Latin American Film Makers and the Third Cinema
Edited with an introduction by Zuzana M. Pick

260 pages, Ottawa: Film Studies Program, Carleton University for the author and available through her, 1978, $5.90

Among the most substantial achievements of the continuing Canadian inquiry into Third Cinema is Zuzana Pick's anthology, Latin American Film Makers and the Third Cinema. The book contains some 18 translations of articles by the most prominent filmmakers and critics of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba and Uruguay as well as an introduction, filmographies and extensive bibliography of English, Spanish and French materials. As such, it is a successful progression from pioneering, though less useful, works such as E. Bradford Burn's Latin American Cinema and Julianne Burton's The New Latin American Cinema. It is a measure of the times that Pick unlike Burns and Burton, has had to print the book in samizdat and distribute it herself (Film Studies Program, Carleton University, Ottawa).

Pick's simple but radical step of letting the Third Cinema speak for itself yields a compilation of some of the freshest cinema writing to appear in English in recent memory. One is struck in nearly all these pieces by the clarity with which the authors integrate their understanding of their societies into the pragmatic concerns of film production in order to formulate their aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) statements. In this vein, the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines (The Blood of the Condor, The Courage of the People) writes:

"We give back to culture what it has given to us. The cultural equipment we assimilate, the vision and the concepts, the styles and characteristics of our people, incorporated into our personalities; all these factors determine a particular creative style... They add to and augment cultural values and equipment, not modifying them, but simply enriching them."

But the cinema discussed by these authors is not populist in Capra's sense of the term. The audience is not simply complimented for its instinctive good sense and traditional values. Rather, as Glauber Rocha (Terra em Transe, Antonio das Mortes) states:

"The public feels itself taken to task in the theatre, forced to decipher a new type of film: technically imperfect, dramatically jarring, sociologically inaccurate and unimpressive - as is Brazil's own official sociology; politically aggressive and uncertain, as is Brazil's own politics; violent and sad - though sadder, much sadder than it is violent - like our carnival, which is much sadder than it is gay."

The tentative nature of the cinema that Rocha describes is echoed in nearly all the articles by the non-Cubans. As the Colombian director Carlos Alvarez (Que es la Democracia?) admits:

"Perhaps it is still very little, a beginning, but it is already being done. And the ones who learn the most from contact (with the workers and peasants) are not the people when one tries to speak of their oppressed and vilified realities, but the directors in contact with them, the people, that contemptuous word in the mouth of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is the class of origin of all the filmmakers who have gone to the people and who have had to learn painfully that it is this social class..."
that is the source of all real knowledge: a fountain of learning and the only one that can be changed and restored to its humanity."

The firmness of purpose displayed by these three writers is an outgrowth of a creative pragmatism all too often absent from the political cinemas of more developed nations. Despite their unquestionable Marxist commitment, the Third Cinema writers rarely undulate in idiosyncratic jargon or pointless distinction. They have little difficulty in defining their revolutionary goals while suggesting a sense of political purpose equal to that of any other film directors. All but one of the articles is taken from Cine Cubano, presumably one of the few Latin American publication outlets remaining for Third Cinema directors. Conscious of this, Pick argues, in her extensive introduction, that it is only with a political orientation that one may begin to terms with the body of work these people represent:

"The application of "traditional" criticism to the Third Cinema would be a treason to the political concerns of its filmmakers. An "auteurist" approach would go against the ideological concepts outlined by the Third World film makers. It is therefore necessary to develop a critical method which takes into account some of the notions which have been introduced, such as "national culture," "decolonization," "didactic cinema," and political engagement. A traditional sociological analysis might permit an effective content analysis which demands good knowledge of the situation of the Third World, but neglects the aesthetic objectives of this cinema.

Pick's anthology is edited with a sense of political purpose equal to that of the authors chosen. All but one of the articles is taken from Cine Cubano, with the unique benefit of the title role in «The Intruder.»

Seth Feldman