Litoral [*Alumnos del Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral*," as they are listed in the program], thereby underscoring the importance of collaboration rather than individual credit. Interestingly, the people of the shantytown are not credited in any way in the

program. The film documents their faces and their experiences, but they are not acknowledged formally as collaborators in the filmmaking process. The shantytown dwellers provide the film's subject matter and help fulfill the film's objective, but they are not so much subjects with their own unique agency who actively participate in the making of the film as they are documentary subjects, or objects of study, who provide evidence of what Birri calls the problematic contradictions present in contemporary Argentina. Birri provides the people of Santa Fe with a forum for the expression of their views and experiences, but then incorporates them into his larger film project. These people and others like them become the focus of another of Birri's objective for the film: the promotion of critical consciousness and associated action among the people.

In this manifesto, Birri positions the film as an instrument for a larger collaborative change effort rather than a total solution unto itself. Birri begins by describing *Tire dié* as "a moral and technical product of the desire for action among [the University's] students" [*producto moral y técnico de la voluntad de hacer de sus alumnos*] (15, translation mine). The film becomes an act, tangible evidence of a critical consciousness and associated desire for change among a cohesive group, and Birri hopes to instill this same desire in spectators by showing them what can be achieved through collective action. Birri presents the film as serving the popular education goal of the National University, which essentially consists of bringing the people of Argentina to a critical understanding of the problematic contradictions at work in the social, political, and economic systems that surround them and produce the misery of underdevelopment. Birri ends the manifesto by clearly indicating that the film itself cannot provide a solution to

these problems; it can only inspire spectators to find within themselves the desire to work for justice:

*Tire dié* does not provide that solution, does not want to give it, because it understands that whatever it gave would be partial, excluding, limited: it wants however to give to the public, each one of the spectators, you, the capacity to look for and find within yourself a person who works for justice. [*Tire dié no da esa solución, no quiere darla, porque entiende que cualquiera que diera sería parcial, excluyente, limitada: quiere en cambio que el público la dé, cada uno de los espectadores, ustedes, buscando y encontrando dentro de ustedes mismos la que crean más justa.* (16, translation mine)]

Though the film models a process it hopes to encourage, it does not provide spectators with an argument, a mission, or a solution, largely because Birri feels any solution would be “partial,” only one possibility out of many. Birri does not want to mandate a solution, but instead wants each individual spectator, “you,” to look within himself or herself in order to resuscitate their internal social critic and rely on that individual social critic’s conception of justice to guide their actions. In his early manifesto, he shows a respect for individuals and a preference for collective action that takes place around the process of filmmaking and film viewing. He sees in this collective engagement with film the potential not only to awaken latent critical faculties and a desire for justice but also the way towards prompting actions that express critical sensibilities. The film is a product of a will to action, and Birri hopes the film will prompt a similar will to action in its spectators.

In these early days, Birri presented his film to people who were motivated to see it because of an interest in his documentary project or because they know someone or are someone who appeared in or worked on the film. These spectators want to see the film because of their individual interests and they are highly motivated to bring to life the

objectives Birri sets out in his manifesto because they share those objectives and critical attitude. In effect, they form an ideal audience; they are real spectators who resemble the theoretical spectators in Birri's manifesto. So when Birri, in his 1958 manifesto, switches seamlessly from "the public" to "each one of the spectators" to "you." The public at this point consists of a narrow slice of motivated individuals. But as Birri enlarges the scope of his public by expanding the circulation of his films to larger mass audiences, he discovers the motivation and interest of spectators begins to erode.

In his 1962 manifesto, "Manifiesto de *Los Inundados*: Por un cine nacional, realista, crítico y popular," Birri adds the descriptor "popular" to his earlier characterization of his documentary realist film form and we can see him begin to struggle with issues of popularity. In the *Tire dié* manifesto, Birri expressed frustration about having to settle for imperfections of photography and sound in the film, a creative decision that had to be made because of "the nonprofessional means forced upon us by the circumstances," and he vows to work for a future Argentine cinematic industry that exhibits an almost perfect photographic and sound technique (15). In 1962 and 1963, we see the reason for his concern for a perfect technique: popularity. Mass audiences have become used to, and prefer, the professional look of mainstream cinema. *Tire dié* looks different and has an unconventional form; its visual style is imperfect and unspectacular and its basic documentary structure centers on the travails of the poor. Birri struggles in these early years with an imperfect cinema, just as Mekas attempts to defend it in the U.S.; and incidentally, both men are addressing this issue at about the same time, approximately 1958-1963. Mekas sees these errors and imperfections as a necessary part of the road to freedom for independent film. He incorporates imperfection into a new American cinema

aesthetic as a way to distinguish it from the professional style of the official, Hollywood cinema. Birri at first explains the imperfect aesthetic of *Tire dié* as indicative of the context of underdevelopment that the filmmakers have to work in and in which the shantytown dwellers live. But then he works to create a more polished, fictional film style in his next production, *Los inundados* (*The Flooded Ones*, 1961). But he then gives up this approach in lieu of defining his audience and instituting documentary realism as the preferred approach to achieve his objective of social change.

With *Los inundados*, Birri attempts to create a fictional film that, according to the accompanying manifesto, reframes the lapses in contemporary cinema, expands the limits of narrative and documentary as they are traditionally understood, and explodes professional cinematic conventions by using them to develop a social theme. *Los inundados* is a polished fiction film that assumes a polemical stance and Birri hopes that it will come to exemplify a popular film form that is capable of generating critical consciousness.

Yet *Los inundados* did not achieve Birri's goal. In 1963, he again changes his strategy: he decides to return to documentary realism but determines this time to define the audience for his films in order to realize his objective of generating a critical consciousness within spectators:

Having set aside any residual notions of 'art for art's sake,' and committed ourselves to 'useful' creation, we find our intention of the last few years, that of making films not for ourselves but for the audience, is no longer enough. Following our most recent experience, which was our first with a fictional feature [*Los inundados*] shown to a so-called 'ordinary' or 'commercial' audience, we can no longer put off defining the audience – or, more precisely, the *class* of audience, in the economic and historical sense of the term – for whom we are making our films. (92-93)

Birri lays out, in great detail, the ideal audience for “this new cinema which seeks to awaken consciousness:” the urban and rural working class, sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and even the national bourgeoisie. Birri targets anyone who is “open to being enlightened and also to working out matters for themselves in a new light” (93). He concludes this section by reminding readers “that the audience which already sees our ‘national films’ [...] is in its great majority already made up of the kinds of people we have described” (93). Birri essentially gives up on mass audiences and defines the ideal spectators for his new cinema as those who are already going to the films and those who share the film’s interests. He seems to want to return to the pre-screened audiences of 1958 who sought out *Tire dié* because of personal interest or an already developed critical consciousness. In this shift of emphasis back to documentary realism, and by defining the audience, Birri embraces a different definition of popular as a key characteristic of his film form. Where in 1961 he strives to create a popular film form that appeals to a mass audience, by 1963 he returns to a popular film form that purports to represent the people and their interests on film.

Birri begins here to transition into a theoretical focus that positions film, rather than the people who might discover a critical consciousness, as the way to make the passage from underdevelopment to development. In the *Tire dié* manifesto, film was an instrument, one that served the National University’s goal of popular education and strove to awaken a latent capacity in spectators. But in 1963, film takes on a new significance; it becomes the means to enacting social change through its ability to precipitate the creation of a new person, society, and history. Birri’s theoretical shifts over time foreground the belief, held by many of the Latin American and U.S.

filmmakers, that film can produce change by determining the thoughts and actions of spectators. As this thinking goes, film may not be able to produce material social change, but it can influence spectators to make change, to solve the problematic contradictions of contemporary society or to generate the revolutionary activity that erodes those hierarchical social structures that produce underdevelopment's misery. Birri's belief in film's capacity to produce material effects happens to be more fervent than others, to the point that (by 1985) spectators become less of a factor in producing change than does film's ability to envision change within his theoretical manifestos. Like Brakhage, Birri has eliminated the spectator as a factor in achieving formal and political objectives. At this early stage, which spans 1958-1963, we can see that the role of film in producing social change begins to grow in prominence within Birri's conceptualization of the relationship between film, spectator, and social change. In 1958, Birri emphasizes the need for filmmakers, the film's subjects, and film spectators to collaborate since the film itself would not be the ultimate solution to the problems these constituencies faced. Since the film would be "partial, excluding, limited," Birri underscores the importance of the process rather than the end product and places the responsibility for change with the spectators, who must look within themselves for the social critic and the desire for justice and the images and testimonies of the shantytown dwellers, fellow Argentines, serve as the inspiration for this introspection.

By 1963, Birri maintains the basic shape of this relationship, but now the catalyst for change begins to shift slightly as he orients his theory toward establishing documentary realism, which he begins to institutionalize under the genre of social documentary, as a "realist, critical and popular cinema" that stands as a genuine alternative to the two

existing cinematic forms in Argentina. As an alternative, it can provide an oppositional view and stance capable of generating the desired critical consciousness and social change. The potential for social change now lies within this oppositional film form rather than in the collaborative process or collective engagement that surrounds a film.

In “Cinema and Underdevelopment,” Birri sketches out the existing state of cinema in Argentina in order to distinguish his film form from it, and as a way to assert the independence and oppositional stance of his form. He starts from the premise that commercial cinema, as a cultural product and an industrial art, is a product of the superstructure and thus subject to all of the superstructure’s distortions. Yet Birri also criticizes the “cinema of expression,” which includes the films of personal expression that are characteristic of the independent film movement in Argentina. These films spring directly from the European art film tradition, which the filmmakers viewed in the various cinema clubs scattered around Argentina. Because of this, they give expression to a different version of the same bourgeois modes of thought that undergird commercial cinema and also nurture the hierarchical social structures that produce underdevelopment. Birri also critiques the cinema of expression for scorning the mass audience. The commercial cinema attracts mass audiences with “the worst methods going,” that is, polished spectacles that entertain, but also recapitulate the principles that give rise to underdevelopment; but the cinema of expression ignores the people altogether. Birri’s criticism arises from the cinema of expression’s orientation towards the petit-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie in Argentina, who embrace this film form for its radical stance and shower upon it awards and financial support. Since these filmmakers receive funding from the bourgeoisie, they take up issues and problems that resonate with that

class rather than addressing the problematic contradictions produced by neocolonialism that plague the poor of Argentina (88). According to Birri, though these two dominant film forms are similar in their ties to the principles and values of neocolonialism, the Argentine film industry falsely positions them in opposition to one another. Birri attempts to create a film form, grounded in realism, which can transcend this artificial opposition. This argument about the cinema of expression shows up, albeit in a slightly different form, in Annette Michelson's "Film and the Radical Aspiration" (1966) and in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's "Toward a Third Cinema" (1968) as a way for them to distinguish their film theories and the films of their countries from the new waves in Europe.

Birri conceives of this oppositional stance as grounded in documentary film's ability to testify to "how reality *is*." This ability pierces through the false images and false opposition of dominant cinematic forms and reveals the contradictions between the versions of reality, which produces the critical consciousness necessary to create a new person and a new society.

The cinema of our countries shares the same general characteristics of this superstructure, of this kind of society, and presents us with a false image of both society and our people. Indeed, it presents no real image of our people at all, but conceals them. So, the first positive step is to provide such an image. This is the first function of documentary. How can documentary provide this image? By showing how reality *is*, and in no other way. This is the revolutionary function of social documentary and realist, critical and popular cinema in Latin America. By testifying, critically, to this reality – to this sub-reality, this misery – cinema refuses it. It rejects it. It denounces, judges, criticizes and deconstructs it. Because it shows matters as they irrefutably are, and not as we would like them to be (or as, in good or bad faith, others would like to make us believe them to be). (93-94)

Birri begins by theorizing film's relationship to existing social structures. Dominant forms of cinema reflect the principles and values of neocolonialism and thus provide false images of society and the people. But then Birri shifts his rhetoric slightly, moving from the issue of the false image to that of no real image, the ways dominant cinema effaces the people, removing them from the film frame. Dominant cinema either presents a false image, which distorts, or no image at all, which conceals; in either case, the people of Argentina see representations of reality that accord with the tenets of neocolonialism and, by extension, accept this version and the socio-political systems that stem from it. To change this state of affairs, Birri puts forth a theory of oppositional cinema grounded in documentary, which provides an image of society and the people that shows "how reality *is*, and in no other way." In one sense, Birri leans on the indexical qualities of film, believing that documentary film can present the world in an unmediated, or true, form. Yet his interest in film's ability to testify, and to testify critically, shifts him into the realm of formal experimentation, where filmmakers use form techniques to give expression to an alternative reality.

The revolutionary function of social documentary involves presenting documentary images of the misery caused by underdevelopment in such a way as to characterize it, refuse, reject, denounce, judge, criticize, and deconstruct the false images and the neocolonial system they represent. Social documentary does not just present the reality of Argentina by providing an image of its people and the socio-political circumstances of their everyday lives; it represents the misery of the people and their circumstances in order to denounce this state of affairs and to contradict the false images of life portrayed in dominant film forms. The critical consciousness evidenced in these

social documentary films can then be passed along to spectators. Social documentary films denounce, judge, criticize and deconstruct the structures that produce misery *and* the cinematic forms that ignore this misery, and thereby refuse and reject both. Birri's defined audience, which consists of spectators who are open to receiving such messages, would then follow suit, refusing and rejecting these structures in turn. Though Birri still presents film as an instrument that generates a critical consciousness in spectators, Birri now sees spectators reflecting the critical consciousness expressed in social documentary. These social documentary films present an alternative reality in order to represent the ways the superstructure and dominant cinema cause the misery of underdevelopment.

The films themselves become the way to envision and produce social change rather than the relationship between the film and the spectator. Part of the impetus for this theoretical shift may come from Birri's generally unsuccessful attempts to reach and affect a mass audience. We can see Birri beginning to intensify the relationship between film and spectator: film's critical consciousness will determine spectator critical consciousness. By 1985, when he published his manifesto "Towards a National, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema," Birri seems to skip the spectator all together to think through how film imagines an alternative reality and, by imagining it, makes it real. Birri characterizes the New Latin American Cinema as "a cinema which corresponds to what I called and continue to call *a poetics of the transformation of reality*. That's to say, that it generates a creative energy which through cinema aspires to modify the reality upon which it is projected" (96, emphasis mine). He indicates how this poetics works: "it is a cinema which is generated within the reality, becomes concrete on a screen and from this screen returns to reality, aspiring to transform it" (96). In this description, references to the people or spectators

disappear completely as Birri describes a film form that produces a modified reality, albeit a virtual one. These images envision a changed reality rather than contributing to the changing of reality by sparking a critical consciousness in spectators, and the absence of the spectator makes the film appear to do the work of transformation. Filmmaker frustration with mass audiences becomes a theme that runs through U.S. and Latin American manifestos and directly affects the theories of several filmmakers. We saw such frustration in Brakhage's tirade about *Anticipation of the Night's* initial reception, which motivated him to write *Metaphors on Vision*, and we will see it again in the writings of Glauber Rocha and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Spectators may play their part in enacting social change in theory, but the filmmakers find spectator interest and participation in producing such change not nearly as evident, or malleable, in actuality.

The resistance of spectators to film's influence also drives another major shift in Birri's 1963 manifesto: Birri relies less on this spectator-film relationship than he does on the relationship between filmmakers. He no longer writes directly to the audience, to you the spectator, as he did in 1958. Now he addresses filmmakers, and specifically Latin American filmmakers interested in developing oppositional, revolutionary-minded independent film forms invested in social change. He also begins to position himself, and social documentary, as the engines for change not only in Argentina but across Latin America. He sees the other Latin American countries suffering from a dilemma similar to that of Argentina, as we can see in his reference to "our countries" in the passage above, and he thus offers social documentary as a way to address this situation. By describing his film project in transnational terms, Birri begins to lay the groundwork for what came to be known as the New Latin American Cinema movement. Film scholars consider Birri to be

the father of this movement, which essentially began at the 1958 *Festival Internacional de Cine Documental y Experimental* [International Festival of Documentary and Experimental Film]. According to Ana López, until the 1960s, film festivals held in Latin America had been dedicated to European art cinema rather than regionally produced films, with the exception of this 1958 festival, which featured British documentary filmmaker John Grierson and Fernando Birri as guests of honor. This particular festival was also notable because it produced the first pan-Latin American association of film producers and directors, *Productores y Realizadores Independientes de America Latina* (PRIDAL), as a result of a call for increased cooperation and collaboration among independent Latin American filmmakers. But the festival's emphasis on documentary ended up limiting the scope of its influence and PRIDAL was only a short-lived effort. The first sustained encounters between independent Latin American filmmakers took place in a series of festivals in Italy, the most important of which, the *Sestri Levante* festival, occurred in 1962. This spirit of collaboration, however, did not occur in Latin America until the first Meeting of Latin American Filmmakers (*Encuentro de Cineastas Latinoamericanos*) at the 1967 Viña del Mar Festival in Uruguay (López 146-147).

In López's historical overview there is a tension that Michael Chanan also introduces in his claim that the New Latin American Cinema should not be called a movement because the diverse styles, techniques, objectives, and contexts of the individual Latin American filmmakers resist being collapsed into a single, unified category. Because of this diversity, López defines New Latin American Cinema as a term that implies a socio-political attitude or a mode of social practice rather than a coherent

aesthetic movement comprised of common interests and approaches.<sup>20</sup> We can see Birri intimately engaging with all of these issues in “Cinema and Underdevelopment.” Though he becomes caught up in problematic contradictions of his own, he is one of the first filmmaker-theorists to put into words the ideas circulating around the continent and that, as we will see, continue to circulate for the next decade as individual Latin American filmmakers wrestle with their own challenges and contexts. Birri wrestles with creative decisions that arise from limited resources, first aspiring to an almost perfect cinema then inspired to create a cinema that embraces imperfection as a distinguishing, and revolutionary, characteristic. He creates partnerships with universities and film festivals in order to provide himself and his students with production, distribution, and exhibition resources, and he creates a mobile cinema concept that allows him to show his films in shantytowns and other locations without theaters, or which would not show his social documentary, in order to reach popular audiences. Birri attempted, almost single-handedly, to generate a cohesive and unified pan-Latin American film movement. He worked to institutionalize a common form of practice in order to put into place a system of production, distribution, and exhibition that was extensive enough to provide an independent alternative to the superstructure systems of dominant cinema.

Birri and Jonas Mekas play similar roles in their respective continents. Both men make tangible the aesthetic and social dynamics that circulate within their national and international purviews and do so in order to describe and standardize institutional

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<sup>20</sup> This attitude is basically a desire to change the social function of cinema and to transform Latin American cinema into an instrument of change and consciousness-raising, which challenges the hegemony of foreign control and becomes an active agent in cultural decolonization. As a social practice, it works to create an other cinema with other social effects as a way to reveal and analyze the reality of underdevelopment and the possibility for a nation to arise from circumstances of dependency (López 138-139).

practices that attempt to provide independent alternatives to dominant cinema. They also work to define a particular aesthetic – personal expression for Mekas, social documentary for Birri – that expresses the key principles of their institutions, and they create an associated canon of filmmakers that exemplify this style of film. However, by doing so, they tend to ignore or efface the particularity of the various filmmakers and their contexts in order to shore up their own institutional mandates. But this myopia does not go unpunished. Warhol directly challenges Mekas’s New American Cinema with his Factory, and Birri was forced to leave Latin America and return to Italy to realize his vision for social documentary. Birri remembers: “Ours was a pilot experience that later took wings throughout the continent, not because of the creative impulse of a single individual but because of the needs and imperatives of a social, political, and historical reality that was bound to find many spokespeople” (“Roots” 11). But neither the socio-political circumstances nor the formal projects of individual Latin American filmmakers would allow this movement to take shape definitively.

According to his interviews with Julianne Burton, 1963 was also the year Birri left Argentina because of increasingly repressive political conditions.<sup>21</sup> He left Argentina for Brazil, where he worked with Brazilian documentary filmmakers for several months. But he left Brazil after the 1964 coup that deposed the progressive João Goulart and went to Mexico. There, he determined that, despite attempts to create a “new Mexican cinema,” the current situation could not support the kind of filmmaking he wanted to do, so he left

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<sup>21</sup> The Institute for Cinematography, where Birri served as director, was being labeled a “center for subversive activities,” and many of the school’s films (or films done in partnership with the school) were confiscated and banned by the government of Argentina. Looking back at that historical moment, Birri reflects proudly on the school’s “subversive” role. He goes on to explain: “What kind of subversion? Artistic subversion because we questioned *everything*; political and professional subversion because we were training people different from those who controlled the rest of the Argentine film industry. Our subjects, our goals, our methodology – everything was different” (“Roots” 8). He continues to insist on the difference and the independence of his film practice, continuing to shore up its institutional provenance.

for Cuba in mid-1964. In Cuba, the opportunities for collaborative social documentary filmmaking were also limited because of the shortages of equipment and foreign exchange, as well as “disastrous” experiments in coproduction with other countries. Cuban filmmakers had decided to consolidate the internal organization of the Cuban Film Institute, so Birri felt it was not an opportune time to propose transnational collaboration (“Roots” 10). After these failed attempts to establish collaborative, transnational social documentary projects, he decided to leave for Italy. In Birri’s travelogue, we can see how he attempts to find a place to realize his vision of film. There are filmmakers who are able and willing to accept his collaboration (i.e., the Brazilian filmmakers), but other filmmakers are not. So Birri moves on to the next country and then the next until he decides to return to Italy, the point of origin for his filmmaking career and a rare site of collaboration among Latin American filmmakers. He continued (and continues) to write about “New Latin American Cinema,” but he has found it necessary to continue adding “new”s to the descriptor (the title of his most recent book includes three: “nuevo nuevo nuevo cine latinoamericano”). His desire to provide filmmakers across Latin America with the unified vision for an alternative cinematic model – with an independent system of production, distribution, and exhibition – proved to work better in theory than in practice, so he was forced to flee for his life, and his art, but in his theories we can see a ground zero landscape of key issues that enliven the theory and practice of subsequent generations of not just Latin American, but American, experimental filmmakers.

***Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino: "Towards a Third Cinema" (Argentina, 1969)***

Birri's fellow Argentines Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino share his belief in film's power to testify to a vision of reality that contradicts the one put forth by the Argentine commercial cinema. But their film theory only begins with this belief. Their 1968 film manifesto, "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World," was written and published during a time of great socio-political instability and unrest in Argentina and the world, and the manifesto reflects both the anxiety and the optimism of the times. For Solanas and Getino, the people of Argentina do not come into existence through documentary representation but through their revolutionary activities: "*I make the revolution; therefore I exist*. This is the starting point for the disappearance of fantasy and phantom to make way for living human beings" (45). Almost ten years after the Cuban Revolution and with the fighting escalating in Vietnam and Algeria, Solanas and Getino invoke the revolutionary field of action and position the filmmaker within that field as a compatriot of the "new man" born in these anti-imperialist struggles.<sup>22</sup> Revolutionary praxis becomes key to Solanas and Getino's film theory – and to their conception of subjectivity.

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<sup>22</sup> *Tricontinental*, a cinema journal distributed by the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), first published the manifesto in 1969 and it was printed in English translation in 1971 in the journal *Cineaste*. Also, Solanas and Getino's rhetoric resembles that of Brakhage, Mekas, and the students of the SDS. These filmmakers and activists seem to want to tap into this revolutionary zeitgeist that Solanas and Getino specifically invoke in their manifesto. By tapping in, they identify themselves as part of these movements and as expressions of the time and thus provide a sense of urgency and relevancy to their filmmaking and their actions, which would be necessary components for the interest necessary to build a following and to achieve their theoretical goals. What is interesting however is that both the North Americans and Latin Americans tap into this language of the "new man" as part of the description of their film theories and their own artistic or critical personas. This invocation seems to arise in part from a democratic urgency – so though these two groups vary in terms of context (national, historical, social, cultural, etc.) – and though one group focuses on an individual subjectivity and the other on a collective concept – they do share a desire to restore power to the people either in the form of a democracy with publics (to borrow from the SDS manifesto) or in the insertion of "the people" into the historical processes of which they are a part.

At the start of “Towards a Third Cinema,” Solanas and Getino situate cinema within the historical moment of the late 1960s as a way to position Third-World cinema movements within a global revolutionary *and* cinematic framework and to connect their project within the context of these movements. They define three categories of cinema: *first cinema* refers to classical Hollywood cinema, *second cinema* to the European new cinema (what they refer to as the *cinema d’auteurs*, thereby signaling their familiarity with international critical discourse), and *third cinema* to films committed to “constructing a liberated personality” (37). In their overview of first cinema, they focus on the connection between form and ideology. Classical Hollywood films make use of a dramatic form that Solanas and Getino see as a continuation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century bourgeois art, a claim that echoes one Brakhage makes in his 1963 manifesto. While Brakhage sees such concerns with past art as paralyzing, a fixation that destroys artistic creativity and individuality,<sup>23</sup> Solanas and Getino believe the use of bourgeois art forms converts Hollywood films into ideological instruments that contribute to the conceptual dependency of colonized people. First cinema’s influence mediates the Argentine people’s ability to express their own thoughts, experiences, and creativity. As a result, these films play a part in transforming the people into passive consumers who become conditioned to inaction and acceptance: “man is accepted only as a passive and consuming object; *rather than having his ability to make history recognized, he is only permitted to read history, contemplate it, listen to it, and undergo it*” (42, emphasis theirs).

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<sup>23</sup> “[Kenneth Anger] was years without working, trapped by concepts of the Nineteenth Century with no way to break out, almost a destroyed man, and yet still living...that was the important thing. [...] The graveyard could stand for all my view of Europe, for all the concerns with past art, for all the involvement with symbol.”

Solanas and Getino characterize second cinema, the *cinema d'auteurs*, as the progressive arm of the commercial film industry. The Argentines insist that because cinema occupies an important cultural position in Europe and since the Europeans receive state subsidies for their filmmaking, their films are conditioned by capitalism and its conceptual offshoots: language and aesthetics. Solanas and Getino see these films also relying on bourgeois concepts like beauty, art, purity, the eternal, and the sublime, ideals that falsify the real world, and themes and plotlines that relate to the psychological problems of an alienated middle class. Their dependence on state subsidies also causes the cinema authors to become nonviolent and non-confrontational, and this dependence allows their films to be co-opted by the very systems they ostensibly set out to oppose (Solanas "Interview" 39-40).

Solanas and Getino want to create a nonconditioned cinema, one that exists outside of the systems of global capitalism and the political and aesthetic ideologies it promotes and that promote it. To produce revolutionary alternatives to the progressive films of the European new cinema, they determine to make films the system cannot assimilate, because they are foreign to its needs, and to make films that explicitly set out to fight the system (42). These alternative films constitute *third cinema* and their purpose is to bring about the decolonization of culture. The decolonization of culture will precipitate liberated personalities, and liberated personalities are revolutionary personalities, willing to work for historical change (37). To bring about this decolonization of culture, Solanas and Getino decided to ground their films in what they call the concrete facts of national reality. Following the tradition of Birri and *Taller de Cine*, Solanas and Getino founded the *Grupo Cine Liberación* (the Liberation Cinema

Group) as a way to democratize the cinema experience and root cinema even more firmly within everyday life. They democratize cinema and attempt to ground it in everyday life by re-conceiving the production process, considering their films to be works in progress, and developing an open-ended film act.

Solanas and Getino envision their film production process as a “cinema of film-makers” instead of a cinema of authors. In order to situate their cinema completely outside of the industrial system, they decide to shift the concept of the filmmaker away from the idea of the director. Instead of a boss who commands others but who is essentially unable to do individual production tasks, they develop the concept of the “total film-maker,” or film technician, who is capable of handling all aspects of production (38). In this idea, we can see a later echo of Birri’s theory of collaboration. Though two cameramen were responsible for shooting the footage, Birri’s *Tire dié* was the result of collective decision-making and virtually interchangeable production tasks. This collaboration provided eighty filmmakers, mostly students from Birri’s Institute of Cinematography, with the chance to learn skills and gain experience in a wide variety of production activities, allowing them to become total filmmakers. Interestingly, this idea also resembles that of Mekas, who pushed for complete autonomy from what he called “official” Hollywood methods of production, which emphasized a division of labor that denied filmmakers a total view of the production process. However, he suggested an artisanal approach to combat this compartmentalization rather than the collective approach that Solanas and Getino, and Birri, suggest; this difference in proposed solutions arises from their different ideologies. Mekas comes out of the tradition of the Romantic artist and the Argentines are firmly grounded in Marxist cultural traditions.

Solanas and Getino also share Birri's determination to make documentary films that testify to national reality since "[e]very image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image of purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible" (46). Birri presents a view of reality that contradicts mainstream cinema in order to prompt spectators to analyze the disparity. With *Tire dié*, he wants to show the problematic contradictions at work in society, but he refuses to provide a solution to these problems for fear that such a solution would be partial, excluding, and limited. He wants the spectators to look within themselves for their own solution ("Manifiesto de *Tire dié* 16). In contrast, Solanas and Getino generate a fully formed ideological essay that makes claims about Argentina's history and current situation and proves those claims through an analysis of historical and current events, which it then presents to spectators in the form of montage sequences, textual segments, and eye-witness accounts. Such an approach, for Solanas and Getino, allows them to create films that the system of global capitalism cannot assimilate because they explicitly set out to fight the system and because their form and content are foreign to its needs (42).

By grounding their films in documentary images that capture the concrete facts of everyday life, and by presenting those facts as part of an ideological essay, they hope to avoid falling into the traps that ensnare the *cinema d'auteurs*. For example, they are careful in this formulation to distinguish between artistic fact and concrete facts. They believe art, at least in the traditional, bourgeois definition, is cut off from concrete facts since these facts serve as "accusatory testimonies" that contradict their values (46). Artistic facts tend toward abstraction and position themselves as timeless and historyless

(like Brakhage's ideal of universal truths common to all man). Because such art is essentially depoliticized, artistic facts lend themselves to contemplation rather than action. Solanas and Getino determine to ground their films in concrete facts in order to disrupt this vision of art, and to generate action capable of producing systemic change. They follow the lead of Franz Fanon and proclaim the need to

[i]nset the work as an original fact in the process of liberation, place it first at the service of life itself, ahead of art; dissolve aesthetics in the life of society: only in this way, as Fanon said, can decolonisation become possible and culture, cinema, and beauty - at least, what is of greatest importance to us - become our culture, our films, and our sense of beauty.  
(40)

In this formulation, the concepts of culture, cinema, and beauty are no longer abstract and historyless but instead become grounded in specific national contexts and historical moments. Following this line of thought, such grounding would allow them to reflect the ideals and principles of their unique context. Culture, film, and beauty are thus no longer inheritances from Europe but instead become expressions of a national identity, reflecting elements of that identity, of the shared experience of the nation's people, and eventually the socio-political system that organizes that shared experience.

We can see Solanas and Getino working to position film as a cause rather than an effect of revolution. Instead of revolutionary cultural works occurring *after* a revolution has taken place, what they see as the cause-effect logic of most conventional thinking on the subject, they see revolutionary cultural expressions as capable of sparking a revolution by creating a liberated consciousness committed to realizing radical social change. Solanas and Getino conceive of an open-ended film form, situated as part of a larger film act, as instrumental in dissolving aesthetics into the live of society, and dissolving the life of society into aesthetics. Solanas and Getino define this film act as

comprised of participant comrades who respond to the summons of these revolutionary times by risking their lives to attend these underground film screenings; the “free space,” a mise-en-scene in the space of exhibition that reflects the themes of the film and contributes to the disinhibiting of spectators, so the participant comrade can express his concerns and ideas and become politicized; and a film that serves as a detonator for debate and that subordinates its form, structure, language, and propositions to the larger film act and to the participant comrades.

Solanas and Getino intend the film act to generate the decolonization of culture necessary to transform spectators into liberated personalities who can serve as the impetus for revolutionary historical change (37). In their 1968 manifesto, Solanas and Getino speak assuredly about the “new man” born in this revolutionary historical moment. Yet in 1970, Solanas takes a more measured view of the new man, admitting that “the transformation of man into a new man is more complex and is going to take longer” because it is harder to transform the thoughts of men than it is change economic or political systems (41), and he offers Cuba as an example of the persistence of colonized thinking even in the face of radical political change. The neocolonial context alienates psychology and language and turns individuals into passive and consuming objects. Though revolutions and revolutionary regimes can attempt to give these alienated people a revolutionary political consciousness that allows them to recognize their enemies and understand the necessity of revolution, the private lives and subjectivities of these individuals are harder to change. The masses are difficult to awaken, Solanas insists, because in these neocolonial countries, not even the bourgeois culture is national. Everything is colonized. Alienation runs deep within the subjectivity

of individuals and within the fabric of society. So Solanas and Getino's desire to dissolve aesthetics into the everyday life of the nation comes from their intention not only to capture the realities of everyday life, but also to begin transforming the subjectivities of the people of Argentina. Revolution, in its total sense, is not a possibility, or a reality, until it becomes manifest at the level of the social, until the people live their lives in accordance with revolution. Solanas and Getino, taking Cuba as their example, decide to institutionalize the revolution within the everyday lives of the people as a way to bring revolution into its fullest existence, and simply to make revolution possible.

The film act becomes central to their attempt to generate this institutionalization of revolution. The film act considers the film, the space of exhibition, and the mindset of onscreen and offscreen subjects. In this conception, the film within the film act must necessarily be open-ended in order to contribute to, and to transform, spectator understanding. This open-ended quality is key to Solanas and Getino's conception of a nonconditioned and anti-aesthetic cinema, which emphasizes imperfection and experimentation and aligns with the theories of Birri, Rocha, Warhol, and Mekas.<sup>24</sup> But Solanas and Getino expand their conception of experimentation to include not only aesthetics but also spectator cognition. They develop the film act in order to help people learn how to become revolutionary. They position it as a tool for the reconfiguration of knowledge, the shift from a consciousness of the self and the world that reflects the ideology of the neocolonial system to one liberated by the international revolutionary movements. In their conception of the film act, Solanas and Getino shift from an

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<sup>24</sup> Also interesting to note is that Solanas and Getino share Mekas, Warhol and Brakhage's concern with contemporary criticism and theory – and how traditional modes cannot keep up with and therefore and should not be applied to experiments such as theirs. “Such works cannot be assessed according to the traditional theoretical and critical canons. The ideas for *our* film theory and criticism will come to life through inhibition-removing practice and experimentation” (Solanas & Getino 49).

emphasis on inserting the work of art into the people's practices of daily life and instead focus on how to insert the film's themes and point of view into the people themselves so their consciousness becomes the consciousness expressed in the film that grounds the overall act; the film seeks "*its own liberation in its subordination to and insertion in others, the principal protagonists of life*" (54, emphasis theirs). Where Birri tries to appeal to the latent social critic within his spectators, Solanas and Getino attempt to insert the revolutionary ideas of their film into spectators. They want to affect spectators directly so they will bring about revolutionary change, and the filmmakers are able to do so in part by merging the on-screen and off-screen worlds.

In Solanas and Getino's theory, onscreen and offscreen merge as the filmmakers attempt to bridge the gap between consciousness and action in spectators by bridging the gap between onscreen and offscreen through a shared, or matching, mise-en-scene. As we have seen, this relationship between spectator consciousness and action, and controlling the causes and effects that make up that relationship, is a central concern of the Latin American and U.S. filmmakers. But Solanas and Getino specifically work to construct a mise-en-scene for their cinematic space that makes the boundaries between the onscreen and offscreen worlds ambivalent in the hope that they will come to reflect one another. Much of *La Hora de los Hornos* consists of found footage, documentary re-enactments and interviews with labor and student leaders that take place in factories, homes, or labor union offices. The film had to be exhibited in underground locations, like factories, homes, or labor union offices, due to Argentina's repressive system of government, so many of the spaces of exhibition, the offscreen mise-en-scene, directly resemble the onscreen mise-en-scene.

Solanas and Getino attempt to create a similar resemblance, and a fusion of onscreen and offscreen realms, through their concept of “*the participant comrade*, the man-actor-accomplice who responded to the summons” (54, emphasis theirs), which they define as the ideal spectator for their film act. The participant comrade contributes to the creation of the film. He gives the film totality as a work of art. The film cannot be made whole without the participation of the viewers because of the predetermined locations in the film where the comrade speaker turns the film off in order to facilitate conversation about the questions and topics it raises. The film’s ending, which consists of a title card that reads “Now it is up to you to draw conclusions, to continue the film. You have the floor” demand the continuity of its structure be expanded to include the offscreen realm. The participant comrade becomes the film’s comrade in the offscreen space, where he theoretically enacts the film’s drive toward revolutionary change.

Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha performs a similar move in his film theory as he attempts to create a film aesthetic that, first, serves as a facsimile of revolution and, later, derives its power and shape from the people of Brazil.

***Glauber Rocha: “An Aesthetic of Hunger” (1965) and “Beginning at Zero” (1970)***

Glauber Rocha’s theory represents a transitional period in Brazilian history. His theory and films give expression to an emerging sense of crisis that stands in stark contrast to the confidence of earlier times. His manifesto “An Aesthetics of Hunger” (1965), published just after the military coup of 1964, maintains an openness to and a confidence in the possibility for change, which were likely halo effects from the earlier period of democratization. In a palpable spirit of provocation, he writes his manifesto to

the international community of filmmakers and critics. Though he refers to his fellow Latin American filmmakers, the bulk of the manifesto explicitly addresses the European and North American film community, accusing them of contributing to underdevelopment through their films and suggesting that change can occur only once their position at the top of the conceptual and artistic hierarchy is superseded. In fact, while Birri, Solanas and Getino specifically address their fellow Latin American filmmakers and, by extension, other revolutionary-minded filmmakers, Rocha's first manifesto dares to challenge those in power as well as attempting to inspire those who are not in power. However, as Rocha continues his theoretical work, he turns his attention away from the influence of the international film community and instead looks inward, to address the people of Brazil. Where earlier Rocha attributed the misery of underdevelopment to the cultural hierarchies recapitulated in film, by 1970, he begins to examine how the Brazilian people contribute to the maintenance of this inequality. In "Beginning at Zero: Notes on Cinema and Society" (1970), Rocha expresses disappointment in the Brazilian people's lack of understanding and "refuse[al]to accept a more authentic presentation of Brazilian life" (144). But before we move into these darker times, it will be important to analyze Rocha's earlier film theory in some detail, since it informs much of his subsequent theory and film practice, and because it provides insight into his perception of himself as a filmmaker and how he looks to subjectivity as key to revolutionary film practice.

In "An Aesthetic of Hunger," first published in *Revista Civilização Brasileira* in 1965, Rocha writes to an international audience when he describes this aesthetic, which he sees as a way to revise the hierarchical cultural and socio-political relationships that

exist between Europe and the Americas. Rocha does not ground his theory in a specifically Brazilian context; instead he attempts to transcend nationality through reference to the historical forces inherent within colonialism and neocolonialism generally. He addresses the colonizers and the colonized as he thinks through how the cultivation of a taste for and tolerance of misery contributes to the inequitable conceptual and structural relations that exist. Rocha insists that only by overcoming this taste for misery can cultural and socio-political change begin to occur and inequality be remedied. In describing his theory, Rocha plays with the disparity in the relationship between the colonizer and colonized. He does not suggest a leveling of the playing field, but instead presents an aesthetic that overturns hierarchies.

Rocha begins by identifying a disparity, cultivated by the Europeans, between “our culture,” which is equated with primitivism, and “‘civilized’ culture,” then he explores how film helps nurture this inequitable relationship through the aestheticization of misery:

while Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign onlooker cultivates the taste of that misery, not as a tragic symptom, but merely as an aesthetic object within his field of interest. The Latin American neither communicates his real misery to the ‘civilized’ European, nor does the European truly comprehend the misery of the Latin American. (59)

Birri uses documentary images of misery as a source of strength and differentiation for his film form, since these images testify to the existence of this misery and thus shatter and denounce the false images of reality put forth in dominant cinema. But Rocha sees the presentation of misery on film as a technique that maintains hierarchical relations since Latin Americans fail to express the full experience of misery in their representations of it and the Europeans simply treat misery as an aesthetic object.

Rocha points out that the European cannot truly comprehend this misery in any event, since he lives in a different context. Rocha then writes that “only a culture of hunger, weakening its own structures, can surpass itself qualitatively; the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence” (60). To surpass current aesthetic conventions, Rocha embraces primitivism in what Robert Stam calls a “jijitsu move” of using a strategic weakness as a tactical strength and develops his aesthetic of hunger. This aesthetic derives its power from the violence that arises out of misery and the horror of violence replaces the pathos of misery: “[Violence] is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. Only when confronted with violence does the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits,” and only through violence do the colonized comprehend the brutal love necessary to overcome “complacency or contemplation” and produce “action and transformation” (60). Violence becomes the moral, cultural and political expression of an aesthetic of underdevelopment. Rocha calls for the creation of films that represent violence instead of misery. He wants to create “sad, ugly films,” “screaming, desperate films where reason does not always prevail” (60). Such films disobey the rules and norms of aesthetics and politics. They communicate the horror of the misery produced by the neocolonial system, and seed the fear that the colonized may one day rise up to overturn this inequitable system. These films also turn the aesthetic system of value on its head; instead of prizing beauty, these films extol what would be considered the sad and ugly in traditional aesthetic models.

Rocha’s aesthetic of hunger appears to respond to Latin American and U.S. theories of film. As mentioned, Rocha’s theory seems to take Birri’s theory in “Cinema and Underdevelopment” (1963) to task for its reliance on expressing misery. Yet his

theory also seems to resonate with the ideas of U.S. filmmakers like Brakhage, whose *Metaphors on Vision* was also published in 1963. Brakhage and Rocha see images as essentially language-based and therefore working in harmony with particular systems of knowledge. Brakhage specifically avoids creating a film form that relies upon a spectator response to images in order to circumvent language-based systems of signification that rely on established associations to produce meaning. Rocha attempts to avoid the trap of predetermined meaning by refusing to represent misery and instead expressing the *horror* of misery through the representation of violence. He describes a sort of sub-and-objective expression where the objective facts of misery pass through the subjective experience of that misery both onscreen and in the spectator. This dynamic produces an emotional, perceptual, and apperceptual matrix where subjective feelings of sadness and desperation inform the spectator's understanding of misery. Through such a sub-and-objective expression the unique experiences of a particular group can extend to all man, which strikes the European spectator in the universal, and human, category that they have defined themselves as inhabiting.

However, Rocha's aesthetic strategy changes as the Brazilian socio-political situation turns steadily more repressive and violent. He moves from wanting to overturn colonial aesthetic conventions to seeking to wipe them out completely. In his 1983 interview with Julianne Burton, "*Cinema Novo* and the Dialectics of Popular Culture," Rocha describes his search for a film form that derives from popular cultural forms in order to achieve a genuinely Brazilian cinema and "a means of communicating with the public through a language already familiar to them, one that uses many elements created by the people themselves" (108). He believes that the public has been educated in

accordance with a particular film language, in this case, the language of classical Hollywood film, and is thus incapable of understanding another film language: “It’s as if they had been taught to read in German and someone showed them a book written in English. It would be impossible for them to understand it because they had been educated in the structure of another language.” He likens this dynamic to Jean-Luc Godard’s concept of the ideological-linguistic complex, where the language of classical Hollywood cinema, which he refers to as the “North American language,” helps to maintain and nurture the economic underdevelopment of the region by shoring up the capitalist ideology of neocolonialism (107). Rocha also believes that the North American language, is incapable of expressing Brazilian or Latin American content, and Brazilian films that use this language to express indigenous themes are only contributing to the ideological-linguistic complex.

Though some Brazilian filmmakers have attempted [to make a political film with a personal theme], I think that it is a very difficult thing to achieve in a Latin American country, since our political and cultural tradition is not a subjective one. A people who have suffered centuries of oppression have many violent aspects: problems of hunger and psychological neuroses that derive from social and economic circumstances. This is why it’s a mistake to make Latin American films in which the characters behave like Europeans. (110)

Rocha claims that the more personal style favored by European and North American filmmakers does not fit the political and cultural traditions of Brazil, largely because of the structural violence of neocolonialism. The social and economic pressures of underdevelopment produce physical and psychological breakdowns that are products of the system rather than of individual or personal circumstances. Following this logic, to attribute ways of thinking or being to a particular individual misses the systemic pressures that are at work in countries that suffer from underdevelopment. Personal

expression would thus be an effect of the system and would obscure causes. Rocha here provides a crucial insight into his theory and that of the other Latin American filmmakers who also avoid the individual when conceiving their theories of film and subjectivity. They use a collective subjectivity, the people, to represent the historical, socio-political, and economic forces that have long determined the lives of individuals in these colonized countries in order to foreground certain historical forces *and* collective experience.

Rocha expresses the historical forces at work in Brazil when he uses allegory to investigate Brazil's history and national identity and to involve his spectators in that exploration. As Ismail Xavier points out, Rocha's characters embody certain aspects of Brazil's history and their life stories condense a wide variety of questions and experiences tied to ideas of national fate and the destiny of particular groups (15). As Xavier also points out, an allegorical film places the spectator in an analytical position by presenting coded messages that refer to another context that is not an explicit part of the diegesis. This allegorical form engages the spectator's subjective experience, an experience grounded in familiarity with the socio-political, cultural, and economic systems that shape their daily lives. In Rocha's theory, the spectator becomes an historical force attuned to the historical forces expressed in the allegorical film form. In this confluence of forces, he or she receives the opportunity to engage in history. By describing how to engage the spectator's subjectivity and invite them to participate in making change, Rocha's film theory attempts to insert the spectator into history as a force for change. Though this theory works well in theory, in practice it begins to break down, largely because Brazilian spectators were not coming to see Rocha's films. In fact, Rocha admits that *cinema novo* was more popular abroad than it is in Brazil: "Cinema Novo has

come up against an insecure culture and has tried to develop the culture with this insecurity as a starting point” (“Zero” 148). Cinema Novo’s formal experiments attracted European and U.S. audiences interested in cutting-edge cinema from around the world. Their interest was largely centered in the films’ form rather than its subject matter, which confirms Rocha’s assertion that misery becomes an aesthetic object to foreign audiences. But Brazilian audiences also seem uninterested in the subject of misery, and they are also indifferent to Cinema Novo’s formal experimentation. So they do not show up for screenings of Rocha’s films, which provokes him to revise his strategy. However, before he attributes responsibility for this lack of attendance to film form, he blames the Brazilian people’s indifference to contemplating Brazil’s misery, or rather Cinema Novo’s examination of Brazil’s misery, on the “insecure” nature of the culture: the people’s ways of seeing and thinking about the world have been so colored by the form and content of Hollywood films that they are unable to see the ways these films contribute to their subjugation. Like Brakhage, Rocha ascribes spectator rejection to a lack within the spectator. Though unlike Brakhage, Rocha does not ignore the spectator and his or her response. Instead, he attempts to investigate the reasons (or the reasoning) behind this rejection and then he modifies his formal experiments in order to account for the rejection.

In “Beginning at Zero,” Rocha starts to rethink the formal concepts he had developed in “An Aesthetic of Hunger.” In 1965, he called for an embrace of violence in order to cut through the pathos and passivity produced by representations of the misery caused by underdevelopment. But five years later, he explicitly states that films should be “much sadder than violent,” and he begins to develop a film style grounded in the cultural

forms of the people. Because of *cinema novo*'s lack of popularity in Brazil, Rocha decides to begin at zero and reject all external influences, opting instead to draw on the cultural expression of the people in order to produce a more direct connection between the people and film.

However, Rocha begins his search only after his bitter realization that the Brazilian people continue to cling to the images and ideology of Hollywood and "refuse to accept a more authentic presentation of Brazilian life" (144), like the one expressed in *cinema novo* films. He sees the people's refusal as the main obstacle to the success of this movement's formal and political critique: "the search for our truth has as its price our audiences' lack of understanding" (148). This lack of understanding is a significant obstacle to *cinema novo*'s political project since the people's continued identification with the bourgeois ideology expressed in North American and European film languages short circuits their ability to develop a critical consciousness and renders them incapable of harnessing their own power and potential to produce historical change. The absence of this critical consciousness renders the people incapable of realizing the changes envisioned in these films.

Also, if the films are not able to produce a critical consciousness within the spectator then their potential, just like that of the people, will go unrealized. This dilemma exposes Rocha's anxiety about the artist's ability to produce historical change. Rocha positioned himself as an international *auteur*: he addressed "An Aesthetic of Hunger" to an international audience; he referred to Jean-Luc Godard as an inspiration for his own work, and incorporated new cinema (especially French new wave) techniques into his films; he participated in the creation of the distribution company Difilm, which distributed

Brazilian films domestically and internationally; and he was involved in naming *cinema novo* (new cinema), which also signals his awareness of the new cinema movements cropping up around the world. From these actions, we can see that he was keenly aware of the international film community and of his own position within it. But Rocha's anxiety regarding this institutional role is not just a self-centered concern. His interest in this role seems to involve the capacity to create art that signals the artist's belonging within a particular movement, but also the artist's ability to realize a particular institutional objective through art, such as producing political change. He expresses a genuine interest and concern in film's ability to identify and intercede in the causes of underdevelopment. By creating a film form that was uniquely Brazilian but that utilized new cinema forms and techniques, Rocha had the potential to put Brazil on the map in terms of film culture and thereby overturn, in one way, the cultural disparity that existed between Latin America and Europe. In fact, Rocha himself discusses this export strategy and its success: "Acceptance of these films in art cinema circuits all over the world not only offers a supplementary market, but also has given Cinema Novo prestige and with that prestige, some power" ("Beginning at Zero" 148). Here we can see Rocha struggling with another possibility for structural change. If he cannot produce historical change with his films, then he will do his best to transform the aesthetic and cinematic institutions that make up his world as an artist.

### **Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: Popular Film *After* The Revolution**

While Rocha eventually looks to popular forms to create a uniquely Brazilian film form, Gutiérrez Alea strives to create a popular film form that will appeal to mass

audiences while also bestowing a nationalist consciousness. Like the other Latin American filmmakers, Gutiérrez Alea focuses on a theoretical subject who does not yet have a critical consciousness and who is not aware of the influence of ideology in cultural forms and social structures. But Gutiérrez Alea believes these spectators have a consciousness of aesthetic forms and a fully formed sense of taste developed from years of exposure to the classical Hollywood film. This taste determines the spectator's judgment of films and their willingness to engage with a particular film. Hence he defines and addresses the popular audience in order to describe how to reach them. Unlike the other Latin American filmmakers, Gutiérrez Alea wrote his manifesto in a post-revolutionary society. However, he is still faced with the lack of revolutionary consciousness among Cuban spectators. He does not need to inculcate this consciousness in order to motivate spectators to bring about revolutionary change; instead, he needs to create this consciousness so revolutionary change becomes institutionalized. Paradoxically, Gutiérrez Alea's film theory is interested in exploring how the revolution and revolutionary consciousness can become an ideology. In effect, he creates a film theory that attempts to transform the abstract theories of the Cuban Revolution into practice.

Gutiérrez Alea also differs from the other Latin American and U.S. filmmakers in that he had been practicing for decades before developing his film theory, even though he may have begun thinking about theories of film as early as the 1950s, when he attended the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* with Fernando Birri. Gutiérrez Alea's "La dialéctica del espectador" ("The Viewer's Dialectic") was published in Havana in 1982 by *La Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (UNEAC, the Cuban Union of Writers and

Artists).<sup>25</sup> The rebel army in Cuba had made use of mass media forms, like newspaper, radio and TV, in order to build support in the countryside for their Revolutionary activities. As soon as they overthrew Fulgencio Batista in 1959, they established a *Dirección de Cultural* (Cultural Directorate) and the ICAIC (the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*, the Cuban Institute of Cinema Art and Industry), which served as the foundation for the state-owned, centralized film and television production system. Gutiérrez Alea was one of the founding members of the ICAIC and he directed many of its first films. Gutiérrez Alea made his films under the auspices of a state-sponsored production model; he worked openly and with full funding and guaranteed distribution. As a result, he spent most of his time and effort developing Cuba's domestic film and TV industries and focused less on developing a national film form that was defined as "Cuban" on the world stage. He sat down and began to develop a theory of film in the early 1980s after his work had come to the attention of critics around the world; these critics, who designated Gutiérrez Alea one of Cuba's most important filmmakers, asked him to describe and define Cuban film and that is what he set out to do in "The Viewer's Dialectic."

As he recounts the development of Cuban film practice in his manifesto, Gutiérrez Alea outlines three evolutionary stages: "Newsreel" films that documented current events; didactic and propaganda films that extolled and educated the people on the benefits of the revolution; and films that interpreted reality in order to institutionalize the ideals and principles of the revolution within the daily life of the people. Before and during the Cuban Revolution, newsreel-style filmmaking was widely used to present current events to the

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<sup>25</sup> An English translation by Julia Lesage, "The Viewer's Dialectic," was published in *Jump/Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* nos. 29, 30 and 31 (1984-1986).

viewing public. These newsreel images testified to the radical changes taking place and provided fodder for the debates occurring among the Cuban people. Films made during the second stage served as tools for educating the people on the social, political and economic reforms taking place under the new socialist government. During these early days of the transitional government, films were also produced that portrayed the people's support of the revolution and the new socialist government in order to combat the resistance of counterrevolutionaries.

After the tumultuous period of the early 1960s, Cuban filmmakers began to experiment with form rather than focusing exclusively on the documentation of events or didactic efforts. This experimentation became a way to appeal to those Cubans who were either passive supporters of the revolution or who were not sure of their revolutionary convictions. Fidel Castro, in his 1961 "Words to the Intellectuals," broaches this subject:

The Revolution should try to win over the greatest part of the people to its ideas; the Revolution should never give up counting on the majority of the people, counting not only on the revolutionaries, but on all honest citizens who, although they may not be revolutionaries, that is, although they may not have a revolutionary attitude towards life, are with the Revolution. (276)

Gutiérrez Alea echoes this directive in "The Viewer's Dialectic" when he asserts that films should shape taste, intellectual judgment, and states of consciousness and should "contribute in the most effective way possible to elevating viewers' revolutionary consciousness and to arming them for the ideological struggle which they have to wage against all kinds of reactionary tendencies of life" (110). Following Castro's lead, Gutiérrez Alea looks to film as a way to institutionalize the revolution, and the people are the key to this institutionalization. Until the people, who are said to embody the ideals of the revolution and who would constitute a revolutionary society, integrate the principles

and ideals of the revolution into their daily lives, revolutionary society cannot be fully realized.

Gutiérrez Alea's thinking, in terms of institutionalizing the revolution, appears to be a product of the times in which he is writing. In a 1977 interview with Julianne Burton, and again in "The Viewer's Dialectic," he makes reference to "the current stage of institutionalization we are living through" (109). 1977 was named the "Year of Institutionalization" in Cuba and, as a member of the ICAIC and one of Cuba's leading film directors, Gutiérrez Alea does his part by working to theorize a uniquely Cuban cinematic form that has revolutionary institutionalization as its objective. Theory becomes a way to institutionalize the revolution and its principles as a definitive aspect of Cuban cinema, so it also becomes an instrument of public relations and international relations. Throughout the 1960s, according to Alea, support of the revolution had manifested itself through spontaneous and enthusiastic expressions. But there was no critical awareness in these expressions and as a result, what had once been spontaneous and enthusiastic became ritualistic and automatic, passive instead of active, something to be followed rather than something lived and believed:

The current stage of institutionalization we are living through is possible only because it is based on the high degree of political awareness which our people have attained as a result of years of incessant fighting. But this stage also requires the masses' active, increased participation in the building of a new society. Increasingly, a greater and greater responsibility falls on the masses and, for that reason, we can no longer let the public merely cling enthusiastically and spontaneously to the Revolution and its leaders and, to the extent that the government passes on its tasks to the people, the masses have to develop ways of understanding problems, of strengthening their ideological coherence and of reaffirming daily the principles which give life to the Revolution. (109)

Gutiérrez Alea begins here with the assumption that the people support the revolution, but this support has not expressed itself through “increased participation in the building of a new society.” Gutiérrez Alea identifies here a gap between thought and action, belief and lived reality, which all of the Latin American filmmakers struggle with, a struggle that compels them to define subjectivity in such a way as to paper over or bridge this gap. Gutiérrez Alea tries to bridge this gap by developing a film form that the people will embrace, once it reaches them, and that will prompt them to investigate their own stance in regards to the revolution. To accomplish this, he develops a theory of popular film that emphasizes the “enjoyment of life.”

Like Rocha, Gutiérrez Alea admits that revolutionary films are not always popular films. Though these films may find acceptance and appreciation among international art cinema or new cinema critics and audiences, mass audiences in the filmmaker’s nation may ignore or reject these films. To address this challenge, Gutiérrez Alea approaches film as “a human activity which fulfill[s] better than others a fundamental necessity for enjoyment” (112), and he sees historical filmmakers’ recognition of this need for enjoyment as the secret to developing what he calls mature film forms. He identifies classical Hollywood film as a mature film form and points out that Hollywood films were the main fare for Cuban filmgoers until the 1961 U.S. trade embargo. After the embargo, there was a vacuum that could not be filled by the Soviet, Czech, and European films imported by the Cuban government. The Cuban people were most familiar with the classical Hollywood style and thus had an uneasy relationship with other film languages, even revolutionary ones, a phenomenon Rocha also discusses in his

film theory. Gutiérrez Alea's observation of this dynamic leads to his critique of what he calls the revolutionary practices of parallel, marginal, or alternative cinema, which he sees as effective only within narrow limits. Gutiérrez Alea respects these efforts and acknowledges that such films cannot reach large audiences because of the obstacles they encounter within their local distribution and exhibition systems. But he also critiques the lack of accessibility their styles produce, since "most people continue to prefer the more polished product" (114).

Gutiérrez Alea determines to overcome this limited accessibility by creating a theory of popular cinema that intertwines entertainment and ideology and contributes to the enjoyment of life. Like the other Latin American filmmakers, Gutiérrez Alea wishes to push spectators toward a more profound understanding of reality. He wants them to see the reality that exists below the polished surfaces of the bourgeois illusionism found in Hollywood films, and to face the real situation of a revolutionary society that includes individuals who have not fully embraced the revolution. He hopes that such an understanding will induce them to live as active participants rather than passive spectators. But film's ability to create such understanding can only occur through an appeal to emotion and feeling as well as reason and intellect (130). Gutiérrez Alea feels that other Latin American filmmakers tend to put all of their faith in reason and intellect while ignoring emotion and feeling, so he makes a point of driving home this two-prong approach. In fact, he suggests that these qualities must exist indissolubly united with emotion tied to the discovery of something, to the rational comprehension of some aspect of reality (130).

With this in mind, he develops the concept of the open show, a fictional film form with a pedagogical objective that allows the viewer to engage with the ideals of the film even after that viewer leaves the presence of the film. His open show creates a relationship between the film and the viewer by posing problems to the viewer and then directing him or her on how to discover the solutions to these problems. These problems and solutions reflect the values of the Cuban revolution and the viewer's self-discovery of how to resolve the problems faced by the onscreen subjects models, in the context of everyday life, the values and behavior that reaffirm revolutionary ideals. This problem-solution model would help to institutionalize revolutionary ideals within society and attempts to bridge the gap between thought and action in spectators.

The aim of this problem-solution model is to help viewers “develop criteria consistent with the path traced by society” and that reaffirm “the new society's values and, consequently, to fighting for its preservation and development” (116). Essentially Gutiérrez Alea wants to help spectators to catch up with the political changes that have taken place in Cuba, and his film theory explicitly describes how to use film for ideological purposes. Though he echoes the revolutionary rhetoric of his fellow New Latin American Cinema filmmakers, his rhetoric does not critique ideology but instead works to create social subjects who act according to the principles of that ideology; paradoxically, he looks to Hollywood film, the ideal ideological film form, and the anathema of revolutionary Latin American filmmakers, for his model. Like Solanas and Getino, he is intent on producing action among his theoretical offscreen subjects. He wants them to incorporate the ideals and principles of the revolution expressed in his films into their lived consciousness and then enact them in their everyday lives. The

critical leap for Gutiérrez Alea, as it is for Solanas and Getino, is action. The theoretical spectator must act in accordance with the film's ideology. They must become the offscreen actors of the film. Solanas and Getino make the onscreen and offscreen spaces ambivalent so they become reflections of one another by requiring the participation of the spectator for the completion of their film text and by extending the *mise-en-scene* of the film into the offscreen space. Gutiérrez Alea, however, relies upon enjoyment and discovery to push consciousness into the realm of action. He hopes to break through spectator resistance to the revolutionary film, and to the revolution, by proffering visual pleasures akin to those of a mature film form like classical Hollywood cinema. Once the spectator openly receives the film's message, then the hope is that he or she will incorporate that information into his or her *apperceptive* frame and then act accordingly. Ironically, it appears that Gutiérrez Alea is writing in a context where there are too many autonomous ways of thinking and acting, where there are revolutions against the revolution. The purpose of his film theory is to describe how to use film to constrain and restrain these free expressions in order to bring them into line with the ideology of the revolution.

However, Gutiérrez Alea's film theory is not that different from the theories of the other Latin American filmmakers, who strive to bridge the gap between consciousness and action in spectators. The first generation of Latin American film manifestos, like Birri's "Cinema and Underdevelopment" and Rocha's "Aesthetics of Hunger," elaborate aesthetic strategies that contradict the vision of the world put forth in dominant film forms. But later manifestos, such as Solanas and Getino's "Towards a Third Cinema," Gutiérrez Alea's "The Viewer's Dialectic" and Rocha's "Cinema

Novo and the Dialectics of Popular Culture,” explore ways to motivate spectators to act. The early manifestos, especially Birri’s, work to show the contradictions in society so the spectator can become aware of them. It is then up to the spectator to think through a response to these contradictions. In other words, the film presents a problem to the spectator and then lets them draw their own conclusions. Later manifestos do not simply present problems or contradictions, they provide an analysis of the situation and present the spectator with an argument and a course of action; we see this approach in Solanas and Getino’s cinema of ideological essay and Gutiérrez Alea’s problem-solution open show.

In his 1977 interview with Julianne Burton, Gutiérrez Alea provides insight into this transition as he discusses the shift from Italian neorealism to the development of a national film form. Using Italian neorealist techniques, Cuban filmmakers could show the essence of reality in times of historical transformation, when the contradictions were readily apparent. All the filmmaker had to do was set up the camera, roll film, and reality would reveal itself in all its complexity. The conflict between different realities would be easily seen so no analysis was needed; the spectators could draw their own conclusions. However, when the revolution entered a new phase, namely that of institutionalization, the meaning of events became less obvious. The filmmakers were required to adopt an analytical attitude in order to interpret reality for the people. In “The Viewer’s Dialectic,” Gutiérrez Alea provides a reason for this interpretation. The people know the benefits of the revolution and they show their support for it, but they have not yet incorporated it into

the fabric of their daily lives by “strengthening their ideological coherence and reaffirming daily the principles which give life to the Revolution” (109).

The Latin American filmmakers face a similar situation as their projects develop over the course of the 1960s. In the beginning, they work to show a view, or version, of reality that contradicts the mainstream view influenced by neocolonial structures. By revealing another reality, they hope to challenge the dominant view and awaken people to the effects of neocolonialism. But these contradictions prove to have little effect on the people, in part because the imperfect, documentary forms or the modernist experiments developed by the filmmakers to express these contradictory views are not as popular as mainstream films. Actual subjects prove to be harder to influence than anticipated. So the filmmakers are forced to adapt their strategies to achieve their objectives. They turn to theory in order to reflect on new strategies, and then to begin institutionalizing them as effective alternatives.

In Chapter 2, we will look at how Stan Brakhage, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Glauber Rocha interrelate their theory and practice to develop formal experiments that position subjectivity as a window on the world. By viewing objective reality through the lens of a particular concept of subjectivity, they attempt to reveal truths to the spectator that would otherwise remain obscured by mediating forces. However, by viewing their films in relation with their theory, we can see how certain “truths” about their own practice, and assumptions, remain obscure to them.

## CHAPTER II

### **SEEING I'S: THE SUBJECT AS WINDOW ON THE WORLD IN *DOG STAR MAN*, *MEMORIAS DEL SUBDESAROLLO* AND *TERRA EM TRANSE***

Filmmaker conceptions of subjectivity have as profound an impact on the practice of these New American Cinema and New Latin American Cinema filmmakers as they do on their film theories. The next two chapters examine two formal strategies used to bring about cinematic versions of the theoretical subjects described in the various filmmaker theories. The first strategy considers historical contexts and national ideals through the lens of subjective experience. The other strategy, which I will discuss in Chapter 3, moves beyond film to make use of the entire cinematic experience; there I study how these “open” films can only become complete works of art with the participation of the spectator. Both strategies rely upon what these filmmakers represent as the dialectical relationship between film text and offscreen spectator subjects, but the first strategy places more emphasis on using representations of the subject and subjectivity to critique the socio-political and historical contexts that influence the subject. These films work to provoke debate and then action among spectators by promoting identification with an onscreen subject. The open form strategy, in contrast, works to create new systems of production and exhibition that merge the onscreen and offscreen worlds in order to produce the desired critically-conscious spectators who act in accordance with the principles and ideas presented onscreen.

This chapter considers the first formal strategy in order to investigate how the onscreen representations of subjects or subjectivity: 1) create a free space where the relationship between the subject and the socio-political or historical context can be examined, and 2) present a conception of the subject or subjectivity that embodies an ideal capable of bringing about or redeeming the nation. The three films that rely on this strategy are Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* (1962-1964), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968) and Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (*Land in Anguish*, 1967). Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* characterizes its mythological hero by communicating his first-person impressions and by using symbolic and literary references to point out how he relates to a universal humanity. Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* constructs an alienated bourgeois *flâneur* as a way to consider the influence of counterrevolutionary attitudes on the burgeoning, post-Revolutionary Cuban nation. Finally, with *Terra em Transe*, Rocha examines the problem of Brazilian underdevelopment by creating allegorical subjects that reveal and then critique the repetitive cycles of history and the two-faced nature of power that renders Left and Right essentially two aspects of the same repressive political system.

These subjects serve as alternatives to the Hollywood model of subjectivity. Hollywood was an urgent concern for both the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers. They saw Hollywood erasing national and cultural specificity through a universalizing bourgeois worldview that reorients spectator perspectives and reshapes individual tastes so they coincide with the mass culture of global capitalism. In his analysis of the social and historical circumstances of classical Hollywood cinema's development, Noël Burch

examines how camera placement and movement, lighting, editing, mise-en-scene and sound were used to represent a specific view of life that coincides with bourgeois ideals. This singular vision, which helps to repress class conflict and enables Hollywood to establish a profitable mass audience, also creates an imaginary centering of the spectator-subject within diegetic time and space. According to Burch, this imaginary centering of the spectator is crucial to the illusion of reality created in Hollywood films, an illusion that teaches spectators to accept and then desire this particular worldview. Theorists also describe classical Hollywood cinema's attempts to promote spectator identification with the subjects represented onscreen. According to David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, classical Hollywood narrative relies on protagonists who serve as causal agents. These individuals are goal oriented and their psychologically motivated desires serve as the causes that propel the narrative forward. Hollywood narratives generally have a unified ending in which the protagonist achieves his or her goals and experiences change of some sort. These psychologically motivated individual characters mobilize certain cultural values through their representation of an identifiable subject and way of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

The three filmmakers examined in this chapter attempt to create an alternative to Hollywood's model of cinematic subjectivity and the inequitable power relations it ostensibly supports. Instead, these filmmakers devise alternative presentations of subjectivity that envision social change and give life to certain ideals. For example, Brakhage draws upon U.S. national ideals of individualism, freedom, and the frontier to

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<sup>1</sup> Further detail on how characters embody certain systemic influences by enacting story causality and motivation in classical Hollywood film can be found in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 12-23.

create a mythical hero who leaves modern civilization for the wilderness in order to find a more profound sense of himself. By escaping into the interior of his biological, cosmological, and imaginative selves, as well as retreating to the interior of the U.S. (i.e., the Colorado mountains), the Dog Star Man discovers a new way of seeing and a new way of understanding himself and his relationship to the world, an understanding that also pertains to universal concerns. Brakhage works to circumvent Hollywood's point of view and gestures to an unmediated personal expression capable of discovering and communicating alternative truths. For Brakhage, the world and other people are only truly accessible to us through a first-person, impressionistic mode of vision. All other forms of access are mediated and pre-determined. Following this logic, his subjective mode of vision is capable of revealing the world in its true, or unmediated, form. Thus, his films attempt not only to liberate the eye and the mind but also to present universal truths. In contrast, Gutiérrez Alea works to create a single universal truth. He uses his films to cultivate a revolutionary attitude within Cuban spectators who have not yet fully integrated the principles and beliefs of the revolution into their mindset or daily lives. Until they do this, the Cuban nation remains an ideal rather than a true socio-political reality. In one sense, the Cuban nation is real because it has earned recognition on the international stage as a result of events generated by the revolution, such as the revolution's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, the defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuba's protection of its sovereignty during the Cuban Missile Crisis. But the Cuban people must catch up with these events by adopting a wholly revolutionary subjectivity for the nation to become real at the level of the social. In *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Gutiérrez Alea taps into this view and contrasts real events with the subjectivity of an

apolitical bourgeois individual, Sergio Carmona, in order to show the implications to the nation – and to individuals – of inadequately revolutionary attitudes. Finally, Rocha works to expose the self-identical replication of historical cycles and the two-faced nature of power in Brazil by creating allegorical characters that reflect the country's various social and political forces. He challenges the universalizing tendencies of bourgeois thought at work in Brazil, tendencies that lead the people to accept their inequitable positions as true or right instead of standing up to fight for social and political change. Rocha creates an allegorical protagonist, Paulo Martins, who models a process of revolutionary subject formation that brings these repressive dynamics to light while also pointing the way toward reforming the systems of power in Brazil.

All three filmmakers explore the relationship between subjectivity and the objective reality where the subject resides. By examining this relationship, these filmmakers hope to reveal truths about subjectivity and its context that have otherwise been obscured by mediating influences. To accomplish his goals of revealing “universal” truths and realizing an alternative perceptual mode, Brakhage turns to sub-and-objective impressions and abstract expressions, and provides what could be called an exemplary subject. For Brakhage, the subject who looks within himself can avoid associations that pre-determine meaning and thus reveal truths about the objective world. Gutiérrez Alea contrasts the progressive political changes brought about by the revolution with the regressive social attitudes of individuals who have not fully embraced revolutionary principles, in order to provoke critical self-examination. For Gutiérrez Alea, objective reality forces the subject to look within himself to investigate the truth of his revolutionary nature. Rocha wants the people to see and understand the truth of the

reality they inhabit so they will look to their own experiences and look within themselves to discover a way to promote change. However, as we will see, as much as these filmmakers create specific relationships between the subject and objective reality in order to reflect critically on each, they tend to work within the limits of their own subjective reality and re-inscribe those limits within the relationships they create. As a result, we can see Brakhage's self-centered *Dog Star Man* consume the objective reality and other subjects he encounters for his own self-realization. We also witness the current events in Cuba crush an autonomous and free-thinking subject in Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. And we observe Rocha's allegorical hero successfully become a revolutionary subject; but he fulfills his potential alone, consciously separated from the people.

### **Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*: Consuming the World and All That Is In It**

As we saw in Chapter 1, Brakhage attempts to reunify the subjective and objective worlds by giving expression to total views of history, domestic life, and the objective world that arise from the subjective experience of the filmmaker-viewer. This subjectively driven mode allows the individual filmmaker-viewer to express himself directly and to avoid the mediations of imposed ideas and principles. But as Brakhage continues to develop the concept of sub-and-objective expression in his mythopoeic film form, he expands its territory to include subjective perceptions of the objective world *and* first-person interactions with other subjects.

In his 1962 interview with P. Adams Sitney, which opens *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage describes his transition from the lyrical to the mythopoeic film

form when he discusses his move from a self-centered to a “soul-in-action” theory of film. His lyrical films express his desire to be more personal and egocentric; he attempts to look into his own subjective perceptions and experiences in order to uncover truths about the objective world otherwise obscured by mediated ways of seeing. But he now works to be a “soul-in-action,” attempting to uncover truths about the world and the universal concerns of all man through his interactions with others:

I now feel that there is some other concrete center where love from one person to another meets; and that the more total view arises from there... First I had the sense of the center radiating out. Now I have become concerned with the rays. You follow? It's in the action of moving out that the great concerns can be struck off continually. Now the films are being struck off, not in the gesture, but in the very real action of moving out. Where [...] those actions meet and cross, and bring forth children and films and inspire concerns with plants and rocks and all sights seen, a new center, composed of action, is made. [...] soul-in-action, rather than at center.

In his lyrical films, he was concerned with the “total view” that arose from the film, filmmaker, and filmmaker-viewer triad, but in his current phase, he wants to explore a total view that arises from “some other concrete center” that forms in the encounter between subjects. This encounter occurs when a soul-in-action is engaged “in the very real action of moving out” and, within the various encounters that occur in this moving out, the universal concerns of humanity can be investigated. As Brakhage describes it, the encounter does not involve compromise between two individuals but rather a joint effort, where both subjects work toward “finding the one right path that would contain the total view that would be an opening for something new.” This one path would emerge within “some space that is the shape of both of us, and yet doesn't ...enclose us.” This space does not enclose its inhabitants because it encompasses a “direct relationship to a larger

concern than each other.”<sup>2</sup> However, this larger concern generally involves some aspect of Brakhage’s self-realization as a man and a filmmaker. He affirms his masculinity and his artistry through films and a filmmaking process that generate a “space that is the shape of both of us.” Basically, Brakhage consumes the other subject and his or her sensibilities to create this space. As we will see, he incorporates the perceptions and sensibilities of his wife and child into the *Dog Star Man* films. These films thereby affirm both his status as patriarch and as artist, two identities that he attributes to himself throughout *Metaphors on Vision*. In his formulation of the soul-in-action approach to filmmaking, the other subject does contribute to the shape of the film, but does not generate the film’s form, content, or meaning. The other subject becomes subject matter, content that contributes to a film’s themes and formal experimentations.

We can also see the implications of this move from a self-centered to a “soul-in-action” dynamic in his dedication for *Metaphors on Vision*:

‘By Brakhage’ should be understood to mean ‘by way of Stan and Jane Brakhage,’ as it does in all my films since marriage. It is coming to mean: ‘by way of Stan and Jane and all the children Brakhage’ because all the discoveries which used to pass only thru the instrument of myself are coming to pass thru the sensibilities of those I love.... Ultimately ‘by Brakhage’ will come to be superfluous and understood as what it now ultimately is: by way of everything

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<sup>2</sup> David James also looks to Brakhage’s emphasis on the encounter in his examination of Brakhage’s body of work. However, James focuses on Brakhage’s “domestication of cinema,” his use of it to document “the biological processes of life,” to describe how Brakhage’s evolving film form expanded beyond the individual to encompass larger concerns: “Nor, similarly, is the cinematic significance of the films about birth, sex, and death exhausted by their formulation of a filmic vocabulary that made possible meditational attention to the biological processes of life. The domestication of cinema allowed an even more radical incorporation of it into life’s most crucial transactions. If in telling its own story the visual tells all others, the exchange of vision between people becomes the means of social interaction; and so film – a means of seeing – becomes not just an instrument of personal documentation, or yet simply the means by which a subjectivity may be documented, but also the mode of a relationships practice” (37). For James, Brakhage’s filmmaking processes became coextensive with his own life. So the relationships that became incorporated into his filmmaking (e.g., his incorporation of footage shot by his wife, Jane) became metaphors for his “real-life” domestic relationships (e.g., the developing domestic partnership of newlyweds). James then extends this “coextension” into a larger metaphysical plane, and includes *Dog Star Man* as evidence of this broadened coextension.

He intertwines his filmmaking with his family and his role as patriarch in this dedication as a way to begin universalizing his experience. He gives his family credit for their active role in his filmmaking, but the phrasing of this dedication, like the phrasing of his films, makes the roles of his wife and children less participatory and more contributory. They appear in his films and even shoot some of the footage for them, but Brakhage appropriates these contributions for his film art. Brakhage's acknowledgement of his family's contribution and his final pronouncement indicate his desire to expand "Brakhage" and "By Brakhage" beyond himself. He wants to expand his sense of himself to include first his family and then everything so that everything will find its way into his films, presumably so that his films can address universal concerns. This expansion of his self-identity requires him first to appropriate the sensibilities of those he loves, but then to move beyond them to an incorporation of "everything." By doing so, he can position his experiences and encounters as representative of universal concerns.

To go beyond the individual and create this universal space, Brakhage taps into the literary forms of mythology and epic poetry. Tapping into such imposed dramatic forms would seem to fit uneasily into Brakhage's theory and his works. Why would a filmmaker who so adamantly rejects drama and language-based modes of expression turn to literary influences like myth and epic poetry to create the cycle of five *Dog Star Man* films that collectively comprise *The Art of Vision*? In two interviews [2001, 1999] that accompany the Criterion Collection release of the film anthology *By Brakhage*, Brakhage claims to have incorporated the entire history of literary epics, from Homer through

Pound, as well as the influence of such modernist works as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, into the basic concept and structure of the *Dog Star Man* films. He asserts that the film was also informed by the major myths of the world – Egyptian, Norse, Christian, and Greco-Roman. In this move, he defines myth and epic, and their “entire history,” according to his project. He canonizes certain texts and myths while excluding others, but insists that his catalog is entire.

Brakhage claims that his inspiration for the *Dog Star Man* films came from a pulp novel he picked up at a drug store. The book’s engaging title, *Dog Star Man*, and its cover, which pictured a bare-chested cowboy sitting on a bed with a beautiful woman, led Brakhage to believe its prose would resemble that of John Steinbeck or Erskine Caldwell. But as he came to discover, the novel featured tawdry prose and a poorly-constructed story – and Brakhage set about creating his own version, one that met his expectations. Brakhage’s hindsight description of his films’ origins conveys his tendency toward incorporation. He found new territory in this novel that he wanted to remake according to his view of what it should be. However, this story of origins also indicates that the *Dog Star Man* films were inspired by literary sources, and literary sources that situate individual subjects within a larger national, historical, or cultural context. Using them, Brakhage could then focus on the individual subject while also referring to contexts, concepts and processes that lie beyond that subject, and which the subject comes to represent.

For example, the explicit influence of epic poetry on *Dog Star Man* brings out the ways these films rely upon and reference a U.S. national context. Though Brakhage attempts to draw on the entire history of epic poetry and the world’s mythologies in his

*By Brakhage* recollection, his primary inspiration for *Dog Star Man* was a pulp novel that reminded him of two U.S. novelists. Within “The Camera Eye” section of *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage explicitly interweaves his concepts of film and the nation: “Negate technique, for film, like America, has not been discovered yet, and mechanization, in the deepest possible sense of the word, traps both beyond measuring even chances – chances are these twined searches may someday orbit about the same central negation. Let film be. It is something...becoming.” In the *By Brakhage* interviews, he also indicates these films are his attempt to make the “epic of the big daddy,” a visual epic about having and raising a family in a “natural, wild and crazy place” removed from society and civilization. In the films, we can see the Dog Star Man on the frontier, having left the brake lights of civilization behind for the rugged Western landscape. Much of the film’s story, such as it is, features the Dog Star Man struggling up a mountain, ostensibly to find wood for his family’s fire. The lone man (who is, in fact, not alone) strives to conquer nature in order to settle the frontier and make a place where he can more fully realize himself. Brakhage’s assertion in “The Camera Eye” brings out a central theme and context of these *Dog Star Man* films. They are all about becoming, and thus open up static notions about being as it relates to contemporary conceptions and expressions of masculinity and the nation. We can see the creation of a new film form, the mythopoeic; of a man realizing his full potential as a biological, conscious, imaginative, and cosmological individual; and of a man becoming a patriarch in all senses: he has a family, occupies the position as head of household by struggling to fulfill his family’s needs, and works to master nature in order to make his home on the frontier. By showing the becoming of a domestic social space in the wilderness, Brakhage essentially re-creates

the frontier and its settlement. He thereby situates the U.S. in an earlier phase of its history and shifts the U.S. from a state of being to one of becoming as a way to release it from the stifling hold of mechanization. He performs a similar function for the New American Cinema. By situating film production and subject matter on the frontier, he also attempts to release film, and avant-garde film specifically, from mechanization. Brakhage hopes to restore experimentation and chance back into ideas of the nation and filmmaking so they are no longer trapped by mechanization's predetermined paths and destined to endlessly cycle, or orbit, around an empty center.

If we consider the films of *Dog Star Man* in light of Brakhage's use of frontier mythology, we can see how this "epic of the big daddy" dramatizes the colonizing forces inherent within ideas and ideals of the U.S. nation and of a subjectivity situated within this national context. The subjects explicitly colonized within the films are the wife and child, specifically Jane Brakhage and Brakhage's first son, Bearthm. The *Dog Star Man*'s struggle toward self-realization is intimately tied to his position as patriarch. Family needs motivate his journey up the mountain and he is ultimately able to fulfill these needs because he is able to tap into the untutored eye of his child in *Part 2* and his productive, because procreative, sexual desire for his wife in *Part 3*. The family becomes an expression of the nation, especially in the frontier setting of the film.

By staging the *Dog Star Man*'s epic struggle on the frontier, Brakhage allows him to express his essential manhood, unrestricted by the limitations and challenges of the modern world.<sup>3</sup> With this frontier staging, he is also able to reproduce U.S. social norms in a different context. This reproduction of national ideals and related social norms

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<sup>3</sup> As Amy Kaplan points out, "the empire figures as the site where you can be all that you can no longer be at home – a 'real live man' – where you can recover the autonomy denied by social forces" (664).

resonates in two ways. In one sense, this reproduction has colonial overtones, since the Dog Star Man replicates social norms in a space where they do not exist. In this case, the Dog Star Man re-establishes the patriarchal domestic space outside of modern society in order to explore the possibilities of raising a family in a space freed from mechanization. This restaging also allows the Dog Star Man to give these ideals and norms new life and thereby resurrect a nation that no longer exists because of this mechanization. The Dog Star Man's domestic space becomes a microcosm for the nation. In this space, according to the *Dog Star Man* films, America, like film, can be discovered. But the cost of this discovery and recovery is high for those subjects who contribute to rather than shape this process. In their encounters with the Dog Star Man, they become incorporated into his epic struggle as memories, experiences, dreams, motivations – and they become integrated into the formal unity of these films as part of the filmmaker-viewer's subjective and authorial experiences.

The *Dog Star Man* films consist of a prelude and four parts. Each part contributes to the whole, but also stands alone, complete in itself. Taken as a whole, the film seems to break down into three basic threads: 1. the Dog Star Man's epic struggle up the mountain, during which he encounters and consumes the world tree, 2. first-person and abstract expressions of the dreams, perceptions, consciousness, and imaginative journeys of the Dog Star Man, and 3. representations of his cellular and cosmological selves, his universal selves, which complement and expand his subjective expressions. These three formal elements wind their way through each of the various parts and create the connections that unite each of these individual wholes into a larger totality – a self-realization that “touch[es] those universal concerns which would involve all man.”

Brakhage presents the *Dog Star Man Prelude* (1962) as the dream that structures the following day in the Dog Star Man's life, with the subsequent four parts constituting that day. This day that consists of an entire year, marked by the passing of the four seasons. According to Sitney's conversations with Brakhage,<sup>4</sup> the filmmaker was at a loss as to how to proceed with the film once he had shot the initial footage, so he randomly pulled shots from the unorganized rushes and edited them together in no specific order to construct a preliminary thirty-minute version. Brakhage found new insight into the material from what he had constructed, so he then purposefully edited a parallel strip of film that related to the original chance roll. This second, superimposition strip was to comment on or complement the original roll, but whenever that method failed to produce a coherent vision, Brakhage would re-edit a section of the randomly composed roll in order to create the unity he was looking for (196). In this description, we see Brakhage shaping the world and the visions he captures in his films to fit an overall concept and direction that he wants to achieve. So though his approach to the *Prelude* was originally serendipitous, once he discovered his concept, he made all subsequent footage fit that particular direction, underscoring a tendency to find and shape subjects, objects, representations, and encounters into a reflection of his own image.

The *Prelude* establishes the films' key themes and designates the Dog Star Man as the epic hero. Like *Part IV*, the *Prelude* references the entire film cycle by quoting key motif images like the sun and moon, the female body, the snow-covered mountains, the child and the world tree, and introducing significant relationships, such as those that exist between man and nature, man and the domestic realm, and the cellular, conscious and

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Brakhage's comments on his work are drawn from P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), 190-209.

cosmological aspects of man. The *Prelude* establishes the motivation for the journey to follow, as images depicting modern society are juxtaposed with that of the natural world. For example, the red brake lights of a traffic jam dissolve into the flowing water of a small creek. The *Prelude* presents the chopping down of the world tree. Though the cause-effect logic of the narrative is not clear, it appears the Dog Star Man encounters the tree, chops it down and then falls as a result of this action; he is revived by remembering the untutored eye of his childhood (in *Part 2*) and experiencing sexual desire, which restarts his heart (in *Part 3*). To establish these themes and relationships, Brakhage uses various modes of superimposition and juxtaposition to create vertical and horizontal montage sequences. Graphic matches highlight the complementarity of images, as when the painted and scratched film emulsion, which signifies the dream-state, imagination or “closed eye vision” of the Dog Star Man, is superimposed with images of solar flares and when rocks are juxtaposed with red blood cells. With these complementary matches, the film attempts to expand the concept of the individual subject to encompass the biological, cosmological, natural, and imaginative realms. Associational matches contribute to the films’ thematic relationships; here, the car brake lights are contrasted with flowing water and later (in *Part 4*) with the exterior of a house to set up an association between modern society, nature, and the domestic space. In this section, nature and domesticity are presented as free spaces, where the man can escape mechanization and express his autonomy and mastery. Finally, symbolic matches, such as that between the moon, the cat and the Dog Star Man, generate certain mythological relationships and establish the Dog Star Man as an epic hero.

The Dog Star Man produces the dream of the *Prelude* and is featured within it, so this introductory film establishes the Dog Star Man as the center point from which these various realms and relationships radiate and through which they interrelate. Many of the images are fragmented or give the sense of a very narrow or limited point of view, which is accomplished through the use of extreme close-ups. This technique renders the images immediately recognizable as subjective, as if we were seeing through the eyes of the Dog Star Man as well as through the eye of the camera and filmmaker. The movement of the objects in the images, the manipulation of film speed and the camera movement, which provides a sense of movement to still objects, compounded with the speed of the montage rhythm, also heightens the impressionistic quality of the sequences. The spectator is able to see through the eyes of the filmmaker-protagonist here, which continues the expansion of our concept of onscreen subjectivity, but which also collapses it. The universal and multivalent nature of the subject presented in the film is linked explicitly with this protagonist perspective. Thus, the universal is linked to this particular.

In Brakhage's earlier lyrical films, fragmentary aspects of the filmmaker might appear within the frame (a hand, a silhouette, etc.), but Brakhage himself generally does not show up onscreen, much less appear as a character. In this film cycle, however, he does appear onscreen as the Dog Star Man – and by doing so, expands his role from filmmaker-viewer to filmmaker-viewer-protagonist. *Dog Star Man Part I* (1962) presents the Dog Star Man's "two steps forward, one step backward" progress up the mountain where he encounters the world tree. Brakhage likens this progress to the motion of blood through the capillary system, but it also complements the long and arduous journey generally undertaken by epic heroes. *Part I* is not so much about this man's progress to

and destruction of the world tree as it is about the Dog Star Man's journey and how it relates to his identity. His struggle to conquer the snowy mountainside is intercut with other scenes and images. If we look to the typical structure of the epic, which generally begins *in medias res* and fills in the story and information about the protagonist through flashbacks or speeches, these intercut images provide us with background or additional information about the hero. The images include the flow of blood through the body and blood cells, intertwined male and female bodies, the Dog Star Man in the water, a distorted extreme close up of a vulva, fire, a baby, church scenes that include black and white images of stained glass windows, a fragment of a female (Jane's) face, a lactating nipple, and a burned forest. These images are motif images for the film as a whole, but their placement within the Dog Star Man's journey seems to position them as memories, flashes from the Dog Star Man's past that he recalls as he struggles up the mountain. These memory images contribute to our understanding of the Dog Star Man's experiences, the experiences that comprise his identity. *Part I* begins to exhibit a more conventional cause-and-effect narrative structure, which relies upon protagonist motivation and action to produce a cause-and-effect based structure that invites spectator identification. It thus creates the spectator-film dynamic Brakhage had earlier resisted. But just as it seems to produce this dynamic, *Part I* and the subsequent *Parts* also resist it through the presentation of highly impressionistic images and montage strategies that are more interested in associational, graphic and symbolic matches than they are in cause-and-effect logic. Brakhage labors to colonize spectator sensibilities: the allegorical nature of the Dog Star Man and his epic struggle invites spectators to identify with him and to try and make sense of the film in relation to him and his journey. Yet at the same time,

the only information presented to the spectator is derived from the Dog Star Man's senses, memories or dreams. The film imposes the Dog Star Man's way of seeing and being upon spectators. It also bases its narrative and narration on the subjective perceptions of Brakhage and the Dog Star Man. The Dog Star Man is successful in his journey because the ties between his sense of self and his body, senses, and emotions are restored. The narration presents these events as they occur in the mind of the Dog Star Man. The narration does not worry as much about providing information to spectators so they can follow the film as it does about expressing the experiences of the Dog Star Man as his sense of self is restored. Theoretically, spectators can try to make sense of the film by applying their own perceptions, knowledge, and experiences to it. But the film remains unified and total without their contributions. Though the film appropriates Jane and Bearthm's sensibilities to realize the Dog Star Man's self recovery, the film rebuffs the sensibilities of spectators. Spectators are excluded from participating in the total view constructed by the film because of its formal unity – and because it communicates a total view. The film's narration and narrative are solely tied to the total view defined by Brakhage as film artist and enacted by Brakhage as the Dog Star Man.

We can also Brakhage construct the films' totality in the way *Part I* plays with time. *Part I* creates a timelessness that serves as a foundation for the Dog Star Man's universalization as a mythological figure. This section makes use of film speed and time-lapse photography to manipulate the recording of time on film. It also uses editing punctuation to ellipse time, more so than any other of the *Parts*; fades to black are used to ellipse the time of the Dog Star Man's climb up the mountain so we see him at various stages of his progress rather than seeing his progress (or lack thereof) in real time. In

addition, other modes of time are also presented throughout this section to expand our concept of time beyond that of the chronological. Solar time is presented through solar flares, the time-lapse movement of shadows across the mountain and night scenes, while images of the full moon imply a lunar time by referencing one of the phases of the moon. This section also juxtaposes images from different seasons; for example, a winter landscape adjoins a summer landscape, and a bare-chested Dog Star Man moves through the water while a winter-attired Dog Star Man journeys up the snowy mountainside. Finally, the flow of blood through the body provides a sense of cellular or biological time. These multiple senses of time – lunar, solar, seasonal, chronological, biological, and cinematic – give this section a sense of timelessness or a position outside of time that situates the Dog Star Man as an individual in time but not bounded by time. This contributes to an understanding of him as a mythological figure who represents not just a singular heroic character but a cultural ideal with universal applicability. *Part 1* underscores this mythological quality through the Dog Star Man's literal and figurative fall at the end of the section. Toward the end, the film presents an "axe cam" shot of an axe being swung, though we do not see it strike the world tree. The editing rhythm becomes more urgent as snow falls from branches, the film repeatedly and frantically zooms in to the world tree, and we see a rush of indecipherable images of extreme close ups of the Dog Star Man. We see his continued progress up the mountain through a series of repeated sequences, but each progression now ends with a slip and a fall and a slide into black and white and then into negative imagery. The final fall, which concludes with an image, presented as a negative, of the Dog Star Man lying prone, is accompanied by images of static cells and a heart that has stopped beating. *Parts 2* and *3* center on the

deathbed dreams of the Dog Star Man. These dreams, along with the flashbacks and memory images, originate from the hero as a way not only to provide insight into the hero's development, but also to secure his role as a mythological figure who represents not just himself but also a process of development or way of being that is both idealized as a subject position and also presented as a cultural or national ideal.

In *Dog Star Man Part 2* (1963), the Dog Star Man is both climbing and fallen, a state that carries over from the final images of *Part 1*. He is a man split in two. *Part 2* is also split in two since it contains a film-within-a-film. In addition to the footage shot for *Dog Star Man*, Brakhage incorporates, in its entirety, a short film entitled *Meat Jewel* that he made in 1963. This short film focuses on the changes of expression in the face of Brakhage's first son, Bearthm, during the first six weeks of his life (Sitney 199). The integration of this footage is a literal example of incorporation since Brakhage not only digests this film into *Dog Star Man Part 2*, but he also uses the physical expressions that register the awakening of sense perceptions in his son to reflect on what he considers to be a state of perfect sensibility, the untutored eye of the child. In his interviews with Sitney, Brakhage indicates that *Part 2* is in some sense autobiographical since "the Dog Star Man is being engaged with his own childhood by his child" (191). The child becomes critical to the Dog Star Man-Brakhage's self-realization both narratively and formally. Narratively, the child reawakens the fallen Dog Star Man's ability to live, and to live more purely, without mediation, through his senses, thereby contributing to his resurrection from his fallen state. Formally, the footage from *Meat Jewel* is the heart of *Part 2*, providing it with its core theoretical and aesthetic experiments and providing the structural connections to the other *Parts*.

The opening sequence of *Part 2* explicitly establishes the fallen state of the Dog Star Man. A montage of images of the Dog Star Man, in the midst of his mountainside struggle, shift from negative to black-and-white to color, but then his color image is ripped asunder by another, negative, image of himself. His images then shift back to a juxtaposition of black-and-white and negative images. He has torn himself in two and he languishes in his fall. Then comes the *Meat Jewel* section where a vivid and rapid montage of images and animation are superimposed over different shots of Bearthm. We briefly see speeding treetops, animated snowflakes and geometric shapes, snow on branches, a nipple, and other abstract flashes over a shifting montage that shows the baby in various positions, camera distances, states, and ages. At this point, the baby's eyes are closed but as the parallel montage sequences continue, the baby begins to open his eyes and, as his eyes begin to open, the camera shifts to close up to register the event. Once his eyes open, the quality of the images representing his way of seeing changes as does their method of presentation. There are fewer superimpositions and more juxtapositions and the images shift from animation and painting to documentary images of trees, water, and blood circulating. Toward the end of this sequence, what the baby sees is almost entirely comprised of extreme close up images of a nipple, and these images eventually transition to blurred images of a naked female figure juxtaposed with a single image of the fallen, prone Dog Star Man. These final images set up the transition to and connection with *Part 3*, which is the Dog Star Man's sexual daydream.

Though images of the Dog Star Man bookend *Part 2*'s film-within-a-film section and the baby's way of seeing seems to have some effect on the Dog Star Man, the film does not explicitly indicate whether the baby is the Dog Star Man as a child or if he is the

Dog Star Man's child. Either way, the baby becomes subsumed by the Dog Star Man and *Dog Star Man*. While the baby represents an autonomous subjectivity with his presence and gaze into the camera, the filmmaker supplies his sensibilities and consciousness as represented. In fact, the "catalog of senses," as Sitney calls it (199), that we see the baby developing are all bestowed – or imposed upon him – by the filmmaker. The film works to determine, define, and confine the baby's subjective presence, using the baby's actual presence and an imaginative construction of his subjective perceptions to provide insight into the subjective development of the Dog Star Man. Interesting to remember here is Brakhage's assertion about his interest in the encounter between souls-in-action. Though Brakhage might qualify *Part 2* as such an encounter, what we can actually see here is an example of a self-centered stance that reduces all other selves and subjects to a reflection of the self. The Dog Star Man literally consumes the baby and his way of seeing and uses this incorporation to achieve a sense of balance and unity at the end of *Part 2*, when the Dog Star Man is presented in a single, prone image rather than as his black-and-white and negative doubled self.

*Dog Star Man Part 3* (1964) uses three film rolls for superimpositions – "His," "Hers" and "Heart" – and represents what Brakhage calls the sexual daydreams of the Dog Star Man. According to Brakhage, *Part 2* and *Part 3* work together to present the resurrection of the Dog Star Man, whose heart begins beating again at the end of *Part 3*. Brakhage also claims that the "His," "Hers" and "Heart" superimpositions tell the story of the Dog Star Man's attempt to become female and the attempts of the unidentified feminine figure (Jane Brakhage) to become male. Images of a fragmented male body are superimposed with fragments of a female body and vice versa to indicate this attempt at

transmutation. But when the male and female bodies fail in their attempted transformations, they separate in order to come together again in the act of heterosexual sex. The dream quality of this section is indicated through the constant presence of painted frames and the fragmentary extreme close-ups of male and female body parts, both internal and external. The fragmentary and extreme close-up views of these parts make them difficult to distinguish as obviously male or female. Instead, they take on an asexual, or universal, biological symbolism. Only toward the middle and end of *Part 3* do male and female figures become evident. At this point, the rapid rhythm of the horizontal and vertical montages expresses the urgency and excitement of the sexual daydream. As the sequence continues, the rapidity increases and a montage sequence begins that centers on a beating heart shown in various positions. The power of his desire is enough to start our hero's heart beating. But it is also powerful enough to re-inscribe social conventions and the hierarchies of heterosexual sex and, when placed in conjunction with *Part 2*, of procreative heterosexual sex. In *Part 3*, the woman is cast as an erotic object and giver of life. By reproducing these social norms, any possibility for a universal, asexual immanence and subjectivity that *Part 3* raises in its beginning when the fragmented body parts are sexually indistinguishable, is undone at its end, when sexual difference is re-inscribed and put to use.

The five-minute *Dog Star Man Part 4* (1964), which concludes the series, integrates four rolls of film to create a complex recapitulation of the entire film series. *Part 4* picks up from the end of *Part 2*, with the Dog Star Man lying prone on the ledge of a cliff. We see four layers of Dog Star Man superimposed upon one another, though a slight delay in each roll's presentation makes each one distinguishable. These four layers

are quickly intercut with a repetition of motif images from the other *Parts*: the dead world tree, the stained glass windows of a church, the cat, Greek columns, male and female bodies, painted frames and animation, solar flares, a lactating nipple, the baby and then images of an older infant crawling across a floor, an extreme long shot of a house, a hearth fire that includes the baby, trees, etc., all against a backdrop of woods and the Dog Star Man, as we see his rise and fall and rise again and his chopping of the world tree. *Part 4* resembles the *Prelude* in its multifaceted, dreamlike quality; the images occur so rapidly and are composed of so many layers that one can only get a sense of what is occurring by focusing on the repetition of motif images and thematic associations. By hearkening back to the first film of the cycle, *Part 4* brings the series full circle and provides it with a totalized form and structure. *Part 4* also exemplifies Brakhage's skill as an artist. He is able to compose a unified, four-minute film from four layers of superimposed images. While the *Prelude* and *Part 3* represent the dreams of the Dog Star Man, *Part 1* represents his memories in conjunction with his current endeavor and *Part 2* ambivalently represents his childhood and the development of his senses, *Part 4* not only re-presents the film's motifs and themes in their entirety but also expands beyond them in an attempt to unify them into a total narrative about the Dog Star Man's development as an individual subject – and how that development touches universal concerns. *Part 4*'s re-presentation of events occurs outside of the Dog Star Man; we have a more limited access to his dreams and perceptions in this part. Instead, he, his visions, his imaginings and the objects that they include are fused in multi-layered associations and they begin to lose their distinguishing characteristics. In *Part 4*, the Dog Star Man becomes just another part of the whole; he becomes *Dog Star Man* and the presence of the filmmaker

is more clearly felt. Brakhage colonizes his own fictional and representational self to underscore his self-realization as artist and filmmaker. The Dog Star Man ultimately becomes an instrument for Brakhage's affirmation of his status as artist.

While representing the filmmaker and the process of experimental filmmaking, the Dog Star Man is also an allegorical figure that exemplifies the U. S. national ideal of an autonomous individual subjectivity. By doing so, he condenses an endless number of questions and experiences that directly relate to the U.S. national and cultural ideal of the autonomous individual. The Dog Star Man and his actions represent the possibilities for others who search for such autonomy, individuality, and self-expression. He also represents a sort of immanent, conscious, and imaginative truth. Or rather, Brakhage attempts to use the Dog Star Man to represent certain universal truths about the body, consciousness, and imagination. But Brakhage specifically relates these qualities to the national ideal of the autonomous individual. Though, following the logic of the epic, this national ideal could be seen as universal. Because the epic is grounded within a national context, it appears universal to those spectators who inhabit that particular context. In other words, the myth of the frontier would appear to be a universal truth to someone who has exclusively inhabited that context. But it is not a universal truth. Thus Brakhage's use of the epic form sets up an explicit tension between the universal and the particular when it conflates the two.

By embracing myth and epic poetry, Brakhage achieves some success in expanding his film form so it encompasses both the individual subject and that subject's larger context, which includes other subjects, as a way to touch on the universal concerns of all humankind. But these literary influences also foreground two specific tensions and

blind spots in Brakhage's works: 1. the ideological conflict between the universal and the particular and 2. the re-inscription of U.S. social norms, especially those that situate the patriarch at the center of the world. Both of these blind spots contribute to the self-centered nature of Brakhage's work. As much as he might want to move beyond the subject to the encounter between subjects, the *Dog Star Man* films remain firmly self-centered. Though Brakhage situates his film within a U.S. national context to provide the film with codes recognizable to spectators so they can follow the universal references, these references are not universal. Brakhage establishes the U.S. national context as universal. By doing so, he generates the same sort of cultural imperialism that the Latin American filmmakers fault Hollywood for when its films depict standardized bourgeois attitudes and worldviews. Within this imperial landscape, there exist no other autonomous subjects, alternative histories or different cultures.

**Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del subdesarrollo (Memories of Underdevelopment)*:  
The Subject of Reality**

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the other Latin American filmmakers examined here critique the colonizing worldview expressed in Brakhage's attempt to make his individual subject universal. They see the North American and western European concept of the individual as contributing to the inequitable social and political systems of neocolonialism since universalizing notions of the individual have contributed to the creation of this repressive context. Such universalizing notions erase the particularity of historical and national contexts and enfold all people within a single conceptual matrix, that of Western civilization. The Latin American filmmakers explicitly reject the universalizing concept of the individual to counter this dynamic and they focus instead on

a collective conception of subjectivity that expresses systemic influences and contributes to nation building: the people. For example, Rocha renders his individual characters in allegorical terms so they represent the historical and socio-political forces of global capitalism rather than psychologized individuals whose goal-oriented actions do not question the status quo. However, Rocha also integrates psychologically-motivated behavior and goal orientation into his protagonist's development as a revolutionary subject. These tendencies, which define the protagonist's formative period, are what propel him toward empty, self-centered bourgeois behaviors like dissipation, angst, and betrayal. These behaviors must be overcome for him to realize a more active and agential subject position where he can use his talents and social status for productive change rather than for self-aggrandizing, and ultimately self-destructive, ends. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, also relies upon his protagonist's psychological motivation and goal orientation to characterize bourgeois behavior. Like Rocha, he indicates that this bourgeois behavior is something that must be overcome. Working within a post-revolutionary context, he codes this bourgeois individualism as specifically counter-revolutionary and dangerous to the goals of the burgeoning socialist society. Like the other Latin American filmmakers who work in pre-revolutionary contexts, Gutiérrez Alea's goal is also nation building, but he does not need to rely on the people to produce the social and political change necessary to bring about a revolution. The Cuban revolution has overthrown the U.S.-backed and foreign investment-friendly president, Fulgencio Batista and is replacing his regime with a socialist government intent on integrating the masses of exploited Cuban people into the fabric of society so they can enjoy the rights and benefits of citizenship so long denied them.

However, though the Cuban nation is a political reality, both in terms of its state apparatus and its recognition from the international community, the nation is not a reality at the level of the social. From 1958, the year of the revolution, through 1982 when his “The Viewer’s Dialectic” was published, we can see evidence in Gutiérrez Alea’s writings and interviews that the Cuban people remain fragmented by their attitudes toward the revolution. There is a contradiction in the “real situation” (as Castro calls it) that exists between the state and the people. Though the state is uniformly revolutionary, the people are not – within themselves and among their ranks. In order to examine this contradiction, and in an attempt to remedy it, Gutiérrez Alea places a bourgeois individual into a direct relationship with the historical and socio-political forces that surround him. He mines the contradictions of the character to examine the lived reality of post-revolutionary Cuban society and to provoke critical thought in the spectator. Gutiérrez Alea wants to prompt critical *self*-examination in the spectator. In this self-examination, Gutiérrez Alea wants spectators to scrutinize their own behavior in terms of its revolutionary or counter-revolutionary valences. Though Gutiérrez Alea works in a different political context than the other Latin American filmmakers (a post- rather than pre-revolutionary context), he still works to create a critical consciousness about the possibilities for revolutionary social change. For Gutiérrez Alea, though the revolution has occurred and has brought about radical political change, the Cuban people have not yet embraced these changes and incorporated them into their daily lives. Because of this, they exert a counter-revolutionary pull on the institutionalization of a revolutionary nation. The revolutionary Cuban nation remains a possibility instead of a reality.

Like Brakhage, Gutiérrez Alea taps into national ideals and historical contexts to construct his protagonist. Also like Brakhage, Gutiérrez Alea focuses on the concepts of individual freedom and self-determination to bring his protagonist to life. However, Gutiérrez Alea produces his films in Cuba, a socialist country located approximately ninety miles from the U.S. As a result, he makes a point of presenting himself and his work as situated within a politically, socially, and culturally free environment. In his interviews especially, he is careful to address the international perspective on his work and on Cuba in general. After the release of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, many critics in the U.S. and western Europe saw him as a dissident working in a repressive environment, and characterized him as a beacon of individual artistic freedom burning brightly in the shadow of a repressive Communist regime. In his 1977 interview with Julianne Burton, he replies to these critics by attempting to describe how he achieves, and has achieved, freedom and self-fulfillment as an artist working within Cuba's socialist regime. He argues that Cuban filmmakers and artists enjoy a more profound freedom and sense of self-fulfillment than those who work within a liberal democratic environment, since those democracies perpetuate class warfare while Cuba attempts to involve all citizens in the political process. Both Cuba and the U.S. hold freedom as a national ideal, but the Cuban ideal emphasizes the relationship between the individual and the collective.

For Gutiérrez Alea, freedom means consciously identifying with and contributing to a collective that orients its activities toward eliminating exploitation and inequality. In this context, individuals are for the first time able to exercise genuine control over their destinies and actual rather than apparent free will. In countries where society is based on inequitable relations, freedom may occasionally be granted by the powerful to the

powerless, but this is “apparent freedom [...] more illusory than real” (Gutiérrez Alea “Beyond the Reflection of Reality” 129). Freedom in Cuba, by contrast, derives from an awareness of working together to achieve the common goals of change and redemption; the people are free when they can shape their individual experiences and destinies, when they no longer have to accept their lot in life but can instead work toward realizing their potential and reaping the rewards of this self-fulfillment. But realizing one’s potential in Cuba can only be achieved within a collective context. Individual success is seen as ultimately self-defeating. For example, Gutiérrez Alea indicates how this view of freedom differs from “the purely individual creative freedom so precious to people in capitalist society” (129). Collective achievement is more significant than personal achievement because individual success when all succeed is a true measure of worth and a genuine source of self-fulfillment:

To find my own personal fulfillment, I need the existence of the entire Cuban film movement as well. Without such a movement, my work might appear as a kind of ‘accident’ within a given artistic tendency. Under such circumstances, one might enjoy some degree of importance, but without ever achieving the level of self-realization to which you really aspire. This is not measured by the level of recognition you might achieve, but rather by the knowledge that you are giving all you can and that the environment you work in guarantees you that possibility. (130)

Gutiérrez Alea reorients personal fulfillment and self-realization from individual achievement to individual contribution. One is not just a big fish in a small pond, but rather part of a flourishing ecosystem where the largest fish are those who attain their status as a result of talent, knowledge and contribution to the whole. Gutiérrez Alea also differentiates between importance and self-realization in his response, which is essentially a way of distinguishing between surface appearance and depth. One may

achieve superficial, or apparent, recognition from the outside world or from others, but inside, one will eventually comprehend that this recognition is not enough to create a strong sense of self-worth or self-identity. Self-realization as an artist and an individual occurs when one contributes at the height of his or her powers and creativity within a competitive environment that guarantees success for those with the ability to achieve it.

We can also see Brakhage relying in his practice on this dynamic of individual contribution to a larger whole. He uses Jane's footage and her figure, as well as the figure of his son Bearthm, for his *Dog Star Man* films and, since his family is involved in their making, the films on one level do appear to be a collective effort. But Brakhage determines the shape and use of these contributions and by doing so usurps the individual sovereignty and agency of Jane and Bearthm. They become contributing factors that serve a larger cause – the realization of Brakhage's films and his own self-realization as an artist. Gutiérrez Alea also describes, in his interview responses, artistic contributions to a larger cause. But in Gutiérrez Alea's description, all people can partake in and benefit from participation in the artistic process instead of one or a few. He positions freedom and individual achievement within the revolutionary context. Freedom and individuality are possible because of the revolution, and in turn they must contribute to its ongoing strength and well-being. He addresses freedom and individuality to respond to U.S. and western European critics and he conceptualizes them in revolutionary terms in order to exemplify a proper "revolutionary attitude" for internal audiences. We must situate Gutiérrez Alea's statements and his films within this revolutionary context in order to understand how his film practice exemplifies a particular concept of freedom and

the individual, especially since *Memorias del subdesarrollo* is a direct response to this revolutionary context and a mirror of this revolutionary attitude.

Similar careful attention to freedom and the individual appears in Fidel Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals," where he lays out a principle of tolerance for all points of view as a tenet of the new socialist government.<sup>5</sup> Castro gave this speech in 1960, during the first congress of the Cuban Union of Artists and Writers. Here, he attempts to ease the fears of these intellectuals regarding creative freedoms under the new regime. Castro references a fear expressed by the intellectuals, that Cuban policy might resemble "the despotic hands of the Stalinist Revolution" (295). After the Russian revolution, revolutionary politics and radical art forms were seen as complementary, and avant-garde artistic experimentation flourished. But some elements in the Communist party rejected modernist styles as decadent bourgeois art. In 1932, socialist realism became the official art form and all art was scrutinized for its adherence to this policy. Art became a tool for state propaganda and those artists who refused to abide by state policy were severely punished. The Cuban government, like the early Soviet state, began institutionalizing cultural production immediately after the end of the revolution. One of Castro's first official acts was to found the Cuban Institute for Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC), which controls all film and TV production and distribution. But Castro attempts to allay these fears of despotic control and censorship by assuring the artists and writers that tolerance will be the official state policy. First, he reminds the intellectuals gathered there that freedom is an inherent quality and natural consequence of the revolution: "Permit me to tell you in the first place that the Revolution defends freedom; that the Revolution has

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<sup>5</sup> This speech can be found in Fidel Castro, "Words to the Intellectuals," *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, Ed. Lee Baxandall, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972, 267-298.

brought the country a very high degree of freedom; that the Revolution cannot by its very nature be an enemy of freedom; that if some are worried about whether the Revolution is going to stifle their creative spirit, that worry is unnecessary, that worry has no reason to exist” (272). He describes the state’s philosophy regarding works of art in all-encompassing terms: “within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing” and then explicitly extends this artistic freedom to all artists and intellectuals, even those “who are not genuinely revolutionaries,” but who “can find within the Revolution a place to work and create” (276).

But Castro’s rhetoric of freedom also creates limits. Castro insists that freedom is an integral part of the revolution: that the revolution has brought freedom to all people of Cuba and the revolutionary government will defend this freedom, and will do so in part by protecting creative freedom – hence the expansive state artistic policy and invitation to all honest artists to practice their work freely. Castro first insists on the link between freedom and the revolution and carefully describes the many ways they are connected. He does this in order to make these connections apparent, so the artists and writers can see how each relates to the other. Castro then establishes a finite area of practice for artists: the revolution. As he clearly states in the beginning of his speech, freedom of form is not an issue. All formal experiments will be tolerated. But freedom of content is a more subtle matter since obviously counter-revolutionary content will not be acceptable – and the ICAIC and other state organizations, which have final approval of all artworks and oversight for their distribution, will censor and withhold those works deemed to be counter to the revolution.

In order to concretize what constitutes revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, Castro sketches out a taxonomy that classifies and orders different types of individuals within contemporary society in relation to their attitude toward the revolution, and he uses the artist as the base unit for this taxonomy. After Castro dismisses the artists' concern that the state will intervene in their work, he compares this concern with concerns about one's own artistic ability: those who are unsure of their revolutionary convictions are like those who do not have confidence in their own art and artistic ability. He implies that good revolutionaries and good artists are one and the same since their creative processes are inspired by and oriented toward the revolution. Castro indicates "that doubt is left only to the writers and artists who, without being counter-revolutionaries, are not revolutionaries either. And it is correct that a writer or artist who is not truly revolutionary should pose that question: that an honest writer or artist, who is capable of comprehending the cause and the justice of the Revolution without being part of it, should face that problem squarely" (272-273). There are revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries and then those who are neither revolutionary nor counter-revolutionary. This variation in attitudes toward the revolution constitutes the "real situation" of contemporary Cuban society: the counter-revolutionaries flee to Florida, the revolutionaries embrace the new regime and those who are neither wait and see. Though they are not actively counter-revolutionary, they do pose a threat to the revolution. The revolutionary nation remains an ideal rather than a reality as long as these individuals continue to resist thinking and acting in accordance with the revolution. Their presence generates an oppositional pull that contradicts, or checks, the complete establishment of the revolutionary nation. For the nation to achieve its fullest realization, the members of

this final group must examine their attitude toward the revolution; they must examine themselves in the face of current events and the newly changed reality in order to become revolutionary. Once they become truly revolutionary, they can contribute to the establishment of the nation and will be able to enjoy its benefits as fully recognized citizens. Though Castro recognizes freedom and individual autonomy, he attempts to shape them in a very particular way by relating them to the revolution. Freedom and autonomy for all are consequences of the revolution and each person must actively participate in the defense and institutionalization of the revolution and its principles so these benefits endure. Those individuals who choose not to participate actively, “should face that problem squarely” and be willing to accept the consequences of diminished freedom and autonomy.

Gutiérrez Alea uses the problem Castro describes as the foundation for *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. In his 1982 manifesto “The Viewer’s Dialectic,” Gutiérrez Alea outlines his version of this problem: the masses have a high degree of political awareness as a result of the revolution, but they are not actively participating in the building of a revolutionary society – or, more specifically, a society that reflects the ideals and principles of the revolution. The once dynamic and ever-changing reality of the revolution has become ordinary and familiar to the people, and the profundity of the changes produced by the revolution are not as “‘apparent’ now nor are they immediately visible to the observer.” As a result, the Cuban people cling to the concepts and symbols of the revolution instead of “strengthening their ideological coherence and reaffirming daily the principles which give life to the Revolution” (109). While they appear to support the revolution, in their everyday lives, they succumb to reactionary tendencies

that undercut the successful institutionalization of the revolution at the level of the social. Because of this, the Cuban nation will remain divided against itself and will not be unified and total – it will not cohere – until the social sphere catches up with the political and the people, all of the people, display a proper “revolutionary attitude towards life,” in other words, until they think and act in accordance with the revolution. Thus Gutiérrez Alea’s film theory reflects Castro’s “Words to the Intellectuals” in the sense that individual freedom must be respected, but it must also be directed. “The Viewer’s Dialectic” lays out the theory of a film form that attempts to shape spectator consciousness so that it manifests the proper attitude toward the revolution and so it produces actions that directly relate to and further the ideals and principles of the revolution. Like the other Latin American filmmakers, Gutiérrez Alea wants to use his films to promote a revolutionary consciousness among spectators. But this revolutionary consciousness will not inspire spectators to challenge and then actively counter the historical and political context where they find themselves, a context that includes the film they are viewing; instead, this consciousness prompts them to embrace this context and to bring their own thoughts and actions into alignment with it.

To accomplish this goal, Gutiérrez Alea (again, like the other Latin American filmmakers) wants to pierce surface appearances to reveal the truth below, a truth that contradicts appearances. But where the other filmmakers examine the socio-political and economic forces that constitute the apparent reality of their nations in order to reveal a truth that counters this surface reality, Gutiérrez Alea turns this negative dialectical investigation to focus on the individuals that comprise Cuban society. His is not an examination of the contradictory realities that comprise the socio-political systems of the

nation. Instead, he examines how the contradictory impulses in individuals erode the continuing progress of the revolutionary Cuban nation. He wants the people to examine their attitudes and actions to be sure they are revolutionary rather than simply appearing to be revolutionary. In *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, he attempts to show the people how insufficiently revolutionary attitudes affect individual lives and the life of the nation. Unless individuals catch up with the dynamic revolutionary progress of the nation and national events, they risk increasing marginalization and even self-destruction.

*Memorias del subdesarrollo* reveals the profound changes that have transformed reality by focusing on isolated aspects of that reality, which are not immediately apparent in the flow of everyday events. He renders the progressive nature of reality apparent in order to create identification with it, so that individuals will want to take an active role in continuing the changes wrought by the revolution and participating within the dynamic stream of events that have placed Cuba as a nation among nations, and specifically a nation with a significant role in the international affairs of the Cold War. He contrasts these documentary views of a progressive reality with the regressive subjective tendencies of a bourgeois individual, Sergio Carmona, who is neither revolutionary nor counter-revolutionary. Gutiérrez Alea wants to generate spectator identification with this fictional protagonist, but then he punishes that identification in order to prompt critical self-reflection in the film's spectators. Sergio represents the ideal bourgeois man – rich, attractive, intelligent and connected – and, as such, he invites identification, despite his continuing commitment to bourgeois ideology. But as the film progresses, Sergio's subjective reality becomes overwhelmed by the documentary reality of national events, such as the flight of middle class Cubans to the United States, the public trial of the Bay

of Pigs invaders and the climactic days leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis. The force of these events and Sergio's increasing self-alienation from them ultimately result in his entrapment and disappearance. Much of the film centers on Sergio's individual thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the world around him. However, these subjective responses are consistently placed in relation to the reality that surrounds him. In other words, the world is not just a backdrop or an object that provokes Sergio's responses. Instead, the events that make up contemporary Cuban reality are continuous, foregrounded presences not just in Sergio's life, but also in the film itself. It might be a stretch to call these events characters, or to call contemporary Cuban reality a character, but they do serve as catalysts for Sergio's actions and reactions and they eventually overwhelm him and usurp his place as protagonist of the film.

*Memorias del subdesarrollo* shows the birth of a new revolutionary nation, a birth that requires bourgeois notions of individual subjectivity to be reformed and reoriented. The individual must become a part of this national collective, or else risk disenfranchisement, a disenfranchisement that strips the individual of his or her national identity *and* self-identity. In this scenario, the bourgeois individual actually disappears from the film just as conventional, or bourgeois, notions of the individual must disappear conceptually for the nation to come into being. To present this process, Gutiérrez Alea structures the film in three parts. The first part focuses solely on Sergio's subjective responses to the world around him; the second part, though still grounded in Sergio's responses, shows how the progress of institutionalizing the nation's ideals at the level of the social increasingly alienates Sergio, driving him deeper into himself and putting him

at odds with the direction of the nation; and, in the third part, current events take over Sergio's life and his dominant position as protagonist within the film.

The film's narrative begins with an intimate personal moment and thereby places the spectator in a direct relationship with Sergio's subjective perspective from the beginning. In this initial section of the film, the spectator has access to Sergio's perceptions, thoughts, and memories and also glimpses his current, disheveled state-of-mind. In the opening segment, close up shots show Sergio bidding his parents and wife goodbye as they flee Havana for the United States. This intimacy continues after Sergio leaves the airport. Though he rides home on the bus, a public form of transportation, he is virtually alone, lost in his thoughts and memories, as the film replays scenes from the airport to accompany Sergio's musings about his wife, their life together, and her future in the U.S. The film cuts to Sergio entering his apartment. The subjective point-of-view tracking shot of this entrance, accompanied by Sergio's whistled tune and footsteps on the soundtrack, positions us, the spectators, to become Sergio. The film cuts to a brief montage that presents views of the apartment. These views give the spectator a feel for Sergio's luxurious surroundings but they also indicate Sergio's state of mind. Though the apartment is spacious and well-appointed, it is cluttered and disheveled. Now that Sergio is alone, he no longer bothers to keep up appearances and he expands his own living space to take up the entirety of the apartment. The film cuts to an extreme close up of words Sergio is typing on a typewriter, as his voice over narration continues, and he tells us that he intends to begin keeping a diary and writing a book, a distinctly bourgeois, intellectual pastime and a direct reference to Edmundo Desnoes's book, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, which the film adapts. In the next scene, Sergio looks out over the city

through his telescope, a symbol of his alienation and one of the mechanisms he uses to keep his distance from the events that surround him. Within the subjective point of view iris frame provided by the camera-as-telescope, the film presents a montage of images from the city below accompanied by Sergio's voice-over comments on the scenes presented. Once again, the spectator has direct access to Sergio's subjective perspective. We experience the city through Sergio's contemplation of it. In effect, he transforms the city and its everyday activities into his own documentary film, and it becomes an object that receives the brunt of his distaste for this underdeveloped island and its revolution. Also in this scene, we see what Sergio sees. Or, more specifically, we see what he comments upon. So though he comments upon what he sees, which is onscreen, we (the spectators) are the ones who actually see these images. Though we can see and interpret these images for ourselves, Sergio's continuous captioning frames this interpretative possibility.

In this opening sequence, though we see Sergio remaining at a distance from the people and events that surround him, we as spectators cannot help but identify with Sergio. We cannot escape him or his perspective of the world around him. The film puts a great deal of formal pressure behind producing the identification Gutiérrez Alea wants to create in the spectator. Though he grounds this identification in Sergio's construction as an ideal, the film essentially forces the spectator to identify with Sergio, and in some instances to become Sergio. He inhabits every shot and his voice over commentary captions every aspect of the world we see. The film's form in this opening section makes objective distance from Sergio almost impossible for the spectator. These forceful formal tactics continue throughout the film and begin to prompt us to question just how free the

individual, and the individual spectator, is to maintain his or her autonomous thoughts and actions. Just as in Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals" and Gutiérrez Alea's "The Viewer's Dialectic," though individual freedom may be a part of the revolutionary ideal, individual freedoms are limited to the bounds of the revolution, however expansive those boundaries might be ("within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing"). As Sergio is soon to discover, those individuals who think freely outside of the revolution, will find themselves increasingly marginalized, both by their own thoughts and by the events that inexorably take place around them.

The film begins to put pressure on this identification and inhabitation of Sergio's perspective in the next sequence of the film, where his openly counter-revolutionary thoughts narrate his *flâneur*-like walk through the streets of Havana. Sergio is not only distanced from the revolutionary context, he appears openly hostile to it, though only in his thoughts. Though he does not act upon his counter-revolutionary tendencies, which would make him a true counter-revolutionary, his thoughts preclude him from fully embracing the revolution and acting in accordance with it. This section, and the one that follows, clearly establish Sergio as the contradictory individual subject – neither counter-revolutionary nor revolutionary – whom Castro and Gutiérrez Alea insist must engage in a critical self-examination in order to eliminate their internal contradiction, a contradiction that prevents the individual and the nation from realizing their full revolutionary potential.

This sequence opens with a documentary street scene montage presented as a series of subjective point of view tracking shots, which then settles into a city symphony portrait of people going about their daily lives. The film positions us once again within

Sergio's point of view, this time as he walks around the city. He is among the people but he remains alone, distanced from them by his critical comments, first about the city and then about the people themselves. As harpsichord music plays on the soundtrack, a montage of unattractive, old and slovenly or kitschy individuals unfolds onscreen. Sergio says nothing on the voice-over track, for once, but we can tell by the faces presented that these individuals comprise Sergio's view of the people – and they are certainly not ideals, nor are they presented in a sympathetic or laudatory way. They are obviously poor and uneducated and they are not participating in what might be called productive activities. They lap dripping ice cream cones, sit staring disinterestedly into space, or walk aimlessly. They are clearly a part of the social fabric, but their presentation makes them seem to be impediments rather than the key to an ideal society. At the end of the montage, Sergio wonders, in voice over, what the sense of life is for these people and for him. He immediately shifts from contemplating the lives and experiences of the people to solipsistic self-reflection. He concludes, “[b]ut I'm not like them.” With this conclusion, the film stops its progress and freezes Sergio into a still image, then fades to black. The film seems to punish Sergio here for actively differentiating, and distancing, himself from the majority of the people. It paralyzes him and then erases him from view; he disappears into darkness and thus the film foreshadows his ultimate end. In addition, the film appears to attribute his disappearance with his admission, thereby placing the responsibility for his final destruction on him. He asserts, emphatically, that he is not like them. He chooses to distance himself from the people and the events that surround him, and this choice – a choice he makes of his own free will – has serious consequences for which he must take responsibility. The film positions Sergio to self-destruct. He thinks

and chooses freely, but because these actions occur outside of the revolution, they go against revolutionary progress and so are destructive. But they do not destroy the society or the nation, which we will see proceeds according to its own progressive trajectory. Instead, this outsider thinking destroys those individuals who position themselves at odds to this progress.

However, though the film continues to keep this sort of pressure on Sergio, and on the spectator who identifies with him, it does not characterize Sergio as an empty, one-dimensional character type, nor does it present him as a counterrevolutionary. The film acknowledges the real situation of Cuba and presents the subtleties and inherent contradictions that pervade the thoughts and affiliations of most honest Cubans. Those who are neither counter-revolutionary nor revolutionary are not bad; they are simply confused because the dynamic progress of the revolution does not make sense according to the habitual associations created by the bourgeois worldview. Sergio, and the other divided people he represents, identify with the bourgeois worldview and structures of power they know from North American and European culture. Gutiérrez Alea's frustration with the people comes from their inability to see the contradiction of identifying with the bourgeois worldview that represses them. Through his protagonist, Gutiérrez Alea points out the persistence of such pre-revolutionary contradictory thinking in Cuba's post-revolutionary context. He also wants the people to recognize the contradictions Sergio exhibits in their own thoughts and actions so they, unlike Sergio, can choose to realign their attitude so it wholly embraces the revolution. Sergio must be a conflicted character in order for this spectator self-examination to occur. To represent

Sergio's contradictory nature, the film's next segment, entitled "Pablo," contrasts Sergio with a true counterrevolutionary.

In this segment, the film shows us that Sergio understands the need for change. In this sense, he is a revolutionary since he agrees with and supports the revolution's efforts to change reality in order to stop the people's exploitation. His friend Pablo's ceaseless chatter provides him with the opportunity to distinguish himself from someone who does not see or support revolutionary progress. In addition, Pablo introduces the subject of Cuba in relation to international politics by touching on a variety of topics that relate to the Cold War and Batista. Putting his faith in U.S. "know how," Pablo doubts Cuba's ability to stand up to the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and he wants to flee Cuba in order to avoid what he sees as the inevitable downfall of the revolutionary nation-state. He cannot believe that "these people" were able to defeat Batista and he sees their victory as short-lived. He admits that people said things had to change under Batista but he does not admit to seeing that need himself, and he admits that he chose not to participate in the revolution to produce this change since it was not his business. He confesses to thinking about changing his apolitical ways in the coming days because he feels the pressure of the Cold War and doubts Cuba's ability to protect its sovereignty and its people. But Sergio keeps his distance from Pablo's counter-revolutionary sentiments and lack of faith in the nation. Though he largely remains silent and lets Pablo speak, he does occasionally disagree with him. Also, while Pablo negotiates for some auto bodywork, Sergio daydreams about the hunger that has existed in Cuba "since the Spanish came." The film presents a sort of mini-documentary on hunger as Sergio provides voice over narration and statistics about the number of deaths from hunger. This film-within-a-film technique

is used once again in the “Playa Giron Prisoners” documentary that Sergio narrates in the next sequence. Here too, as in the telescope documentary, he presents his view of reality. But here we see he understands the problems and hardships created by colonialism. While Pablo does not care about the difficulties of life under Batista and refuses to work to change that reality, it is clear here that Sergio does understand that the political system has to be changed in order to prevent further deaths.

But Sergio’s attitude toward changing reality is clearly a past-tense attitude. He no longer keeps up with or participates in the dynamic current events that shape contemporary life and politics in Cuba. We begin to see how these progressive events begin to threaten Sergio’s regressive mindset in the next section of the film, where the reality of such events begins to overtake Sergio’s subjective perspective. This second section of the film begins after Sergio rejects the young woman he aggressively seduced, Elena, because she reminds him of underdevelopment. The film presents Elena as one of the people, a young woman from an impoverished background who naively tries to find her way in this new society. As Sergio confesses in his voice over narration, the world in Elena’s head is different from that in his, and he is disappointed that she will not change in order to adapt to his. Paradoxically, Sergio had earlier critiqued the women of Cuba for being inconstant, shifting their attitudes and ideas incessantly in order to adapt to the times, and then holding himself up as an example of consistency. But consistency in Cuba’s dynamic environment has become a handicap. Because of his consistency, Sergio is left with only his memories to keep him company now that his friends and family have gone and he has rejected Elena. This section begins with a high-angle zoom-in approximately one minute in duration, which brings Sergio from extreme long shot to

extreme close up as he predicts his own destruction and the reasons for it in his voice-over narration. Instead of Sergio viewing the world from his position above everyone, now the spectators look at Sergio from their position above him. Since the camera is positioned at a great distance from Sergio, as the zoom-in brings him into close up, his face disintegrates into the grain of the film; the zoom continues until Sergio's face is an indistinguishable field of grainy abstraction.

From this moment on, the film accentuates and hastens Sergio's process of disintegration from society and within himself. For one thing, Sergio's memories begin to take over the film. The first section consists largely of his comments on the present-day world around him; but the past becomes the present in this section as Sergio becomes increasingly withdrawn. Early on in this section, the film sets up a lengthy flashback to one of Sergio's first loves, a beautiful blond woman whose parents had fled Hitler's Germany, and who believed in Sergio's capacity to become a writer. He remembers her as the best thing that ever happened to him. But she was lost long ago – just like the people in the photos he peruses as he sits alone in his apartment. In addition, though he successfully shuts out Elena, he is not able to keep at bay what she represents – a nation in the process of being born. Two bureaucrats come to interview him about his apartment and then take it from him without telling him why or preparing him for the event. Also, Elena's family charges him with rape and he is forced to go out among the people to face these charges in court. Originally, he had agreed to marry Elena to keep the police out of the affair, but the family insists on bringing these charges against him and Sergio is swept along in these events: "I was going to be dragged to its conclusion. I was afraid." Sergio begins to realize now that the everyday life of the nation will continue, whether he

voluntarily participates or not. In fact, he cannot exist as a member of society without participating in these events. He can try to distance himself, to hold himself above others, but the progress of the post-revolutionary nation will not allow him to maintain his pre-revolutionary position. He is free to choose to participate, or not, but he must also face the consequences of his decision. With this realization, the confident Sergio becomes paralyzed with fear and he begins to weaken, physically and mentally.

Also in this section, the formal dynamic of the film changes as the camera seems to examine Sergio more aggressively, seeming to put pressure on him to account for his thoughts and actions. Sergio still provides voice-over narration of his thoughts, but there are no longer any subjective point-of-view shots. Instead, the camera continuously zooms in on Sergio. Sergio no longer contemplates the world; instead the world contemplates him. We see him disintegrating, falling apart because of his fear and alienation. The film gives us a closer look at this disintegration at the same time that the camera seems to participate in it. Yet at the same time, the film appears to resist its impulse to destroy Sergio. It still permits him the freedom to choose. At first it appears that his seduction of Elena has turned into the threat of a forced wedding and official action, as if he were finally being punished for his sins now that the people have come to power. But Sergio agrees to marry Elena and to go to court and face the charges, and he is acquitted as a result. The film makes it clear that he is acquitted in part because of the naivete of the people. During the legal process, Elena's family answer too openly and honestly; her father admits threatening to kill Sergio and her brother confesses that their mother had taken her to a doctor for examination before she met Sergio. Though the people are in the

process of being born, as Gutiérrez Alea describes it, they are not born yet and are thus unable to acquire the justice they seek.

This event is important because it shows the nation as fragmented and weak. Individuals turn against one another for their own personal agendas instead of pulling together to work for the nation. Throughout the courtroom segment, framing and editing are used to make this fragmentation explicit: they separate Sergio from Elena's family, and then separate the family members from one another. In addition, the film fragments itself in the sentencing phase by relying on non-synch sound and non-chronological images. As we hear the sentence being read, we see the judges walk out and then the defense attorney summing up the case. This final segment indicates the implications of this fragmentation: there is no unity, and regression becomes the norm. After the acquittal, Sergio's voice-over thoughts consider the ways that this fragmentation has ultimately defeated them all. Sergio, as the exemplar of the bourgeois, every-man-for-himself approach, wins the case, but he ultimately loses, as he admits to himself and to the spectators: "I've seen too much to be innocent. Their [Elena's family's] mind is too tangled to make them guilty." In this section, the film considers the personal, or individual, effects of this fragmentation, but in the next section, it expands this consideration to the (inter)national stage in its integration of documentary and newsreel footage from the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In the third, and final, section national and international events overwhelm Sergio and the film, and his subjective perspective, which has guided and shaped the film to this point, becomes displaced by the dynamic progression of real events. One morning, Sergio picks up the morning paper and glances over the headlines that announce the increasing

international tensions as the U.S. prepares for the Cuban Missile Crisis. Once Sergio glances at the headlines, the film cuts to a close up of those headlines and the surrounding text and then launches a montage comprised of the different sections of the newspaper. The film leaves Sergio and finds new interest in the diverse collection of news and events covered by the paper. When the film does return to Sergio and his response to these events, it lingers on him only long enough to register his paranoia and then it returns to portraying current events. In the middle of this section, the film launches its own film-within-a-film documentary in response to these occurrences, where before Sergio had been the source of these asides. It superimposes a current event-related intertitle over Sergio's face and then cuts to newsreel footage of Crisis events. On the soundtrack, we hear Kennedy speaking as if on a short wave radio and then see a long scrolling panel of text translating his words into Spanish. In this way, the film situates the spectator firmly within the Cuban context. This text roll is positioned over images of maps and photographs where the missile sites are supposed to be located. These "background" images then shift to newsreel footage of the U.S. army ramping up its preparations for battle. An image of a mushroom cloud concludes the montage section and the film cuts to a street scene montage of Cuban preparations for the impending conflict. Sergio, again walking through the streets, comments on the voice-over track, captioning the various images we see as the people playing at going to war. Sergio has no faith in the nation and his comments center around how Cuba is too small and too poor to stand up to the U.S. As Sergio continues his voice over commentary, the film intercuts images of Sergio with images of Cuba's preparation for war; these images show the people excited and ready to fight. Each set of images (those of Sergio and those of the preparations) are shown in

equal duration, and then the film cuts to newsreel footage of Castro's UN speech where he insists that Cuba will "defend our integrity and our sovereignty" and refuse to allow inspections. After images of the speech, the crosscut montage begins again, first with Sergio reiterating the fears he has already expressed, then images of the country's preparation and then a longer clip of Castro's speech.

Sergio's fear has paralyzed him; he simply wanders aimlessly in these shots and is only able to repeat the same mantra of fears about Cuba's vulnerability. In contrast, the images of Castro's speech and Cuba's preparations increase in vitality. Castro ends his speech with his dynamic trademark phrase "*Patria o muerte, venceremos*" ("Fatherland or death, we shall overcome!") and the preparations for war intensify in sound and image, making an aural clash with the images that feature Sergio, thereby heightening the contrast between them. The film then shows Sergio in his apartment, and the film makes clear that Sergio is coming very close to "end[ing] up like a cockroach – squashed by his fear, by his impotence, by everything," as Gutiérrez Alea describes the film's end in his interview with Burton (118). Sergio watches water go down the drain, stares at the moon through his telescope, and paces around his apartment. The film's presentation of his pacing literally forces Sergio to meet himself coming and going as the editing places opposing screen directions in juxtaposition with one another. The final image of Sergio shows him in bed playing with a lighter, which he does not light. He does not act – but the nation does. And the film ends with the sound of Sergio repeatedly opening and closing the lighter's top over a tracking shot that moves between two long lines of troops. He may not be willing to act, but the nation is. The subjective point-of-view shot no longer belongs to Sergio, but to an anonymous national representative. As dawn breaks,

we see Sergio's telescope but not Sergio and the autonomous camera movement picks up again on Sergio's balcony. His view from above is now inhabited by another subject, and by a subject whose interest is focused on the nation and its preparations for war. A slow pan of the quiet city tilts down to observe troops pulling up large guns to arm the roof tops and a pan left comes to rest on a long line of troop carriers and transports driving below. Sergio has disappeared and his alienated perspective has been replaced by one oriented toward the state and its preparations to defend itself.

In his interview with Julianne Burton, Gutiérrez Alea claims that he uses Sergio to trap spectators into identifying with an individual who ultimately destroys himself because he "is always heading in the other direction from everyone else" (Interview with Burton 118). This statement gives us insight not only into Gutiérrez Alea's objective for the film, but also into his revolutionary vision of Cuba's contemporary reality. The current events of the nation are progressive, moving in a direction that ensures the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. The events explicitly portrayed or alluded to in the film – the self-imposed counterrevolutionary flight to the U.S., the public trial of the Bay of Pigs invaders and the Cuban Missile Crisis – are all events where the post-revolutionary Cuban state asserts and proves its sovereignty and its strength to counter-revolutionary forces within and outside of its borders. Gutiérrez Alea also mentions that the film shows a people in the process of being born, and as the film progresses we shift from Sergio's distorted vision of the people to documentary views of a young, strong, and excited group of individuals who celebrate their nation through May Day parades and their preparations to defend Cuba during the missile crisis. They are true revolutionaries and while they celebrate, Sergio heads in the other direction in his desire to be alone.

Ultimately, he is a counter-revolutionary, but his solitary, “counter” withdrawal from national events cannot counteract the force of revolutionary dynamism. The collective, revolutionary reality of the people overwhelms Sergio’s individualist, subjective reality.

The objective reality in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* represents the revolutionary Cuban state and its political actions, and is thus a subjective reality constructed from identification with a particular set of principles and ideals. Though this film at first glance appears to differ from the other films of this chapter because Gutiérrez Alea claims to use objective reality to critique subjectivity, in fact Gutiérrez Alea’s protagonist, who clings to his bourgeois ideas even in the face of revolutionary political change, provides us with critical insight into the director’s view of reality. This version of reality encompasses actual, material social and political changes, which Gutiérrez Alea inserts via newsreel segments into *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. But by inserting these events into the film as tools to achieve a certain purpose, Gutiérrez Alea represents and reconstructs these events in order to make the film realistic:

Such a way of looking at reality *through* fiction offers spectators the possibility of appreciating, enjoying, and better understanding reality. [...] Cinematic realism does not lie in its alleged ability to capture reality ‘just like it is’ (which is ‘just like it appears to be’), but rather lies in its ability to reveal, through associations and connections between various isolated aspects of reality – that is to say, through creating a ‘new reality’ – deeper, more essential layers of reality itself (Interview with Burton 122).

Gutiérrez Alea reveals the limits of representing reality on film. He admits that film cannot capture reality but instead captures how reality appears to be. But Gutiérrez Alea sees this as a positive attribute since, by calling attention to appearances, film can isolate the various associations and connections that construct reality. In other words, he

acknowledges the constructed nature of reality and intends to use the realism of his films to investigate reality's construction. However, his filmic investigations are firmly oriented toward constructing a revolutionary reality. His realism is thus an instrument that works to institutionalize revolutionary ideology; his realism constructs one reality just as it works to deconstruct another reality. In the passage above, he also calls into question concepts of freedom and the individual, since he introduces another definition for each, definitions that attempt to counter bourgeois notions of both. For him, individuals can only find self-realization by contributing to a collective. But as we discovered in Brakhage's theory and practice, contribution (rather than participation) can signify the limits of autonomy and agency since an individual subject's contribution to the whole does not necessarily mean that the individual will be able to control or shape his or her contribution or representation. Also, Gutiérrez Alea believes that an individual can be more truly free within a revolutionary context since he or she finally has the ability to exert control and free will within their surroundings, unlike those who live in inequitable societies and only enjoy an apparent freedom bestowed occasionally from those in power.

Gutiérrez Alea's unremitting focus on countering these bourgeois ideals makes him blind to the limits of his own revolutionary attitudes and to the contradictory impulses he creates in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Though the film presents Sergio as free to choose and free to think in accordance with his own belief system, the film's insistence on a revolutionary attitude ultimately disenfranchises Sergio. His freedom and individuality are an illusion – put in place as an object lesson. This illusion of freedom and individuality begs the question, when power is transferred from one system to

another, does one set of illusions simply replace another? In addition, when the people are liberated from one repressive context will they only be placed within another limiting one by this power shift? Gutiérrez Alea appears so interested in countering U.S. and western European bourgeois notions of the individual and freedom that he creates versions that oppose – but do not radically reconfigure – these ideals. Though power may shift from Right to Left, from capitalist to socialist, power is still power and continues to rely on the manipulation of reality and of the people. Gutiérrez Alea puts his faith in the Marxist vision of progressive history. He believes that current events, which prove the strength of the new revolutionary nation, are leading the nation in a progressive route. But Rocha, in the aftermath of a violent military coup, has a more cautious view of history. For him, history is a series of self-identical cycles endlessly repeating. He hopes that individual self-sacrifice and a mix of tenderness and violence can interrupt these cycles. But even he is not certain of such a possibility – and even he has his blind spots.

**Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (*Land in Anguish*): The Power of the People of the Filmmaker**

*Terra em Transe* represents a transitional period in Brazilian history and in Rocha's work. The growth of a nationalist cinema in Brazil had been made possible by the nationalist government of Getúlio Vargas (1937-45 and 1951-54), and this cinematic form continued to be nurtured by the atmosphere of increasing democratization under the elected government of Juscelino Kubitschek in 1955. But everything changed in 1964 when a military coup overthrew João Goulart and then again in 1968 when the coup-within-a-coup greatly eroded cultural tolerance within the country (Rich 275-276). Released in 1967, *Terra em Transe* expresses an emerging sense of crisis that stands in

stark contrast to the confidence of earlier, more democratic times. Rocha's anger and disappointment in relation to the coup is palpable in this film; there is a prevailing sense of hopelessness that haunts the narrative. This hopelessness derives from the fear and frustration that history is simply a repetition of cycles grounded in colonial power relations, that power may change its appearance but it does not change its basic nature, which involves repression and manipulation. There is also an anxiety that the people, who derive their identities from those in power, will remain unable to speak for themselves and thus fail to break free from the conceptual and material systems that continuously marginalize them. Rocha fears that the people will remain powerless not only because of the limits put in place by the structures of power, but also because of their own mistaken perceptions regarding their subordinate position. They believe they are powerless and thus they are powerless. At the film's climax, the dying protagonist, Paulo Martins, bitterly gives voice to this frustration and specific shape to this hopelessness, specifically regarding the people of Brazil:

We are eternal sons of darkness, of inquisition and conversion. And we are forever sons of fear, of our brother's blood. And we don't accept our violence. We don't accept our ideas, neither our barbarian hate. We don't assume our stupid and feeble past, plenty of prayers and laziness. [...] These indolent races, servile to God and the lords. A typical passive indolence of indolent people. Ah, I can't believe it's all true! How long can we stand it! How long, beyond faith and hope, can we stand it? Until when, beyond patience and love, can we stand it? Until when, oblivious to fear, beyond childhood and adolescence, can we stand it?

In this climactic scene, which represents his final conversion from self-centered poet-politician to revolutionary agent of change, Paulo expresses anger, disappointment and frustration, but also tenderness and love for the people; according to Rocha, in "An Aesthetic of Hunger," love and tenderness fuel the desire for change. The people put their

faith in religion and authority and become passive and lazy as a result. They pray for change rather than working for it themselves. They fear bloodshed instead of embracing violence and their own barbarian hate. They do not examine the past in order to plan for the future. They can still stand the eternal cycles of history where one form of authority replaces another – and where each form is simply a different face of the same external influence (i.e., Christianity and colonial power). Throughout this soliloquy, Paulo uses “we” as a way to position himself as a member of the people. Though he attempts to fashion his identity in connection with them, his knowledge and understanding of the situation is also clearly outside the realm of the people. As we will see, Paulo’s ambiguous role, both inside and outside the people, reflects the role of the artist and filmmaker who is both one of the people and also beyond the people, in a vanguard position that attempts to make the forces of repression visible in order to move beyond them. But as Paulo also shows us, in making certain limits visible, one can also reinscribe them. The frustration Paulo – and Rocha – feel in regards to the people ultimately limits their view of them and their potential to create change.

Disappointed by populism’s failure and the passive response of the people in the face of the 1964 coup, Rocha began to work on creating a film form and content capable of breaking through the Brazilian people’s lack of understanding. Implicitly in this idea of “How long can we stand it!,” and explicitly in his 1970 essay, “Beginning at Zero: Notes on Cinema and Society,” Rocha describes the people living a divided existence. They represent a life defined by contradiction. According to Rocha, they base their images of life on what they see in Hollywood films. They identify with the worldview of Hollywood, yet they live in circumstances of underdevelopment that directly contradict

this worldview – yet they do not question this contradiction. Instead they accept it and incorporate it into the fabric of their lives, so much so that they do not believe in and cannot understand a vision of life that is drawn from their own underdeveloped experiences. Rocha critiques the people for this lived contradiction, for the way they cling to the images and ideology of Hollywood and “refuse to accept a more authentic presentation of Brazilian life” (144) that expresses the misery and horror<sup>6</sup> of underdevelopment that makes up the fabric of their daily existence. Rocha focuses his film form not on eliminating this contradiction, but on making the elements of it explicit and capable of being analyzed.

A good place to start in examining these contradictions is to look at the contradiction that characterizes critical analysis of Rocha and *Terra em Transe*. Robert Stam focuses on Rocha’s “neo-baroque Afro-avant-gardist aesthetic,” which expresses “the discontinuous, dissonant, fractured history of the nation through equally dissonant images and sounds.” Stam describes how this fragmented film form foregrounds the discordant nature of Brazil’s history, draws parallels between the conquest and contemporary oppression, and questions metanarratives such as Marxism, with its faith in inevitable revolution and its progressive view of history (38-39). For him, Rocha’s fractured film style calls any such totalizations of Brazil’s history into question. In contrast, Ismail Xavier examines Rocha’s use of allegory and free indirect subjective narration, a decentered narrative mode that interweaves objective plot events with the protagonist’s subjective experiences. He points out how these formal techniques rely

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow these descriptors from Rocha’s “Aesthetics of Hunger” manifesto.

upon totalized views to provide condensed representations of the nation that consider long-term historical journeys and recognize flaws and failures (8).

Essentially, Stam sees Rocha responding to a “crisis of totalizations,” while Xavier considers his “collapse into totalization.” The “crisis of totalizations” resists total views in order to point out the destruction caused by colonialism, which has fractured history, the nation, and the people, and which continues to exert a negative influence in the present day. The “collapse into totalization” emphasizes the necessity of big-picture views as the way to understand how historical processes and influences interact to affect the life of the nation and determine trajectories of development, or in this case, underdevelopment. By stepping back to see how Rocha’s film form and theoretical project support *both* of these analyses, however contradictory they might seem in their relationship to one another. In fact, *Terra em Transe* relies upon the delicate tension between fragmentation and totalization to generate a self-reflexive allegorical form that attempts to foreground the lived contradiction of the Brazilian people, the way they accept their subordinate position and the misery that accompanies it rather than seizing their power and their potential for a loving violence that works for change.

The film uses totalization in its structure and characterizations to represent the cycles that make up Brazil’s history. In other words, the film represents complete historical cycles in its structure and embodies systemic influences in its characters in order to examine their effect and to consider opportunities for change. By presenting one complete political cycle where power moves from the Right to the Left and then back again, and by grounding this political succession in the complete cycle of one man’s subject formation, from Paulo striking out on his own to his ultimate self-sacrifice, the

film creates a structure for the analysis of Brazilian history and politics that exists outside of the cycles it portrays. The film represents these cycles in a total form – from start to finish – and then steps outside of the momentum of the cycles in order to analyze them. In addition, by starting the film with the narrative climax, the film spoils the plot and redirects attention to the events that gave rise to this climax.<sup>7</sup> These events recount the formation of an individual subject, Paulo Martins, who represents a process – the process of revolutionary subject formation. As such, Paulo is characterized by both fragmentation and totalization since he is the sum of his experiences and also himself. Paulo is both an individual and a process; he is subject and subjectivity. As such, he makes subjectivity an object for analysis and serves as a lens through which to view the objective world.

The film begins and ends with the same four climactic events: the populist left-wing governor Felipe Vieira's surrender of power, Paulo's self-sacrifice, his resurrection into a revolutionary figure and the conservative, right-wing Porfirio Diaz's rise to power. These events bookend the flashback sequence that comprises the bulk of the film and that re-tell the events comprising Paulo's development into a revolutionary subject. This structural repetition foregrounds the ways that Diaz and Vieira re-enact historical events and political processes to shore up their respective power structures and indicates how they both rely upon manipulation of the people to achieve their political goals. Diaz restages Brazil's "discovery" as well as variants of inland invasion and a coronation that ensures his totalitarian rule in order to solidify his right-wing power base while Vieira

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<sup>7</sup> As Paul Young points out, this thoroughly Brechtian concept, "eyes on the course" rather than "eyes on the finish," had been well-flogged by the global Left by this time. However, we can see Rocha paying homage to his idol Jean-Luc Godard in his use of this technique. With this move, he signals his knowledge of and involvement in international cinematic strategies. He also adapts this particular strategy to his own use by folding it into his aesthetic of totalization. This Brechtian technique becomes just one aspect of a larger, uniquely Brazilian approach.

stages elaborate political rallies where he meets the people and promises to remedy their problems, promises he consciously decides not to fulfill once he is in power. Both politicians rely upon these ritual performances in order to ensure their position as “the elect,” the leader chosen by the people or who can claim to represent the people. Diaz claims to represent the will of the people while Vieira claims to be their guardian, but both manipulate the people in order to secure their power, as we discover in the course of the flashback narrative, which exposes the two-faced nature of power and the repetitively self-identical and palimpsestic nature of Brazilian history and politics. In this way, the film gives spectators the opportunity to see the repetitive nature of history and the two-faced nature of power.

To portray these key events, which comprise the total cycle of one complete power shift and one subject formation, the film relies upon a fragmentary visual style that juxtaposes discordant elements in order to make contradictions and connections apparent. In its style, the film references Rocha’s “An Aesthetics of Hunger,” in which he contemplates the morality of representing violence to express the misery of underdevelopment. Violence is used to express horror and this horror helps those unfamiliar with the circumstances of underdevelopment to feel its misery. Rocha defines this violence as a loving violence, one that is brutal but that expresses itself through the positive attributes of action and transformation. Interestingly, Rocha does not specify the formal relationship between violence and film in his manifesto. Should film rely on images of violence or on the violent interaction of images to provoke this horror? Some Latin American filmmakers, like Solanas and Getino, use images of violence to express the horror of underdevelopment. For example, in *La Hora de los Hornos*, they include

images of the military violently repressing protestors, the testimonies of people who witnessed executions and massacres, and montage sequences that create explicit associations between violent acts and the presence of multinational corporations. But other filmmakers, like Rocha and Gutiérrez Alea, rely on a violent formalism rather than on the violent content of images to express the misery, murder, and destruction produced by underdevelopment. They use the formal properties of film to express the violence inherent within underdevelopment. In this approach, violence occurs in the clash and contradictory impulses of the various formal techniques brought together in the films.

For example, *Terra em Transe* attempts to invoke horror in spectators by refusing to make sense in a conventional or familiar way. Its modernist formalism immediately differentiates it from narratively focused mainstream films, thus announcing a break with the conventions and ideology of the invisible classical form. For example, the film uses asynchronous sound, autonomous camera movement, violations of the 180-degree rule and fourth wall, genre mixing, and distancing performances in order to make visible the divisions and contradictions that exist between ideology and lived experience. In one of the film's key scenes, the film's fragmentary style foregrounds how the people's faith in the powers-that-be prevents them from taking power themselves. At Vieira's final political rally, Paulo critiques the people for going "after the first person who shows them a sword or a cross." As a rejoinder, Sara grabs a man in the crowd and thrusts him toward the camera: "Jeronimo is the people. Speak Jeronimo. Speak, Jeronimo! Speak!" The man's smiles turn into a look of uncertainty and he falls silent. With further urging, he addresses the camera, "I'm a humble man, a worker. I'm the leader of my union. I've been in the class struggle. Everything is wrong. I really don't know what to do. The

country is in crisis and the best thing is to await the President's commands." Paulo rushes forward from the background to place his hand over Jeronimo's mouth; Jeronimo does not resist. Paulo addresses the camera directly: "Do you see what the people are like? Idiots! An illiterate! A petty politician! Can you imagine Jeronimo in power?" The film then cuts to a close up of a man, crouched at the bottom of the crowd, who rises up and fights his way forward. The shot of his movement forward repeats twice to underscore its importance. He pulls Paulo's hand off of Jeronimo's mouth and then takes up a centered, close-up position within the frame; the camera then pans from his face to Jeronimo's, then to the faces of Sara and Paulo, and then cuts to pan over the faces of the crowd.

Every stylistic technique the film has at its disposal has been mobilized for his speech, or rather, his speech act. The soundtrack plays Brazilian music; the man is positioned as central, or at center, first in the frame and then as the center of attention for all eyes in the crowd; and he directly addresses the camera: "Excuse me, sirs. Jeronimo does the people's politics, but he's not the people. The people are me. I have seven children and have nowhere to live." Suddenly, a large, suited man bursts into frame to grab the man; he shouts "Extremist!" repeatedly, punches the man and ties a rope around his neck. The crowd takes up the chant of "Extremist!" and the camera cuts to an absurd little industrialist figure who reads from a stack of papers: "Hunger, and illiteracy, are extremist propaganda! Extremism is a virus that infects actions, infects the air, the blood, infects the water, and morals. In Eldorado, there is no hunger, no violence nor poverty!" As he reads, a priest grabs the man's hair and the large man pulls out a pistol and shoves it in the "extremist's" mouth. This shot is also repeated twice, and then the sound of machine guns takes over the soundtrack. The film cuts to the man now lying prostrate;

the crowd has dispersed and several TV cameramen and photojournalists point their cameras at the prone, and presumably dead, man. The scene ends with a violation of the 180-degree line. This scene's teeming amalgamation of avant-garde styles and influences continuously resists spectator absorption by pushing the spectator outside of the film and forcing him or her to relate to it on their own terms and in regards to his or her own experiences, though within the parameters of the film's themes and concepts.

This resistance to spectator absorption theoretically places spectators into an analytical position in relation to the film. Forced to rely on their own experiences in order to make sense of the film, the spectator becomes more attuned to events outside of the diegetic realm, which the film taps into with its system of signification. In his analysis of the film, Xavier looks at how the film creates an analytical posture for spectators through its use of allegory. The film provides spectators with coded messages that refer to another scene not given directly in the diegesis. The spectator's willingness to decode this message depends upon the other scene's relationship with the national context as a whole, and the spectator's ability to identify that reference (16). Rocha's characters are allegorical: Porfirio Diaz is the right-wing demagogue; Felipe Vieira is the populist left-wing governor; Sara is the Marxist revolutionary who protests in the streets; other characters represent the oligarchs who manage natural and cultural resources for the benefit of multinational corporations (Julio Fuentes), while others represent the people. Paulo represents the revolutionary poet who links these other subjects together. By expanding Xavier's examination of the film's allegorical characterization to include how the film formally constructs subjectivity, we can look at how it uses subjectivity to critique the objective world of history and politics.

Unlike the other characters, who do not question their roles or actions, Paulo struggles to live with contradiction. As a poet and politician, his very nature is contradictory due to the tense relationship between truth, beauty, and power. He works to put this contradiction into a useful form by aspiring to write about serious things, to become a poet of politics or a political poet, and his attempt to come to terms with his divided self by creating a dual identity becomes a driving force within the film's plot. The relationships between these characters also reflect the duality and contradiction inherent in Brazilian life. The film interrelates these individual characters so they become reflections of one another and express the socio-political and cultural systems that have given rise to them. This expression is significant since it corresponds with Rocha's insistence that political films should not rely on individual subjects or make use of a personal style because attributing ways of thinking or being to a particular individual misses the systemic pressures that shape subjectivity in countries that suffer from underdevelopment. In addition, the interactions of these allegorical subjects reveal the cyclical nature of history, the ways particular discourses about history influence these cycles and the ways in which these cycles determine the lives, worldviews and possibilities of subjects. The film's fragmentation and totalization meet at this nexus, where style and structure contribute to our understanding of these characters, their relationship to one another and to the events that surround them.

The film's violent formalism directly interrelates with the construction of subjectivity in the first and final presentation of the climactic events. Vieira's surrender of power to Diaz is the precipitating event. Paulo enters this scene just as Vieira says "I don't want any bloodshed." Paulo and the camera circle Vieira as the two men discuss the

blood of the people. Vieira claims this blood is sacred and determines to resign his post without a fight, while Paulo denounces his decision by saying that only with bloodshed will “the beginning of our history” become possible. Vieira ignores Paulo’s remonstrations and dictates a letter of resignation to his secretary (Sara) as Paulo comments upon each of Vieira’s statements with his angry strides and caustic rebuttals. The scene ends with Paulo bitterly denouncing Vieira and the film cuts to Paulo and Sara fleeing the governor’s palacio in a speeding car – a Volkswagen Beetle, ironically, tangible evidence of the presence of a foreign multinational presence and Paulo’s bourgeois status. They continue the debate as Sara maintains Vieira’s position on mitigating bloodshed while Paulo continues to emphasize the need for armed resistance, even by “people like us, bourgeois, weak.” To underscore this point, Paulo blows through a police roadblock and a pursuing motorcycle policeman shoots him. The film repeats the shot of the motorcycle policeman shooting his pistol. Though the editing pattern leads spectators to believe that he is shooting Paulo, Paulo is in offscreen space, so in this image the policeman appears to shoot the audience. The repetition of the image highlights the pistol shots while simultaneously pushing spectators outside of the narrative so they can analyze what has just occurred. But this analysis would be influenced by Paulo’s ceaseless commentary on the events that have unfolded around him and by his willingness to sacrifice his life for his beliefs.

The film then moves from the dramatization of events to a more symbolic (or allegorical) register with the introduction of a repeated, iconic image and with an intertextual reference. After Paulo is shot, the film cuts to a medium close up as Sara attempts to comfort him as he begins his death soliloquy: “No more this regal

parade... With war and Christ, side by side. No more the naivete of faith.” The film then cuts to the iconic image of Paulo. He stands alone in extreme long shot in a barren landscape, his body first balletically contorting as if in pain. He then rises to his full height and raises a rifle over his head. In this first iteration of the scene, handwritten text is superimposed over the image of this resistant gesture as dramatic classical music plays on the soundtrack. The text is from an untitled poem by Mario Faustino, a Brazilian poet, literary critic, journalist, and translator: “I was not able to ratify the treaty between the bloody cosmos and the pure soul. A gladiator defunct, but intact (so much violence, yet so much tenderness).” In the first statement, an individual (“I”) confesses defeat in his attempts to produce peace between, or at least to stop the combat among, a bloody universal force and the pure soul. But the next statement becomes a pragmatic appraisal of a combatant who lives to fight another day – and who stays alive because he maintains a balance between violence and tenderness. Though the referent of this second sentence is somewhat ambiguous (“I” or “the pure soul”), what is clear is the necessity of striking a balance between violence and tenderness, a balance that insures the pure soul of the I, or the “I” and “the pure soul,” will remain intact. This “I” will become important as we consider Paulo’s relationship to the people, and how the film envisions change.

The repetition of these climactic events at the end of the film is repetition with a difference. The sequence that begins the film is laid out in separate stages that follow a basic cause-effect narrative logic: Vieira’s overthrow leads to Paulo’s frustrated flight, then to his death and resurrection, which prompts the first stage of the flashback narrative, which consists of Diaz’s re-staging of the scene of discovery and inland invasion, that leads to the introduction of Paulo’s former self and the beginning of his

revolutionary subject formation. The climactic sequence that concludes the film is a clashing composite of these now familiar scenes juxtaposed with one another and overlaid with Paulo's death soliloquy.<sup>8</sup> Diaz's inland invasion, a repeated image of Diaz in medium close up in a speeding car clutching a crucifix and black flag, is juxtaposed with Paulo's car speeding toward Vieira's palacio. A montage of images from Vieira's overthrow, with a replay of certain phrases (e.g., "the blood of the people is sacred"), is presented and juxtaposed with a momentary image of the policeman shooting Paulo. This scene sets off a lengthy sequence of images from Diaz's coronation accompanied by Paulo's death soliloquy in voice-over. The coronation scene, which settles into a sort of tableau vivant, is intercut with shots of Paulo, on his back with gun in hand, crawling up the stairs of Diaz's palace. Diaz speaks, but he is silenced by Paulo's voice over. Once Paulo reaches "Until when, oblivious to fear, beyond childhood and adolescence, can we stand it" in his soliloquy, the film presents a canted shot of Diaz's coronation and Paulo's voice becomes drowned out by sounds of machine gun fire. The members of the coronation pretend to be shot by the machine guns and the film flashes suddenly between Paulo and Sara alone on the desolate road and Paulo standing alone at the coronation as the sound of machine gun fire continues. On the road, Sara asks Paulo, as she comforts him, "What will your death prove?" The film then flashes to Paulo raising the now dead Diaz's crown and dropping it to the floor before it returns to the dying Paulo on the road,

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<sup>8</sup> "No more medals...this joyous pomp of glory. The golden hope of the Plateau. No more this regal parade with war and Christ marching side by side. No more the impotence of faith, the naivete of faith. It's no longer possible. We are eternal sons of darkness, of inquisition and conversion. And we are forever sons of fear, of our brother's blood. And we don't accept our violence. We don't accept our ideas, neither our barbarian hate. We don't assume our stupid and feeble past, plenty of prayers and laziness. A landscape, a sound over indolent souls. These indolent races, servile to God and the lords. A typical passive indolence of indolent people. Ah, I can't believe it's all true! How long can we stand it! How long, beyond faith and hope, can we stand it? Until when, beyond patience and love, can we stand it? Until when, oblivious to fear, beyond childhood and adolescence, can we stand it."

where he responds to Sara's question: "The triumph of beauty and justice!" In this final line, the last of the film, Paulo brings together art and politics; he is a poet whose art has become political change. In this moment, his sense of self is no longer divided.

In this synergy of poet and politician, he realizes his goal, stated at the beginning of the flashback sequence, of becoming a political poet through his search for beauty and justice. Paulo ultimately discovers that beauty and justice can only be found in the embrace of a moral violence that brings change and development, a realization that echoes Rocha's "Aesthetics of Hunger" manifesto. With his embrace of this violence, Paulo has produced historical change. He has become an historical agent – acting rather than acted upon – and he also becomes a unified subject capable of action. This particular dynamic brings into play the film's central contradiction: this film about an individual is not about an individual. But it is about the process of an individual's revolutionary subject formation. Paulo, as both an individual and a process, makes subjectivity an object for analysis and serves as a lens through which to view the world. In Paulo, art and politics *and* the subjective and objective unite – and in this unification, a free space forms where these elements can be analyzed in terms of their interrelations. It may seem paradoxical at first glance that a director who rejects such personal filmmaking would center a film around the subjective experiences of an individual. But, picking up on Xavier's claim regarding the film's use of allegory and Rocha's view of subjectivity in the context of underdevelopment, *Terra em Transe's* protagonist can be seen as a representative of the system of underdevelopment and how that system can be overturned. Following this logic, if the subject embodies the system, if one changes the

subject, one can change the system – and the story of Paulo Martins brings this dynamic to life.

However, for this particular dynamic to be successful, the subject must be able to exercise his autonomy and agency in order to break free from the system. Thus, Rocha and the film must walk a fine line between the subject as a representative of the system and the subject as a psychologized, goal-oriented and conscious subject, the stuff of classical Hollywood and personal filmmaking. The film tries to contain and channel this contradictory impulse by presenting Paulo, in his initial subjective phase, as a divided subject. In the beginning of the flashback sequence, Paulo's goals and psychological impulses – products of Brazil's system of underdevelopment – threaten to destroy him. His desire to leave the protection of Diaz and strike off on his own in order to find his poetic voice leads him into a life of decadence and dissipation. Rescued and given a purposeful focus by Vieira and the populist Left, Paulo finds himself betraying the people and his former ally and protector Diaz. Paulo, who first supports the Right wing and then the Left, who is first a poet and then a politician, comes to realize both sides are simply different faces of elite power and that art and politics are not mutually-exclusive provinces. In the film, psychology is something to be negotiated and then overcome. One must learn how to recognize these system-initiated impulses and learn how to control and even overcome them.

The film thus centers on Paulo's progressive ability to see and live within the field of contradiction. Over the course of the film, Paulo develops what I call "double vision" as a resource that enables him to negotiate a productive relationship to the lived contradiction that shapes his life and the lives of Brazilians. Instead of allowing the

negotiations that tacitly indicate acceptance, double vision creates the opportunity for negotiations that produce change. Double vision is the ability to see the two faces of power and to see both ways – from the present into the past *and* the future – in order to recognize the origins of contemporary power while simultaneously envisioning its end(s). In this way, double vision gives a subject the ability to see the ultimate contradiction between power's appearance and its reality, and to see this two-facedness in both conservative and progressive modes of government. While Paulo lives, he is torn apart by contradictory impulses; but, ironically, once he decides to embrace the violence that ultimately leads to bloodshed, and to his own death, he finally lives and becomes the embodiment of a creative force that turns empty poetic impulses into radical political change. In this space between life and death at the beginning and end of the film, he acquires double vision and embraces contradiction as the way toward the triumph of beauty and justice over duplicity. In fact, Paulo's death signifies the end of duplicitous contradiction, the death of contradiction hidden behind the false appearance of unquestioned authority or undisputed reality. Only when contradictions are seen and lived and identified with can they become a creative force for action and change rather than a destructive force that erodes agency and self-determination.

In fact, one might also wonder if the film's flashback sequence should also be read in terms of this double vision. The flashback may be read as an objective narrative of Paulo's discovery, as a story of one man's progressive development – from Paulo as protégé, on the margins of Diaz and then Vieira's rise to power, to Paulo as revolutionary, taking power into his own hands. Or, the sequence may be seen as subjective revisionist storytelling. Paulo's ultimate double vision, which he acquires at

the start of the film when he repudiates Vieira and embraces the violence of his own death and resurrection into an iconic revolutionary figure, may account for the subjective camera presence, the elaborate staging of each event and the allegorical characterization that are the vital forces of the film. These modes of retelling, or rewriting, which would be available to Paulo after he has completed this full cycle, are responsible for revealing the contradictions that underlie surface appearances. In this mode, Paulo would essentially be reshaping his past in accordance with his newfound understanding. This re-visioning calls the nature of history, and the power of those who write history, into question and poses an alternative mode of writing that attempts to unite art and politics into a single creative activity or into a direct relationship with one another. In this way, the film becomes a living experiment for the New Latin American Cinema's goal to use film to produce social and political change. Paulo's subject formation illustrates a new way of thinking and being and, by stimulating cognition grounded in double vision, the film attempts to present an alternative mode of subjectivity capable of recognizing the need for change. This recognition involves seeing the two faces of power – appearance and reality, progressive and conservative – *and* seeing how power functions in the way things are and how it could function if rooted in the untapped forces of revolution.

Paulo's subjectivity embodies the fragmentation and totalization that is a hallmark of *Terra em Transe*'s form and content, and he exemplifies the search for meaning that the film wants the spectator to undergo. He is a conscious subject with the capacity for thought and emotion and an allegorical figure who points to the process of revolutionary subject formation. Paulo Martins, as a psychologized, goal-oriented character, embodies the violence of a subjectivity divided by the lived contradiction of underdevelopment.

Yet Paulo, as representative of a process of revolutionary subject formation, also embodies totalization by illustrating how this process in its entirety allows for the unification of these divisions into a productive whole capable of double vision and of becoming a change agent. Paulo also becomes the “I” of the Faustino quote superimposed over the image that characterizes him as a revolutionary icon in the first presentation of the climax. This “I” attempts, though fails, to ratify the treaty between the “bloody cosmos” and the “pure soul.” Paulo, in his process of discovery, switches the directional flow between these two elements. Where the bloody cosmos may have originally attempted to overtake the pure soul, now the pure soul has the opportunity to encounter and produce change within the bloody cosmos.

But if Paulo is the ratifying “I,” then who is the “pure soul” referred to in the Faustino quote? The film appears to position the people as the pure soul. *Terra em Transe* critiques the people harshly, as harshly as it critiques those in power, as sharing in responsibility for the repressive political system. It critiques the people for actively participating in their own manipulation by voluntarily giving up their power and for refusing to use violence to protect their political rights. Though the people remain central to the political process, they have become a means to an end and have lost their ability to speak and act for themselves, instead looking to those in power for direction or falling victim to violence. Yet the film also seems to place its hopes for political change in the people. If they could discover their power, they would have the ability to rise up, demand, and receive access to political power. But just as the film places its hopes for change in the people, the people also serve as the focus of its frustration. Again and

again, the people do not exercise or demand power. So that job must fall to someone else: to the “mediating I” of the artist.

The flashback narrative features two critical interactions that involve Paulo and the people. The first occurs when Paulo starts working for Vieira and faces down the people’s representative, Felicio, while the obviously angry crowd that accompanies Felicio makes no move to protest this repressive action. Paulo recounts this encounter to Sara in the next scene: “I beat a poor peasant because he threatened me. He could have cut my head off with a hoe, but he was so cowardly and servile! And I wanted to show he was a coward and servile. Weakness! Weak people. Always feeble and terrified.” The scene is an indictment of the people’s position within and treatment by progressive, populist governments; and it shows Paulo’s betrayal of the people. Still interested in amassing power for himself, Paulo breaks his promises to the people. But this scene also criticizes the people’s willingness to back down. Though they may find a tentative voice, when push comes to shove, they will retreat. In this initial stage of his discovery, Paulo wants to demonstrate this weakness as a way to enhance his own position. But in the second scene involving the people, when Paulo mutes Jeronimo and addresses the camera, Paulo’s desire to show the people their weakness is not a method of self-aggrandizement but instead a direct challenge to the people to rise up and take power. But immediately after this scene, where Paulo, and then those in power and the people themselves, silence the representative of the people, Paulo tells Vieira: “If you want power, you have to bite into the struggle. I’ve told you, inside the masses, there’s man. The man is hard to control, harder than the masses.” But the man inside the masses has been controlled – and his violent silencing came in part from the masses themselves, who

also labeled him an extremist. This final turn leads us to wonder if perhaps the man inside the masses might not be the poet-politician, the man who makes political change his art form. As a mediating figure, between the pure, though helpless, soul of the people and the bloody cosmos, this man is the only one capable of taking a stand and producing change.

Paulo, the poet and filmmaker (he produces a film within the film, *Biografia de um Adventuroiro*, in order to discount Diaz and shift the balance of power to Vieira), remains the exemplar and the ideal of this hard to control man. Though Paulo's death soliloquy attempts to position him as one of the people (i.e., through his repeated use of "we"), his sacrifice is executed alone and by his own, individual choice, and his final iconic resurrection image does not include the people. He does not rejoin them to march together; instead, he stands alone as an iconic ideal. One might argue that he serves simply as a symbol of provocation, an ideal that others can follow. He stands alone in order to show others how to stand up, since the man who stands up is the hard to control man. But this image refuses to make Paulo's spoken "we" actual. He remains separated from the people. So this hard to control man remains just that, a man, an individual instead of a collective. Because of this, the symbolic space Paulo inhabits, this free space for revolutionary subject formation, keeps him steadfastly positioned as the ratifying I, the I that mediates between the bloody cosmos and the pure soul. This I then has double vision – the ability to see the workings of the bloody cosmos and the purity of this soul. But this double vision keeps the poet-politician above and beyond the people; he is able to speak for them and stand for them (stand in for them), but he does not stand with them.

Because of this stance above and beyond the people, the process of revolutionary subject formation that Paulo points to is that of the artist who searches to create political change as his art form. Though Paulo may be shaped by the power structures of underdevelopment, just as the people are, his process of transformation remains separate from theirs since his search for autonomy is grounded in his search for a new poetry. At the beginning of the flashback narrative, he breaks from Diaz, specifically refusing “to be Dom Diaz’s protégé,” and leaves in order to learn how to “write about serious things,” “political ideas.” Paulo’s ultimate, totalized status as poet-politician becomes the ideal form for those artists engaged in New Latin American Cinema: an artist whose work of art is political change. For Paulo, there are no intermediaries or mediating forces; there are no art works that inspire others to action. Instead, Paulo acts and his actions are his art. However, the film itself must accept and work within the limits of mediation since it is not a direct action. Mediation may always be a fact of life, but representation can mitigate the effectiveness of action. As Rocha laments in his 1970 manifesto, though his films were well-received by audiences in Europe and North America, the vast majority of Brazilians ignored them and their messages, preferring to watch the classical films of Brazilian commercial cinema instead. As a result, Rocha’s hope that *Terra em Transe* would provoke active engagement among spectators, in hopes that this active engagement would prompt new ways of thinking and being, were ultimately thwarted by the people’s lack of interest. In any event, Paulo is not just the ideal for a revolutionary consciousness; he is the ideal of the revolutionary artist.

## Conclusions

As the ideal of the revolutionary artist, and as a poet and filmmaker, Paulo resembles Brakhage's filmmaker-viewer. The filmmaker-viewer, a self-identified artist and film poet, remains an autonomous, independent figure as the last remaining individual in society and person most in touch with his subjectivity. In fact, he must retain this status in order to exemplify the subjective process that maintains individuality. While Paulo's double vision allows him to see the two-faced nature of power and the repetitive nature of history, Brakhage's filmmaker-viewer, as exemplified by the Dog Star Man, has a double vision of his own: sub-and-objective expression. As Brakhage describes it in *Metaphors on Vision*, this way of seeing allows the filmmaker-viewer to nurture his individuality through his ability to see and recognize his own subjective vision, that is, his "mind's eye" cellular and cosmological vision, as well as his view of the world. Rocha's pre-revolutionary context appears to have limited his thinking to western European and North American artistic and aesthetic models. He references Godard as a major influence and his formal experiments are distinctly modernist and drawn from the historical avant-garde. Though his protagonist does not re-instate a repressive political system as Gutiérrez Alea's does, Paulo comes to represent a hierarchical cultural system that organizes the world according to a system of value that places individuals with certain skills and abilities in positions of prominence. Paulo's solitary objective, which involves the creation of an active art form, or more specifically of an art form capable of action and change, positions him as the "mediating I" between the bloody cosmos and the people. As such, he represents a vanguard, and one that embodies western European aesthetic and socio-political traditions.

All of the subjects created by these filmmakers concretize the limits of such traditional thinking. They attempt to revolutionize their film forms in order to create onscreen subjects that reflect the potential for a liberated reality, a reality freed from the mechanization and inequalities of global capitalism where individuals can live and think autonomously. But these formal revolutions are not total revolutions and their experiments ultimately end up reworking the repressive dynamics they struggle against.

For example, Brakhage's lone patriarch, who becomes the onscreen avatar for the filmmaker-viewer-protagonist, generates a formal unity that resists outside mediation while also resisting the recognition of other points of view. Brakhage intends the Dog Star Man's struggles within the world and his unmediated views of it to reveal truths otherwise hidden from view by the mechanization of modern life, truths that have a universal validity by touching on those universal concerns that involve all man. The Dog Star Man's struggles and his revelations, staged as they are in a frontier wilderness setting, become a way for him, and for Brakhage, to discover America and film. But there are costs to realizing this objective, just as there were with the original "discovery." Brakhage's subject colonizes the world and everything and everyone within it. Brakhage's filmic representations of his perceptions may provide an unmediated form of vision. But the juxtaposition of these visions, and the addition of narrative in his mythopoeic films, reproduce an apperceptive mode that incorporates the world into the self-realization of the individual subject. In the *Dog Star Man* films, the world and everyone in it become fodder for the thoughts, memories, and experiences of the Dog Star Man and Brakhage.

Working in a post-revolutionary and socialist context, Gutiérrez Alea works specifically to counter these universal bourgeois concepts, which he sees as U.S. and western European notions. He attempts to counter them by addressing them in terms of binary oppositions. He confronts the individual with the collective and splits freedom into apparent and real categories in order to place them in opposition to one another. To create this oppositional exercise, he focuses on the individual subject, and specifically on an individual bourgeois subject, as the avatar of the way of thinking he wishes to counter. He places this actively distancing and alienated individual in a direct, and oppositional, relationship with the events that comprise contemporary revolutionary reality. In order to translate these oppositional relationships, he integrates documentary and fictional modes into a single film form. The documentary sections, such as the film-within-a-film documentaries and the newsreel montage segments, as well as the documentary feel produced in many of the fictional sections, like the street and airport scenes, when Sergio leaves his apartment, represent the dynamic progress that characterizes contemporary, revolutionary reality in Cuba. The film mobilizes its fictional sections to position the spectator within Sergio's thoughts and memories, his subjective perspective, and it even occasionally positions the spectator in Sergio's subjective position, as when we see through Sergio's eyes. The film thus attempts to trap spectators in Sergio's subjectivity in order to force them to conduct a critical self-examination to determine the quality and consistency of their revolutionary attitude.

Finally, Rocha, who works from a pre-revolutionary context, falls victim to the limitations created by North American and western European systems of thought. Instead of reproducing repressive socio-political systems as Gutiérrez Alea does, Rocha re-

inscribes cultural hierarchies. His protagonist represents a process of revolutionary subject formation. This process reveals the two-faced nature of power and the self-identical repetition of historical cycles while also pointing the way to change by indicating how a change within the subject can produce change within existing reality. By embracing a loving violence that seeks action and transformation, the individual subject can move from serving as a passive part of history to becoming an historical agent. But Rocha's crisis of faith in the people, and their ability to embrace violence and produce change, positions this capacity in the individual, and specifically the individual artist. His revolutionary subject remains a vanguard, separated from the people and privileged by a double vision that allows him to see, act, and live inside and outside the system.

These three filmmakers at first glance appear to produce a spectrum of relations between subject and objective reality – with Brakhage at one end (subject equals reality) and Gutiérrez Alea at the other (reality equals subject). In actuality, however, their subjects cluster within the same repressive forces they wish to combat. They want a total revolution of the subject, where the subject stands for a liberating force, which also represents a national ideal. But their subjects end up reproducing hierarchical socio-political norms and these liberators ultimately become dominators who consume other subjects in their own search for self-realization. However, these patterns of consumption have much to reveal about the potential and limitations of revolutionary modes of thought. By studying these films and their subjects closely, we can see the limits these filmmakers work to overcome when they create subjects that explicitly refuse to abide by certain conceptual frames while inhabiting new totalizing frames that are defined as positive. These filmmakers give life to subjects who embody ideals of action and

transformation, or unmediated perception, or a collective notion of self-fulfillment. They do so in order to escape the repressive forces of mechanization and standardization, bourgeois ideology, and the conceptual and systemic reconfigurations enacted by neocolonialism – all of which (these filmmakers believe) transform subjects into objects, making them tools that contribute to the maintenance of systems of oppression. However, the subjects in these films enact the same types of repressive forces the filmmakers seek to overcome: consumption, colonialism, apparent instead of actual free will, and the recycling of hierarchical systems of value based in primitivism and civilization. In Chapter 3, we will look at how other filmmakers of this generation attempted to create open film forms that resist totalization. The formal experiments of these open form filmmakers attempted to preserve the autonomy of subjects through the cinematic process, rather than using subjects to create a window on the world and its workings.

### CHAPTER III

#### **EMPOWERING OTHERS: THE ALTERNATIVE CINEMAS OF *THE CHELSEA GIRLS, TIRE DIÉ, AND LA HORA DE LOS HORNOS***

As we saw in Chapter 2, Stan Brakhage, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Glauber Rocha attempt to provide alternatives to Hollywood's model of cinematic subjectivity with its psychologically motivated protagonists who mobilize bourgeois cultural values. They create a relationship between their onscreen subjects and the objective reality that surrounds the subjects to critique the context or the subjects who inhabit it. While these three filmmakers focus on creating alternative onscreen subjects and subject positions as a way to mount their challenges, Andy Warhol, Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, and Octavio Getino create an open film form that allows onscreen and offscreen subjects to play with, exert, or transform their subjectivity within the cinematic free space.

Where the filmmakers in Chapter 2 examine the transformation or manifestation of a particular subject position through its portrayal onscreen, the filmmakers in this chapter work to instantiate that position offscreen, in the realms of the profilmic and exhibition. Warhol's denunciation of his authorial role, institutionalization of improvisational performances, and experimentation with expanded media exhibition practices works to generate a space where individuals taking part in the cinematic experience have the opportunity for self-expression and self-determination. Filmmakers, superstars, and spectators all contribute to the film's meaning and, by doing so, express themselves through the improvisations and the relational choices they make. Birri's emphasis on collaboration and self-presentation opens up a space for onscreen subjects to

present themselves as autonomous and agential subjects. In addition, by enlisting the feedback of spectators to produce the final form of *Tire dié* (1960), he also attempts to engage everyone involved in the cinematic experience to contribute to the film's final form and meaning. Finally, Solanas and Getino's create a film act that allows participant comrades, as they call them, to share their experiences and allows potential participant comrades to engage in a transformation of consciousness and collective revolutionary activity. They create an offscreen mise-en-scene to promote conversation and they include within the structure of their film, *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), places where the film can be turned off so discussion can take place regarding the personal stories, events, and premises communicated in the film. Essentially, the film remains incomplete without the active participation of those involved in the onscreen and offscreen realms.

These four filmmakers work to create these free spaces, in large part, as a way to institutionalize a cinematic alternative outside of mass culture, new cinema models, and repressive political regimes, thus providing what they see as a genuine alternative to the conventions of the culture industries, and the bourgeois ideology they represent. Warhol works to create an alternative model of experimental film through his public surrender of authorial control and development of a provocative minimalist aesthetic as a way to critique the New American Cinema. By 1963, the year Warhol began making films, the New American Cinema had become an institution with an established mission, distribution and exhibition system, discursive network, and star system built around an artisanal ideal that centered on independent filmmakers like Stan Brakhage. By adapting a culture-industry model with a star system, commercial distribution, and a model of filmmaking that relied on a division of labor, Warhol exposes the ways Jonas Mekas and

the New American Cinema fetishize the film artist and artisanal filmmaking, bestowing value on a particular kind of creativity and creative expression.

In “Cinema and Underdevelopment” (1963), Birri outlines the history of film in Argentina through the growth of two cinematic forms: commercial cinema and the “cinema of expression.” Commercial cinema refers to an industrial filmmaking tradition based on the Hollywood studio model while the cinema of expression is an independent film movement grounded in individual self-expression. According to Birri, though the Argentine film industry positions the cinema of expression in opposition to commercial cinema, in fact, both cinemas re-inscribe the beliefs and values of global capitalism (88). This artificial opposition interrupts independent film’s ability to break away from or contradict the dominant belief systems that maintain inequitable social relations and Birri works to provide an alternative to this model by creating a “realist, critical and popular” cinema that critiques the false images and values re-inscribed in these cinemas.

Like Warhol and Birri, Solanas and Getino critique the *cinema d’auteurs* and do so by questioning what they see as the artificial revolutionary qualities attributed to new cinema practices. They view new cinema filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Federico Fellini as the progressive arm of the commercial film industry because their revolutionary films are often co-opted by the culture industry they purport to oppose and because they draw on narratives that perpetuate the bourgeois neuroses of an alienated society. A revolutionary fiction cinema becomes fundamentally impossible under these conditions (Solanas “Interview” 38-40). Where Birri and Warhol opt for the self-presentation of onscreen subjects via a realist film form, Solanas and Getino strive to create an anti-aesthetic, revolutionary film form through a “cinema of ideological essay,” which

becomes part of a larger film act. They interrelate an experimental film form with a revolutionary act in order to insert film into everyday life and into specific historical processes so spectators are transformed from passive observers into active participants.

Solanas and Getino's film theory idealizes the complete integration of spectator, exhibition space, and film into a single unit known as the film act, and this integration becomes the path to revolutionary social and aesthetic change. By opening up the creative process to onscreen subjects and offscreen spectators, these four filmmakers expand the concept of artistic practice and extend the province of artist to include those who participate in creating the work of art and those who receive and respond to that work. By expanding these concepts and opening up the creative process, the filmmakers create free spaces where onscreen subjects and spectators can realize their autonomy and a fuller sense of themselves.

### **Andy Warhol and *The Chelsea Girls*: The Question of "Pope Ondine"**

As we saw in Chapter 1, Warhol's art reveals the workings of both the pop art and high art culture industries and attempts to establish an alternative to them that allows individuals to define their own value. His interest in allowing individuals to participate in the determination of their own value and values also extends to spectators. As we also discover in his interviews, Warhol defines his films as experimental because they test spectator responses: "My first films using the stationary objects were also made to help the audiences get more acquainted with themselves. Usually, when you go to the movies, you sit in a fantasy world, but when you see something that disturbs you, you get more involved with the people next to you" (92). By producing films that disturb spectators, he hopes to

encourage them to examine their responses and to engage with others around them. He wants his films to move them from being passive inhabitants of a fantasy world created by mainstream Hollywood cinema to active and engaged individuals who look to themselves and to others in order to make sense of what they are seeing, or to make sense of their reaction to what they are seeing.

A number of critics attempt to describe the disturbing effect Warhol's films have on spectators, and they generally focus on how his films provoke spectators by wearing them down, frustrating their traditional patterns of film consumption. Warhol's first films rely on an intriguing panoply of stationary objects: a sleeping man (John Giorno in Warhol's first film *Sleep*, 1963), the infamous *Empire* (1964, eight hours and five minutes of real time footage of the Empire State Building), and the *Screen Tests* (1964-1966), three-minute silent films that feature a centered sitter, face-forward, full in the frame, and as motionless as possible. Warhol would then emphasize the more or less static qualities of these "stationary objects" by projecting the films at 16 frames per second rather than the conventional 24 frames per second, thereby slowing down each motion and event, and expanding the duration of each action (or inaction). Paul Arthur contends that, by inviting spectators to focus for a period of time on a relatively static visual field, Warhol's early films invite them to relate to the film through a different cognitive response. For example, the spectator's initial impulse of assigning conventional categories of reference (like the names of things and their social contexts) would become supplanted by a more reflexive process of apprehension since an automatic response would become less certain in the presence of the film's temporal demands (145-146). Amos Vogel takes a similar view of Warhol's early films, looking at how they deprive

spectators of psychological support by confronting them with tiresome, yet stimulating, portrayals of an unedited reality. Spectators must fashion a new relationship with and within this cinematic reality, where film time slows down real time, silence is as significant as speech and tiny details, because of the absence of larger events, acquire new importance (100).

In “Notes After Reseeing the Movies of Andy Warhol,” Jonas Mekas expands this idea through his concept of phenomenal reality (37). What distinguishes Warhol’s films for Mekas is their ability to register reality in its total form through the seemingly omnipresent and naked gaze of the camera, which captures reality by breaking down the defenses of the individuals who perform before it. Also, by slowing down filmed activities in projection to reveal aspects of reality that generally evade human perception, Warhol’s films provide spectators opportunities to enter a period of “jumping the reality gap,” where they begin to view the film and its events from a new perspective. Every detail reveals a new meaning as one begins to notice “not only the hundred-mile movements but also one-inch movements.” A new world opens because of this shifted perspective and the actions of everyday life become filled with as much action, suspense, tension, adventure, and entertainment as presented by any Hollywood film (40). Mekas concludes that Warhol’s films position the spectator in such a way that he

is, thus, confronted with his own blank mind. Here is cinema that doesn’t manipulate him, doesn’t use force on him: he himself, the viewer, has to search, to ask questions, sometimes unconsciously, other times consciously, and still other times by throwing objects at the screen. The serious art and the good entertainment are supposed to shake you up. Here, however, is an art which asks that it be shaken up; by you, filled up with ideas, by you! An art that is a tabula rasa. A cinema that leaves the viewer standing alone, in front of it, like looking into the mirror. Didn’t we always say that art mirrors reality? So here it really is! Before, it was

always true that man mirrored art. Now we straighten things out. We liberate man from art's slavery (39, emphasis his).

In his writings about the New American Cinema, Mekas focuses on how film, as a mode of personal expression, reveals truths about the world otherwise hidden by dramatic forms or official productions. Film art is a way to liberate man from the slavery of an everyday existence regularized and standardized by the forces of modern life. Where dominant film forms force or manipulate the spectator into thinking or acting in a certain way, Mekas sees Warhol's films being authored by the spectator. In the claims Mekas makes about Warhol's films (in the quote above), he places them in a category outside of the serious art of avant-garde filmmaking and the "good entertainment" of mass culture because of the film-spectator dynamics these films produce: instead of the film attempting to determine spectator response, Mekas sees Warhol's films being determined by spectator response. Unlike Brakhage's films, which emerge as total works of art, complete unto themselves, Warhol's films can only become complete with spectator contributions. Mekas's observation aligns with Warhol's explicitly stated desire to use his films to provoke a response in spectators. Mekas sees this participation as liberating, but he also notes that Warhol's films are "like looking into the mirror." But given Warhol's own appropriation of the mirror metaphor, it is unclear whether the spectator sees him- or herself in that mirror or sees Warhol's formal project, with its various modes of provocation that influence what the spectator sees. Mekas corroborates Warhol's claim that his films serve as the conduit for spectators to see themselves, or at least regard themselves more self-consciously so they can actively shape their context through their response to it.

As Mekas tells it, the spectator has to respond when confronted with Warhol's films; he has to search, to ask questions or to throw things at the screen. Yet such provocation also seems to resemble the forcing or manipulating that Mekas rejects; Warhol's films simply manipulate spectators in a different way by asking them to respond actively instead of passively. His earlier films refuse to satisfy spectator expectations regarding cinematic narrative; in order to convert spectators from passive consumers into engaged meaning-makers. Warhol's later films, with *The Chelsea Girls* as an exemplary model, also places responsibility in part for the creation of meaning with the spectator, as Mekas observes. But the film also guides the ways spectators access its images. Though Warhol chose to show the film two reels at a time so spectators could improvise their own film by creating unique montage combinations from the simultaneous screenings, the film employs formal strategies that guide spectator relations with the images. The film's pans, tilts, and zooms produces in-camera editing that delimits views of the actors and mise-en-scene and that guides spectator attention to various aspects of the image.

The film's aesthetic also places bounds on the spectator's absolute freedom to choose because of the ways each reel attracts the eye of the spectator. The reel chosen by the projectionist to be played with the sound up tends to draw the spectator's focus, since one is drawn to match the audio to the visual, unless the visuals of the accompanying reel are strong enough to distract the spectator. Movement, which includes both performer movement and camera movement, tends to attract the eye, as does light or lighter areas. Color, especially when accompanied by the constant variations produced by the light shows in two of the three color reels, also tends to create a strong pull on spectator

attention. Critics of the time often noted how the simultaneous screenings affected their experience. Gregory Battcock indicates how he perceives the importance of one of the key reels of *The Chelsea Girls*, the “Pope Ondine” reel, because of its placement and audio prominence: “The film is placed in an important spot in the sequence – at the end. Sound for the accompanying film is always turned off, rather conspicuously, when ‘Pope Ondine’ begins. [...] ‘Pope Ondine’ speaks entirely for itself. Distraction is irrelevant” (364). Also, as the film gained wider distribution, the reel pairings became standardized, thus regulating spectator access to the films and in effect further rationalizing the outcome. In this way, *The Chelsea Girls*, like Warhol’s other formal experiments, both liberates and confines spectator activity and autonomy.

Mekas also claims that Warhol’s art mirrors reality. Warhol’s representations of reality in his early films revealed unnoticed details and patterns that occur in everyday life. But his later films, like *The Chelsea Girls*, reveal the unnoticed people that exist at the margins of everyday life in the mainstream. Warhol brings spectators face to face with the leftovers of society, those rejected by it, pushed to its margins, and driven underground. As Peter Wollen points out in his analysis of Warhol’s diaries, in developing the Factory filmmaking system, Warhol attempted to

re-integrate the rejected [...] Warhol recollected that ‘the people I loved were the ones like Freddy, the leftovers of show business, turned down at auditions all over town.... You had to love these people more because they loved themselves less.’ Warhol surrounded himself with ‘leftovers’ and set about turning them into ‘stars’ – not just ordinary people, as in the Hollywood myth, but rejects, people ‘turned down at auditions all over town’ (23)

Part of *The Chelsea Girls*’ allure was its subversive and “dirty” subject matter. The earliest Warhol films had been produced by Factory regulars for viewing within the

Factory. But when Warhol began his work with the Velvet Underground and put together the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, he began to show his films outside of the Factory, often looping parts of *Sleep, Eat, and Vinyl* as a part of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable's intermedia experience. In 1966, Jonas Mekas commissioned *The Chelsea Girls* to screen at the Film-Makers' Cinémathèque, thereby guaranteeing a public performance for one of Warhol's full-length films (other Warhol films that circulated publicly were often in excerpted form). Warhol and Mekas then worked with Cinémathèque manager Tom Chomont to distribute the film in wider release.

The film caught on among the viewing public and eventually became one of the first popular (and profitable) films in experimental film history. As the 1967 *Newsweek* article "Up From Underground" attests, Warhol and *The Chelsea Girls* were instrumental in the surfacing of the underground into the public consciousness. After screening at The Film-Makers' Cinémathèque, *The Chelsea Girls* moved into a commercial movie house where it averaged \$10,000-\$15,000 per week. Given this success, offers came into the Film-Makers' Cooperative from large distribution chains like United Artists and Twentieth Century-Fox. Trans-Lux Corporation even offered \$100,000 for the distribution rights. But Warhol and the Cooperative turned down the offers, preferring to control film distribution to the 150 commercial theaters, plus film societies and universities, which expressed interest in screening underground films after seeing their potential profitability.<sup>1</sup>

In *Perverse Spectators*, Janet Staiger claims that the commercial success of *The Chelsea Girls* prompted both the independent film movement that became New Hollywood

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<sup>1</sup> These details and others can be found in Jack Kroll and Frances Heller, "Up From Underground," *Newsweek*, Feb. 13, 1967.

and the development of the commercial pornography film industry (148). In the twelve vignettes of *The Chelsea Girls*, the Factory superstars invert, subvert, and pervert the codes and conventions of normative behavior in their improvisational roles and interactions: Ondine's queering of such sacred roles as priest and Pope, Ingrid Superstar's masochistic lesbianism, Nico's narcissism, Brigid Berlin's onscreen drug use, Eric Emerson's body groove, Mary Woronov's sadism, and Patrick's hustling. *The Chelsea Girls* not only brought underground film up, it also brought to the screen underground identities, behaviors, and relationships for public view, and consumption. The roles and interactions of the superstars were often described as dirty and unwatchable by contemporary mainstream film critics like Rex Reed.<sup>2</sup> The improvised dramatic performances of the superstars provided mainstream spectators with a through-the-looking-glass view of social interactions that mirrored dominant society. But in their reflections, these interactions distorted mainstream conventions through parody and contradiction. These individuals who were once leftovers because of their unconventional values and identities have become transformed into superstars through their involvement in the film. They expertly employ and exemplify Factory conventions and receive authoritative positions as a result.

In his interviews and writings, Warhol lays out a number of his aesthetic conventions. For example, he describes his theory of what makes a good performer. Good performers are capable of providing reproductions of scenes they have experienced before, and they are not professionals. These good performers can mimic emotions, gestures, and speech, and they can even provide a sense of the atmosphere for a scene. But they are more inclusive than tape recordings, videotapes, or novels because they can record "complete

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<sup>2</sup> Rex Reed complained "Chelsea Girls is a three and a half hour cesspool of vulgarity and talentless confusion which is about as interesting as the inside of a toilet bowl" (<http://www.warholstars.org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1f/chelsea.html>).

experiences and people and situations and then pull out these recordings when they need them. They can repeat a line exactly the way it should sound and look exactly the way they should look” (82). But their mimicry is more than just a mechanical reproduction; in fact, it is better than mechanical reproduction because they can record and replay complete experiences and people and situations. In addition, because they are not professionals, who do “exactly the same thing at exactly the same moment” in order to play to audience expectations, they are unpredictable, doing different things at different times so you can never tell what they’ll do next (82). Good performers, then, engage in the improvisational replaying of complete experiences. In “My Favorite Superstar: Notes on My Epic, *The Chelsea Girls*,” Warhol refers to this ability as the sign of a real person. In this interview, Warhol chooses Ingrid Superstar as his favorite superstar “because she’s just her. She’s a real person; she’s not phony. She’s just her. She’s a real person. She says and does whatever she happens to feel like doing and saying at the time. And the only time she acts phony is when she feels like being a phony” (128). Ingrid says and does whatever she happens to feel like doing and saying. But feeling in this sense seems less about emotions than about responses, especially since Warhol indicates that this saying and doing has a moment-by-moment quality (i.e., “at the time”). Ingrid’s words and actions are a response to external stimuli: she reflects the world around her, like a mirror. Her words and actions re-present her context, but through her representation, she is able to control that context rather than being controlled by it.

This attempt to shape a context rather than being shaped by it also explains the popular use of parody in the words and deeds of superstars like Ingrid Superstar in *The Chelsea Girls*. It also helps to explain why phony is such an insult. A phony pretends, and

by doing so replaces being with acting. Though “Ingrid Superstar” is a star persona, the woman who is Ingrid Superstar is Ingrid Superstar because she is not acting, or performing a role. Warhol’s insistence on improvisation and profilmic distractions can be seen as his attempt to do away with imposed roles and identities. By doing so, he attempts to capture a more profound view of reality in his films while also instantiating an alternative reality, one that inverts normative conventions. As Richard deCordova discovers in his analysis of the Hollywood star system, a star is born from the intertextual field of associations produced by the star system and the star’s identity is imposed by that system (20). The circulation of the star’s name, image, and set of characteristics in filmic and extrafilmic discourse constitutes his or her identity as an individual.

Warhol works to create an intertextual field that produces a superstar system capable of giving the individual performer a free space in which to shape his or her own identity. He insists that superstars perform themselves instead of performing roles. What they say or do, that is, the particular role or persona they improvise in any given moment, becomes in this scenario an expression of what they think or feel at that moment, how they respond to their context and the interactions within it. But any deviation from this improvisational mode, any pretension or performance of a role done for effect instead of in response to what one thinks, feels, or encounters at any given moment, constitutes phoniness. Were such phoniness to happen, instead of the performer shaping the role, the role would shape the performer – and the free space for subjective expression created by this approach would be penetrated by outside influences like dramatic conventions or mainstream social roles, the same forces that originally classified these superstars as leftovers.

But the superstars are also a product of discourse. Though Warhol's discourse may not necessarily individuate particular superstars, their status as superstars is determined by what he says about this particular phenomenon. Ingrid Superstar may have the ability to control her individual superstar persona, but Warhol sets the nature and parameters of her superstardom. She can only be a superstar if she abides by the conventions he establishes. One of the principles Warhol establishes for superstardom involves being a real person who says and does what they feel at each moment; they are themselves and respond to their environment according to their own consciousness and sense of self. Yet by appropriating subjectivity, and a particular conception of subjectivity, to establish this Factory convention, Warhol annexes a mode of individuality to establish his oppositional institutional stance. As deCordova also points out, the star is an individual and an institution: a real person who exists outside of the system yet who is also the product of that rationalized system. Warhol's superstars are also subject to this paradoxical state even though Warhol strives to create a free space where the superstar can be a real person through improvisation. Here, the individual superstar can present him or herself through words and actions that express moment-by-moment responses to the environment. Because these superstars are often drawn from marginalized positions within mainstream society, their responses can, and often do, playfully invert dominant social roles or take on roles deemed deviant or subversive within that society. By doing so, they give shape to an alternative, through-the-looking-glass Factory society because these improvisational performances largely occur within the filmic and extrafilmic networks generated by Warhol. Their improvisational responses become contextualized as part of the Factory. Though the superstars' individuality is not necessarily a product of

the system, the system appropriates their individuality as a part of its institutional structure. But, as we will see in the “Pope Ondine” reel, the distinction between individuality and institution, like the distinction between Factory and mainstream society, can be difficult to maintain, especially under the pressure of institutional conventions.

In his 1966 review of *The Chelsea Girls*, Gregory Battcock points out that the “Pope Ondine” reel is given special prominence in the film because of its placement at the end and because its soundtrack plays in its entirety. In this reel, the superstar Ondine is also given special prominence since the majority of the reel consists of his solo performance. He has the unique challenge of having to create *and* respond to a particular context. As a result, his performance lays bare many of the Factory conventions that shape the otherwise freeform film. Because of the pressures placed upon him by these conventions, his performance ruptures and reveals the connections and commonalities shared by the Factory and mainstream society.

Early in the reel, Ondine admits, or rather, complains, to the cameraman, Paul Morrissey, and the crew that he is at a loss as to what to do for his performance. He has just injected himself with methadone, but he still has over thirty minutes of film time to fill before the reel runs out. He does not address the camera, but rather conducts his conversation with the individuals offscreen, telling Morrissey to shut up and asking the offscreen crew for suggestions. With this engagement, his performance shifts from a solo action and monologue to a dramatic dialogue. Though Ondine is by himself in front of the camera, he creates an inter-relational context by calling on the crew. As both Hal Foster and David James point out, in regards to Warhol’s *Screen Tests*, Warhol’s minimalist films became tests of the filmed subject’s capacity to confront a camera,

present an image, and sustain a performance for the entire duration of the reel without the armature of character or the benefit of direction. The sitters of the *Screen Tests* had the additional strain of imposed immobility and distractions like teasing, questioning, and provocations, but Foster makes the point that they were left with no sympathetic other to interact with and no reciprocity with which to engage in order to determine their sense of self and to create a self-image. The result is an experience of “radical desubjectification” (Foster 18). Though Ondine is not faced with the stress of immobility and distractions, he does exhibit anxiety regarding his performance and attempts to engage with others around him in order to begin developing an improvisational narrative. He brings the offscreen into frame and into his performance by soliciting suggestions. In addition, through this solicitation, Ondine draws attention to the process of filmmaking and to his starring role within that process. Though he reveals his uncertainty as to what this starring role should consist of, he does attempt to produce a context where he holds some authority.

Someone offscreen suggests he do one of his outbursts, which have become an “Ondine” trademark. He refuses, but says “Alright let’s talk about me” and launches into an improvisational dramatic monologue about the difficulty of being Pope. He promises to provide an inside view of the Pope as a man, an inside view which is more of an inside-out view that parodies this authoritative figure, stripping him of his conventional sacred identity and portraying him instead as if he were a sinful man. Ondine fluidly switches between his performances of “Ondine” and “Pope.” There is no change in his manner, his gestures, or facial expressions as he continues his monologue. We only know which persona he currently inhabits by the contextual moment of the improvisational

narrative he creates. When he is the “Pope,” he addresses the camera and ignores the crew, and when he is “Ondine,” he references the crew but ignores the camera. Also, he tends to use the Pope persona defensively, or offensively. He may choose to respond to questions and comments from offscreen as “Ondine” but then ignores them by immersing himself back into his role as “Pope.”

At this point, we should distinguish between Ondine, “Ondine,” and the “Pope.” Ondine is a conscious subject; he has a sense of himself, is able to respond to the world around him, and is capable of self-expression. “Ondine” is Ondine’s superstar persona, his identity within the context of the Factory. “Ondine” is thus subject to, and a subject of, the discursive network and conventions established by Warhol. “Ondine’s” trademark outbursts demonstrate that he is a real person within the principles of superstardom designated by Warhol. The Pope, and also the Priest, are roles Ondine returns to regularly; they are ways he responds to his environment, improvisational roles that express what he feels in any given moment. His outbursts give vent to his emotions and to his anger and frustration over restrictions that he immediately encounters, but the Pope and Priest are roles adopted to generate narratives that parodically invert, and overturn, normative social restrictions. The reel “Pope Ondine” is accurately named because Ondine calls upon the “Pope” and “Ondine” to combat the introduction of normative social conventions into the Factory free space.

In “Pope Ondine,” Ondine responds to the anxiety of having to produce an improvisational narrative by repeating an aspect of his performance in the “Pope Ondine and Ingrid” reel of *The Chelsea Girls* when he demands to hear a confession. In “Pope Ondine and Ingrid,” Ingrid Superstar confesses her sins, on the supposed eve of her

wedding, to an eager priest who relishes her past sins while seemingly prompting her to commit new ones. In this reel, Ingrid keeps pace with Ondine, matching her characterizations with his, even initiating causal chains in their shared narrative with her own developments and transformations. She also rebuffs Ondine's verbal and physical outbursts with her own. As his voice increases in volume, so does hers; as he pushes her or tries to strike her, she quickly shoves him back. "Pope Ondine and Ingrid" encounter one another as relative equals; they both understand the cinematic conventions of the Factory and they both hold authoritative positions within its superstar system and social structure. But where "Pope Ondine and Ingrid" flows as a shared narrative created by the interplay between two superstars and their various roles, in "Pope Ondine," Ondine constructs his narrative in relation to a Factory outsider, Rona Page, when he decides to create another confessional scene. Page was a friend of Jonas Mekas and Factory-insider Gerard Malanga. Mekas suggested she visit the Factory and the Chelsea Hotel during the production of *The Chelsea Girls*. Rona Page knew the scene and some of the superstars, but she was no superstar. She did not know how to improvise, nor did her role playing abide by Factory conventions. In their encounter, her lack of knowledge disrupts not only Ondine's improvisation but also his sense of himself.

When Page enters the frame, in response to Ondine's commanding request, "I want a confession!," Ondine controls their interaction by bullying her. He places himself in an authoritative position by enforcing the conventions of production: "Sit down. Quickly, quickly because the cameras are rolling." She sits down quickly then confesses her anxiety: "It's kind of scary." Ondine then shifts into his "Pope" persona and tries to provoke a confession from Page, but she is unable to produce one immediately. She

grasps for a direction and Ondine tells her to try relating to Jesus by visualizing herself giving him a blowjob as he hangs on the cross. After he tells her to “pull back the loin cloth in your mind,” Page immediately calls his authority into question, perhaps as a shocked response to his unconventional suggestion. She calls his status as a priest absurd. She demotes him from Pope to “Father” (in an unconsciously ironic move) and challenges his improvisational narrative. Ondine first responds by playing along, “If that’s what you believe, you’re not going to get very far,” but when she tries to leave the set, he refuses to let her go before he finishes. In answer she says “I think you’re a phony. I can’t confess to you because you’re such a phony. I’m not trying to be anyone.” Ondine explodes in response, “So are you! Get out of here.” He throws water in her face. “Now who’s phony? Get out of here you creep!” He slaps her twice then hits her on the head and moves around to her side of the couch in order to hit her again and shove her offscreen. When Ondine erupts into his rage and hits Page, we can see his blows are real. Page’s facial expression reveals her shock. She quickly brings her hands up to her head to protect it and says “Do not hit me” in a very measured, angry tone. Ondine does not hit her again, but he does shove her out of the frame and she does not reappear for the rest of the reel.

When Page calls Ondine a phony, she drives a wedge between Ondine, “Ondine” (his superstar persona) and “Pope Ondine.” The violent outburst triggered by Page’s insult seems to be real while Ondine’s earlier performance of the Pope seems artificial in comparison, as if Page’s accusation was in fact an accurate observation. In light of her accusation, Ondine’s performance becomes parsed between his real response and his artificial role-playing, and this role-playing now becomes isolated, seemingly cut off

from any relationship with his self-identity. His improvisational inversions become illusions, a fantasy with no application to reality. Page's insult transforms his Pope into a figment of his imagination rather than a social critique. What now seems real is his violent response to Page's insult and her refusal to abide by the conventions he imposes upon her, conventions that secure his authority and that represent the Factory. Page wanted to leave the set when Ondine suggested she imagine giving Jesus a blow job; she likely wanted to remove herself from the situation as a way to register her protest. But her intent to do so in the midst of Ondine's improvisational narrative would have interrupted it, which is why Ondine stops her from leaving. He protects the conventions of filming and his narrative. She stays, but assumes a defensive posture, which becomes offensive when she repudiates him, his self-appointed role, and status, which she thinks is phony and therefore nonbinding.

Page then says "I'm not trying to be anyone," which casts Ondine's words and actions as the performance of a role while attributing hers to a subjective response. Page's comment places her in a position of greater authority; she first challenges and diminishes Ondine's status, then questions the structure upon which it is built by calling upon the conventions of mainstream society. She *is* someone while he *tries to be* someone. David James reads this moment as an assertion of a stronger validity for the individual against the assumed role. Ondine's performances have created a world where ontological certainty is not available, but when Page refuses to accept the Pope, she undermines the conditions that made his different roles possible. In response, Ondine is forced to condense his two main personae, "Ondine" and the "Pope" (72). Though ontological certainty is not possible in this space, Ondine must unify his selves in order to

respond to Page's ontological assertion. Page does not play by the rules of the game, yet Ondine's response is only possible when he plays by her rules, rules that she imports from normative society. James also indirectly positions Page's response within the realm of the real and opposes it to Ondine's artificial response; Page refuses to accept Ondine's artificial role so he must become more real in order to respond to her. What is evident from this exchange is that two sets of principles and values are coming into conflict and struggling for authority. Page's ontological certainty in the face of Ondine's fluid ontology appears to give her authority, while also interjecting mainstream values into the space. Ondine must respond in order to preserve the free space of the Factory, which prizes fluidity and inversion, and requires them to maintain the autonomy of this Factory free space and the individuals within it.

Ondine responds to her comment in order to maintain this authority and autonomy, though his response may come from a desire to preserve *his* authority rather than that of the Factory free space. He uses violence to re-establish his authoritative position and to remove the threat she poses from the frame. He then directly addresses the spectators in a monologue that serves as an attempt to erase all traces of Page and her challenge from the set and the film frame. Paradoxically, Ondine responds to her accusation by calling on normative social hierarchies and methods of containment. Ondine's use of physical violence to displace Page gives expression to a social order grounded in gender-based hierarchy, but it also hearkens to the use of violent methods of repression used to contain and remove any threat to dominance by a subordinate group. After using violence to erase her physical presence from the set, Ondine employs objectifying language in order to begin removing traces of the threat she posed. He

initially refers to her as a phony and a creep but then resorts to bitch and finally to it. Though he employs gendered language to reduce her authority, most of the terms he uses are gender neutral, with “it” proving to be perhaps the most devastating term he uses to define her: “I have to hit it and it deserves to be put into its place. Somewhere beneath me.” Once he uses “it” to refer to her, he settles down and works to find his equilibrium again by re-establishing the conventions of the Factory and his own authoritative status within it.

But Ondine returns to a stable state in part by ignoring the conventions of filming. After he removes Page from the set, he removes himself, either forgetting or angrily subverting the formal conventions of Warhol’s film by refusing to remain in the established frame. As Ondine darts around the set, we can hear his outbursts, but we cannot see him. The camera searches for him, panning and tilting to scan the set, but it finds the crew members, who scatter as the camera’s gaze moves through the formerly offscreen space. The camera’s search for Ondine heightens the drama of the moment and indicates the presence of another actor behind the camera who is participating in this moment and documenting this event. Also, in the camera’s search, we see that the carefully contrived setting of the original frame, a shaded background and two couches placed back to back, hides an empty, industrial space filled with clutter. This revelation emphasizes the artificiality of the set, making the reality it stages seem less real, again underscoring Page’s accusation. After a few moments, Ondine and the camera return to the set and re-establish the frame. After he takes his place on one of the couches, the camera zooms in to reveal the throbbing artery in his neck and the tendrils of sweaty hair that frame it. The camera zooms back out as Ondine says, “Alright now it’s my set.”

But the camera's improvisational zoom, which points out Ondine's throbbing artery to spectators, opens up Ondine's declaration to question. Is this his set? The zooming camera appears to hold authority of its own as it characterizes the event as an "Ondine" outburst. The obvious presence of the camera, and the camera's participation in the outburst event, positions this event as an act of improvisation rather than one of real provocation. The camera's pointed focus on Ondine's throbbing artery, the sign of his anger and heightened emotional state, contextualizes his actions as part of the film, drawing them back into the Factory frame. As we saw in Chapter 1, Warhol's minimalist aesthetic involved profilmic provocations. The final shape of these films was often determined by the responses of the onscreen subjects to provocation and interpersonal conflict. Paul Morrissey's camerawork works to shape a particular interpretation of the event by rendering Ondine's outburst as a spectacle. In fact, "Pope Ondine" became one of the most popular and remarked about reels of *The Chelsea Girls* and, while the film was still in distribution, Warhol commissioned Ondine to make another film, *The Loves of Ondine*, which consisted of Ondine performing a series of outbursts as he interacts with various women.

Ondine's actions complement and contradict this reading since Ondine seems to defend his real response by drawing on the conventions of filmmaking. When he returns to the set, he directly addresses the audience and the camera in what seems to be a non-performative, self-reflexive real moment. Yet he locates this address within the realm of art, thereby making it appear to be a performance: "I'm sorry but that's a fucking artistic bore. How dare you come on to a set and tell me I'm a phony on my set? Do you know what she had the nerve to do, audience of mine? Came on to the set with, 'I don't know

what to do,' as a friend, and calls me a phony." He is now on his set, alone, at the center of the frame, and he uses this opportunity to define the event according to his view of it. He concentrates on establishing the inferiority of Page's improvisation and speaks directly to the audience ("audience of mine") in an attempt to move it to his way of thinking. He knows the film will document this event and his actions, so he attempts to influence its representation of these events through language.

This may be an historic document. I don't like to hit people. And I don't like it when people hit me. It's ugly and boring. I have to hit it and it deserves to be put into its place. Somewhere beneath me. God forgive them. I forgive them. And the saints who know a lot about movies had better be sharp. [...] It's a document. It will remain. Be praised! I knew it would be big though. I adore myself. I can't bear it. Oh idolatry. [...] 'I'm not trying to be anybody.' You heard her words. [...] Willful and horrid befoulment, you fool. What you're trying to undermine here is your very existence.

After this soliloquy, Ondine's improvisational flow breaks down and he is left, as he was at the start of the reel, with only actions to draw upon. He remains fixed in one position, draped over the back of one of the set couches, awkwardly fumbling with a series of props. "Can I say goodbye? No. ... What should we do? You can always watch me do something [he starts to play with his necklace]. I'm losing my power as a performer and becoming something else. What can I do now?"

Ondine seems to be searching again for a suggestion on what to do in order to fill up the time allotted to him. But after his outburst, his query emphasizes the pressures that Warhol's filmmaking conventions place on him and his uncertainty about himself. After shooting up and verbally sparring with Morrissey and the offscreen crew at the beginning of the reel, Ondine decides to talk about himself as a way to begin his performance and that is when he launches into his performance as Pope. But at the end of the reel, he can no longer

find any actions or words capable of launching him into another parodic performance of self. Though Morrissey frames Ondine's violent response to Page as an "Ondine outburst," an expression of his superstar persona, Ondine does not immediately translate his response into these terms. Instead, he feels compelled to explain his actions, and he seems compelled to explain himself in order to control the representation of these events, which have been documented on film. His attempts at overt meaning making are not parodic, but serious. In these moments of explanation, he appears caught between normative distinctions of being and acting and those conventions established by Warhol for the Factory. He struggles for a foothold in the riptide created by this clash of conventions, which have been brought together in his and Page's exchange. He loses all sense of himself here. He eventually re-adopts but then drops his Pope persona, and is left to fumble with a prop – no longer able to improvise or maintain his superstar persona. He flounders to regain his equilibrium in front of the naked gaze of the camera, as that camera (unbeknownst to him) continues to frame his responses.

Ondine's couching of Page's actions as directly related to the undermining of her existence seems to give us some additional insight into his outburst and into the forces that come into conflict in this violent event. Trying to be somebody means you're nobody according to the social conventions of the Factory. Yet not trying to be somebody can result in the re-introduction of normative social conventions. The improvisational interplay that inverts dominant social conventions in order to give authority to those generally deemed leftovers cannot be seen as pretend for the alternative, Factory society to hold. For these improvisations and inversions to become real, to constitute genuine identities and an alternative reality, they must be real responses by real people. As we discovered, for

Warhol, real people say and do whatever they happen to feel like doing and saying at any given moment. These responses reflect the world around them but, like any mirror, they also re-present and change the world as they reflect it. This re-presentation allows the individual to control his or her context rather than being controlled by it. But Ondine has lost control. He does not frame his response to Page as an outburst, but rather attempts to shape its representation against normative values (i.e., he feels compelled to explain himself and what he did). As a result, his earlier improvisations now appear to be false, since he is now explaining his actions within the frame of normative conventions. By bringing normative conventions into his space, Ondine calls his actions and words as Pope and “Ondine” into question. Though he insists that Page is undermining her existence, the implications of his response to her, and his response to his own response, indicates that he also fears his own existence has been undermined. Though Ondine’s superstar persona disintegrates – for him – as the sequence continues, the camera work that frames his various responses maintains the Factory conventions. Though he falls apart, the camera holds the Factory, and its alternative reality, together.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Warhol’s minimalist approach attempts to capture a more profound view of reality by using conflict, improvisation, and the interactions between human constructions of reality and its objective aspects. By positioning Ondine’s struggle as an “Ondine outburst” and by capturing Ondine’s unsuccessful attempts to compose himself, these scenes become another successful Warhol film experiment. Ondine’s struggles are neatly folded back into the Factory and Warhol’s formal project. The film’s positioning of Ondine reveals that the free space Warhol seemingly wants to create is, in practice, not free at all. It exists as part of his total view, a specific way to achieve freedom and autonomy that

Warhol defines – and controls. In this light, we can see how Ondine’s outburst, framed as an expression of his Factory superstar persona, would help affirm Warhol’s overall project. Positioned as a part of his persona, his outburst would call normative conceptions of reality and the power structures they are built upon into question since his performance becomes situated as a real, subjective response, i.e., the response of a real person. The violence of Ondine’s blows, which actually hit Page and hit her hard, signify a real, non-performative response. But then Ondine immediately stalks off set, revealing that this event is after all “just a movie” as the camera follows him and reveals the constructed nature of the set. When he sits back down, he begins to mitigate and justify his actions, largely by explaining how he feels about Page’s insult, and his response takes on the shape of a performance. He directly addresses the camera and launches into an improvised narrative that represents the events and feelings and thoughts in relation to them. In Warhol’s description, the ideal superstar’s words and actions should come from their moment-to-moment responses to their context. In this scenario, the boundary between reality and illusion breaks down since the superstars’ performances, which include both their real responses and their improvisational dramatic scenes, are real in the sense that they are both responses to the actions, events, situations, and people that surround them. A phony tries to be someone by acting the part. But Ondine’s response shows that being and acting may not be as distinctive as we might think. Superstars are real people when they have the unfettered ability to say and do what they feel, and this ability eliminates the distinction between being and acting. In this context, all performances become responses and thus take on the patina of reality.

Ondine’s parodic performance of “Pope Ondine” instantiates an alternative reality, one that inverts and subverts dominant social and cultural norms, norms that would have

produced Ondine's original leftover status. Ondine even connects his "Pope" explicitly with the leftovers: "Thieves, criminals of any sort, perverts. I'm Pope for the few who really can't. Those rejected by society. I'm willing to hear anyone's confession." He makes this alternative Pope real because he *is* the "Pope for the few who really can't" within the context of the Factory. Since real people say and do whatever they feel at any given moment, Ondine retains his "real person" superstar status, as Warhol has defined it, even when he uses violence to displace Rona Page. Though Page attempts to make a distinction between being and performing, reality and illusion, Ondine's ambivalent response blurs the boundaries between them. However, his responses blur the boundaries between the reality of the Factory and mainstream reality since both become tangled up in one another in his outburst and in his attempts to maintain his authority. Or perhaps his responses reveal the conflict that occurs when competing concepts of reality come into contact with one another and struggle for dominance.

This open conflict between normative and Factory conceptions of reality and what constitutes a real person becomes possible within the institutional framework established by Warhol. Warhol's careful definition of real person renders all performances as responses and thus gives them equal weight, and equal reality, with those conventions regarding what constitutes subjectivity in mainstream society in contrast with what constitutes pretension. "Pope Ondine" may or may not have disturbed spectators enough to prompt them to get more involved with themselves and those around them. From the contemporary reviews of the film, we can ascertain that spectators certainly noticed and remarked upon "Pope Ondine." However, these review notices, along with the camera's framing of the events not only as a performance but also as a spectacle, marks the

beginning of a critical transition in Factory filmmaking. As mentioned earlier, Ondine went on to star in a feature-length, commercial film based on his outbursts. This particular outburst and its consequences can be seen as a pivotal moment in Factory filmmaking, an early indicator of the transition often remarked upon by scholars of Warhol's work, when he began to shift from making movies just to make them to making feature-length movies that regular theaters would want to show (Michelson 44-45).<sup>3</sup> Warhol's attempt to institute an alternative cinema and an alternative reality are replaced by his desire to become a Business Artist.<sup>4</sup> The first glimmer of this shift occurs when "Pope Ondine" becomes *The Loves of Ondine*, and the outburst is transformed into an object for consumption. With this shift, Warhol no longer uses his films to expose the direct relationship between art and political economy, or to parody, and disrupt, that relationship through self-fetishization. Instead, the superstars become spectacles, more obviously objectified by their conventional narrative presentations and the packaging of their personas. The potential for a free space initially opened up by Warhol's project collapses as onscreen and offscreen subjects resume their classical positions in relationship to one another, and voyeurism replaces the possibility for self-discovery and self-composure.

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<sup>3</sup> In part, Warhol's change in strategy can be attributed to the attempt on his life by Valerie Solanas, but it can also be explained by Warhol's interest in creating a perfect overlap between aesthetics and political economy: "After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art" (*Philosophy* 92). But, as most critics agree, Warhol's films not only stopped being "art" after this transition, they stopped being experimental.

<sup>4</sup> "Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art" (*The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* 92).

## **Fernando Birri and *Tire dié*: The Art of Collaboration**

Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri is also interested in film's ability to provide an opportunity for real people to present themselves, and in film's capacity to document reality and the events that constitute it. While Warhol uses the process of filmmaking to stage improvisational interchanges and to capture the contingencies created by conflict so onscreen subjects can express themselves as real people and shape their own self-determination, Birri relies on a collaborative production process that solicits the participation and input of onscreen performers and spectators in order to determine the final shape of the film. Theoretically, the collaborative process opens up a space for the onscreen and offscreen individuals involved to shape their self-presentation or the representation of their social, cultural, or ethnic group to ensure that the image produced by the film is representative and portrays their reality as they see it. According to Birri in "Cinema and Underdevelopment," the film's expression of "how reality *is*" serves to denounce the illusion of reality represented in the mainstream Argentine cinema.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Birri emphasizes cinema's direct connection with neocolonialism; film, in all of its aspects – production, distribution, exhibition, and as a cultural product – gives expression to the international system of political economy that produces underdevelopment in Argentina. He wants his films to reveal the circumstances of life in the shadow of neocolonialism and by doing so contradict the images of reality portrayed in mainstream cinema. By exposing this contradiction, Birri hopes to awaken a critical consciousness in film spectators that inspires them to overturn the disparities and misery that surround them. A key aspect of Birri's attempts to document Argentina's reality involves the production of films that include the participation of the leftovers of

Argentine society, those who are rejected by bourgeois society and mainstream views of society. As Birri's first film in Argentina, *Tire dié*, shows, the people of Argentina who suffer the misery of underdevelopment live on the margins, pushed out of sight and out of mind, relegated to shantytowns on the outside edges of cities and completely erased from the images of mainstream cinema.

In the period of *Tire dié* (1956-1960), when Birri was helping to found the Institute of Cinematography and the Documentary School of Santa Fe, Birri emphasized the interrelationship of theory and practice and the "photodocumentary" approach. As he recalls these early days, Birri points out how theory and practice must go hand in hand: "practice has to be the key, with theory as its guide and interpreter" ("Roots" 5). Birri's insistence on this interrelationship emphasizes the process of filmmaking and the effects of the film rather than the film itself. For Birri, all aspects of the cinema should be collaborative and should inform one another by involving the equal and active participation of everyone touched by the experience, including those who view the film. This strategy of collaboration explains the four years of work that went into *Tire dié*. The film was a direct outgrowth of Birri's photodocumentary project, which he initiated in 1956 as part of the original film seminar he conducted for the Institute of Sociology at the National University of the Litoral. Birri told his 120 students to go in search of their environment, to venture forth with a still camera and any available tape recorder "to converse with and photograph people, places, animals, plants, but mainly *problems* of one's surroundings" ("Roots" 4). Birri and the students then culled through the results of these forays and chose the project that "offered the fullest opportunity for denouncing a

deplorable set of social conditions” and that project eventually became Birri’s first film, *Tire dié* (“Roots” 6).

As the opening titles of the film proclaim, between 1956 and 1958, between the hours of 4pm and 5pm, each day of winter, spring, summer and fall, the filmmakers visited the shantytown outside the city limits of Santa Fe in order to interview the residents. Though Birri was the project leader and two people were responsible for the camerawork, 80 people participated in the shooting of *Tire dié* and virtually all of the shantytown dwellers were involved in some aspect of the project. As Birri remembers the process, the students involved in the film’s production were divided into groups, each concentrating on a specific individual from the community. With the exception of the filming itself, Birri strove to make each task virtually interchangeable so all of the students could participate and all decisions could be made collectively. Each part of the filmmaking process was collaborative. The students involved in the project were involved in decision-making and each had the opportunity to engage in the interchangeable production responsibilities, thereby gaining experience with a wide variety of production practices. Such experience was significant given the conventional industrial filmmaking’s division of labor, which emphasizes specialized skills rather than knowledge of the production process as a whole. The students also relied on the first-person information and experiences of the shantytown dwellers for the film’s content. These individuals directly informed the film’s subject matter and many of them appear onscreen, directly addressing the camera as a way to communicate their experiences with spectators. Just as Warhol attempts to provide an opportunity for his superstars to control their own fetishization,

Birri's interest in making collaborative films appears to stem from a desire to provide onscreen subjects with some capacity to control their self-presentation.

The first version of the film was approximately an hour long. It premiered, in three screenings, in the Great Hall of the University of the Litoral and then traveled by mobile cinema to the shanty community featured in the film and to other communities around Santa Fe so even those people without ready access to a film theater would have a chance to see the film and discuss it. Birri's film students made up hundreds of questionnaires asking spectators for their opinions about the film, which parts were effective, which were not, and why, so the filmmakers could collect their input as the film traveled by mobile cinema through the provincial communities. All of the data was then compiled and this information was used to shape the film's final, 33-minute version ("Roots" 6). The feedback of the film's subjects and other spectators was incorporated into the film's final version (completed between 1958 and 1960). This version interweaves two storylines, one that traces the relationships and daily struggles of the shantytown dwellers and another that features the children's daily vigil for and dramatic run alongside the train that travels between Santa Fe and Buenos Aires. These children beg for coins from the travelers and this daily event represents a significant source of income for the children and their families. This simple event, the daily passage of a train as it travels from one city to another, is a central event in the lives of these children, shaping their experience, opportunities, and futures, and it becomes the central event of the film and characterizes the film's primary theme: how the misery and limitations produced by underdevelopment circumscribes the daily life and lives of a segment of Argentina's people.

In his 1958 manifesto, which appeared in the program at *Tire dié*'s premiere, Birri underscores his collaborative approach as he describes the film project, which consists of three elements enumerated by Birri: 1) To collaborate with students to overcome the present situation in the Argentine cinema” by creating a “national, realist and critical” film form, one that has heretofore remained inaccessible to the public [*Colaborar en la medida de sus jóvenes fuerzas a la superación de la crisis actual del cine argentino aportando al mismo una problemática nacional, realista y crítica, hasta ahora inédita* (translation mine)]; 2) “To strengthen the basis for a future Argentine cinematographic industry capable of reaching an almost perfect photographic and audio technique” [*Afianzar las bases para una futura industria cinematográfica argentina ha alcanzado una técnica fotográfica y sonora casi perfecta*] (translation mine)]. He then attributes the “imperfections” of photography and sound in *Tire dié* to the nonprofessional means forced upon the filmmakers by their circumstances, which are the direct result of underdevelopment and the closed system generated by the dominant film industry. However, though they were forced to work within these constraints, they decided to move forward anyway – “we have decided to prefer content to a technique, an imperfect sense to one perfect but without sense” [*han hecho que se prefiriera un contenido a una técnica, un sentido imperfecto a una perfección sin sentido*] (translation mine)]. Birri and his students chose to produce and show an imperfect film in order to ensure that the film’s content, the images of the people, reached exhibition and thus could be seen by audiences. 3) “To use the cinema in the service of the University and the University in the service of popular education,” which he understands as bringing the people to consciousness and responsibility in regards to the important topics and national problems

that exist in the here and now. Birri intends to achieve this objective by showing the contradictions at work in representations of Argentina's reality. By showing spectators these contradictions, he hopes to bring them to a critical consciousness that inspires reform-based action.

In discussions surrounding the film's release, Birri describes it as a filmed social survey, which likely stems from his close involvement with the University of the Litoral's Institute for Sociology, which supported his initial film seminar and subsequent filmmaking. Also, as we saw in Chapter 1, when Birri returned to Santa Fe, he decided to found a film school that combined the basics of filmmaking with sociology, history, geography, and politics in order to help prepare his students to create films that analyze the reality surrounding them. Through an understanding of their context, they would then begin to work towards transforming it. *Tire dié* becomes a vital part of this search for understanding since Birri structures it in an attempt to give an unmediated documentary view of the conditions of underdevelopment experienced by the people of Argentina. Though the film does not put forth a hypothesis about the reasons for Argentina's underdevelopment (as occurs in Argentine films from later in the 1960s that deal with the same subject), it does rely on the firsthand testimony of the people who suffer from underdevelopment in order to communicate its effects and the misery it causes.

According to the General Social Survey website,<sup>5</sup> social surveys generally involve demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal answers to questions that work to capture information about societal trends or social change. Viewed through this lens, *Tire dié* attempts to capture a portrait of an unexplored aspect of Argentine society through the

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<sup>5</sup> The General Social Survey website can be found at: <http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/>.

answers to the questions asked by the filmmakers. Such an action is commensurate with Birri's objective to present the people and the miserable circumstances of underdevelopment usually not seen in mainstream cultural expressions. By showing this unexplored, and perhaps denied, aspect of Argentine society, Birri hopes to provide spectators with the opportunity to receive a more total or complete view of their society; he also wants to reveal the difficult truths about the important topics and national problems that exist in the here and now. But Birri's project also includes a concern with social reform, which as Julianne Burton points out, is a characteristic of social documentary. Birri establishes a theory of social documentary in "Cinema and Underdevelopment," and it has come to be identified as a documentary film form that involves human subjects and a descriptive or transformative concern (3). Burton's interest in *Tire dié* stems from its position as one of the first social documentaries, and one of the first to work towards democratizing the documentary form. Despite severe financial and technical limitations, Birri and his students sought the "synchronous self-presentation of social actors," a self-presentation free from the mediations of authoritarian narrators and the onscreen presence of filmmakers. To signal its emphasis on self-presentation, *Tire dié* generally introduces onscreen subjects in direct visual and verbal address and then provides a montage of images that illustrate what the subjects discuss. In this way, the film provides these individuals with an opportunity to retain control over their images and stories. In addition, the film's opening, with its aerial view of Santa Fe and increasingly absurd statistics about the city – such as the number of streetlamps and hairdressers, how many glasses of beer are consumed monthly, how many cows are slaughtered daily, how many pesos are spent on ink, paper, and blotter for government officials, etc. – that

produces a parodic critique of traditional documentary techniques that use “voice-of-God narration with perspective-of-God images” as a way to shape the spectator’s access to the people, places, and events portrayed. After the film’s title appears, the voice-of-God narrator disappears and the camera descends to “the eye level of the children,” thus indicating a different kind of documentary form (“Democratizing Documentary” 51-52).

But Burton concludes her analysis of *Tire dié* by claiming that Birri’s attempt to democratize documentary ultimately fails because of what amounts to his theoretical and technical short-sightedness. Birri sees documentary having a double function: to negate false representations of reality and to present reality as it really is. According to Burton, this view stems from Birri’s “naïve faith in the direct and incorruptible communicability of a pure and passive truth that merely awaits capture by the right agency” (77). Birri claims in “Cinema and Underdevelopment” that his films show how reality “really *is*” because his films reveal a reality not shown in dominant film forms. By portraying this real reality, the misery of underdevelopment as testified to by the people who live it, his films contradict the illusionary reality of mainstream films, which he believes try to hide this miserable reality. Once spectators see the contradiction between “real” and “illusionary” reality, they will develop a critical consciousness and begin to work for justice by transforming the social structures that contribute to the misery of underdevelopment. Birri seems to insist on the indexical quality of documentary film, its ability to register objects in the profilmic space and then to present them as they are, yet his depiction of how social documentary films generate a negative dialectical critique of dominant cinematic forms relies on film’s formal qualities and its ability to construct meaning. Birri collapses presentation and representation into one another. Because of this

collapse, *Tire dié* does not present its onscreen subjects as autonomous, conscious Subjects but instead represents them as subject matter; they become signs that prove the real reality Birri seeks to portray.

This collapse of presentation and representation becomes manifest in the way the film introduces and uses its documentary subjects. As we saw in Chapter 1, in Birri's discourse about *Tire dié* and his "realist, critical and popular" cinematic form, the onscreen subjects become a key aspect of the films' ability to testify to a real reality. Birri's theory relies not so much on film's indexical ability to show "how reality *is*" but rather on film's ability to portray the lives of the people who suffer from underdevelopment; their first-hand testimony and their images signify this real reality. In *Tire dié*, the images of the people and their surroundings, as well as the stories they tell, testify to reality *and* denounce, judge, criticize, and deconstruct the illusionary reality portrayed in dominant cinematic forms. Because of this, the onscreen subjects become a part of Birri's formal project and lose control of their capacity for self-presentation. But *Tire dié* generally introduces its subjects via visual and verbal direct address. Many of the onscreen subjects are filmed alone as they silently look into the camera or relate their stories to it. The onscreen subjects' breaking of the fourth wall indicates his or her awareness of being filmed and functions in part to produce a face-to-face encounter between subject and spectator, an encounter that elicits a more active and engaged relationship in filming and exhibition. This encounter also opens up a space for the onscreen subjects to affirm their autonomy and consciousness.

These moments appear to be forebears to the portrait films that were done in the U.S. in the 1960s, especially those produced by Warhol. Their similarities are especially

striking when read through the lens of David James's analysis of Warhol's work. In examining the portrait films, which include *The Chelsea Girls*, according to his categorization, James stresses how a solo onscreen subject must anxiously construct himself "in the mental mirrors of his self-image or his recollection of previous photography" because he is aware of being observed but is denied access to the results of that observation, and because he has no second person within the diegesis or on location with whom to speak or exchange glances (*Allegories* 69). This anxious construction becomes communicated in exhibition as direct address to the spectator. This direct eye contact implicates the spectator in the anxiety of the profilmic and asks the spectator to either meet or refuse to meet the gaze of the onscreen subject. James asserts that "these moments when the spectator's self-consciousness catches its own trace in the sitter's" subvert illusionism and explore the tensions between "an implied though never fully realized autonomous identity [...] and the inflection of it in their experience of the medium" (69-70). Though James attributes this phenomenon to the onscreen subjects, his theory of how it works also extends to the spectator, since he or she also experiences the anxiety that produces this implied identity. If we think about *Tire dié* in these terms, both the onscreen and offscreen subjects have the potential, theoretically, to develop a consciousness about themselves and in relation to the direct eye contact and the context represented by the film because of the face-to-face encounters the film produces. The film opens up a space for autonomy in these moment-by-moment direct encounters, although this autonomy is circumscribed by the film's formal structure and by the discourse that surrounds it. Birri, like Warhol, wants to collaborate and share artistic control, but because they use public statements about their filmmaking to institutionalize certain practices by

systematizing and defining them, these liberating techniques become incorporated back into the overall scope of their formal projects. Freedom has its limits.

We can also see the limits of freedom in one particularly significant technical aspect of *Tire dié*, which Burton claims is the ultimate cause of the film's failure to democratize documentary: the dramatic voice-over re-enactments that supplant the speaking voices of the onscreen subjects. In their filmmaking, Birri and his students had to rely on borrowed cameras and donated film, and much of their technology was outdated, making the equipment difficult to transport and the quality of the recordings imperfect. Though the grainy, high-contrast images produced an arresting visual style, the soundtrack, in Birri's estimation, was "virtually unintelligible." Because it was a social survey film, Birri and his students felt it was essential for spectators to be able to hear and understand what the interviewees were saying. So when they made the final cut in 1960, they decided to do something with the soundtrack as well. They laid on an additional track in which a leading Argentine actor and actress, Francisco Petrone and María Rosa Gallo, repeated what the filmmakers determined to be the key information from the subjects' responses. These voice-overs do not repeat the responses word-for-word. Certain sentences are repeated in full, while others are paraphrased, and they often occur over the original soundtrack, which plays at a decreased volume. Birri frames these voice-overs "as intermediaries between the subjects of the film and the audience" ("Roots" 7). Julianne Burton critiques this mediation, viewing it as contrary to the film's apparent commitment to direct verbal address. For Burton, the persistent intervention of the male and female "mediator-narrators," who speak over the voices of the onscreen subjects, imposes the "unwanted stamp of residual authoritarian anonymity" on this early attempt to

democratize documentary (54). Burton's critique is significant, since the decision to use two well-known actors instead of two individuals chosen from the shantytown introduces a mediating influence that signals structures outside the film that have authority over it, and thus interrupts Birri's attempt to present, rather than represent, the lives and experiences of the shantytown dwellers.

Yet these intermediaries also indirectly point out the constructed nature of filmic reality and thereby undercut the illusionary reality of dominant cinematic forms. Of course, these dramatic voice-over narrators also reveal the constructed nature of *Tire dié*'s reality. In one way, this revelation complements the film's parodic opening, and the two formal experiments can be seen as self-reflexive. However, Birri's manifestos undercut that reading because of his interest and insistence that his films show "how reality *is*." While Birri, like other Latin American filmmakers, emphasizes the ideological nature of reality, they always level that accusation against dominant film forms, with their bourgeois ideologies and realities, rather than against their own films. However, though Birri's experimentation with the voice-over narration is not self-reflexive, the gap opened up by the interrelation of the film's documentary images and its dramatic voice-over reenactments does call the unity of filmic representation into question. This gap divides words from image and narrative from the images of the onscreen subjects. *Tire dié*'s slum dwellers speak for themselves yet literally do not speak for themselves since the same male and female voices re-present sections of each of the individual inhabitants' personal testimonies. The film juxtaposes words and images in a variety of different ways: words voiced over portrait images that silently address the camera, words re-enacted over quotidian events that take place within the slum, words re-presented over images of

silenced speaking individuals, dramatized words over images of speaking individuals whose voices can be distantly heard, and finally the looping of a single phrase – “tire dié – as backdrop to the climactic scene of the train’s arrival, when the children of the slum run alongside to beg for coins from the travelers. The phrase “tire dié” gains significance at this moment because it is the only voiceover drawn from the events we witness. A boy’s desperate voice calls out the phrase again and again as we see the children run alongside the train in the film’s climactic montage sequence.

This dis-integration of the image created by the rift between words and their associated visuals accentuates what Rick Altman calls the sound-image gap that lies at the heart of the myth of cinematic unity. Birri’s post-production revision of the sound track challenges the convention that when mouths on the screen open, sound or speech naturally results. This convention disguises the source of the words and disassembles the work of production and technology (Altman 69). *Tire dié* exposes the ventriloquism of cinema. It also disrupts the imposition of a narrative upon individuals since these individual figures can no longer be contained by the narratives told about them, even when those narratives originated in their own words. Though the voices speak for the images, the images also speak for themselves through the onscreen subjects’ direct address to the camera. The subjects we see in the images, because of their direct address to the camera, maintain a sense of autonomy even in the presence of the authoritative voices that attempt to explain their actions. The two co-exist separately, and tensely, as the blind authoritative words grapple with the mute autonomous images, and a third agency becomes necessary to co-adapt them.

This third agency can be found in the spectators who collaborate to produce the film's ultimate shape and meaning. Such a reading is not meant to downplay the mediating effects of the voiceovers. Instead, it suggests a consideration of the voiceovers as a technical and formal choice rather than a mistake. This choice was necessitated by the limitations of the filmmakers' equipment and constructed as part of a critical relationship to dominant modes of cinema as part of a film's search for truth within its context. As Michael Chanan insists, the search for truth is different in cultures under the shadow of underdevelopment, since truth is more immediate and material. Truth, and perhaps reality too, lies in the relationship with the audience, in the film's mode of address, because the meaning of what is shown depends on the spectator's position. Chanan claims that, over time, New Latin American filmmakers became worried less about the way the filmic discourse positions the spectator and more about whether it adequately realizes where the spectator is already. For this reason, he believes that New Latin American Cinema films cannot be properly understood without considering the different ways these films position both the spectator and the filmmaker, or how they assume certain positions for the spectator (45-46). The onscreen subject could also be added to this relationship as a vital link or tool for the negotiation of this positioning since he or she can be instrumental to the filmmaker's project to reveal or revolutionize the spectator's relationship with his or her context.

Birri's collaborative production process for *Tire dié* and the film in exhibition open up a temporary free space where onscreen and offscreen subjects can share their experiences and develop new relationships, with themselves and with others. But these shared experiences occur through the medium of the film itself. Though Birri makes clear

in his 1958 manifesto that *Tire dié* does not provide the solution to the problems Argentina and its people face, he does position the film as the means to working towards that solution. The shantytown dwellers describe their daily struggles for the purposes of documenting the problematic contradictions of Argentina. The spectators share their thoughts and experiences as a result of encountering the film in exhibition so those thoughts can be incorporated into the film's final form. Though the collaborative process of filmmaking and the face-to-face encounter created by the film itself may open a space for onscreen and offscreen subjects to affirm their autonomy and agency, Birri's theory of the social documentary film form appropriates this space by defining it as a property of the film form and an offshoot of the cinematic experience itself. The film itself creates an uneasy tension between self-determination and objectifying incorporation. As Burton and other critics attest, *Tire dié* ultimately fails in its attempt to provide onscreen subjects with the means to guarantee their self-presentation. The voice-over intermediaries and the film's construction as a portrait of underdevelopment's misery incorporate the onscreen subjects into the film's objective of contradicting mainstream views of reality. But at the same time, the onscreen subjects' direct address of the camera and the way the voice-over intermediaries draw attention to the constructed nature of the documentary open up a space where the subjects can insist on their own autonomy and self-consciousness. Like *The Chelsea Girls*, *Tire dié* provides no easy or clear-cut solutions to combat the forces of repression that face subjects in their everyday lives, and the films in their turn exhibit their own repressive forces through their formal conventions. But we can see open conflict in these films between forces that work to repress and subjects that refuse this repression. Evidence of such conflict becomes a small-scale revolution. Though these

films may not directly contribute to the transformation of social hierarchies in the U.S. or Argentina, alternative realities and societies, with their own logics and values, do come into existence in these films. Their existence has the power to call into question, and even overturn, the structures of mainstream society, even if just for a moment.

### **Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino and *La Hora de los Hornos*: The Violence of Film Acts**

Solanas and Getino also want to create a free space where onscreen and offscreen subjects can share their experiences and, through this exchange, theoretically work towards transforming the circumstances of misery that surround them. Solanas and Getino conceive of the film act as a way to generate what they term a “free space” where individuals can gather to express their concerns and ideas freely, become politicized, and begin to free themselves by working toward revolution and revolutionary change (54). They are not satisfied with staging a virtual revolution onscreen. They want the revolutionary thinking and revolutionary activities they portray onscreen to become manifest in the offscreen realm. To this end, they situate their film within a larger film act and by doing so unite the onscreen and offscreen realms so they become mirror-image reflections of one another.

In “Towards a Third Cinema,” Solanas and Getino position the film as a detonator for discussion, knowledge, and the transformation of spectator consciousness and society. As part of the film act, the film is constructed to be open-ended. As Robert Stam points out in his analysis of their film *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), the film’s openness derives from its process of production, its structure, and its participation in the

“provocative amalgam of cinema/theatre/political rally” that is the film act.<sup>6</sup> According to Stam, Solanas and Getino originally set out to make a socially minded short documentary about the working class in Argentina, but through the filmmaking experience, the two filmmakers’ politics began to change. The production process had influenced their own ideological trajectory and, once aware of the tenuous nature of their initial certainties, they decided to open their project to the criticism and suggestions of the working class. As a result, they updated their film several times to reflect this feedback. In addition, Stam points out the openness of the text’s structure. At key points, the film raises questions and proposes that the audience debate them, even interrupting the projection to allow for such discussion and exhorting the audience to draw its own conclusions (154). In this way, the film joins the space of representation to the space of exhibition and makes real and immediate communication possible through the mobilization of “motor and mental activity rather than self-indulgent fantasy” (154).

But Solanas and Getino’s elaboration of the film act provides plenty of theoretical fodder to help explain the open-ended quality of *La Hora de los Hornos*. After screening the film a few times, and seeing the spontaneous debates that arose from these screenings, Solanas and Getino wanted to make these debates a consistent part of the cinematic experience. They incorporated into the space of exhibition for each subsequent screening various elements, which they refer to as a *mise en scène*, such as recorded music or poems, artwork and posters, debate facilitators, even wine and *mates*. The purpose of this *mise en scène* is to reinforce the themes of the film and to disinhibit the participants so they feel comfortable enough to engage in debate. Solanas and Getino extend the mise-

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Stam, “Hour of the Furnaces and the Two Avant-Gardes,” *The Millennium Film Journal*. 7/8/9 (1980-1981), 154.

en-scene of the film into the space of exhibition in order to create a free space in the off-screen realm where the film's themes and arguments can find expression through debate, which is now no longer spontaneous.

Solanas and Getino attempt to bridge the gap between consciousness and action in spectators by bridging the gap between on-screen and off-screen space through this *mise en scène*. This relationship between spectator consciousness and action – and influencing the causes and effects that make up that relationship – is a central concern of the Latin American and U.S. filmmakers. Where Warhol uses his films to give expression to an inverted through-the-looking-glass social milieu, Solanas and Getino want to create a cinematic form, the film act, which produces on-screen and off-screen realms that mirror one another. Much of *La Hora de los Hornos* consists of found footage, documentary re-enactments and interviews with labor and student leaders that take place in factories, homes, or labor union offices. The film had to be exhibited in underground locations, like factories, homes, or labor union offices, due to Argentina's repressive system of government, so many of the spaces of exhibition, the off-screen *mise-en-scene*, directly resemble the on-screen *mise-en-scene*. By extension, they hope the on-screen revolutionary mindsets and actions will be mirrored in the off-screen realm and they attempt to bring this about through a decolonization of subjectivity that transforms alienated "man" into revolutionary-minded "new man." To this end, they structure *La Hora de los Hornos* to create and respond to a specific spectator subject position, that of the participant comrade, which embodies this revolutionary subjectivity. The film works to create this spectator position through the development of a violent formalism and a

structure organized according to Solanas and Getino's three stages in the process of learning, which they outline in "Towards a Third Cinema."

Like Glauber Rocha with *Terra em Transe*, Solanas and Getino develop a violent formalism that uses formal techniques to shock spectators into recognizing the structural violence inherent in neocolonialism – and to provoke them to use revolutionary violence to overturn neocolonialism's structures. The fiction film *Terra em Transe* relies primarily on formal techniques like handheld autonomous camera movement, violations of the fourth wall, overlapping editing that repeats violent acts, disregard for the 180-degree rule and use of non-synchronous sound and sound effects to push spectators out of the diegesis and compel them into an analytical relationship with the film's history-based plot events. Such techniques reveal Rocha's interest in formal experimentation. His experiments are not necessarily apolitical, since he uses these techniques to invite spectators to take up a critical position in relationship to the allegorical characters and the historical events and forces referenced in the plot. But at the same time, *Terra em Transe* also reveals Rocha's interest in creating a uniquely Brazilian cinema that appropriates and adapts European and North American new cinema techniques for its own purposes. He works within the tradition of revolutionary aesthetic experimentation begun by the French New Wave, and especially his idol, Jean-Luc Godard, rather than explicitly attempting to produce an aesthetic that exists outside of imported or inherited notions of aesthetic principles and values, which is what Solanas and Getino strive to do with their "nonconditioned cinema," which they define as a cinema positioned outside of, and in contrast to, the bourgeois ideals and values re-inscribed by Hollywood and European filmmakers.

Solanas and Getino seem to draw on the ideas Rocha puts forth in his manifesto “An Aesthetic of Hunger” in their attempt to represent the misery of underdevelopment through formal experiments that center on violence, but they would also want to move beyond Rocha’s experiments, which rest largely on appropriation and adaptation. Stam characterizes *La Hora de los Hornos* as reviving “the historical sense of avant-garde as connoting political as well as cultural militancy. [...] *La Hora*’s experimental language is indissolubly wedded to its political project; the articulation of one with the other generates the film’s meaning and secures its relevance” (151). Though Stam embeds his subsequent analysis of the film in the historical context of the film project and the politics of the filmmakers, he generally takes the film at face value. He critiques the ways it falls short of its revolutionary project by not placing Peronism in the context of Latin American populism, boosting the apparent radicalism of the film by leveraging a tricontinental revolutionary intertext, using hyperbolic language and “sledgehammer persuasion,” and generating a “demolition job on Western culture” that is more of an exorcism than a political statement (162). But Stam also analyzes the film according to how it accomplishes its goal of launching what he calls a frontal assault on passivity: “Rather than being hermetically sealed off from life, the text is permeable to history and praxis, calling for accomplices rather than consumers” (155). Though Stam does not explicitly take into account Solanas and Getino’s film theory in “Towards a Third Cinema,” nor does he consider the filmmakers’ awareness of particular film aesthetic traditions, here he taps into one of Solanas and Getino’s objectives for their film: to dissolve aesthetics into the life of society as a way to decolonize subjectivity and inspire action.

By taking their film theoretical interests into account, we can begin to see how Solanas and Getino attempted to put into practice their desire to create a nonconditioned cinema theoretically capable of inspiring revolutionary consciousness and action. They distinguish themselves from Rocha by rejecting fictional film forms and opt instead for a documentary realism approach akin to the one embraced by their fellow Argentine filmmaker, Fernando Birri: “Instead of making a cinema of fiction, which is very exciting for the personal satisfaction of the author, who filters the external world through his subjectivity, his fantasies, we tried to make a *cinema of ideological essay* which is based in the concrete reality” (Solanas 39, emphasis his). But Solanas and Getino outline in “Towards a Third Cinema” how they hope to make their ideological essay more effective by “subordinating its own form, structure, language, and propositions to that act and to those actors – to put it another way, *if it sought its own liberation in its subordination to and insertion in others, the principal protagonists of life* (54, emphasis theirs). Here, Solanas and Getino outline the ways in which a film becomes a factor in, or rather a detonator to, a larger process. This process encompasses both the film act and the formation of new epistemological frames.

In fact, Solanas and Getino conceptualize the film act as a way to align film and knowledge, so that the film can be more effectively inserted into the lives and the minds of spectators. Solanas and Getino attempt in this way to bridge the gap between film and spectator consciousness and spectator consciousness and action. In addition to institutionalizing an alternative cinematic model, the film act, their formal experiments also make manifest a profound interest in creating a cinematic form that mimics, and affects, spectator cognition. Solanas and Getino do not just want to compel spectators to

look within themselves in order to become more engaged with their own subjectivity or with that of others, nor do they want to awaken the spectators' latent social critic. Instead, they want their films to shock spectators into thinking and acting in ways that deliberately counter the system of neocolonialism. *La Hora de los Hornos* shocks spectators through its violent formalism. In his fiction films, Rocha relies on Brechtian formal experiments, inspired by Godard's films, to push spectators out of the film and place them in an analytical mode in relation to the diegetic events and characters. Alternatively, Solanas and Getino create a composite violent formalism, which uses documentary images of violence to testify to the repression that nurtures neocolonialism. In its Part 1 montage sequences, the film also employs an Eisensteinian Soviet montage technique that juxtaposes images to create associations that compel the spectator to recognize neocolonialism's inherent structural violence.

*La Hora de los Hornos* presents documentary images of violence and documentary footage of eyewitnesses who speak about their firsthand experience with armed repression. We see footage of soldiers beating protestors, repeated images of the gaunt, staring faces of young children and the elderly who suffer from malnutrition, the first-person testimonies of people who witnessed executions or were victims of state-sponsored torture, various images of people carrying coffins, political cartoons that take torture as their subject, the ID cards of people who are missing or who have been killed and a three-minute shot of the CIA photo of Che Guevara, which was taken by the U.S. government agency to prove his death. These images emphasize the effect of neocolonialist structural violence on the innocent, on the illiterate and starving children and elderly, and on those who struggle to overturn this system of misery. Evidence of

state-sponsored violence, especially against student and labor protests, comprises the bulk of this documentary footage and helps to provide one of the key assertions of the ideological essay that runs through the film and culminates in Part 3: only by meeting violence with violence will revolutionary structural change occur. In this way, the film attempts to promote action and violent actions by indicating the stakes of inaction. These images indicate the risk to life that already exists under the current system. By showing that violence and danger are almost daily occurrences, the film makes revolutionary action appear less perilous. Whether you choose to work for change or not, violence is likely to be visited upon you in any case.

The film's violent formalism also manifests itself in the form of shocking juxtapositions that compel the spectator to think through the associations created by the clash of disparate images. In "The Montage of Film Attractions," Sergei Eisenstein lays out a theory for a cinema of action that Solanas and Getino have adapted for their own purposes. For Eisenstein, cinema's formal characteristics and thematic possibilities have the power to influence the consciousness and emotions of spectators: cinema can move spectators in a desired direction through a series of calculated pressures (35). The filmmaker's selection of images drawn from objective reality and the comparisons he makes between them produce associations that work to move the audience in the direction determined by the film. Eisenstein suggests choosing the images for the "contrasting comparisons" based on their "definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience" (36). In other words, the juxtaposed images should not be chosen for what they document but for what affect they can generate. Such choices should also correspond with the film's overall theme or argument, since they guide the cumulative

emotional responses that motivate the audience to act in a certain way (44). Eisenstein is also careful to indicate that the “attractational calculation is conceivable only when the audience is known and selected in advance for its homogeneity” (36). A filmmaker can only know how to affect an audience if he or she knows which buttons to push, so to speak. The montage of attractions, as a result, seems to rely on a somewhat self-contained cycle. The filmmaker predetermines the audience in order to leverage their emotions and knowledge in order to change their ways of thinking. By changing their ways of thinking, the film can provoke them to act in new ways, ways that complement the assertions of the film (Eisenstein 35-44).

In “Towards a Third Cinema,” Solanas and Getino address the issue of audience along the lines Eisenstein suggests. They explicitly define their audience rather than attempting to appeal to a broad mass audience. Solanas admits in his 1970 interview that the “role of the revolutionary avant-garde is to penetrate into the mass-culture, but many of those masses are difficult to awaken” (41). Though Solanas and Getino may seem to cut their losses by ignoring the masses and embracing the willing, one must also remember that the historical context where they worked included a repressive government that confiscated subversive materials and imprisoned the filmmakers who made them and the spectators who watched them. Small and motivated audiences were an historical necessity. But they also made up the field of possibility, since they included participant comrades and participant comrades in the making. By looking closely at two of the montage sequences in *La Hora de los Hornos*, we can see how the film attempts to leverage affective images in order to create and leverage the participant comrade subject position Solanas and Getino describe in “Towards a Third Cinema.”

In the montage sequence that juxtaposes slaughterhouse scenes with advertising images, the filmmakers create an unambiguous association between slaughter, consumption, and multinational capitalism. Advertising images of smiling, beautiful, upper middle-class men, women, and children surrounded by shiny consumer goods like cars, kitchen appliances, liquor, candy, hygiene products, and clothes are intercut with graphic documentary images of cows being led to the slaughter, and then being slaughtered, all while a blithe score by the Swingle Singers plays on the soundtrack. The casual, carefree music provides an apt soundtrack for the happy and untouched lifestyle portrayed in the advertising images, but its light-heartedness takes on the appearance of callousness when juxtaposed with the images of slaughter. This callousness then carries over to the advertising images and tinges them with violence and death. Two title cards are placed within the sequence, and supply editorial commentary: “Each day we export more than we receive in turn,” and “Each day we work more and earn less.” However, unlike the other uses of title cards throughout the film, these cards are weak interruptions of the sequence’s progression and may indicate that the shocks of these juxtapositions surpass the power of language to express the sequence’s theme. Language proves inadequate to the characterization of the misery and violence of underdevelopment, perhaps because language has been imposed as part of the colonial system. Spanish is, after all, the language of the colonizer and the concepts expressed in language have been determined by the colonizer’s system of values. The power of violent images to evoke affective responses in this regard also takes us back to Rocha’s “An Aesthetic of Hunger,” where he suggests that Latin American filmmakers stop trying to represent misery and instead use images of violence to invoke the horror of misery. This montage

sequence is a powerful example of using violence to portray misery through affect. But the inclusion of title cards interjects intellectual cognition, as well as the mediating effects of premise imposed from the outside, into the affective response, which interrupts it and tends to weaken its effect.

Over the course of the montage, motifs develop around eyes and allure. Extreme close-up images of mascaraed, wide-open women's eyes appear throughout the advertising images and they find their match in the slaughterhouse images, which include a medium close-up, with a zoom in to an extreme close-up, of the twitching eye of a dying cow. As the film returns to the extreme close-up of this cow's eye, the eye stops twitching, and the dead eye becomes a reference point returned to several times as the montage continues. These eyes are unseeing and become signs of death and alienation, literally and metaphysically. The eyes that populate the advertising images are women's eyes, which tie into the second motif of allure. The majority of advertisements feature women who appear to be of European origin (blond, tall, fine-boned, fair-skinned); they are beautiful, in a conventional European sense, and either pose coolly or frolic playfully for the camera. The images of these women are juxtaposed with images of cattle being prodded down a chute and then killed with the blows of sledgehammers; they often require several blows until the mortal blow is struck. The bodies of these cows are then hooked to chains and hauled upside down so their throats can be cut and their blood drained. The final images of the montage sequence consist of a lovely young woman who smilingly "kisses" the camera juxtaposed with a cow's face being slit open so its skin can be peeled back to reveal the skull beneath.

If we consider the adage that “sex sells,” then we might equate these images of attractive women as akin to the cattle prod that compels the cattle forward to their deaths and the sledgehammers that deal the mortal blows. The allure of these women, and the desire it induces replicates the desire for consumer goods, a desire that leads to (self-)destruction, in the form of an alienation perpetuated by multinational consumer culture. The final montage juxtaposition seems to indicate that beauty is only skin deep while also insisting that piercing the surface is one way to dispel the illusions that perpetuate desire and alienation. The shocks of this montage sequence associate consumer desire with slaughter through images that compel desire and disgust simultaneously. By doing so, the sequence appears to direct spectators toward a new association: multinational consumer goods are disgusting (instead of desirable) and contribute to the literal and metaphysical slaughter of the Argentine people. These goods, and the desire they represent, produce unseeing eyes and blind compulsions that can lead to physical death as the result of systemic violence and alienation. However, the next montage sequence sharpens these associations in order to show how mass culture and consumer desire masks the violence of multinational capitalism.

It is important to note that both Solanas and Getino worked in the advertising industry, making commercials in order to fund their larger revolutionary project. Solanas explains the reasoning behind this in his 1970 interview: “We worked on making commercials – right in the heart of the commercial-industrial system. That work enabled us to obtain the money to make our revolutionary film – and also to gain valuable technical experience. So the solution we found was to make a few commercials in order to be able to make *another cinema*” (37). He explains this strategy in terms of corrupting

the system from within or, more specifically, of using the system to surpass the system. Yet Solanas and Getino contributed to the system in order to achieve their individual goals. It would be too easy to say that they have blood on their hands or that they are hypocrites because they chose this route. We do well to remember that they worked in extremely limited circumstances, however. As filmmakers, they are “profoundly tied to the economic conditions of [their] work” (Solanas 37), which means that they must take some responsibility for those conditions, since they reproduce them in their films, but it also means that they are limited by their lack of access to the means of production, in terms of the resources (e.g., cameras, film stock, audio recording equipment, among other necessities), and the knowledge and skills required for film production. Birri borrows equipment from the University of the Litoral, equipment that forces him to make certain formal decisions based on its limitations, and he devises a collaborative production process with interchangeable responsibilities so everyone may learn the skills that go into filmmaking. Warhol sells his art works in order to buy cameras and film stock and solicits help from a retinue of assistants who take part in generating his mechanical reproductions. He also inserts himself into the discursive networks of the culture industry in order to influence his own fetishization. Solanas and Getino use their connections in advertising to gain the resources and skills required for their project, which they mold and shape as production continues in order to incorporate the feedback and experiences of those involved in the filmmaking process and in the film acts. In one sense, they do attempt to use the system to surpass the system by using it to learn filmmaking and to raise money.

But in another sense, they exhibit a blind spot that their own montage sequence makes clear: as much as they use the system, the system also uses them. Their subjectivity was also formed under circumstances of alienation. So the film becomes a way for them to share their own progress towards subjective decolonization, while also revealing how they too have been conditioned by their circumstances. The film becomes both an argument and an exorcism since this sequence seems to express what Solanas and Getino have learned about the dangers that lie beneath the glossy, sexy surfaces of advertising.<sup>7</sup>

In the next montage sequence, Solanas and Getino produce their shocks in two different ways: through the juxtaposition of voice-over narration with a series of images depicting symbols of Western civilization and various works of European art, and through a multifaceted montage of attractions that integrates three image threads accompanied by up to three soundtrack layers. The first montage technique defamiliarizes the images through the juxtaposition of voice-over narration that captions the images in such a way as to give new meaning to them. No longer are they authoritative symbols of wisdom and beauty; instead, they symbolize neocolonial repression and alienation. The sequence, which I will call the “models of civilization” sequence, begins with a series of still images that dissolve into one another. The filmmakers include a wide variety of high culture references that encompass centuries of art and culture: the Parthenon dissolves into “The Rape of Europa” and then a series of medieval and Renaissance prints gives way to

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<sup>7</sup> Stam also mentions the exorcisms Solanas and Getino perform in regards to their own alienation through their demolition job on Western culture, the way they draw our attention to how concepts of Western art and Western civilization are integrated into the neocolonial system. These constant reminders, of how these elements are inextricably tied, seem to be Solanas and Getino’s way (and need) to remind themselves to reject classical notions of “beauty” and success in their own work, since only through this rejection and creation of an anti-aesthetic will they be able to achieve their objective and create a “nonconditioned” film form that surpasses the system.

*“Dejeuner sur L’Herbe”* and Botticelli’s *“Primavera,”* paintings of Byron and Voltaire segue into sheets of classical music and busts of Socrates and Plato, then to the head of Michelangelo’s David, a circular stained glass window in a church dissolves into da Vinci’s human form. Paintings from Picasso and other modern artists are also presented in order to underscore the diversity and breadth of high cultural forms. The use of dissolves to join the images together makes them appear as palimpsests; each one builds on the other to give shape to the cultural network that contributes to such hierarchical notions as beauty, knowledge, and civilization. The length of the sequence (approximately 2-3 minutes) gives these images the appearance of a never-ending assault that stretches over centuries. Each image replaces another over and over again; they keep on coming without stopping.

The narration emphasizes this assault and its influence on the ability of Argentines to enact an autonomous creativity. The narrator positions these images as models of civilization, which essentially tell Argentines “to be a man, deny your essence and alienate yourself in me.” The narrator then claims that the paternalism of European culture makes local work appear inferior. The artist in Argentina becomes copyist, translator, interpreter, and leaves his own creative abilities untapped. To underscore this point, when the issue of art in Argentina is picked up again after a montage sequence that shows local cultural expressions, like religious processions, telenovelas, tarot cards, and shamanism, the film locates us in a museum filled with modern, European art. The abstract forms of the art seem absurd and out of place given the repeated images of misery in Argentina the film has displayed in its earlier chapters. A title card that reads “Artists and intellectuals are integrated into the system” appears as the museum trip continues, and then a series of

words, alone or in short phrases, flash on screen to usher in the climactic montage sequence for the chapter: “Violence / Crime / Destruction / are converted into / Peace / Order / Normalcy.”

The montage continues, but now transitions to images drawn from mass culture. The Ray Charles song “I Don’t Need No Doctor,” which began playing over images from the art museum, carries over into this section and creates continuity between them. This part of the sequence begins with a handheld tracking shot that travels up a stairway as young people goof for the camera, waving bananas and mugging self-consciously. (They don’t go as far as Warhol’s superstars do, but this footage is a sort of screen test for them, their fifteen seconds of fame, and they realize this and act accordingly.) The Ray Charles song plays throughout the sequence providing it with a basic unity. The song choice is interesting because it comes from a blind African-American artist, which opens up a number of richly ambivalent fields of interpretation. Did the filmmakers’ choose this song because of Charles’s blindness, his race, which would contribute to his social and cultural marginalization, or is it chosen to be an ironic counterpoint because it is invasive U.S. pop music? Or is it because the title of the song is a sort of declaration of independence, an overt announcement that conventional structures of authority and authority figures are unnecessary, and in fact counterproductive? A riff from The Beatles’ “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band” plays over the Ray Charles song as the film cuts to a disco where other young people mug and dance for the camera. Shots from the disco are then intercut with images from the religious procession shown earlier and then still images of pop culture references – ads, album covers, movie posters and stills from Hollywood films – begin to flash onto the screen. They segue to images of violence that

give over to images of a pop band and then back to the party at the disco. The faces of starving children and desperate women are then interspersed into this combination, their faces accompanied by pop culture quotes like commercial jingles and cartoon sounds among others on the soundtrack. The montage then juxtaposes images of the party with images repeated from the models of civilization montage and scenes of misery.

At this juncture, the sequence produces shocks in a new way by attempting to overwhelm and overload the spectator's perceptual system. Images flash onto the screen rapidly and there are no dissolves now to cushion the transition between visuals. The stately progression of the earlier slide show is now replaced by short, violent bursts of information as straight cuts give the images a staccato, almost machine gun-like rhythm. Instead of one element on the soundtrack, a voice-over narration, the audio track consists of multiple layers, sometimes three at a time. Though the Ray Charles song maintains some continuity, the additional layers largely consist of disembodied sound effects, commercial jingles, and other snippets of sound snagged from mass culture that come to the spectator without any particular logic or rhythm. The shock of this perceptual overload is then compounded with the intellectual and affective juxtaposition of images. The sequence first creates associations between mass culture in Argentina and multinational capitalism, European art, and Western civilization in order to expand on its earlier premise by including mass culture in its critique of high culture. While high culture alienates Argentine artists and intellectuals, mass culture decimates the autonomy of urban youth, who vapidly grin and groove to British and U.S. pop music. The out-of-context shots of urban youth and the various urban street scenes that populate this part of

the sequence portray the people shown as lost souls in a neon wasteland, oblivious to their plight and to the misery of those who suffer or struggle.

The montage then moves away from the connections between U.S. mass culture and mass culture in Argentina to begin mapping out a relationship between U.S. popular culture, current politics, and counterrevolutionary military activities in Vietnam. Icons from Hollywood films, popular music, and comics are explicitly connected with political icons in order to think through how mass culture works to disguise violence or to displace violence into cultural forms. As the multilayered soundtrack continues its Ray Charles song and pop culture quotes, scenes of racial violence (i.e., U.S. police beating a young African-American man) adjoin an image of Batman; further scenes of racial violence and police repression give way to scenes from Vietnam as a U.S. army helicopter cuts to a helicopter in a fashion ad. An image of Bobby Kennedy appears next to one of Superman punching his fist through a human mannequin and then a scene from Vietnam is accompanied by the sound effect of machine gun fire over the Ray Charles song. The song then transitions to a woman's maniacal laugh with other mass culture quotations layered onto it as scenes of U.S. military violence in Vietnam are positioned next to images of Lyndon Johnson. At this point a title card appears, "Monstrosity disguised as beauty," and the rhythm of the montage picks up speed as images of women and children crying in obvious distress are juxtaposed with the repeated image of a tank. Finally, the soundtrack gives way to machine gun fire and the pop culture references shown earlier are repeated with a rapid-fire momentum. Here, figures of U.S. pop and political culture become associated with images of obvious suffering inflicted by the U.S. in Vietnam, and with suffering imposed upon women and children, specifically. The innocence of popular

culture is called into question by the misery the U.S. imposes on innocents. The final barrage of images assaults the viewer and heightens the association between U.S. mass culture and violence; the film associates images of mass culture with images of violent repression and then violently assails the spectator, thereby producing both intellectual and affective associations.

These montage sequences attempt to create shocking associations between images known to carry affective and intellectual power in order to begin the process of decolonizing subjectivity, of transforming “man” into the “new man” who thinks, acts, and lives in accordance with the principles and values of revolution. Solanas and Getino and Warhol work to reveal the connection between mass culture and political economy while simultaneously critiquing the dynamics of high culture, both of which fetishize films and the cinematic process to inculcate within them the particular values and principles of the aesthetic and socio-political systems that support global capitalism. But while Warhol and his superstars playfully invert mainstream social and mass cultural values and concepts in order to give expression to an alternative social structure, Solanas and Getino take their project as the deadly serious business of provoking emotional responses strong enough to inspire spectators to think and act in such a way as to abolish neocolonialism’s alienation and misery. By using these montage sequences to shock and disturb the spectator, the filmmakers attempt to begin the transformation of consciousness necessary to generate the ideal spectator, and product, of *La Hora de los Hornos*: the participant comrade. Part 1 of *La Hora de los Hornos*, the only part that relies on these montage sequences to develop its themes, brings to life what Solanas and Getino term the first stage in the process of learning.

The film's three parts reflect each of the three stages in the process of learning as a way to guide the spectator through deepening levels of critical consciousness and a strengthening commitment to revolution. In "Towards a Third Cinema," Solanas and Getino describe these three stages, and in each stage they associate an aspect of cinema with cognition. The first stage, one of sensation, occurs through contact with film's "living fresco of image and sound" (55), generated through montage, which establishes new associations for the spectator by re-signifying historical and mass cultural images. Part 1, which relies on these living frescos to provide the visual evidence to develop its theme of "Neocolonialism and violence," attempts to push the spectator to recognize the connections between the two.

Solanas and Getino describe the second stage of knowledge as that of "concepts, judgments, opinions, and deductions," where the spectator synthesizes data into a new understanding (55-56). At the beginning of Part 2, titled "Action for liberation," a title card sets up the film's purpose:

This is not a show for spectators, nor for those who comply with imperialism. This is a film to witness and document. The purpose of this film is to gather information on the struggles waged by our comrades since 1955. We know this information has been altered by the system and is not available in archives, libraries, or film libraries. Only the unions and student groups had this information. This presentation is not meant to crystallize a struggle not yet defined but a way to document a history that remains in the collective unconscious, transmitted by word of mouth, through collective memory, trade union, leaders, and activists. To draw your own conclusions at the end of the film will be the most effective way to achieve liberation. The film is the pretext for dialogue, for research, for a meeting of wills and should be debated after the showing to create unity. You can add to this experience and to this chronicle of liberation. The comrade-speaker in the hall will begin debate as our first gesture of unity and support for those who are fighting against imperialism and colonialism.

After cutting to a quote by Frantz Fanon, the film cuts to a black screen where the “comrade-speaker” can stop the film in order to analyze the Fanon quote and start discussion. When the film starts up again, it retells the history of the Peron era through narration of newsreel footage from the time and then it portrays a history of revolution in “The decade of violence 1955-1966.” It concludes Part 2 with another scrolling text that indicates that these retellings are editorial opinions meant to begin conversation and dialogue. It then poses a talking point – No national revolution can succeed unless it is a social revolution – to end Part 2. In this second part, the film offers itself as an historical document, grounded in what it presents as the more authentic history of eyewitness accounts and word of mouth. It attempts to make history, or remake it in the image of the people and their struggles, by tapping into an underground oral tradition to present an alternative history that opposes authoritative history. By asking for contributions from the spectators, the film remains open-ended in terms of its final form and makes its role in sparking conversation prominent. The film explicitly states its role as a conversation-starter, even providing within itself opportunities where the comrade-speaker can turn it off in order to allow that conversation to take place.

Unlike Part 1, Part 2 offers two opportunities, at its beginning and end, for the comrade-speaker in the exhibition space to stop the projector and to facilitate discussion based on the talking points provided by the film. In addition to a *mise-en-scene* that connects onscreen and offscreen spaces, the film act also provides an onscreen *and* offscreen narrator to facilitate – and to guide – conversation. In this way, it produces the second stage of knowledge described in “Towards a Third Cinema” where the spectator synthesizes the data into a new understanding. By giving spectators an opportunity to

speak and debate, the film prompts them to create and share their “concepts, judgments, opinions, and deductions” based on the data they have gleaned from the film. Spectators are thus given an opportunity to engage in critical thought on their own, albeit in the presence and at the prompting of the film, and to share their thoughts with others in a public forum. In this way, the film fulfills another objective it states for this conversation: to promote debate as a way to unify spectators around a common cause – revolution in Argentina. This unity joins not only those gathered for the film act, but also those who have struggled against the governments since the fall of Perón in 1955 and with those in other continents who fight against imperialism and colonialism. Part 2 not only further develops the process of transforming consciousness and knowledge begun in Part 1, it also further enhances a sense of collective experience, thereby contributing to a shared identity upon which to build a foundation for revolutionary action. In Part 1, spectators were shown the stakes of action. In Part 2, they have the chance to see how they will be joining a community of revolutionaries who fight against imperialism and colonialism in the film act, in Argentina, and around the world as participant comrades.

The third and final part of *Las Horas de los Hornos*, “Violence and Liberation,” replicates the third stage of knowledge: “the active leap from sensory to rational knowledge [...] and what is even more important, the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice” (55-56). Parts 1 and 2 lay out the premises for the film’s “ideological essay,” and do so without providing an opportunity for conversation about the spectators in attendance. Part 3, however, does provide them with that opportunity. It continues the film’s objective of serving as an historical document by bearing witness to firsthand recollections of firing squads and massacres that put down peasant and worker

uprisings, and it includes a covert interview with Julio Troxler, a famous Peronist activist, in the backseat of a car parked at the scene of his almost-execution. But it also provides various points throughout its sequences for the comrade-speaker to stop the film and facilitate debate, and it asks again for historical contributions from spectators. In Part 3, the film transitions from a retelling of history and an affirmation of the government's violent repressions to a sharing of information on how to enact revolution. Now that the "why" has been established, the "how" becomes necessary. The latter section of Part 3 includes interviews with labor organizers who led factory occupations and protestors who have fashioned homemade devices for interfering with police action. It also gives the spectator insider access to labor union meetings. These latter sequences not only provide valuable information on how to resist police and military repression, they also situate the spectators in a revolutionary context, with those who plan and enact revolutionary resistance. Part 3 concludes with text that appeals to the spectators to "remember these tactics" and underscores the importance of becoming "aware of this war and to enter it on every front in order to verify all of the hypotheses submitted in this film. In short, to invent our revolution. You can continue this film act through the debates you engender and the action you enact."

The film ends with a call to revolutionary action, and bases its call on the hypotheses submitted throughout the film, which Solanas and Getino intend as detonators for debate. By concluding the film in this way, with a call to action and debate, they do not end it but rather extend it by leaving its conclusion up to the spectators. The film has done everything it can, in terms of its formal strategies, to transform spectators from passive consumers to active participant comrades by laying out the reasons behind its call

to action (thereby fulfilling Solanas and Getino's work to create a "cinema of ideological essay") and by taking spectators through what Solanas and Getino define as the three stages of knowledge, which conclude with the leap from knowledge to practice. But Solanas and Getino do not rely only on the film to produce their participant comrades. They position the film and the spectators within a larger film act, which consists of material, relationship, and conceptual elements. By actively taking the stance of an ideological essay and explicitly working to change the epistemological frames of the spectators, the film labors to transfer the worldviews it deems necessary to the production of autonomous subjects to those spectators gathered together at the film screenings. The filmmakers also construct a material free space, a location where individuals can gather and freely express their thoughts, to facilitate debate. But just as the film attempts to set the parameters for discussion via its premises and prompts, the free space serves as a controlled location where a comrade-speaker and various elements of mise-en-scene guide and moderate the "spontaneous" debates that occur. These debates, which are presented as the province of the participant-comrades gathered, are instead a product of the filmmakers' project and their total view.

Filmmakers like Birri, Rocha, Gutiérrez Alea mobilize the formal properties of their films to engender a consciousness in spectators – a self-consciousness, a consciousness of shared experiences, or an understanding of problematic contradictions that invite them to look at the world in a different way. However, each of these filmmakers at one time or another express their frustration with the ineffectualness of this approach. Either mass audiences remain disinterested in their films and avoid them, or spectators respond immediately to the films and then return to their everyday lives

without changing their thoughts, behaviors, or actions. These filmmakers confront the fact that their films do not produce social change and, in fact, do not even produce the sought after critical consciousness. Solanas and Getino, like Gutiérrez Alea, write from a later historical stage and take into consideration the challenges faced by other filmmakers. Solanas even references Cuba and its citizens as an example of what happens when revolutionary change occurs but consciousness remains colonized, which is why he and Getino insist on decolonizing consciousness before decolonizing society and why they are careful to define their audience and then leverage what they know to be the attitudes held by that audience. They create an exceptionally tight feedback loop in order to circumvent the difficulties faced by other filmmakers.

But by doing so, they give rise to a situation that resembles the one Warhol creates with his films. Warhol insists that his films remain open; their final form depends upon the improvisations of the superstars, profilmic contingencies, and the responses of spectators. Warhol expands his films so they become cinematic and encompass production and exhibition. As a result, Warhol's films incorporate on-screen and off-screen subjects into its matrix. Even violent emotional responses, like Pope Ondine's and the outright rejection of the films, as when spectators throw things at the screen (as Mekas alludes to) or when critics deem them dirty and unwatchable, become a part of the film's ultimate shape. One benefit of this incorporation is the creation of a free space for self-expression. In production and exhibition, on-screen and off-screen subjects have the freedom to express themselves in any way they see fit, and they become real people through these responses. Though concepts like "real people," and reality in general are contested, we can see the reason for this contestation in the cinematic experience Warhol

produces; conflicting versions of reality come in contact with one another, and issues of reality and pretense also arise in the cinematic free spaces he creates. But by incorporating all responses into the body of his films, he is able to achieve his goals of provoking spectator response and creating an environment for improvisational responses. The other filmmakers, however, find it harder to realize their objectives, since they want their films to develop a total view that carries over into the sphere of everyday life. They want their total view to become reality; but as they find out, film is unable both to present reality or to determine reality, especially when it comes to spectator consciousness.

That hard lesson is what Gutiérrez Alea faces in 1982, and what Solanas recognizes in his 1970 interview. Solanas and Getino do everything they can to keep their film open in order to avoid the situation where life goes on after the film stops rolling. They embed their film within a film act; they designate places in the film where it is to be turned off in order for debate to occur; and the film does not end but invites spectators to extend it through their own debates and actions. Because *La Hora de los Hornos* is an open text and part of a larger film act, it remains open so it can incorporate spectators into its total view. The film becomes complete once that incorporation has occurred. While spectators inhabit the free space of the film act, they are revolutionaries, participant comrades. In fact, they cannot be anything but participant comrades given the structure Solanas and Getino have established and the historical contingencies of Argentina's repressive political system; Solanas and Getino seek participant comrades for their film acts, use Soviet montage techniques that will resonate with participant comrades, and then structure the film so it replicates the three stages of knowledge and ends with debate and a call to action. They are successful in dissolving aesthetics into the life of society,

but only into the lives of a particular part of society. Their film becomes the ultimate in underground film, shown in secret to select audiences. As such, it falls short of the filmmakers' objective of social change and mass diffusion of a revolutionary consciousness. It becomes a cult favorite at film festivals and on the international film art circuit, but it does not produce revolution.

### **Conclusions**

The three filmmakers in Chapter 2 attempt to stand outside of the repressive contexts they critique in order to develop their challenges; but even with their outsider positions, they end up producing repressive forces similar to those they criticize. To escape a milieu that destroys autonomy by mediating the sensibilities of individuals, Brakhage leaves New York City for Colorado where he creates a film that portrays a man restoring his sense of self by re-forging connections with his body, perceptions, dreams, and memories – and by asserting his position as patriarch and his mastery over nature. Rocha critiques the Brazilian people's powerlessness and the duplicitous nature of power in Brazil by adapting the new cinema techniques of Jean-Luc Godard and by framing the development of an autonomous ideal via a poet and filmmaker who stands apart from the people. Finally, Gutiérrez Alea uncritically uses ideology to fight ideology; he wants the Cuban people to stop identifying with a bourgeois worldview and take up a properly revolutionary attitude. But the four filmmakers in this chapter, work within the systems they critique to develop their challenges to those systems. They attempt to use their cinematic experiments, and their discourse about these experiments, to produce a material

and conceptual free space where onscreen and offscreen subjects can achieve a more empowered subject position.

The free spaces created by these four filmmakers are not entirely free or accessible to all, however. Though they work to create alternatives to what they see as repressive institutional contexts, their efforts often reproduce some of the same repressive forces they wish to escape. Their work to generate an autonomous and discernible alternative to existing commercial and artisanal cinemas leads them to systematize and standardize certain practices and conventions. Such regularization of practice tends to institute systems of value and hierarchical structures, which function in ways similar to the dominant structures the filmmakers attempt to challenge. However, though institutionalization tends to limit the freedom of and access to the free spaces created by these filmmakers, Warhol, Birri and Solanas and Getino are able to mount small-scale social revolutions, albeit transitory ones, within the “free” spaces generated by the production and exhibition of their films.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Common Interests and Competing Subjectivities of the new American cinema**

We can see shared concerns and common interests that unite these diverse filmmakers into a cohesive network when we consider their manifestos in association with their films and in conversation with the theoretical statements of one another. We can also see how their interests and their various conceptions of subjectivity change over time in the face of spectator resistance. While their early ideas of subjectivity address the systemic pressures they see limiting the autonomy of subjects, their later notions come to engage what they believe to be the root causes of spectator resistance to their films.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, we can see an interest in structural failure manifest itself in the various theories: the filmmakers concentrate on the ways Hollywood, mass culture, and repressive socio-political structures limit the potential of subjects within their purview. Specifically, the U.S. and Latin American filmmakers concern themselves with how the culture industry and commodity culture constrain subjects by transforming them into passive and consuming objects whose main purpose is to serve as instruments of these systems.

Both Brakhage and Warhol mention the threat of mechanization. Warhol's famous claim, "I think everybody should be a machine," follows on the heels of his observation that "[e]verybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way" ("What is Pop Art" 16).<sup>1</sup> With this comment, he emphasizes the structural

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<sup>1</sup> Also interesting to note is that Warhol makes these claims in association with a larger artistic claim, one that involves Brecht: "Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under

violence leveled against individual subjects in U.S. consumer culture. Individuals are losing their individuality as the system increasingly standardizes them. Warhol's career in advertising would have given him a firsthand look at this phenomenon. Advertising transforms individuals into demographics and psychographics in order to figure out how to sell products and services to them in an efficient and effective manner. To draw attention to this dynamic, Warhol creates a Pop art and then a filmmaking aesthetic that relies on mechanization and automation. But there is life within these mechanical reproductions. Though his film production process is almost completely automated, he insists that the circumstances of filming be grounded in improvisation and contingency. He wants conflict, play, and anxiety to be a part of filmmaking in order to capture human beings at their most "real," being themselves instead of acting a role. However, as critics like Hal Foster have pointed out, the environment Warhol creates to document these moments of being real (so to speak), elicit individuality through traumatic pressures like teasing, interpersonal conflict, harsh lighting, imposed stillness, and the unflinching gaze of the camera (Foster 18). Similarly, Warhol wants his films to disturb spectators so they do not sit passively in a fantasy world but will instead become involved with themselves and others around them. He provokes them by thwarting their expectations and pushing them past the conventional limits of endurance in his films of epic duration, like *Sleep* and *Empire*, and in his short films, like the *Screen Tests*, which are projected in slow motion.

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government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way" ("What is Pop Art?" 16). Warhol parodically positions mechanization as happening in the U.S. "all by itself" rather than through political systems, or through Communist (i.e., Marxist) aesthetics. Yet he also connects this standardization of thinking to aesthetics (and perhaps to mass culture). He seems to suggest here too that an aesthetics attuned to this mechanization is in order, or is already available through Pop art with its emphasis on serial images and mechanical reproduction – an aesthetic he transfer to film with his minimalist approach.

Brakhage also concerns himself with the structural violence imposed by contemporary forces of mechanization and standardization. In 1959, he declares “[i]t seems to me that the entire society of man is bent on destroying that which is alive within it, its individuals (most contemporarily exemplified by the artist), so that presumably the society can run on and on like the machine it is to the expense of the humans composing it” (*Metaphors on Vision*). In response, he develops his lyrical, and then his mythopoeic, film forms, which seal off the individual artist from mediating forces. His films are grounded in his perceptions and apperceptions; we see what he sees, and we also see how he makes sense of what he sees. As a result, his films become closed systems, inaccessible to mediating systemic forces and to the interpretations of the spectator. In this way, his films resist automatic associations and consumption and remain wholly themselves.

While Brakhage and Warhol focus on how capitalist systems mechanize and standardize the individual, those Latin American filmmakers writing their manifestos in the early 1960s express a similar concern with the violence caused by these systems. However, they are less concerned with the pressures placed on individuals, or more specifically, on individuality. They are concerned with the human misery produced by underdevelopment, which arises from neocolonialism. In their countries, they see poverty, starvation, illiteracy, and limited opportunities to change these life-threatening conditions; yet they do not see this misery reflected in the films of their country’s mainstream cinema. Both Fernando Birri and Glauber Rocha, who write the earliest manifestos, address this paradox. Birri sets about to create a realist, critical and popular film form that shows “how reality *is*” by showing a different view of reality, one that

includes the misery effaced in mainstream cinema. He hopes that once spectators see this reality the latent social critic within them will be awakened and they will work to overturn the structures of inequality that nurture underdevelopment.

Rocha, who writes “An Aesthetic of Hunger” two years after Birri’s “Cinema and Underdevelopment,” frankly disagrees with the strategy of using film to represent misery, since the limits of representation do not allow it to be adequately communicated. Under these circumstances, misery becomes an object of interest or pity to those European or national bourgeois audiences who see the films. Alternatively, he suggests Latin American filmmakers use violence to communicate the horror of misery. Instead of asking spectators to respond intellectually to images, he wants to make them feel something – horror or hope. The colonizers will feel horror when they see the potential for violence within the colonized, and the colonized will feel hope once they realize how violence can produce action and transformation. Rocha’s approach resembles Brakhage’s since he too is interested in circumventing traditional modes of representation. Rocha also wants to communicate without the mediation of imposed systems of meaning. Though his films do not replicate Brakhage’s closed system, his film *Terra em Transe*’s revolutionary subject, Paulo Martins, a poet-politician who learns to embrace violence in order to produce change, stands apart from the people portrayed in the film. In addition, and Rocha’s film aesthetic proves to be unpopular among Brazilian audiences. As a result, his work has only a limited impact on the structural inequalities of his country, though he does make a mark for himself, and for Brazilian film, within the international film community.

In addition to addressing these socio-political pressures, the filmmakers also discuss the restrictions placed on their own work by industrial modes of filmmaking. They feel shut out by the system, unable to realize their career aspirations as filmmakers by following the traditional route of going to Hollywood or to their nation's capitals. Birri travels to Buenos Aires to find work, but every door remains shut to him so he travels to Italy with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea to study filmmaking. When he returns, he decides not to try again in Buenos Aires but rather to begin his career in his home town of Santa Fe. He begins teaching film at his alma mater, the National University of the Litoral, and receives financial and technical support from the university for his film projects. He also develops his mobile cinema concept in order to get around limitations on distribution and exhibition. In his 1963 manifesto, he calls on filmmakers across Latin America to develop such independent alternatives for production, distribution, and exhibition. He also advocates the "imperfect" film aesthetic thrust upon him by underdevelopment. In his 1958 manifesto, he dreams of overturning these limitations and developing an "almost perfect" film form capable of competing with the polished, professional products of industrial cinema. By 1963, however, he decides to embrace imperfection as a formal choice and focuses on developing his documentary realist approach to filmmaking. Similarly, Rocha concentrates on creating a film aesthetic grounded in the unique circumstances of underdevelopment, an aesthetic of hunger, and he establishes Difilm, an independent distributor for Cinema Novo films, to distribute films nationally and internationally. Solanas and Getino, in their turn, also find themselves excluded from the system of industrial filmmaking in Buenos Aires, so they turn to advertising to learn the skills and to make the money necessary to finance and

execute their cinema project. As a result of their experience, they develop the concept of the total filmmaker and take their show on the road with film acts, which they stage in underground locations like factories and labor union headquarters.

The U.S. filmmakers face structural limitations of their own. In “A Call for a New Generation of Film-Makers” (1959), Jonas Mekas rages at the “Hollywood monolith” and spells out his plan to develop a “free cinema,” one that is financially independent and free from the formal conventions of the Hollywood model. He, along with John Cassavetes, Shirley Clarke, Adolfo Mekas, and Robert Frank began work on low-budget, high-art productions, akin to the new cinema films of France, Italy, England, and Eastern Europe, in order to put their free cinema theory into action. Their dream of independent artistic achievement lasted only through production, however. Their dream became a nightmare when they began looking for distribution and financing for future projects. This core group decided to join forces with experimental filmmakers like Maya Deren and Gregory Markopoulos. They incorporated their association as the New American Cinema Group and they established an independent network for distribution (the Film-Makers’ Cooperative) and later for exhibition (the Film-Makers’ Cinematheque). They had also hoped that the Film-Makers’ Cooperative could become a source of funding, but they quickly found out that this would not be the case. They could not support the low-budget filmmakers, so their focus quickly shifted to the no-budget experimental filmmakers (*Film Culture Reader* 71-72). Warhol remained independent from the independents by financing his early film projects through selling his artworks, producing his films with the help of Factory regulars, and by showing his films only to Factory audiences. In this way, he remained outside of both industrial and high art systems.

As the 1960s continue, however, the filmmakers shift from examining how structural pressures limit subjects to look instead at how subjects play a role in their own repression. One reason for this change can be explained by consistent audience preference for mainstream cinema over these new cinema films. In their manifestos or related correspondence, Birri, Rocha, Brakhage, and Gutiérrez Alea mention that audiences have rejected their films, and they seem compelled to address this rejection. Birri first answers the popular audience's lack of interest by developing a fictional film form that uses narrative to portray the problematic contradictions that bring misery to the Argentine people. But he discovers that even this approach fails to have mass appeal. He turns instead to defining his audience, and his ideal spectators are basically those spectators who already come to see his films. He also begins addressing other Latin American filmmakers instead of spectators in his manifestos. Likewise, Rocha expresses frustration over the rejection of Cinema Novo films by Brazilian audiences. He first blames this rejection on the colonization of their minds and beliefs, linking their response to the concept of the ideo-linguistic complex, which he borrows from Jean-Luc Godard. He insists they prefer mainstream films because they speak to them in a now familiar language, while the Cinema Novo films are incomprehensible. He retains some faith in the ability to reach film audiences with these social message films, but by 1970, he gives up this approach and sets about developing a film form grounded in the folkways of the people, which he believes will increase the popularity of his films. Brakhage answers the rejection he faces by developing a film form that basically ignores the spectator. His lyrical and mythopoeic films are self-contained and complete, existing without the need for spectator response or interpretation. Gutiérrez Alea develops an approach to

filmmaking, the open show, which attempts to meld entertainment with social themes as a way to appeal to popular audiences. However, whether they mention this factor of spectator resistance or not, the filmmakers who write their manifestos at the middle or end of the 1960s all address the role of the subject within the system and place some responsibility there for the possibilities and limitations available.

This shift in focus from structural failures to individual failures produces an associated shift in emphasis: from structural violence to discursive violence.<sup>2</sup> The filmmakers become more focused on ideology and conceptual dependency, that is, on the ways language, including film language, shapes worldviews and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> They look not just at how colonial powers have overtaken the social, political, and economic systems of their countries, but how they have colonized the thinking of the people. When they begin to focus on meaning-making, they begin instituting ideologies of their own to combat capitalist ideology – and by doing so, commit discursive violence in their turn.

In his 1977 interview with Julianne Burton, Gutiérrez Alea explicitly positions his work, and his career, as contradicting capitalist versions of freedom and self-determination (129). He also indicates that his film form works to institutionalize revolutionary ideals and principles into the everyday lives of the people. Though the Cuban people express their support for the revolution and its benefits, they do not think and live in accordance with the revolution. The people remain the last bastion of

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term and concept “discursive violence” from J.K. Gibson-Graham’s *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*.

<sup>3</sup> Each of the filmmakers, at one time or another, references French filmmaking, and many of them mention Jean-Luc Godard by name. For example, Rocha claims Godard as a major influence, but Gutiérrez Alea and Solanas and Getino reference him to acknowledge his importance, but then to indicate how their own work in film has attempted to move beyond his experiments, which are not suited for their particular contexts. Though they reject Godard, they continue to rely on what Peter Wollen describes as the Godardian avant-garde when they tackle meaning and attempt re-signification in their films.

neocolonialism in Cuba. Until their minds and actions accord with the revolution, the revolution will not be complete; it will not be a total revolution. In essence, Gutiérrez Alea's descriptions of his films position them as ideology. But he believes this ideology is more beneficial to the people than the capitalist ideology to which they still subscribe. However, as we see in our analysis of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, the revolutionary ideology can be as repressive as capitalist ideology. Though the film presents Sergio as free to think and choose in accordance with his belief system, the film's insistence on a revolutionary attitude ultimately disenfranchises and then destroys Sergio. His freedom is an illusion – put in place as an object lesson. Gutiérrez Alea uses Sergio to trap spectators into identifying with this individual, who ultimately destroys himself because he “is always heading in the other direction from everyone else” (Interview with Burton 118). The first half of the film insists we identify with Sergio; in many ways, we become him. However, the film releases us from Sergio's perspective in its second half. At that point, we have the opportunity to decide for ourselves whether we want to identify with him or not, since the film's narration becomes more objective. But our choice says a lot about us, and whether we are revolutionary or counterrevolutionary. In the end, we have to decide whether to go in the same direction as the people, or whether to go in an opposing one, as Sergio does. But we now know the stakes of the choice and, in that light, it is no longer a choice. By focusing on and reproducing the binary opposition between socialist and capitalist notions of freedom and the individual that he invokes in his 1977 interview, Gutiérrez Alea replaces one repressive system with another. The individual is permitted to think and be on his own terms, as long as those terms coincide with the revolution.

Although they work in a pre-revolutionary context, Solanas and Getino use Cuba as a model, and as a cautionary tale, for what can happen to a revolution when it fails to revolutionize the thinking of the people. They decide to decolonize the minds of the Argentine people as a way to bring about socio-political change. They develop an open film form that presents an ideological essay, but this film form also interrupts itself in order to invite the spectator to debate the topics it raises and to add their knowledge and experiences to what is presented onscreen. The film is also structured to replicate the three stages of knowledge outlined by Solanas and Getino in “Towards a Third Cinema,” so though it allows spectators to share their own thoughts, it also seeks to impress upon them the ideas expressed within the film. Furthermore, the film is one part of the film act, which also includes an offscreen mise-en-scene that expresses the themes of the films and disinhibits the spectator. The mise-en-scene of the film act brings onscreen and offscreen reality into a reflective relationship. The spaces resemble one another since the film features factories and labor unions and the film was often screened in these locations. But Solanas and Getino also hope that the spectators will come to resemble the revolutionary individuals featured onscreen, and that they will replicate their thoughts and actions. Their fellow Argentine, Fernando Birri, had by this time (1968) left Argentina for Italy, but in his 1963 manifesto, we see him moving away from spectators as the source of change because of their resistance to his films. In response, he increasingly puts his faith in film’s ability to envision change. He develops his social documentary form so it expresses a critical consciousness, which it models for the spectator.

In his later manifestos, Rocha also seems to despair about spectators. He first preaches patience, indicating that the Brazilian people have to learn this new language

before they can understand it, but by 1970, he remains frustrated by what he calls the people's lack of understanding. Instead of trying to teach them to understand, which has not proven successful, he decides to go to the people to borrow themes and forms that arise from their folk culture; he opts for a grassroots approach. Brakhage also expresses frustration with the ideo-linguistic complex, though he does not call it that. He wants to circumvent language-based film forms in order to avoid the pre-determined meanings and habitual associations language produces. He develops what might be called a grassroots approach of his own. To avoid imposed meanings and associations, he looks deep down into the depths of his subjectivity, his perceptions, "closed eye vision," and consciousness, in order to mine his sensibilities, which he then communicates through his films. In this way, he produces an unmediated form of self-expression while also protecting his senses, sensibilities, and thoughts from outside mediation. He believes this unmediated self-expression allows him to reveal truths to spectators about the world and the concerns of all man, which would otherwise be obscured by these mediations. However, these truths and the self-discovery that enacts them assume universality; as a result, they incorporate other subjects and subjective impressions into them.

Warhol is also interested in an unmediated form of self-expression, but instead of pulling out of the culture industry and plunging into his inner perceptual depths as Brakhage does, Warhol stays fully engaged within this system and uses it against itself to carve out a space of autonomy and self-determination for himself and others. He focuses on the subject as the subject of discourse, and looks at the ways institutions use discourse to characterize people and to determine their value. He appropriates these discursive forces for himself in order to establish the Factory as an alternative institution, with its

own conventions and superstar system. Grounded in improvisation and parody, these conventions allow individuals who are usually effaced from the film frame or deemed not valuable by mainstream society to determine their own selves and their own self worth. However, as we have seen, Warhol's conventions come at a price: by establishing an ideal subject (i.e., the superstar as "real person") and by establishing conventions of behavior, he imposes an alternative system that allows for free self-expression but positions that self-expression within the overall institution or places pressures on it so it conforms to the institution's conventions. Because of this, his theory and films come to resemble Gutiérrez Alea's, which attempt to bring freedom and autonomy to the Cuban people by prompting them to think and act in accordance with revolutionary ideology.

In these later manifestos, which address issues of meaning and knowledge, the subject becomes a defined space where conflicting knowledges, views, and ideas come into contact and battle for dominance. The filmmakers think through how these subjects process information and acquire knowledge. They consider actual spectator responses, generally in terms of the spectators' rejection of their films, but then they usually return to a consideration of theoretical spectators. When this happens, they think through these spectators; in other words, these theoretical spectators become bodies of knowledge and discourse that can be analyzed. The filmmakers use their theoretical spectators to figure out how ideology works, and how knowledge is formed and reformed. These theoretical spectators are experiments in themselves, as experimental as the films of these filmmakers. Even if these experiments "fail" when applied to actual spectators, they still reveal much about the challenges these filmmakers wrestle with and provide insight into many of their formal decisions.

The common interests and competing subjectivities exhibited in these filmmaker theories underscore the existence of a discourse network that unites these filmmakers with one another, and with the international new cinema community. We can see in their public statements about their filmmaking and in their films a shared interest in addressing socio-political and institutional pressures, and a common struggle to think about how to overcome them. We can also see in their work, and its change over time, how a discourse network opens up opportunities for new directions. These filmmakers learn from one another's successes and failures. But discernible too is how such a network imposes its own limits. These filmmakers share, critique, challenge, and push one another toward experiments that generate innovation. But this work occurs within an established set of conventions, traditions, and languages. The filmmakers are radical in their thought processes and formal experiments, but they tend to be more traditional in their self-identification. They want to belong to the international new cinema community and to be a part of the aesthetic revolutions taking place there. They want to achieve recognition for their work, and they want it to be seen as significant. As much as these filmmaker theories reflect an anxiety about actual spectators, they also reflect an anxiety about European new cinema, especially the French new wave. This anxiety heightens when they realize that the French filmmakers scorn their "imperfect" cinemas. Even though they attempt to distance themselves from the European new cinemas at this point, they still refer to them and keep an anxious watch on them, as Jonas Mekas's *Movie Journal* reveals. This anxiety reveals the persistence of their ties to more conventional systems. Though they seem fiercely proud of their imperfect cinemas, they are still shaken by the value judgments that render them subordinate. Though the filmmakers try to step outside

the system by using the system, and in many ways they are successful, in many other ways the revolutionary quality of their projects, their ability to create something new, becomes restricted by their ability to think outside a system that they so very much want to belong to.

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