From Taking to Making Images of Indigeneity: Reading the Films of the Ukamau Group Ethnographically

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With nothing but a 16mm projector and a portable generator, a filmmaker embarks upon a series of impromptu screenings of his most recent film in rural hamlets lacking even the most basic cinematic infrastructure. He is doing so because the residents of these hamlets are both the subjects and the addressees of his film, and he is interested in gauging his success in communicating with them and, in particular, their perception of the fidelity with which he has represented them. At one screening, audience members criticize some of the techniques the filmmaker has used as inauthentic, criticisms that lead the filmmaker to reinvent his formal practices. At another screening, the audience suggests what should be the subject of the filmmaker’s next film. He takes their advice and subsequently makes a film that becomes a milestone in his development of collaborative filmmaking practices while also embroiling its maker in political controversies that make the film and the filmmaker a cause célèbre.

This has happened twice in the history of cinema—perhaps more often, but we can identify with certainty two instances. The first was in Niger, and the filmmaker was Jean Rouch. The screening took place in 1954, and the film being shown was Bataille sur le grand fleuve (Hippopotamus Hunt,
1950). The audience of Sorko fishermen who were portrayed in the film objected to Rouch’s use of nondiagetic music to heighten the suspense of the hunt, and thus, according to Rouch, was born his anthropologie partageé, or sharing anthropology, in which the filmmaker enters into a collaborative relationship with his subjects (Rouch “Our Totemic” 224). Rouch removed the music from subsequent prints of the film and never used nondiagetic music in one of his films again (Stoller Cinematic Griot 43). At an earlier screening of the same film for prisoners of the colonial Gold Coast administration, he was invited by attendees to document a Hauka possession ritual. Les maîtres fous (The Mad Masters, 1953), the subsequent film and possibly the one for which Rouch is best remembered, prompted the future Senegalese filmmaker Sembene Ousmane to declare Rouch regarded Africans as insects (Stoller Cinematic Griot 2). Charges of racism leveled against the film aggrieved Rouch deeply, since, as his biographer Paul Stoller notes, “his prior practices and commitments were clearly anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist” (“Artaud, Rouch” 52). Rouch would later describe the film as a depiction of “colonialism from below”, which, if we were to substitute the first word with “imperialism”, would make a succinct definition of New Latin American Cinema, the continental wide film movement initiated by Fernando Birri in Argentina in the late 1950s (Stoller Cinematic Griot 159).

The second incident comes from New Latin American Cinema. In 1970 Jorge Sanjinés and screenwriter Oscar Soria presented the Ukamau Group’s 1969 film Yawar Mallku (Blood of the Condor) to peasants and workers in the barrios of La Paz, small communities on the Bolivian altiplano where it had been filmed, and in miners’s unions’s meeting halls. Although the film had been a triumphant success among the Bolivian urban middle class, popular audiences complained that its flashback structure made the story difficult to follow. The filmmaking team recut prints of the film to make it chronological
and arranged to have itinerant storytellers relate the plot to the audience in advance of the screening (Sanjinés “A Talk with Sanjinés” 12). These experiments in narrative conducted on the fly in response to audience criticisms would form the basis of the group’s subsequent overhaul of their filmmaking practice, compelling Sanjinés to turn his attention to theorizing how to make a cinema that would be useful to and culturally consonant with his intended audience of indigenous Bolivians. Attendees of one screening at the enormous Siglo XX mine told Sanjinés and Soria about a massacre that had taken place there three years previously, news of which had been successfully suppressed by the government of military dictator René Barrientos (Sanjinés “The Courage of the People” 19). The Ukamau Group returned to Siglo XX the following year to make El coraje del pueblo (The Courage of the People, 1971) in collaboration with survivors, who performed in the film. In addition to the new, more collaborative process of scriptwriting and performing, it also marked the group’s first attempts at creating sequence shots, which would become the formal basis of its “cinema with the people” (Sanjinés “The All-Encompassing”). Produced under the brief tenure of the left-populist military dictator Juan José Torres, El coraje del pueblo names all those responsible for the massacres of miners that took place between 1942 and 1967. The Torres regime fell two days before Sanjinés completed post-production in Rome, and it would be nearly ten years before the film could be shown in Bolivia. Sanjinés prudently chose exile over a return to Bolivia, and members of the group would be arrested in 1975, including cinematographer Antonio Eguino, for merely possessing a print of the film.

That such strikingly similar experiences can be observed taking place on two separate continents is less coincidental than it may seem at first glance, given the shared affinities and personnel linking Rouch’s and
Sanjinés’s filmmaking practices. Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, Sanjinés’s assistant on ¡Fuera de aquí! (Get Out of Here!, 1977) had attended classes given by Rouch while studying in Paris between 1973-76. After working with Sanjinés, he re-joined Rouch in Mozambique where the two established a program training locals in the use of Super-8 cameras, a program Gumucio Dagron would replicate in Nicaragua in the early 1980s at the invitation of the Sandinistas (Burton 261, 279). The handbook he produced as a result of his work in Nicaragua, El cine de los trabajadores (The Workers’s Cinema, 1981) shows the clear influence of both Rouch and Sanjinés. Another key New Latin American Cinema filmmaker, the Colombian Marta Rodríguez, also studied filmmaking under Rouch in Paris and would use his methods of anthropologie partageé to make Chircales (The Brickmakers) with Jorge Silva in 1972 (King 208-9). Finally, in the 1980s, Paris-based Ateliers Varan, an institution founded by Rouch, organized the Cine Minero (Miners’ Cinema) project in Bolivia, which trained miners to use Super-8 cameras to document their lives. Although short lived, this program, like the Ukamau Group, became an important factor in the development of indigenous video in Bolivia (Schiwy 73).

In delineating these linkages, affinities and similarities between Rouch and Sanjinés, my aim in part is to confound received notions of center-periphery relations and their effect on the exchange of cinematic styles and practices, approaching New Latin American Cinema as part of a shared project of what we would now call the Global South, rather than as a movement of aesthetic opposition to Hollywood and European auteur cinema, respectively labeled first and second cinema by Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino in their “third cinema” manifesto (42). After all, their formulation of third cinema encodes not only a bifurcated opposition to North America and Europe, but also the notion of tricontinentalism in its use
of “third”. More importantly, though, in bringing Rouch and Sanjinés together in this manner, I wish to explore the reciprocal influence of New Latin American Cinema and ethnographic filmmaking, but before doing so, it is worth pausing to consider why this connection has so seldom been made historically.

**Third Cinema: Bridging the “Two Cultures” Divide**

In “The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections”, Paul Willemen argues that Rouch should be considered the most appropriate father figure for third cinema, noting that, “His absence from the classic Third Cinema manifestoes thus operates as a marker of the marginalization of African cinemas by Latin Americans at the time” (22). Leaving aside the question of whether it is even possible for one marginalized cinema to marginalize another, I would like to examine this claim briefly, as I believe it is more representative of western scholars of third cinema than its Latin American practitioners. Latin American filmmakers mingled with their counterparts from Africa at the Soviet-era Tashkent Film Festival, which was dedicated to films from Asia, Africa and Latin America (Herlinghaus 40-3). And in 1973 filmmakers from the three continents met in Algiers to form the Third World Cinema Committee, which held its second meeting in Buenos Aires in 1974 (Mestman 40-53). Although these festivals and meetings scarcely merit mention in western scholarship, the latter does seem to suggest a concerted effort to unify production and distribution among tricontinental filmmakers independent of the somewhat forced solidarity of Soviet patronage, which, I hasten to add, filmmakers from Latin America, whatever their reservations about the Soviet Union, happily took advantage of for the opportunities it afforded to meet filmmakers from other parts of the world operating under similar conditions of repression (de Urioste).
Far from being a result of supposed African marginalization by Latin American theorists, the real reason for Rouch’s absence from texts by Sanjinés and others is precisely that which Willemen finds “not very convincing”—Rouch’s association with ethnographic film (22). Rouch was a prolific filmmaker who worked in a variety of genres and modes. The question of exactly what kind of filmmaker he is continues to vex scholars: is he French or African, documentarian or ethnographer, father of the French New Wave or father of sub-Saharan African cinema? He is in fact all these things at once, although the most prominent Rouch scholars, like Stoller, tended to emphasize the ethnographic value of his work above all else. In doing so they were defending him from critics within the profession who looked skeptically upon his free mixing of ethnographic observation and improvised narratives, a type of film Rouch gave the eccentric-sounding but wholly appropriate label, “science fictions”.

World-Systems analysts like Immanuel Wallerstein locate a “divorce” between science and philosophy in the late 18th century that literally led to the departmentalization of knowledge as the modern university was established on the foundations of medieval institutions (2-3). Under these regimes of knowledge, scientists limit themselves to the study of universally applicable laws, whereas scholars of a philosophical bent contemplate discrete phenomena, culture being a prime instance. Anthropology has always been uncomfortably poised between the two. Originally, its practitioners fashioned a universal teleology based on its observation of “primitive” peoples that assumed stages of development inevitably terminating in something like European civilization. No sooner were the racist and colonialist assumptions of this kind of thinking exposed than the apotheosis of scientific, i.e. based on universal laws, forms of anthropology rushed in to take its place, Claude Levi-Strauss’s structural anthropology. Postwar ethnographic film was increasingly
dominated by techniques associated with observational cinema whose lineage could be traced back to Italian Neo-Realism (Grimshaw 71-89). Practitioners of observational or direct cinema documentary and ethnographic film alike used the realist theories of André Bazin to posit an immediate access to reality via the motion picture camera that could bypass or remain only minimally affected by human intervention (Bruzzi 15-46). Rouch violated the tenets of observational cinema wholesale and repeatedly; not content to create a reflection of reality, Rouch used his “participant camera” to “penetrate reality”, an expression also favored by Sanjinés (Rouch “The Camera and Man” 82, Sanjinés y el Grupo Ukamau Teoría y práctica 57-8).

Rouch is a key figure prompting the shift away from the naïve realism of the observational school of ethnographic film, and recent scholarship has attempted to restore his reputation as an anti-colonial filmmaker, no longer concerned that the political commitment so evident in his work would diminish their scientific value (Feld 8 and Grimshaw 91). Not so, Sanjinés, who remains as scandalously unappreciated by scholars of ethnographic film as Rouch once was to scholars of political film. A case in point would be the solitary review of one of his films to appear in American Anthropologist, the flagship journal of the profession. At the beginning of his review of Yawar Mallku, Eric Ross writes, “Though rich in ethnographic detail (particularly coca fortune-telling rituals), it is not in such terms that it ought to be viewed“ (203). His evident sympathies with the film’s anti-imperialist themes so override his concern for its ethnographic value that, instead of saying the film should not primarily or solely be viewed ethnographically, he dismisses such a reading altogether. Although Ross may reject the comparison, he sounds very much like Jay Ruby, a conservative theorist of visual anthropology who argues that politically engaged cinema is by definition disqualified as ethnographic film (33, 148).
If the ignorance about Rouch was a product of the primacy of scientific discourse around his work, the opposite held, and holds, for Sanjinés, who is, and is most consistently identified as, a politically militant filmmaker. For Sanjinés, though, the separation of culture and revolutionary politics is artificial and, worse yet, bound to lead to political failure. “Many leftists are condescending towards our culture. They don’t know it, they underestimate its richness, both what it is and what it may become. And that is extremely grave” (Sanjinés and the Ukamau Group Theory and Practice 86). Sanjinés used something remarkably similar to ethnographic fieldwork to approximate “our” culture, a shared culture of the Andes region and one which, in a later formulation, he would insist is shared by all residents of the region across the complete spectra of classes and ethnic identities (Sanjinés “The All-Encompassing”). If in Rouch we have an ethnographically motivated political cinema, it is fair to say that Sanjinés created something on the order of a politically motivated ethnographic cinema. If this sounds like hedging a bit, it is for good reason. In Teoría y práctica de un cine junto al pueblo (1979), Sanjinés describes anthropologists, ethnographers and sociologists as shock troops for the forces of North American imperialism (53). The knowledge these researchers gain in the field, he writes, is then used by the US military and multinational corporations to effectively thwart resistance to their efforts to penetrate a society, mostly by sowing conflict between local constituencies in an academic and bureaucratic version of the age-old imperial technique of divide and conquer. The film ¡Fuera de aquí! is a Brechtian Lehrstück on how to resist this kind of domination. The missionaries who divide the community by converting some to Protestantism do so using knowledge previously acquired by linguists. The division in turn makes the community susceptible to destruction my multinational mining concerns colluding with corrupt politicians deferential to US interests.
With Sanjinés’s mistrust of ethnographers in mind, what I am proposing doing with the films is not treating them as ethnographic films per se, but rather, as Grimshaw suggests ethnographic filmmakers do, “develop a way of seeing cinema, *anthropologically*, and a way of seeing anthropology, *cinematically* (9). There is a long history of this in visual anthropology, although Sanjinés’s films have so far escaped such readings. As ethnographic filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall notes, “Until very recently most ethnographic films were the by-products of other endeavors: the chronicles of travellers, the political or idealistic visions of documentary filmmakers, and the occasional forays of anthropologists whose major commitment was to other methods” (116). Elsewhere I have described how Sanjinés transculturated tropes and techniques from European art cinema to create a film language consonant with the subjectivity of the indigenous people of the Andes (Hanlon 358-64). The advantage to reading Sanjinés’s films ethnographically and his writings as ethnography is that it permits us to fill in the other side of this transculturation equation, revealing the knowledge he developed through his encounters with indigenous, specifically Aymara, culture, knowledge that guided him in exactly what forms to appropriate in order to create what he called the “all-encompassing sequence shot” or, at other times, the “Andean sequence shot” (Sanjinés “The All-Encompassing”). This style of shooting, first deployed extensively during the filming of *La nación clandestina* (*The Hidden Nation*, 1989), is Sanjinés’s greatest achievement, the final synthesis of his search for a narrative cinematic form that could communicate effectively to his indigenous addressees and represent their subjectivity as they might want to be seen, not as he saw them. A second advantage of such a reading is that it traces an arc within Sanjinés’s development as an artist that has parallels and echoes in other contexts. The first is Sanjinés’s move from outside observer, recording
people and rituals with the camera in traditionally realist styles, to his creation of something like Rouch’s “participant camera” that gave the spectator the impression of participating in the center of the scene, suggesting indigenous social structures as well as the particularities of indigenous perceptions of time (Sanjinés “The All-Encompassing”). The second arc takes us back a bit from the particularity of Sanjinés’s practice to the movement with which he identified, New Latin American Cinema. The movement as a whole gradually moved from a realist model grounded in Italian Neo-Realism to forms that could express a growing preoccupation with memory and subjectivity (Hess) for which the Neo-Realist model proved inadequate (Chanan The Cuban Image 128). Finally there is the parallel arc defining ethnographic film made in the postwar years, from a naïve realism inspired, again, by Italian Neo-Realism, to experimental forms capable of expressing alternate subjectivities and social formations, what Catherine Russell calls experimental ethnography, “discourse that circumvents the empiricism and objectivity conventionally linked to ethnography” (xi). Reading Sanjinés ethnographically reveals the parallels between these two larger projects, suggesting heretofore unacknowledged articulations crucial to our understanding of both.

Despite the collaborative methods Sanjinés and his group devised, it is difficult to avoid auteurist readings of these films. For all his achievement, his films remain a cinema with the people, not the truly popular form he often described, using weavings, pottery and sometimes Andean flute music as models:

Popular art is revolutionary art is collective art, and, within it, we always encounter the collective stamp of a people, of a culture that embraces a whole community of people, with their general and particular conception of reality and their way of expressing it...Revolutionary popular cinema takes this principle into account and is created with the people, serving as their expressive instrument, completely. The result in the long run will be the same as that of other popular artistic expressions, because just as we encounter in popular ceramics a collective stamp and spirit and not just the particular style of one individual, so also, in this cinema, when it reaches its full development, we
will encounter the life-breath of a people and their profound truth (Sanjinés Theory and Practice 67-8).

Arguably, this goal of a popular cinema has only been reached in recent years, with inexpensive digital video giving rise to vibrant communities of indigenous videomakers, of which, especially in Bolivia, Sanjinés must be considered an important precursor. It is true, as Schiwy notes, that Sanjinés and his group never shared the tools of filmmaking with their Indigenous collaborators, but it is not true, as she argues, that the cost and difficulties entailed in then-current analog film technologies constrained such sharing “to some degree” (75). Writing in 1972, Sanjinés calculated that of the previous six years, a full 54 months had been devoted simply to acquiring the means of producing cinema (“Cine revolucionario” 14). As late as 1993 he continued to describe the difficulties he experienced merely importing virgin stock, the production of which is controlled by multinationals (Himpele 133). The artisanal mode of production adopted by New Latin American Filmmakers in response to the material constraints upon their practice militated against handing over the cameras to the subjects of their films. For Sanjinés, devoted as he was to the development of a truly popular film art, this presented a particularly acute dilemma, the solution to which was to minimize the perceived presence of the filmmaker in the film, producing something like a piece of pottery, which can be assumed the product of one person’s hands and yet expresses accumulated collective creativity rather than the mark of the individual. Oriented toward European culture by class and upbringing, Sanjinés accumulated the elements of collective creativity through a series of ethnographic encounters.
Sanjinés’s Early Films—Taking Images

Sanjinés began making commissioned documentaries in 1960 after returning from college in Chile. The first film he considers part of his oeuvre, though, is a ten-minute film from 1963 called Revolución (Revolution). He shot the film in his spare time on tail ends of rolls used for commissioned projects, a case in point of the precarious nature of independent filmmaking in Bolivia described above. Ostensibly a reconstruction through associative montage of the events leading up to the 1952 revolution, it is actually an implied critique of the revolutionary government’s failure to meet the goals of its 10-year plan, since the extreme poverty the film records is clearly that of the early 1960s, not the late 1940s. Revolución ends with a sequence of ten shots of young children, all filmed in close-up. On the soundtrack we hear a haunting guitar melody and occasional gunfire. In the last of these shots, one of a young boy, the camera tilts down to reveal his bare feet and holds this framing for several seconds before fading to black. All of the children acknowledge the camera by looking at it, so in some sense they are not completely denied agency. And yet the repetitive editing pattern, the frontality and closeness of the framing, and especially the tilt down the body of the last boy, objectify them, making of their image a cinematic supplication not that different from the Christian Children’s Fund infomercials with Sally Struthers that haunted late night US airwaves in the 1980s.

In an essay titled “Un cine militante” (“A Militant Cinema”), Sanjinés writes:

Those who came from the poorest places, there where misery is the only face of the day, began uncovering their lenses and thereby discovering only rags, trash, and infants’s coffins. There where they would focus was present death, inanition, and the pain of the people. They had traversed these same streets “without looking”, and it was the camera, which was for them like a magnifying lens, though which they looked honestly at objective reality. They suddenly posed to themselves the question, “What is to be done?” (46 translation mine).
Although published in 1971, this essay references the period in which Sanjinés filmed *Revolución*. “Rags, trash, and infants’ coffins” are recurrent motifs in the film. As described here, the camera is an instrument allowing the filmmaker to see the surrounding misery of which he or she habitually took no notice, bringing this misery to attention through its ability to capture objective reality. However effective such objectification might be for the political awakening of the filmmaker, it presents nothing to the subjects before the camera that they do not know already and thus is ineffective as a tool for political mobilization, as would become decisively clear to Sanjinés six years after *Revolución*, with the screenings of *Yawar Mallku* to popular audiences.

The raw objectification at the end of *Revolución* would never again appear in Sanjinés’s cinema, and with his first feature, *Ukamau* (*So It Is*, 1966), he adopted a more conventional, less exploitative ethnographic gaze. Set on the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, the film narrates a tale of revenge that scandalized its backers, the state-run Bolivian Cinema Institute. The protagonist, a farmer named Andrés, takes a boat across the lake one day to attend a fair. In his absence, the mestizo trader who exploits the island’s farmers rapes and kills his wife. At the end of the film, Andrés tracks the trader across the island and kills him by beating him to death with a stone.

The scenes of the fair, with ritual dancing in the square and open air markets, are shot in a documentary style reminiscent of direct cinema. The shots tend to be from above, probably to secure the best vantage and draw the least attention to the filming, but occasionally the camera mingles unobtrusively with the crowds. Of particular ethnographic interest in the film is its documentation of a ritual practiced on the island to ward off crop-destroying hail. A pair of decorated bulls’s horns representing the god responsible for hail is ritually castigated. When one member of the group picks up the horns and runs with them, becoming a symbolic scapegoat, the
rest run after him, pelting him with small stones resembling hail. Unlike the
dancing on the square, which was captured spontaneously, this ritual was
staged for the camera, as evidenced by the variety of shots deployed, and
marks the first appearance of a collaboratively re-enacted indigenous ritual in
Sanjinés’s films.

The Ukamau Group, which took its name from their first feature, next
produced the film for which it is still best known, Yawar Mallku. This film tells
the story of Ignacio, a mallku, or elected leader, of the ayllu, or community, of
Kaata. Near the beginning of the film he is shot by the local sheriff and taken
to La Paz, where his wife and brother unsuccessfully try to raise the money
needed for a life-saving blood transfusion. In a series of flashbacks we learn
why he was shot. After several men of the community came to him
complaining their wives were no longer able to conceive after giving birth in a
clinic run by an organization clearly meant to represent the US Peace Corps,
Ignacio seeks the advice of the local yatiri, a specialist in indigenous rituals,
whose reading of coca leaves confirms Ignacio’s suspicion that the clinic is the
source of the community’s plague of childlessness. Ross, in his American
Anthropologist review of the film, considers this scene among the most
ethnographically significant in the film, although he fails to grasp on how
many levels it registers an ethnographic encounter. Cinematically, it goes
beyond the ethnographic reconstruction of the hail ritual in Ukamau, and in it
we can begin to see hints of Sanjinés’s later theory that the camera placement
and movements must position the spectator in the center of a group, with
cuts and close-ups determined by the natural interest of a participant-
spectator, not by the conventional rules of the analytical breakdown of space
and time. As with continuity editing, the camera movements and joining of
shots should be transparent, only achieved by other means. The ritual is shot
at night, mostly from the center of the group, roughly where the fire lighting
the scene would be. The camera moves fluidly within the group, following the
objects used in the ritual and occasionally alighting on the face of an
individual to whom a censer has been presented, the obvious focus of the
group’s interest.

The coca leaf reading was included in the film as a result of the group’s
first encounter with the people of Kaata, giving it added ethnographic
significance. As Sanjinés recounts in detail in his essay “La experiencia
Bolivana” (“The Bolivian Experience”), the group had met Marcelino
Yanahuaya, the actor who portrays Ignacio, several times in La Paz. Upon
learning he was the current mallku of Kaata, a region known for producing
kallawayas, itinerant herbal healers, Sanjinés proposed collaborating on a film
project in his community, an idea with which Yanahuaya concurred. After a
strenuous journey, the last leg of which required them to carry their camera
equipment on donkeys, the group arrived in Kaata bearing gifts of medicine
and some money for the remuneration of anyone willing to participate in the
filming. Days passed and no one would cooperate. They had assumed that
Marcelino, as leader, could simply order the community to assist them, failing
to realize that such decisions could only be made collectively by the
community as a whole. Finally, someone in the group suggested a coca leaf
ceremony to divine their intentions, and they promised to leave if the yatiri
ruled against them. The reading was a success, and the community
unanimously voted to permit the filming. The meeting with the Ukamau
Group would not prove to be Yanahuaya’s last ethnographic encounter.

A few years later a former priest turned anthropologist, Joseph W.
Bastien, arrived in Kaata, traveling from La Paz in an open-air truck named the
Yawar Mallku (Bastien 6). Yanahuaya was to be the native informant for the
book Bastien would write about Aymara ritual, which appeared in 1978.
Bastien acknowledges but downplays Yanahuaya’s participation in the film,
one suspects in part, to preserve the impression of his informant’s uncorrupted authenticity. One story he relates casts considerable light on the Ukamau Group’s method during the making of Yawar Mallku, though. According to Bastien, Yanahuaya revealed that when his two sons fell ill, a yatiri divined from a coca reading the precise time and cause of their death. Disbelieving this prophecy, he took his sons to doctors in La Paz, where they died exactly as predicted (Bastien 13-4). Details from the script correspond to this story; the fruitless trip to La Paz for medical care, the coca reading, and, most significantly, the two dead children. Near the beginning of Yawar Mallku, Ignacio atones for the drunken thrashing he gives his wife by agreeing to bury effigies of their two deceased children on Mt. Kaata. In his detailed accounts of the making of the film, Sanjinés never mentions obtaining this part of the story from Yanahuaya’s own experience; it should hardly be surprising, though, that this detail illustrating the extent of Sanjinés’s collaboration with his subjects can only be revealed by cross-indexing the film with an anthropological treatise.

For their next film, El coraje del pueblo the group intensified its collaboration with the film’s subjects, having survivors of the 1967 Night of St. John massacre at the Siglo XX mines re-enact their experiences. It was also with this film that the group began experimenting with using long takes, a first step towards the Andean sequence shot. John Mowitt, analyzing scenes from the second, documentary-like passage of the film depicting the quotidian hardships of the miners’s wives’s daily lives, has argued that the way the zoom is used in certain sequences introduces a non-western film language corresponding to certain syntactical features of Aymara (151-162). These features, in conjunction with more conventional film language, create a “bilingual” film language mirroring the inflected Spanish spoken by the film’s protagonists.
Whether the sequences Mowitt analyses point to a bilingual or merely transitional, and hence mixed, style, deserves further study. Unfortunately, the three films Sanjinés made between *El coraje del pueblo* and *La nación clandestina*, the film in which the cinematic language he had been striving for appears in its most complete form, are currently not available for the kind of detailed analysis this would require. Mowitt’s description of the oscillation between film languages points to another oscillation during this period that appears most markedly during moments in the films’s recreations of rituals, a movement from inside to outside within a sequence that reveals the filmmaker passing judgment on his subjects. Referring to the scene depicting Ignacio’s induction as *mallku* in *Yawar Mallku* and the celebration of the Feast of St. John in *El coraje del pueblo*, Schiwy correctly notes that “the Ukamau Group frames drinking as an intoxication that obstructs clear revolutionary consciousness and serves to maintain the oppression of the people” (77). The scene referred to from *Yawar Mallku* continues long after narrative function is exhausted, the camera movements becoming wilder as the participants get drunk. It concludes with a montage of people stumbling and leaning against each other, clearly incapacitated. Schiwy contrasts these scenes with similar rituals in contemporary indigenous videos, noting how they are depicted positively as generating community or facilitating clairvoyance (78).

**Sanjinés, Anthropology and Andean Vampires**

Sanjinés, like most Marxist artists, is particularly concerned with the relationship between form and content; his most widely anthologized essay is titled “Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema”. In the above I have demonstrated how the ethnographic knowledge Sanjinés acquired both provides the films’s content and informs their evolving form. Before taking up the Andean sequence shot, the ultimate expression of
conjoined content and form in his cinema, I would like to consider how ethnographic knowledge is used to create content decodable only by his indigenous audiences and western audiences armed with ethnographic knowledge of the region. Such content functions in the Bolivian context much like the local details embedded in transnational heritage films, details which can only be apprehended by the local audience, creating the impression that they are the true addressees of the film. To do so, I would like to consider the surprising appearance of vampires in Yawar Mallku and ¡Fuera de aquí!

Yawar Mallku mobilizes indigenous ways of knowledge that go unremarked in critical and historical accounts. Ethnographers like Libbet Crandon-Malamud, though, have connected the film with a legend that circulates among Andean cultures in various forms, that of the *kharisiri* (also spelled *Qhariciri*) (120). *Kharisiri* and *karikhari* (or *qari quari*) are all Aymara words for a vampire of sorts that cuts out a person’s fat, after which their victim usually wastes away and dies. Among Quechua speakers in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, it is known as a ñakaq, and in Peru it is given the Spanish name *pishtako* (sometimes *pishtaco*). There are numerous regional variations on this legend and there is a substantial ethnographic literature recording them. That there is such an extensive ethnographic literature on *kharisiri* speaks to the pleasure people in the Andes take in telling these legends to outsiders, who, not coincidentally, are often “mistaken” for *kharisiri* themselves. That they rob their victims of fat is highly significant. In Andean cultures fat (*wira* in Quechua) is considered the energy principle and blood (*yawar* in Quechua) the life principal. (Bastien 45). Fat is considered so important that one of the principal divinities in Andean theology is called *Wiraqocha* (or *Viracocha*), which translates roughly as “Sea of Fat.” According to Nathan Wachtel, fat and blood are somewhat interchangeable, so it could
also be translated as “Sea of Blood” (72). Therefore, anyone who takes blood can also thought of as a kharisiri. He notes that the semantic core unifying the various names for the kharisiri is not a reference to fat but some form of a verb used to describe cutting: ŋakaq comes from nakay, to slaughter; kharisiri comes from kharina, to cut with a sharp instrument, etc. (Wachtel 72).

Until around the 1950s the kharisiri was portrayed as being a Franciscan monk who stole people’s fat to make holy oil (Crandon-Malamud 120). After that he was increasingly depicted as a gringo. Many explanations are given as to why these gringos steal fat. Crandon-Malamud records that the fat was believed to be destined for La Paz, where it would be made into soap or perfume to be consumed by the elite or sold to tourists (120). Other accounts are even more fantastic, suggesting that the fat is taken back to North America where it is used to lubricate factory machinery or even power rockets. There is a general consensus among anthropologists that these stories are used as an expression of labor and economic relations, subtended by race. More recently it has been claimed that the kharisiri legend has been revived as a consequence of neoliberal reforms (Rivera Cusicanqui 113-114). Evidence in the ethnographic literature as well as Sanjinés’s mobilization of the legend in films made in 1969 and 1977 suggest otherwise. I see Rivera Cusicanqui’s assertion as a political intervention not unlike Sanjinés’s.

When in Yawar Mallku Ignacio peers into the window of the Peace Corps clinic and sees the doctors, scalpels in hand and blood on their scrubs, we are not told what he thinks. For a western audience this is the moment he realizes that the women giving birth there are being sterilized. For a Bolivian audience, this is also where he realizes that the Peace Corps members are kharisiri. The two interpretations, one based in rationality, the other in legend, are mutually exclusive in the western mind. But, as June Nash convincingly demonstrates in her classic ethnography of Bolivian miners, We
Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us, the ability to hold in balance such irreconcilable views is characteristic of indigenous Bolivians; they use it to endure oppression by creating a sense of their own identity and to fight against that oppression.

In ¡Fuera de aquí! Sanjinés again evokes the kharisiri when a man is brought into a medical clinic run by the missionaries and given their all-purpose cure, a bleeding. On the door to the clinic a sign is posted with a quote from the gospels, “This is my blood,” making explicit what Canessa notes is the persistent religious undertones in the modern kharisiri legends (707).

**Toward Making Images—The Andean Sequence Shot**

The details of the Andean sequence shot can now be found in English in Sanjinés’s last major theoretical work, “The All-Encompassing Sequence Shot”, so rather than attempt to describe its every element, I would like to focus on one, the repeated representation of two temporalities within the single shot. La nación clandestina is the story of Sebastián Mamani, played by Reynaldo Yujra, who, after receiving formal training from Sanjinés, went on to become one of the most important figures in Bolivian indigenous video. Sebastián is coffin maker living miserably in El Alto, the barrio above La Paz, after being ostracized from his community on pain of death for having betrayed them while mallku. Near the beginning of the film, he buys an elaborate mask, which he then carries back to his village, intending to sacrifice himself by performing a long disused dance to the death which he had witnessed as a small child. Along the way, the details of Sebastián’s alienation from his Aymara community are revealed in a series of flashbacks. At times Sebastián is seen regarding events from his past, all presented in an interrupted take. For example, when he is expelled from his village, we get a
high-angle long shot of Sebastián, astride a donkey backwards, being compelled forward by a crowd of community members. The camera tilts up to frame Sebastián, framed in medium close-up, observing the action from a hilltop outside the village.

Although the flashback structure of *La nación clandestina* is significantly more complicated than that of *Yawar Mallku* and lacks the latter’s directive voice-over narration, *La nación clandestina* is widely regarded as Sanjinés’s masterpiece, admired by indigenous audiences similar to the ones that rejected the early film. There are at least two ways to account for this shift. First, in the 20 intervening years between the films, exposure to audio-visual media increased in all sectors of Bolivian society. Another is the film’s form, the use of the Andean sequence shot and the manipulations of time described above, which utilize two Aymara and Quechuan temporal concepts, *nayrapacha* and *pachakuti*, accomplished by transculturating, not merely imitating, imported forms. *Nayrapacha* suggests that the past should guide the present and that the future can also be the past. *Pachakuti* refers to a radical turnaround of time and space. Both are elements in a cyclical, non-linear conception of time. Thus, when Sebastián sees his past, it is not a flashback. He is present in both, with the past element guiding his future behavior. The last shot of the film, a freeze-frame of Sebastián taking up the rear of his own funeral procession, is a radical turnaround of time and space. For the non-initiates, Sanjinés includes a scene near the beginning in which a yatiri explains the Aymara conceptions of time from which the film derives its narrative form.

The anthropological theorist Johannes Fabian argues that a “denial of coevalness” is at the heart of much anthropology (198). Spatio-temporal and developmental distance, he argues, is a necessary assumption key to the constitution of the Other (197). The opposite would be “radical
contemporaneity, which would have as a consequence that we experience the primitive...as copresent, hence co-subjects, not objects of history” (198). Sanjinés was, of course, motivated by the desire to be an instrument of his collaborators’s coming into being as subjects of history after hundreds of years of oppression. And the form he devised for representing this displays “radical contemporaneity” in two senses: first, by insisting on the coevalness of his subjects with the modern world by refusing to pose as the rescuer of their culture, a traditional mode of the ethnographer; and second, by asserting the coevalness of past and present as derived from the Quechua-Aymara cosmovision.

In the lengthy quotation above about popular art, Sanjinés notes that what interests him about Andean indigenous culture is not merely what it is or was but what it might become. After La nación clandestina’s meditation on Bolivian indigenous identity, Sanjinés’s next film explored the class and ethnic fissures in Bolivian society and how they might be overcome through the recentering of indigenous culture. The film, Para recibir el canto de los pájaros (To Hear the Birds Singing, 1995), is based upon the Ukamau Group’s experience making Yawar Mallku as detailed in “La experiencia Boliviana”, especially the early troubles with the community. Like the essay, the film is what ethnographers call an “arrival scene”, a narrative of the initial encounter between the ethnographer and his or her subjects, which, for that reason, is “symbolically and ideologically rich” (Pratt 131). As Mary Louise Pratt argues, ethnography defines itself negatively by contrast to adjacent and antecedent forms of discourse (133). The arrival scene serves to remind the ethnographer and the reader that the discursive practices of ethnography are all borrowed from other discursive practices. Para recibir el canto de los pájaros, clearly a self-reflexive film, is simultaneously a reflexive ethnography in which Sanjinés
acknowledges the fundamental importance to his cinematic practice of ethnographic methods, borrowed and used for other means.

The crew in *Para recibir el canto de los pájaros* are well-intentioned middle class urbanites determined to make a film exposing the truth of the conquest of Bolivia. Several times scenes start with shots of conquistadores *in media res*, destroying artifacts, imprisoning natives, burning villages, etc. Each time the sequence ends with a shout of cut or with a camera on a crane dropping into the frame. This seems at first to be a retreat from *La nación clandestina*’s formal strategy of *nayrapacha*. Near the end of the film, a producer who has slipped into a small canyon is rescued by a group of locals. Walking away, he sees a conquistador whom we earlier saw kill the other members of his party in order to keep all their gold for himself. The two characters’ eyes meet as they pass each other, and we expect a camera to drop into the frame, resolving the temporal ambiguity. It does not, and we are left to understand that the conquistador has not been an actor all along. The withholding of the self-reflexive gesture established as a trope in the film creates a void into which rushes the Quechua-Aymara conception of time.

At the end of the film, the crew is shooting a ceremony celebrating the return migration of songbirds to the region, an event at which the community’s musicians learn new tunes. At this point the yatiri has read the coca leaves and the crew has obtained the cooperation of the locals. As the director shoots the birds and the colorful bird costumes of the dancers, the two soundmen try to record the birdsong. Previously they had hunted the birds for sport, leaving the dead ones where they lay. Although their equipment seems to be working properly, they are unable to record the birdsongs. The reason is that they are taking, rather than making recordings, unlike the locals, who repeat the birdsong with their flute. Here Sanjinés explicitly critiques the form his earliest films take, one which looks from the
outside rather than participating within the community, thus marking the distance he has come as a filmmaker. There is a tradition within art cinema of using self-reflexivity to announce one’s consummate mastery of cinematic form (e.g. 8½, Federico Fellini, 1963). Sanjinés’s film alludes to this tradition not to emphasize his mastery but his proximity to and knowledge of his subjects and to warn of what might happen if the “what it might become” of indigenous Andean culture continues to be marginalized.

Conclusion—Rouch and Sanjinés’s Provocations

Reading Sanjinés ethnographically does not make him an ethnographic filmmaker, but it does reveal his engagement with ethnography. What remains to be determined is where that engagement interfaces with the larger field. David MacDougall notes that “no ethnographic film is merely a record of another society; it is always a record of a meeting between a filmmaker and that society” (125). Thus we can read all Sanjinés’s films as encounters, even when not so reflexively obvious as in Para recibir el canto de los pájaros. MacDougall also writes, criticizing the observational method’s claims, “It is a form where the observer and observed exist in separate worlds, and it produces films that are monologues” (125). In Revolución, filmmaker-observer and observed were still in separate worlds. Bridging these worlds required the formation of mutually participatory forms of cinema, dialogic, if not dialectical in nature.

With their emphasis on the dialectical nature of the encounter, both Sanjinés and Rouch can be seen as pioneering Steven Tyler’s influential notion of a “postmodern ethnography,” which he posits as a challenge to the presumed transcendental observer. Tyler’s postmodern ethnography “privileges ‘discourse’ over ‘text,’ it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the
ethnographic situation.” (203) This cooperatively developed discourse, according to Tyler, is “intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is in a word, poetry,” he argues, a poetry that will evoke the communal ethos and provoke the hearers to “act ethically” (202). Here Tyler is specifically describing written ethnographies, and it is surprising that he does not address visual ethnography, given that film and photography do not impose the same barriers to reception written texts do. But this has not stopped his ideas from being taken up by theorists of ethnographic film, such as Bill Nichols, who describes postmodern ethnography as “transformative” and “practiced with social use-value foremost in mind,” words more reminiscent of the ambitions of New Latin American Cinema than traditional ethnography (83). Still, I do not believe Nichol’s interpretation to be far off the mark; it merely brings to the fore what seems latent in Tyler’s argument, which reads a bit like a manifesto of Third Cinema with all references to politics redacted. Even rather severe critics of ethnography’s ideal of the transcendent observer, like Tyler or Fabian, hesitate before the notion that an ethnographer might be politically committed. Sanjinés and Rouch, by contrast, follow a line established by Brecht at the beginning of his “sociological experiment,” “The Threepenny Lawsuit,” when he notes that, since the investigator of any social phenomenon is already a party in a force field of opposing interests, he or she must adopt a thoroughly subjective and partisan perspective (198).

Tyler’s description of ethnography as a “provocation” is useful for linking up Third Cinema and ethnographic film. For Rouch, the basic method was provocation. He believed the camera could provoke the subject into revealing himself or herself and could also serve as a catalyst for social phenomena. Sanjinés also staged situations to provoke revelatory actions on
the part of his performers. There is no mistaking the terror on the face of the children in the crowd being machine gunned down in the opening sequence of *El coraje del pueblo*. Similarly, in *El enemigo principal* (*The Principle Enemy*, 1974), Sanjinés uses the peasants’s confusion about whether or not they have just witnessed a real execution to great effect. As provocative acts, though, Sanjinés’s films are distinguished from Rouch’s in that the provocation caused by the reception of the film is intended to be greater than that of the production. And here, ultimately, is what separates Rouch and Sanjinés politically. They developed remarkably similar methods in response to the revolutionary and transitional moments in which they worked, but while Rouch’s films like *Les maîtres fous* provoke then capture that moment, Sanjinés’s are calculated to advance the revolutionary politics of the moment, which, as an artist, he accomplishes by the creation of a revolutionary, hence non-bourgeois, practice of art. Brecht argues that the artist should effect the political transformation of art, and of politics through art, “not simply by waiting but by provoking reality with experiments in order to formulate the process more visibly through accumulation and concentration” (194). Any ethnography that recognizes the radical contemporaneity of its subjects along with their agency in history and the collaborative, dialectical nature of the enterprise, must take into account its very specific political ramifications, reading forward into time the results of its provocations, however reluctant the ethnographer may be to recognize his or her own political commitments. This is not to say that ethnographic filmmakers must be politically committed, but I would argue that the political commitment in New Latin American Cinema, because of its very explicitness, can be read almost as a self-reflexive gesture on the part of the maker, making films like *Yawar Mallku* valuable as ethnographies. Conversely, ethnographic knowledge, which is seldom used as a resource for interpreting Third Cinema, can be useful for audiences who
are not part of the social collectivity that is the subject and principal addressee of the film.

**Bibliography**


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