"HUMBLY, THE GROUP RESPONDED": ORGANIC INTELLECTUALISM, EXILE AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION IN THE CINE DE LA BASE FILM COLLECTIVE

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Much film historiography tends to privilege authorial figures, particularly directors, to structure any discussion of artistic and political trends and movements. The exponents of militant cinema do not always accept this approach and often consider filmmaking activity in terms of other processes, such as the multi-directional and horizontal interactions between organic, technical and militant intellectuals. Out of such experiences has come a particular kind of biopolitical production that is reflected both in the resulting films and in the work methods that members of the movement often exported to other collectives to which they contributed. Certain repressive strategies, including exile, facilitated the dissemination of these approaches—which from the outset were internationalist by nature—and have opened up the possibility of new constructions of militant cinema history. This article takes the example of Raymundo Gleyzer's time as a member of the Cine de la Base collective to illustrate these dynamics and reflect on the future of radical film movements.

1. FROM RAYMUNDO GLEYZER TO CINE DE LA BASE

> I am an Argentine filmmaker and I've been making films since 1963. All of them deal with the social and political situation in Latin America. I try to show that there is only one way to bring about structural changes in our continent: socialist revolution.
>
> Raymundo Gleyzer
> (cited in Ardito and Molina, 2002)

This is how Raymundo Gleyzer described his work and his purpose as a filmmaker. Peña and Vallina (2000) identify three periods into which Gleyzer's career can be divided: the first period from 1963 to 1966, when he worked on ethnographic documentary films; the second, from 1965 to 1971, when he engaged in film journalism, combining documentation and investigation; and finally, a third phase

from 1971 and 1976, when he devoted himself entirely to making militant underground films. The points of transition between each stage are uncertain, because the shift was progressive and each phase emerged as a result of the previous one.

After completing his studies and working on projects such as the fiction film *El Ciclo* (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1964), Gleyzer began making documentaries. As a student at the Escuela de Cine de La Plata film school, he connected with film industry professionals such as Humberto Ríos, with whom he ended up forming a network of colleagues who would contribute to several of his films (Peña and Vallina, 2000). In 1963, Gleyzer directed *La tierra quema* [The Land Burns], which explored the social issues faced by rural workers in Brazil. This film was funded by an Experimental Film Association grant awarded to him and Jorge Giannoni (Recchia Paez, 2017), although Giannoni ultimately abandoned the project because of the harsh conditions of the filming location (Peña and Vallina, 2000). The cinematographer on the project was the Brazilian Rucker Vieira, who would subsequently work in Brazil's Cinema Novo movement (Link, 2011). Two years later, Gleyzer directed *Ceramiqueros de Traslasierra* [Potters of Traslasierra] (1965), working with colleagues who would subsequently contribute to many of his other films: Ana Montes de González, Humberto Ríos, Catulo Albiac and Juana Sapire. This film presents the lifestyles and working conditions of a community of potters in Córdoba, Argentina.

His ethnographic leanings led him to work with Jorge Prelorán, with whom he co-directed *Occurado en Hualfín* [It Happened in Haulfin] (Jorge Prelorán and Raymundo Gleyzer, 1965) and *Quilino* (Raymundo Gelyzer and Jorge Prelorán, 1966). Prelorán enjoyed a long career as a documentary filmmaker, working on most of his films on his own, which was his preference (Pérez Llahí, 2011), with Gleyzer being an exception. In an interview he gave in 2000, Prelorán acknowledged that his work with Gleyzer helped him develop new ways of interviewing and presenting certain issues, a methodology he labelled "ethnobiographical". He also stressed that his films should be classified as "works of art, not of documentation", as he considered himself more a dramatist than an anthropologist (Masotta and Campano, 2000). Gleyzer's markedly structural approach gave rise to an ideological conflict between the two filmmakers (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

It was at this point that Gleyzer began his journalistic period, with *Nuestras islas Malvinas* [Our Malvinas Islands] (1966), a production made for Argentina's night-time news program *Telenoche*, which had hired Gleyzer. According to Julio Gómez, the cameramen for *Telenoche* were divided into two groups: technicians without much political awareness, and people such as Gleyzer or Pino Solanas of the Grupo Cine Liberación, intellectuals trained in film schools who were nearly always leftists (Peña and Vallina, 2000). The news show format made it possible to reach more people, but it also highlighted the tensions between the mainstream message and the new perspectives of these directors. In *Nuestras islas Malvinas*, Gleyzer paints a portrait of life of the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas). At this time, the dispute over the sovereignty of the islands was the living expression of the colonial conflict between Argentina and Britain, a confrontation between "a peripheral country and a major power" (Laufer, 2022: 49). The conflict would later be seized on by the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) in an effort to galvanize public support for a regime that had become notorious for its constant human rights abuses, repression and economic mismanagement. The Malvinas question, and Argentine politics in general, was defined by two key factors: class and country. This stage of Gleyzer's career ended with *Mataque* (Raymundo, Gleyzer, 1967), a film about the living conditions of Argentina's Wichí people, an Indigenous community affected by social exclusion.

Throughout 1968 and 1969, Gleyzer and sound engineer Juana Sapire, whom he had married two years earlier, travelled around Europe making news reports for *Telenoche* and screening the films *La tierra quema* and *Hualfín*. From there, while still working for *Telenoche*, they flew to Cuba and filmed *Nota especial sobre Cuba* [Special Note on Cuba] (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1969), an experience that reinforced their Guevarism. They then returned to Europe and met a couple of Americans in London who would later introduce them to producer Bill Susman in the United States (Peña and Vallina, 2000). Susman financed their trip to Mexico to film *México, la revolución congelada* [Mexico, the Frozen Revolution] (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1971). In addition to Gleyzer and Sapire, the production team included Humberto Ríos on the camera, María Elena Vera as historical researcher, and the Mexican producer Paul Leduc, who acted as a guide for the team but asked not to be credited for fear of reprisals by his government (Pineda Franco, 2016). The fact they were not Mexicans placed them in a favourable position to make the film (Peña and Vallina, 2000). After being condemned by the Mexican authorities for exposing their strategies of repression and co-option, it received very limited screenings in a few universities and union halls in the country. In Argentina, the film suffered the same fate, but it was shown in the United States, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, Chile and Venezuela, among other countries (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

On their return to Argentina, Gleyzer and Sapire joined the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Workers' Front (FATRAC), the cultural branch of the PRT-ERP.[1] There they met scriptwriter Álvaro Melián and sound engineer Nerio Barberis, and they made productions such as *Swift* (FATRAC, 1971),[2] consisting of ERP press releases (numbers 5 and 7) on the abduction and revolutionary trial of the British consul Stanley Sylvester, manager of the Swift meat processing plant in Rosario. These militant films with marked TV production formats countered the hegemonic discourse describing the kidnapping merely as an "incident", characterising it instead as a political strategy to secure worker rights. As will be explored below, such films contributed to the creation of new "common places" (Virno, 2004) in relation to the party's revolutionary politics. Much to the disappointment of its members, the PRT-ERP dissolved FATRAC in 1971, but by this time the connections among the filmmakers had already been established (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

At the end of 1972, the group began filming *Los traidores* (Cine de la Base, 1973), marking the commencement of the third phase in Gleyzer's filmmaking career (Peña and Vallina, 2000). For the screenplay Gleyzer had the support of Melián and Víctor Proncet, the writer of the short story on which the film was based. This moment was decisive for the establishment of the collective. *Los traidores* is a fiction film that tells the story of a union boss named Roberto Barrera (based on José Ignacio Rucci) who fakes his own kidnapping in order to win re-election in the National Workers' Confederation. While the film was being made, the Lanusse dictatorship killed 16 political prisoners and injured three others when they attempted to break out of the Rawson prison (Peña and Vallina, 2000). In response, the group produced *Ni olvido ni perdón: 1972, la masacre de Trelew* [Neither Forget nor Forgive: 1972, The Trelew Massacre] (1972). Due to "the urgent need to counter the official versions, the film is armed with material from the [press] conference, the photos that appeared in the press, the records of the court statements, news footage; in other words, there is practically no original footage" (Escobar, 2007: 7). This would become a regular approach for Cine de la Base. *Los traidores* was completed in 1973, effectively marking the formation of the group. Initially, its main objective was simply to distribute the new film (García and Bouchet, 2003; De la Puente, 2016). The core of the group was made up of former FATRAC members (Gleyzer, Sapire,

Melián and Barberis), but soon they were joined by friends and supporters, such as Jorge Denti, whom Gleyzer had met in Rome through Giannoni (Ferman, 2010: 5). According to Gleyzer:

> Cine de la Base grew a lot after July because the practical experience of the screening of the film began bringing together around the group a lot of people who had the same ideas and the same concerns. So it was the film *Los traidores* that consolidated and strengthened the group a bit. (Cited in Schumann, 1974)

The evolution and growth of Cine de la Base resulted in the expansion of its initial objectives from the distribution of *Los traidores* to the formation of a network of groups in different regions that were engaging not only in the distribution but also in the creation of militant cinema. "The basic premise was that cinema had to go to the people [*la base*] because the people weren't going to the cinema" (Escobar, 2007: 6-7).

2. CINE DE LA BASE: INTELLECTUALISM, SPONTANEITY AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION

Despite the repressive context of 1970s Argentina, branches of Cine de la Base were established in different regions. In 1974, Gleyzer spoke of "four groups in Buenos Aires, one in La Plata, and one each in Bahía Blanca, Trelew, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Rosario, Paraná, Corrientes, Chaco" (cited in Schumann, 1974). The groups operated autonomously, with their own projectors and prints of the films produced up to that time, as well as others that had not been made by the collective but that had some degree of political affinity with it.[3] Screenings were held every week in community centres and factories, wherever they were accepted. These screenings were initially held openly but subsequently went underground (García and Bouchet, 2003). Alongside the films, Cine de la Base took an interest in other means of disseminating ideas, such as the photonovel, highlighting its constant efforts to challenge cinematic orthodoxy. The group sought "neither individualism nor art; these are utilitarian films" (cited in Schumann, 1974).

Gleyzer is perhaps the clearest example of an organic intellectual in Cine de la Base because his craft allows him to communicate Marxist ideas and practices absorbed from his family and background (Mor, 2012). He thus constitutes a synthesis of two concepts that Gramsci generally identifies as irreconcilable: the traditional intellectual (a professional man of letters) and the organic intellectual, "the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental-social class" (cited in Hoare and Smith, 1971: 3-4). From Gramsci's perspective, his personal concern with the absence of artistic pretension suggests an awareness that:

> The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser [...] and not just a simple orator [...] from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains "specialised" and does not become "directive" [*dirigente*]. (Gramsci, 1971: 10)[4]

When Gleyzer refers to the utilitarian nature of Cine de la Base, he also discusses a range of practices that go hand-in-hand with the production process: discussions of problems, strategies and solutions. The modus operandi of the different cells of the group reflects a horizontal approach, although this does not mean that each member did not contribute according to their particular abilities. As Barberis explains:

> I argued a lot with him. We fought a lot about form and content. Whether the telenovela-like structure was right or not. He said very clearly: "I don't give a shit. I want to make a film that is a political tool for raising awareness. If the telenovela format serves better to communicate with people, I'll use it. I want people to realise that there is a bureaucrat and you have to fight against him." [...]. The interesting thing

> about an individual like Raymundo is that even if he denied what was sometimes considered a bourgeois deviation—the status of an artist—he was an artist. That's why *Los traidores* is a film that endures. (Cited in García and Bouchet, 2003: 28)

As Mor points out, Gleyzer's forced disappearance in 1976 turned him into the "martyr par excellence" (2012: 72) of the reconstruction of Argentina's film industry after the last military dictatorship. In the act of looking back, there is a temptation to reconstruct the Cine de la Base model according to conventional principles, such as the industrial mode of production, with its assignment of credits and distribution of tasks, its authorial tendencies, etc. Based on the idea of the organic intellectual, what this study seeks to define is Cine de la Base's conscious effort to circumvent the whole range of determining factors associated with the notion of the director and the fact that the result of that effort is precisely what made the group so significant. Cine de la Base never actually had normal production or distribution processes. Many of the films were reworked based on the discussions they generated: scenes were cut, new endings designed,[5] and everything came out of the constant debates among members and viewers and the political changes in the unstable context of Argentina in the 1970s. For Barberis, "the leader of the group was Raymundo, but he was not alone; there were other comrades as solid as him politically and ideologically" (cited in García and Bouchet, 2003: 30). Gleyzer expressed the same idea in a letter to Chile Films:

> For us, who have never believed in "auteur cinema", it is perfectly clear that all members of a team have the same rights to influence the film. [...] We firmly believe in a creation and production collective, but we have strong doubts about the effectiveness of overlapping tasks. Things are discussed thoroughly until there is agreement, then the work is divided according to what each one knows how to do: this is the healthiest and the most logical approach. (Cited in Peña and Vallina, 2000: 80-81)



Images 1, 2 and 3. Title credits for *Swift* (Image 1), *Los traidores* (Images 2 and 3)





Images 4 and 5. Title credits for *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan* (Image 4), and *Las AAA son las tres armas* (Image 5)

Gleyzer was troubled by the notion of authorship because Cine de la Base, despite being made up largely of professional filmmakers, worked differently from the film industry of the time. The group was concerned with production and distribution and with establishing certain work patterns that facilitated the consolidation of the principles of aligned political groups, especially the PRT-ERP. Many of their films at this time do not even have credits, or if they do, they only cite Cine de la Base as the organisation responsible and individuals like Susman, who lived far away from the repressive regime (Images 1-5).

The absence of credits is significant for various reasons. The first is that it was a way to protect the members of the group, as the political environment in Argentina after 1966 was hostile to radical movements. There was a grace period with the return of Peronism to power in 1973, but there was still state terrorism, which intensified during the presidency of Isabel Perón, following the creation of the AAA (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance) (Mor, 2012). A second reason lies in the mode of distribution of the films, with people close to Cine de la Base almost always present at the screenings. Any audience member who really wanted to know who had made the film and what their intentions had been needed only to ask (García and Bouchet, 2003; Schumann, 1974; Ardito and Molina, 2002). A third reason is related to the origins of the credit system in the film industry. The members of Cine de la Base were not paid for their contributions and seemed to have no interest in gaining prestige as artists, nor did they have any intention of using these films to help them find work in the Argentine film industry. Members often repeated the same roles—Sapire and Barberis were generally responsible for sound design, Gleyzer and Denti alternated responsibilities for the directorial and cinematographic work, and Melián wrote the screenplays—but the assignment of pre-production and post-production tasks, for example, was less clearly defined. The absence of credits makes it necessary to search through testimonies, some about the number of groups, others about the number of members at specific moments—Barberis, for example, speaks of up to twenty "people involved in filmmaking" at certain times (García and Bouchet, 2003: 29)—in order to identify the contributors.

The core of the group remained unchanged, but the associations between the different members evolved according to the idiosyncrasies of each member and the informal relationships between them (writers like Conti and Galeano and prominent figures in Argentine cinema, such as

Jorge Cedrón, Hugo Álvarez and Octavio Getino, were close to the group). On the other hand, the production seemed to be executed in an extremely organised and dynamic way, "Vietnamese style" (García and Bouchet, 2003: 32). For *Los traidores* (1973), for example, Gleyzer and Susman orchestrated a smuggling system whereby the film rolls were given to sympathetic Aerolíneas Argentinas pilots to take to the United States, where Susman would develop them and send the release prints back. In this way, the films evaded Argentina's censors (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Documenting these processes is crucial because, as Gramsci points out:

> [...] "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history [...]. In the "most spontaneous" movement it is simply the case that the elements of "conscious leadership" cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the "history of the subaltern classes" [...] and consequently it never occurs to them that their history may have any possible importance, that perhaps there would be some value in leaving documentary evidence. (Gramsci,1971: 196)

Cine de la Base sought to generate new spaces of public knowledge, new forms of "common sense". In their films, there is always a certain didactic element, often coming from the participants rather than from the group itself: worker principles, mobilisation through symbols, slogans and ideas intended as "common places" (*luoghi comuni*) for the multitude, as Paolo Virno calls it, as a unifying feature (Virno, 2004). For Cine de la Base, such common places are still found in class consciousness. Examples can be found in *Swift*, which establishes this implicit connection between direct action and material outcomes, and in *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan* [They'll Kill Me if I Don't Work and if I Work They'll Kill Me] (Cine de la Base, 1974), which assigns considerable importance to the tradition of *ollas populares* (community kitchens), as a clear example of solidarity and mutual support. Presented in this way, such events are imbued with realism, shown not only as effective strategies but also as points of convergence of the Argentine working class. For the organic intellectual (and here it is worth asking whether this refers only to Gleyzer or to all members of Cinema de la Base), leadership can never be abstract. On this point, Gramsci observes:

> This leadership [...] neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, real action, with theoretical disquisition. It applied itself to real men [*sic*], formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world, etc., which were the result of "spontaneous" combinations of a given situation of material production with the "fortuitous" [...]. This element of "spontaneity" was not neglected and even less despised. It was educated, directed, purged of extraneous contaminations; the aim was to bring it into line with modern theory. (Gramsci, 1971: 198)

In the creation of these new common places through the cinematic medium, what is left obscured is the documentary evidence of the conscious leadership of the group: the sensation of spontaneity was maintained through a mirror game that allows the coexistence of the act of filming with what happens in front of the camera, in the form of an encounter. Some members of Cine de la Base had already learned to do this in *Ceramiqueros de Traslasierra*, which includes a scene where they ask one of the documentary's subjects whether she thinks the film will change her life and she replies "no".

As a constantly changing group of individuals, Cine de la Base adopted a work method that incorporated debate and disagreement, which were never subordinated to the completion of the film. The group understood that internal contradiction was necessary, that it was not a weakness but an asset that was crucial for the development of their task—a guerrilla cinema, "Vietnamese style", in an ongoing dialectical process. Moreover, this methodological structure made it possible to operate in

a swifter and at the same time more resilient way, given that if any of the members left the project, died or disappeared—as would later occur—the spirit of the group would survive in the set of relationships and learning experiences that shaped it.

In Hardt and Negri's concept of "multitude", people resolve internal differences through *"the common* that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced" (2005: xv). Most members of Cine de la Base were connected by class ties, political alignment and country of origin (the notion of a *people*), but this model explains the set of informal relations in which the members of the group participated. *The common* emerged both within the group itself and in the places where its work was distributed, in future militant production and distribution cells, and in participatory film movements—aimed at the multitude. A second key concept proposed by Hardt and Negri is "biopolitical production". Intellectual labour, they observe,

> tends through the transformations of the economy to create and be embedded in cooperative and communicative networks. Anyone who works with information and knowledge [...] relies on the common knowledge passed down from others and in turn creates new common knowledge. This is especially true for all labor that creates immaterial projects, including ideas, images, affects, and relationships. We will call this newly dominant model "biopolitical production" [...]. This biopolitical production and its expansion of the common is one strong pillar on which stands the possibility of global democracy today. (Hardt and Negri, 2005: xvi)

The biopolitical production of Cine de la Base was counterhegemonic and on a smaller scale than the multitude. It operated on two levels: the textual level, expanding the vocabulary of the Latin American working class by generating a set of common places and collective reference points (direct action, *ollas populares*, support for revolutionary cells, etc.); and the methodological level, referring to the set of informal practices that underpinned the project and served as inspiration for many other activist film initiatives long after the group itself had disintegrated. Exile, as will be shown in the following section, played a crucial role in the expansion of this biopolitical production, as did the battle for memory, which counteracted the terrible repression suffered by the members of the group.[6]

By 1975, the situation had become very difficult for members of Cine de la Base. Gleyzer took his last holiday, together with Jorge Denti and Eduardo Galeano, and the children of all three. The AAA shut down the Escuela de Cine del Litoral, a film school that had played a key role in Argentine revolutionary cinema. Around this same time, Gleyzer met up with Humberto Ríos, who warned him to leave the country (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Although there were still many who thought the military takeover of 1976 was "just another coup d'etat" in the long series of coups in recent Argentine history (Sabat, 2012), Gleyzer took Ríos's advice and went to the United States to stay with Susan Susman (Bill's daughter), where he secured a contract with UNESCO to make a film in Africa. He then returned to Argentina to be reunited with Sapire and their son, Diego. When his friend the writer Haroldo Conti disappeared, Gleyzer decided to hide out in Denti's house, without telling his family of his whereabouts. On 27 May 1976, Gleyzer was kidnapped outside the Argentine Film Industry Union offices (Ardito and Molina, 2002). The last time he was seen was in the secret detention centre known as El Vesubio, along with Conti (Soberón, 2012). His status as a filmmaker made him a target of reprisals. However, when the kidnappers broke into his home, they left various films behind, suggesting that they were unaware of the nature of his subversive activities. Those films were later recovered (Mor, 2012). Most of Cine de la Base managed to escape to Peru, albeit not with difficulties. From there, they launched a campaign with the support

of the Susmans to petition the US government to pressure the dictatorship to release its political prisoners, but to no apparent effect. Nevertheless, these events would lead to the construction of Gleyzer's image as a martyr. The filmmakers Pablo Szir and Enrique Juárez also disappeared around the same time.

3. CINE DE LA BASE IN EXILE: TOWARDS (NOT SO) COMMON PLACES

Less has been written about Cine de la Base after Gleyzer's disappearance. The group's first production during this period was *Las AAA son las tres armas* [The AAA are the Three Weapons] (Cine de la Base, 1977).[7] In 1978, the FIFA World Cup was held in Argentina, an opportunity that the dictatorship exploited in an effort to whitewash its image both domestically and internationally (Wilson, 2016). Using an open letter to the junta written by the then-recently deceased Rodolfo Walsh for the voice-over, *Las AAA son las tres armas* was yet another exercise in counterhegemonic discourse. As Barberis remarks: "It was shown on Mexican television, it was shown on Italian television… While the World Cup was showing Videla celebrating Argentina's goals, humbly, the group responded" (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Despite being its first film without Gleyzer, the group's style is immediately recognisable in the combination of Walsh's words with various images that reinforce the ironic tone, focusing on humorous moments involving the leaders of the military junta and encouraging the spectator to participate actively in its last scene, showing a group of people sitting in a circle listening to and discussing Walsh's letter openly (although we cannot hear what they are saying). This reflects the common language that continued to exist after Gleyzer's disappearance, as a result of the collective nature of biopolitical production.

Certain visual and methodological motifs make it possible to outline a Cine de la Base style, a difficult task given the disinterest in authorship in such movements, the ideological objective of its aesthetic approaches and the tendency to copy successful strategies. A common element in the group's work is the use of parody and acerbic humour. Even *Los traidores* includes a widely discussed scene that uses both strategies: Barrera's dream about his own funeral, in which the curious personalities who attend it, the elegies they offer, and the exposure of his corpse in a ludicrous spectacle confront him with the absurdity of his legacy. There was considerable debate among Cine de la Base and similar groups about whether this strategy was too risky, whether spectators would understand it and whether it served a useful function in the film or was simply artistic self-indulgence (García and Bouchet, 2003). For Gleyzer, the answer was clear:

> The bourgeois always think for the working class […] [the spectators] laugh a lot at [the dream scene] because it ridicules the enemy. We think that throughout the film there is a very heavy burden of oppression through everything that the union bureaucracy does to the working class […] it can be counterproductive […] in mockery lies the basis for understanding that this force, as big as it is […] can be defeated. (Cited in Schumann, 1974)

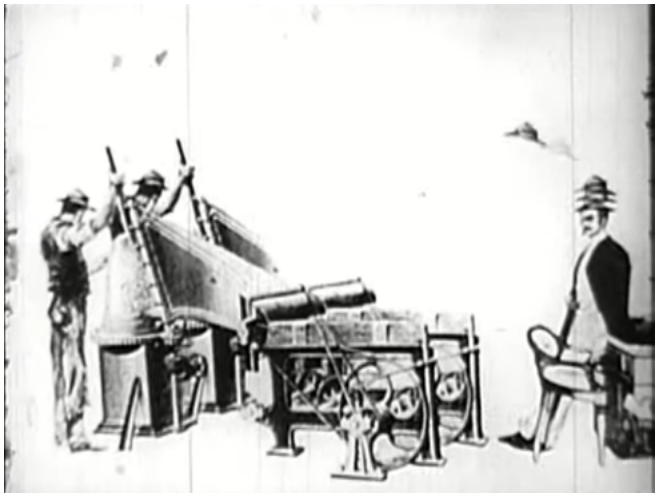
The strategy worked (Mestman, 2008), and its success led Cine de la Base to experiment with comedy in its subsequent films, often combined with the absurd and the use of unrealistic sequences. In *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan*, there is a rather didactic explanation of the transition from primitive accumulation to capital accumulation. To make it more appealing while still exposing the internal contradictions of the system, the collective resorts to an animated sequence in which a business owner piles up a ridiculous number of hats on his head, while giving each employee only one as payment for his work. Despite the extreme seriousness of its content, and the example of solemn dignity set by Rodolfo Walsh's letter, in *Las AAA son las tres armas* the group keeps up the mockery by using editing

strategies with static images; for example, depicting the deposed president, Isabel Perón, giving a fascist salute, and showing the junta generals Videla, Massera and Agosti sniggering while the narrator reads:

> [Even without the pretence] that this Junta seeks peace, that General Videla defends human rights, or that Admiral Massera loves life, it would still be worth asking the Commanders-in-Chief of the Three Weapons [i.e., the branches of the military] to meditate on the abyss into which they are leading the country.

By this point, the strategy had transcended Gleyzer's life to become a collective strategy.

A final example worth highlighting comes from a much later film, in partnership with the Cine Sur group, *El compa Clodomiro y la economía* [Comrade Clodomiro and the Economy] (Cine de la Base and Cine Sur, 1980), an animated short that contextualises the economic reforms implemented by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The short film contains numerous sequences dealing ironically with "what the economy was like in the time of Somoza," but two are particularly striking for the similarity of their humour to *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan* and *Las AAA son las tres armas*, respectively. In the first, a rural worker is calculating the cost of his produce and says to the wholesaler "four times eight, thirty-two", but the wholesaler replies "for me, four times eight isn't thirty-two… One." He deposits a single coin into the worker's hand and leaves in his van to go meet an exporter. When he gets there, he announces: "four times eight, thirty-two." The exporter gives him a bag of money and takes the produce. The sequence continues with an assembly line very similar to the one for the hats in *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan*, where workers insert chickens and extract eggs and, finally, jars of mayonnaise. Once again, the business owner takes the products and deposits a single coin into the hands of each operator (Images 6 and 7). The second example is much more fleeting: when both





Images 6 and 7. Still-frames from *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan* (Image 6) and *El compa Clodomiro y la economía* (Image 7), showing analogous jokes

business owners bring the goods to the port, they meet Somoza, who oversees the exports to the United States. In a lap dissolve between two images, Somoza reveals vampire fangs.

Of course, Cine de la Base did not invent political caricature. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of these films reveals a degree of exchange between groups, accelerated by the rejection of "bourgeois art", i.e., of a claim to originality or authorship of certain cinematic techniques. Such practices are not limited to militant cinema (much has been written about the use of intertextual allusions by Martin Scorsese or Quentin Tarantino), but the renunciation of aesthetic-economic

control over certain motifs and ideas facilitates their adoption by others, as well as the generation of certain common places that are extraordinarily useful for militancy, particularly in exile. The image of the business owner obtaining large quantities of products in exchange for a meagre compensation for the workers effectively condenses whole pages of Marxist literature into a clear and accessible message. It is not just a way of saying "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer", as the motif also alludes to notions of class (who owns the machines and who operates them?), the logic of capitalism (why does the business owner want so many hats?) and justice (how can four times eight equal one?).

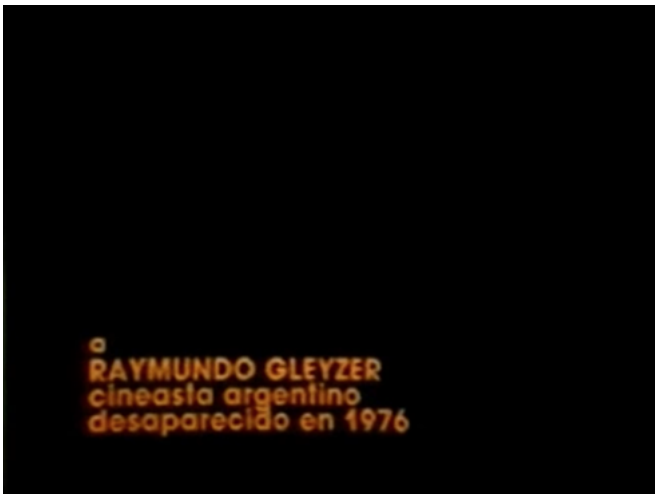


Image 8. Dedication to Raymundo Gleyzer in *Malvinas: historia de traiciones* (1984)

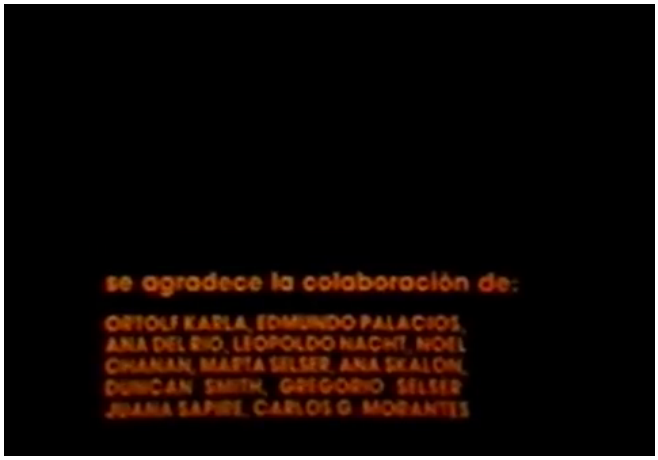
While the group reproduces its biopolitical production, it also protects its members from reprisals. Forced disappearance and exile were not enough to silence them. Undeniably, the loss of affective bonds left an irreparable vacuum, evident in elegies (Birri, 2003) and dedications post-1976 (Image 8). In a way, grief itself was a common place, first for those who knew Gleyzer (Birri and Bouchet, 2003; Ferman, 2010; García and Bouchet, 2003; Ardito and Molina, 2002; Sabat, 2012), and then for the various identities he influenced—Argentina, militant cinema, Latin America, and many others (Foster, 2011; López Marsano, 2018; West, 2019).

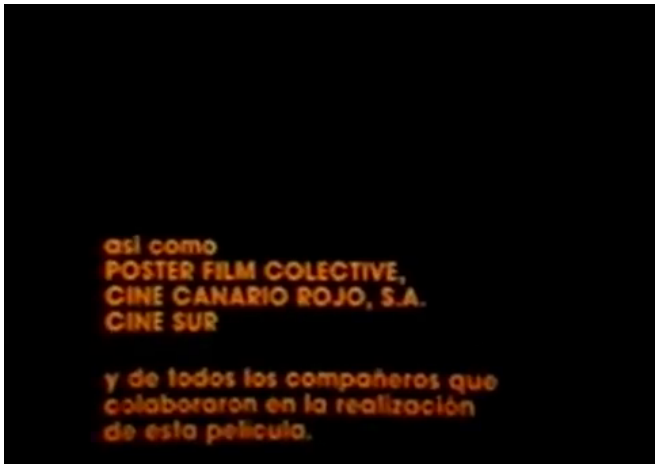
The canonization of Raymundo Gleyzer would draw the attention of later collectives, perpetuating the group's legacy. Examples can be found in the community filmmaking movements established since the 1970s that have taken militant cinema as a direct inspiration, coming to understand it as a link in their genealogical history. Community films can be defined as productions made by "an organised community with sufficient capacity to make decisions about the modes of production and distribution, which takes part in every stage" (Gumucio Dagron, 2014: 11). This logic of collaborative horizontal production inherited many of its characteristics from collectives such as Cine de la Base, which community filmmakers often identify as a direct inspiration due to its approach to communities and its depictions of them, which always eschewed biased images and sought to offer views of social groups traditionally excluded from film production (Fernández de Llanos, 2016; Gumucio Dagron, 2014; Wolanski, Grünbaum *et al.*, 2023). In fact, Gleyzer had considered the possibility of carrying out a joint project with Jorge Sanjinés, one of the most prominent exponents of community cinema, as he considered that the filmmaker shared his "Guevarist objective of expanding the revolution as a process of national liberation to the entire subcontinent [of Latin America] and preventing the revolutionary processes from being interrupted or halted" (Pineda Franco, 2016: 104). In the 1970s, Sanjinés began working on films with local communities, who starred in the films and held decision-making power over their own representation, a modus operandi far removed from the norms of auteur cinema (Sanjinés, 1979). The community film tradition continues today, having become a popular tool of creativity and self-representation for communities of all kinds.

As its collaboration with Cine Sur reflects, the disintegration of Cine de la Base facilitated









Images 9 to 12. Selected title credits from *Malvinas: historia de traiciones*, naming core members of Cine de la Base, as well as the collaboration of associated groups

the distribution of its biopolitical production to different parts of Latin America. Although they were not always credited as such, members like Denti and Barberis continued to make films that drew on their experience with Cine de la Base in terms of politics and methodology (Peña and Vallina, 2000). They moved mainly between Mexico and Nicaragua, supporting the Sandinista revolution and making short films such as *País Verde y Herido* [Green and Wounded Land] (Cine de la Base, 1979), a film featuring the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti that deals with the issue of exile using a series of familiar techniques, such as animation, caricature and excerpts from archival footage.

In 1984, the group produced its last film, *Malvinas: historia de traiciones* [Malvinas: A History of Betrayals], taking up Gleyzer's ideas and the footage he had taken in 1966 and contrasting them with the Falklands War of 1982 and the collapse of Argentina's last military junta. Once again, the group went beyond the immediately apparent to offer an analysis that takes into account the movement of capital, primitive accumulation, the parcelling of land, geopolitical dynamics, and the collusion of both sides (Margaret Thatcher's Britain and the junta) with US expansionism. It also places a notable emphasis on international class solidarity, without forgetting the power imbalance between the two nations. Most importantly, the film uses the Falklands/Malvinas as a starting point for an interrogation of the decade of military dictatorship, a call for accountability for the disappeared, a tribute to Gleyzer (to whom the film is dedicated), and a discussion of the underground trade union organisation, among other things.[8] Finally, it constituted an effort to address the legacy left by the members of Cine de la Base, this time named in the credits, in a significant de-

parture from the norm described above (Images 9 to 12). As of the moment of the film's release, the group was disbanded. Barberis offers the following reasoning: "At that point, we said: 'Cine de la Base, as an element of cultural resistance from the outside no longer made sense.' We were living abroad [in exile], and we said: 'From outside [Argentina], there is nothing more to say. We speak from the inside and if we're not inside we don't speak" (quoted in García and Bouchet, 2003: 33).

4. CONCLUSION: CINE DE LA BASE'S OTHER LIVES

The group's disbandment coincided with the aftermath of the last military dictatorship, the establishment of new avenues for documenting what had happened, such as the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), and the progressive restoration of the Argentine film industry.[9] This raises the question of whether the end of the dictatorship somehow halted the productive process necessary to support the revolutionary initiative of Cine de la Base. The answer is complicated. On the one hand, by the time the group ceased to exist, many of Argentina's revolutionary networks had been torn apart by repression. On the other hand, Cine de la Base persisted in a sense, with celebrations of Gleyzer's life and work within the collective (retrospectives, restorations and his canonisation in Argentine film history). However, perhaps the group's real productive legacy has been its status as a precursor, influence and model, with its biopolitical production of methodologies for countless militant and collaborative filmmaking initiatives. While the significance of the group can be identified primarily in the footage that has been researched, acclaimed and rescued, equally important is the shared intellectual legacy that enables us to understand militant cinema as an urgent, horizontally organised commitment to the pursuit of vital projects in contexts of extreme repression. ■

NOTES

1 The Workers' Revolutionary Party's and the People's Revolutionary Army, respectively. Both were non-Peronist Marxist revolutionary groups. In an amicable breakup, Ríos and Vera joined a different but analogous group that adhered to the tenets of revolutionary Peronism (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

2 As will be discussed later in the article, based on their experience in FATRAC, and especially in Cine de la Base, Gleyzer and other members reconsidered the authorship of these films as collective works. It therefore seems more consistent with the argument put forward here to use the names of the groups rather than the names of the individual members responsible for their direction (which in any case was often shared or undefined).

3 For example, *Operación Masacre* (1973) by the Peronist filmmaker Jorge Cedrón.

4 Gramsci's ideas circulated openly in Argentina thanks to publications of his work such as those that appeared in *Pasado y Presente*, which was widely read and discussed by revolutionaries of the time (Mor, 2012). Gleyzer knew Gramsci (Peña and Vallina, 2000), and his ideas are clearly evident in Cine de la Base's commitment to countering the hegemonic discourse and its concern with the relationship between the intellectual and the working class.

5 An example of a deleted scene can be heard in an interview when Gleyzer himself asks Schumann to take a re-edited negative to Berlin (Schumann, 1974). The ending to *Los traidores* was particularly problematic (Mestman, 2008). Barberis refers to an unrealised intention to shoot an epilogue to explain the structural nature of the issue presented (García and Bouchet, 2003).

6 A methodological note: this perspective allows for a somewhat less orthodox approach to understanding Cinema de la Base in exile. Throughout various configurations of its production and distribution teams and partnerships with other groups, the one constant was precisely this whole series of learning experiences—biopolitical production—that emerged from the

set of practices of the group itself. Although this in no way means that no effort should be made to map out where each of the members was or what role each one played in the making of each film, Cine de la Base's methodology is the central focus here, which allows a certain distance to be be taken to understand its production in terms of the function that the group gave it, instead of trying to interpret it according to the principles of authorship which the collective rejected.

7 Some sources suggest that it was first screened in 1979, but this seems unlikely. Walsh's letter is from early 1977 (just before disappearing) and Denti (1988) dates the film as 1977. "The Three Weapons" in the title refers to the army, the navy and the air force.

8 It should be noted that at that time the report by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, titled *Nunca más* (CONADEP, 2011) had not yet been published. CONADEP presented part of the results of the report on television in July 1984 (Crenzel, 2008). The full report would be published on September 20, 1984 (CONADEP, 2011), while *Malvinas: historia de traiciones* had its first screening on 3 April 1984 in Mexico.

9 This is the process that Jessica Stites Mor describes as "transitional" (Mor, 2012: 11).

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"HUMBLY, THE GROUP RESPONDED": ORGANIC INTELLECTUALISM, EXILE AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION IN THE CINE DE LA BASE FILM COLLECTIVE

Abstract

Classifying the production of militant film collectives and making sense of their work methods poses a number of challenges. Certain historiographical approaches tend to privilege authorial figures—directors, screenwriters—over the multidirectional and horizontal connections established between organic, technical and militant intellectuals. This article uses a case study of Raymundo Gleyzer and his time with the Cine de la Base collective to highlight the productive dynamics, ways of understanding filmmaking, and strategies of resilience of such groups. Drawing on autonomist theory, the study suggests that these collectives generate a twofold biopolitical production expressed both in the creation of common places in the communities where their productions are shown and in the dissemination of a set of methods that could serve as a structure for future militant and/or collaborative film experiments. The analysis is divided into three parts, exploring the initially authorial role of Gleyzer, the establishment of new creative dynamics in Cine de la Base, and the way the group reacted after the forced disappearance or exile of its members. It is argued here that such strategies afford a surprising malleability, even in conditions of extreme repression.

Key words

Cine de la Base; Raymundo Gleyzer; Biopolitical Production; Organic Intellectual; Exile; Common places; Militant Cinema.

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«HUMILDEMENTE, EL GRUPO RESPONDÍA»: INTELECTUAL ORGÁNICO, EXILIO Y PRODUCCIÓN BIOPOLÍTICA EN EL CINE DE LA BASE

Resumen

Los colectivos de cine militante presentan desafíos a la hora de catalogar su producción y entender sus metodologías de trabajo. Ciertas aproximaciones historiográficas tienden a privilegiar figuras autorales —directores, guionistas— por encima de las conexiones multidireccionales y horizontales que se establecen entre intelectuales orgánicos, técnicos y militantes. En este artículo, utilizamos el estudio de caso de Raymundo Gleyzer y su paso por Cine de la Base para poner en relieve dinámicas productivas, maneras de entender la labor cinematográfica y estrategias de resiliencia de estos colectivos. Apoyándonos en la teoría autonomista, sugerimos que estos grupos generan una producción biopolítica doble, que se manifiesta tanto en la generación de lugares comunes en las comunidades en las que circula su producción como en la propagación de una serie de metodologías que sirven de estructura para futuros experimentos de cine militantes y/o colaborativos. Dividimos el discurso en tres partes, que trazan la figura inicialmente autoral de Gleyzer, el establecimiento de nuevas dinámicas creativas en el grupo Cine de la Base y la manera en que el grupo reacciona tras la desaparición forzosa y el exilio de sus integrantes. Proponemos que dichas estrategias permiten una maleabilidad sorprendente, incluso en condiciones de represión extrema.

Palabras clave

Cine de la Base; Raymundo Gleyzer; producción biopolítica; intelectual orgánico; exilio; lugares comunes; cine militante.

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Article reference

Rugiero Bader, A., Cruz García, L. (2025). "Humbly, the group responded": Organic Intellectualism, Exile and Biopolitical Production in the Cine de la Base film collective. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *39*, 53-70.

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Referencia de este artículo

Rugiero Bader, A., Cruz García, L. (2025). «Humildemente, el grupo respondía»: intelectual orgánico, exilio y producción biopolítica en el Cine de la Base. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *39*, 53-70.

recibido/received: 31.05.2024 | *aceptado/accepted:* 10.10.24

Edita / Published by

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com