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Specters of Freedom

in collaboration with Catarina Simão and Filipa César

The *Specters of Freedom* project focuses on films produced during a period of political upheaval which either document the period in question or can themselves be seen to express a “new time”. Films in search of images and sounds capable of conveying a new sense of freedom that is imminent or has already been attained whilst still often having to grapple with the specters of freedom: ideas thought overcome reappearing in fresh garb, the scrap heap of symbols, images and slogans and a suddenly anachronistic language, a future more frequently evoked than actually lived. Over the course of the research project, a concrete interest in films that can be seen as forming part of a cinema of decolonization gradually came into focus.

The title *Specters of Freedom* is a reference to the latent spectral nature of all films, particularly when they are taken out of an archive and brought back to life in a projection. Their ability to abruptly remind us of the euphoria of the past, of the unfulfilled hopes of those there before us and for whom we and our time constitute a future which their films can sometimes seem to be grasping towards like in a dream.

In Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of a remark by Paul Klee, he claims that every work of art is directed towards a “people” that does not yet exist and only demands to be legitimated before a future addressee. Modern political cinema, as Deleuze puts it, can only exist “on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet . . . the people are missing.”¹ If these anachronisms encapsulate a form of interplay between anticipation and legacy in such works of art, then archival work always raises the question of this missing people, whether it is oneself that inhabits the position of this anticipated gaze or whether one is only gazing on behalf of those who are present yet absent, invisible, looking over one’s shoulder.

I only gradually became aware that the research I was carrying out based on hanging files and viewings at the Steenbeck flatbed editor was itself accompanied by a specter: that of a Third Cinema. This can be understood in two different senses – the deliberately chosen idea of a cinema of decolonialization, resistance and emancipation as defined by Octavio

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, London: Continuum 2005, p. 208.

Getino and Fernando Solanas and a somewhat tentative understanding of a cinema which even at the point where it is allegedly capable of articulating itself freely does not enter into the sort of pact so often the price of this freedom. A pact is an instrument of civil law that presupposes a certain degree of civic freedom and ownership. But it is just as unjust as any form of ownership because it excludes and dispossesses everyone else – those absent, those in the future, the Third.

A cinema that resists this pact is a cinema always willing to bite the hand that feeds it. A cinema not content to function in “face to face” terms but which also brings the idea of the Third into play, disturbing this cozy binary togetherness which is always already contained within it. The Third never determines what is right or wrong but rather questions what is allegedly right. “The Third is the one who questions me in the face-to-face, who suddenly makes me feel that there’s a risk of injustice in the ethical if I do not take into account the other of the other.”² A Third Cinema is a cinema where this disquiet occurs.

² Jacques Derrida, A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event, *Critical Enquiry* 33(2), pp. 441-461, p. 444.