

CÁMARA DE COMBATE. EL FESTIVAL DE CINE LATINOAMERICANO COMO REFLEXIÓN- ACCIÓN

(Cámara de Combate. Latin American Film Festival(s) as reflection-action)

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Abstract *Cámara de Combate* is an artwork composed of series of banners inspired by revolutionary cultural movements originated in Latin America, namely, Third Cinema and Latin American conceptualism. I graphically rendered citations onto the robust material of banners, all taken from Third Cinema filmmakers, who first emerged in 1960s in an era of political upheaval in Latin America. They used the camera as a political weapon to engage revolutionary social, cultural, and political ideas in the region and to incite political consciousness and action. I made a direct correlation with Latin America's contemporary political context as it relates to American, Canadian, and European interventionism and oppressive regimes, with Latin American Film Festivals situated outside of Latin America. *Cámara de Combate*, was exhibited in the patio of Vancouver's Cinematheque as part of the seventeenth edition of the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival in 2019. Some of the questions explored within this artistic inquiry are, what is the role of artists living in the diaspora vis-à-vis Latin American political consciousness? What is the role of Latin

American film festivals outside of Latin America in relation to audience and community participants? This text offers a reflection on my artwork and its line of investigation within a diaspora film festival space. I explore some of the philosophical and theoretical currents and political contexts that influenced this work and how it was received within the festival space.

Keywords: Latin America, Film Festival, Art, Cinema, Neocolonialism, Third Cinema

**DARLE LA
VOZ AL
OTRO**

Marta Rodríguez

Give the Voice to the Others

Figure 1: Marta Rodríguez. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.

In their album, *La voz de los '80*, released in 1984 during Pinochet's dictatorship, the Chilean rock band *Los Prisioneros*, ironically expressed in their song *Latinoamérica es un pueblo al sur de Estados Unidos* that, we are “*un sitio exótico para visitar. Solo un lugar económico, pero inadecuado para habitar*” (An exotic place to visit. Just an affordable place, but inadequate to inhabit). The history of Latin America is chaotic, always in constant transformation and suspense. It seems that nothing changes while always changing. Paradoxically, it is hard to explain what Latin America is. The term connects even the most incoherently lucid aspects of the time-space *Sur* (from México to Argentina, including the Caribbean), linked with the *migrante-Sur*, the so-called diaspora. To explain what Latin America is, is like trying to express what is beyond the gravitational singularity of a black hole. To paraphrase the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*, Latin America is a world where many worlds coexist. These multiple worlds create a sublime hyperspace. To understand *Latinoamérica*, you must live it, not only live inside it. *Latinoamérica es una cosa latinoamericana*.

In physics, it is said that to escape from the black hole's event horizon,¹ because of its force of gravity, you need to travel faster than the speed of light to avoid being absorbed. According to this view, if someone falls into the black hole's event horizon, they will inevitably continue their way through the singularity (the entrance to the black hole) where explanatory power of the laws of physics are useless. In Latin America, the neoliberal forces act as a

¹ On Black Holes, see Thorne, Kip S. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy*. W.W. Norton & Company; New e. edition. 1995.

force of gravity to engross society aggressively to a singularity that twists our conceptions about what society, culture and democracy means. It is like seeing Latin American reality through Hollywood film production or BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) documentaries. In the 1960's, *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema), a revolutionary film movement originated in Latin America,² demonstrated that, metaphorically, the speed of light is not a problem for Latin America. To avoid being absorbed by the force of gravity of the black hole, filmmakers pulled the trigger on their Super 8 and 16mm cameras to film the realities in the region. These Third Cinema filmmakers let the light that exposed their film and Latin Americas realities to be projected for public viewing on the big screen, to not only show their audiences what was happening in their region, but to incite the public to political consciousness and action. *Tercer Cine* was first theorized by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in Argentina in the 1960's as a counter position against neocolonial dependency, dictatorial oppression, and subjugations of *los pueblos latinoamericanos*. This cinematic movement was possible through a series of revolutionary, ideological cultural categories with films that were often screened in clandestine and underground locations in both rural and urban settings with a combative force in favour of the liberation of Latin American societies.

² On *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema), see De Taboada, Javier. "Tercer Cine: Tres Manifiestos." *Revista De Critica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 37, no. 73, 2011, pp. 37–60; the manifesto *Hacia un Tercer Cine* (Toward a Third Cinema) by Octavio Getino and Fernando 'Pino' Solanas in: Mackenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2020, pp. 230.

A
CÂMARA
é um objeto que
MENTE
GLAUBER ROCHA

Camera is an object that lies

Figure 2: Glauber Rocha. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. (c) Carlos Colín, 2019.

The decolonial basis of *Tercer Cine* and *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano*,³ were conceived in the second half of the

³ On Conceptualismo Latinoamericano (Latin American Conceptualism), see: Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. University of Texas Press, 2007.

20th century for socio-political intentions. Third Cinema and Latin American Conceptualism established the idea of a public domain social art, capable of creating a dialectic and critical analysis on the socio-cultural and political situation in the region. These decolonial praxes are conceived and incorporated *arte-acción* within everyday life in the middle of foreign cultural policies, governmental politics, and interventions such as coups d'état, dictatorships, neo-colonization, genocides, and acculturation. Both *Tercer Cine* and *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano* aim to be part of the transformation of social development, public resistance, and subversive activities. Specifically, *Tercer Cine* instituted a cultural-cinematographic concept against First Cinema, meaning Hollywood film production; and Second Cinema, in reference to the individualistic author's cinema associated with European art house films.



Figure 3: Fernando Birri. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.

My project *Cámara de Combate* displayed during the 2019 Vancouver Latin American Film Festival (VLAFF), included a series of banners linked with the philosophies and praxes of *Tercer Cine* and the *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano*. *Cámara de Combate* explores a critical thinking about Latin American film festivals, that exist outside of Latin America. These banners, aim to build dialogue and didactics as a crucial factor within the Latin American diaspora. They allow new audiences attending the festival, as well as regular festival filmgoers, to understand that one part of cinema and contemporary art

production in Latin America was (and still is) committed to social movements, resistances, and subversions in the *Sur*. At the same time, *Cámara de Combate* seeks to create a dialogue with the audience, volunteer crew, and organizers of the festival to reflect on the role, and the position of Latin American film festivals outside of Latin America in relation to current socio-political and religious events unfolding in Latin America. In designing this project my aim was to engage the current political moment of Latin America, such as the macho-military regime of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; the interventions in Venezuela of the United States, Canada, and the European Union personified by Juan Guaidó; the neoliberal legacy by Mauricio Macri in Argentina; or the recent soft coup d'état executed against Evo Morales and instigated by the United States, to name a few of the unfolding events in the region at the time of making this work. As a result of Latin America's ongoing struggle for liberation (from the grips of the neoliberal world order and modern patriarchal capitalism), I believe that it is critical that Latin American film festivals assume a political consciousness towards Latin America as a region. *Cámara de Combate* attempts to highlight this critical obligation for political consciousness and political action, as did the films and artworks of the Third Cinema filmmakers, and Latin American conceptual artists.

The series of banners in *Cámara de Combate*, reproduces the aesthetic of banners used in strikes, social movements, and popular manifestations in Latin America. The banners were hung outside of Vancouver's Cinematheque, one of VLAFF's main venues. They contained quotes from some of the prodigious Third

Cinema filmmakers from Latin America such as Marta Rodriguez, Glauber Rocha, Jorge Sanjinés, Fernando Birri, and the cinematic Latin American project known as the *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular* from Chile.⁴ These quotes by the filmmakers mentioned before were expressed during interviews, conferences, or published as part of manifestos that engaged the possibilities of a new formula for cinema, and how cinema itself could and should be in the region. Among the quotes that I used, and which I consider as the most significant one, was written by the *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular*. It stated:

⁴ The Cinema Committee was part of the political alliance between left-wing political in Chile called Popular Unity. To read the manifesto of *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular*. Mackenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2020, pp. 250.

**Consideramos que un cine
alejado de las grandes
masas se ha convertido
en un producto inevitable
para el consumo
de una pequeña burguesía de élite
que es incapaz de construir el motor
de la historia.**

Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular

**We shall regard a cinema removed from the great masses to have
become inevitable a product for the consumption of an elite petit
bourgeoisie which is incapable of constituting the motor of history.**

Figure 4: Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.

This statement, taken from the manifesto of the Chilean *Unidad Popular*, allowed me to juxtapose three aspects of interest. The first aspect is the aim of *Tercer Cine* to foster a popular cinema; *por el pueblo, para el pueblo, y con el pueblo*. This Third Cinema ideological position, which sought to bring cinema to all social sectors, seems not to have flourished in some diasporic film festivals around the globe. Many diasporic festivals lack a socio-political position, probably because of the interests between festivals, the involvement of consulates or foreign Latin American political representations who participate in these festivals.

The second aspect is to highlight the establishment and the dominance of an elite petite bourgeoisie, which does not contribute anything to the festivals, or to its growth. This elite petite bourgeoisie, has converted small festivals into commodities, and, as the *Unidad Popular* observes, they are “incapable of constituting the motor of history” (Mackenzie, 2020, p. 250), thus losing the reflection-action component expected from both the audience and the organizers. The third aspect concerned the lack of a popular proposal from diasporic film festivals, which does not reach out to workers and/or to farm workers living abroad, coming yearly to carry out seasonal migrant work far from home. By popular proposal I mean, to create a festival enjoyable by a large number of people, mainly the Latin American sector. In addition to this lack of community approach, many Latin American film festivals outside of Latin America do not incorporate educational opportunities such as conferences, workshops, and roundtables that would allow the audience to critically engage with current Latin American events, philosophical

currents, and the films screened within the film festivals. For these reasons, *Cámara de Combate* seeks to provide a response to the lack of a socio-political position, the establishment of an elite petite bourgeoisies, and the lack of a popular proposal, attempting to open dialogue to create new perspectives on the role of diasporic film festivals, for filmmakers, and for artists. *Cámara de Combate* is a reminder about our commitment, reconciliation, and responsibility within the *Latinoamericano* ethos abroad.



Figure 5: *Cámara de Combate*. Banners. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. (c) Carlos Colín, 2019.

One of the questions I raised as part of this artwork, interrogates the purpose of diasporic film festivals and the contributions to the Latin American community. While this artwork project was exhibited during the course of the VLAFF, I observed festival goers reading the quotes and taking photos with the banners. Yet, very few people came forward to discuss their reactions with me. Some of those who did come forward were interested in clarifying the meanings behind the quotes. This gave me the opportunity to exchange ideas around Latin American cinema and discuss my preoccupations as a Latin American artist living in Vancouver. Latin American artists living abroad need to understand and think about what they seek to accomplish, what role does a festival such as the VLAFF play, and to be clear about our social commitments regarding a diasporic multicultural Latin American society. As an artist as part of this diaspora community, we need to collectively question what are the needs and factors that brought us here far from the *Sur*, and how we can reconcile past, present, and future in a better understanding about *Latinoamérica*, through cultural production that serves our communities at large.

To conclude, I share this quote from one of the most outstanding dialogues in the *Tercer Cine* film *Sur* (1988) directed by Pino (Fernando) Solanas:

“Mire General. Si ustedes no saben lo que es el sur, es por que son del norte.” (Look General. If you don’t know what the South is, it is because you are from the north.) (Solanas, 1988).

I aim my *cámara de combate* (combat camera) towards Latin American film festivals with this citation in mind.

References

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- Solanas, F.E. (Director). (1988). *Sur*. [Motion Picture]. Argentina: Canal+, Cinesur (Envar El Kadri), Productions Pacific.