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INTERVIEW BETWEEN JEAN LUC GODARD
AND FERNANDO SOLANAS

GODARD BY SOLANAS!

The following is a transcript of an interview recorded by Third World Cinema Group in Paris in 1969.

~~Fernando Solanas~~ and E. Getino are the producers and directors of "The Hour of the Furnaces", "La Hora de los Hornos".

SOLANAS BY GODARD!

Godard by Solanas

Solanas by Godard

Godard: How would you define your film? (*The Hour of the Furnaces*)

Solanas: As an ideological and political film-essay. Some people have talked about a film-book and this is correct, because we supply with the information, elements for reflection, titles, and didactic forms... The structure of the narration is constructed as it is in a book: prologue, chapters and the epilogue. It is a film absolutely free in its form and its language: we have used everything that was necessary or useful for our educational ends. From direct sequences or interviews to others whose form approaches that of a story or tale or a song or even montage of concepts as images. The sub-title of the film shows its documentary character, it is intended to be a proof, a testimony, concrete evidence of a particular reality: "Notes and Testimonies on Neo-Colonialism, Violence and Liberation." It is a documentary film of accusation but at the same time it is a film that wants to educate and to research. It is a film whose contribution lies in its orientation, it points a direction, it points a way. Because the film is not addressed to anyone, it is not addressed to an audience that believes in "cultural coexistence", but on the other hand it is addressed to the masses who suffer the great neo-colonialist oppression. This is shown mainly in the second and third part because the first tells that which the masses already know, intuitively feel and live, the first part plays in the movie the role of a prologue. "*The Hour of the Furnaces*" is also a film-act, an anti-show, because it denies itself as film and opens itself to the public for debate, discussion and further developments. Each show becomes a place of liberation, an act in which man takes conscience of his situation and of the need for a deeper praxis to change that situation.

Godard: How does the act take place?

Solanas: There are pauses in the film, interruptions so that the film and the topics presented can pass from the screen to the theatre, that is to life, to the present. The old spectator, the subject who beholds, the onlooker, according to the traditional film that develop the bourgeois concepts of the arts of the 1800's, that non-participant, becomes the live protagonist, a real actor in the story of the film and in the history itself, since the film is about our contemporary history. And it is a film about liberation, about an unfinished stage in our history, it cannot be anything but an unfinished film, a film open to the present and to the future of this act of liberation. That is way the film must be completed by the protagonists, and we are not discarding the possibility of adding new notes and film testimonies if we were to find in the future new occurrences that needed to be incorporated. "The Acts" end when the participants decide to end them. The film has been the detonator of the act, the agent that mobilizes the old spectator. Furthermore, we believe in what Fanon said: "If we must involve everyone in the fight for our common salvation, there are no spectators, there are no innocents. We all dirty our hands in the swamps of our soil and in the emptiness of our minds. Every spectator is either a coward or a traitor." That is to say, that we are not facing a film for expression nor a film for communication, but a film for action a film for liberation.

Godard: How did you produce the film?

Solanas: Working and conquering all the difficulties that we had to face: economic, technical and artistic... The needs of the film determined a method and a form of work. As most of the recent independent Argentine films, it is produced with a minimum of equipment, and with very few people doing all the work. Concurrently with the film-making I was working in advertisement to pay for the most elementary costs of material and processing. We used in 80% of the film a 16 mm. camera and two or three of us have performed all technical tasks and production needs, besides the generous support of friends, comrades and the people without whom it would have been impossible to produce these four and a half hours of film.

Godard: The film that I am starting now, called "The Strike", is made by four people: my wife does the acting, I do the sound, one cameraman and his wife do the shooting. I do it with a small TV camera...

Solanas: Today the myth that quality of expression was ownership of the industry, of complex equipment and technical mysteries, has been destroyed. We can also say that the advancement of technology is liberating film-making...

Godard: What sort of problems did you have?

Solanas: Besides all the problems common to any economic production, I could say that the biggest problem to overcome was our dependence on foreign cinematographic models. Meaning we had to liberate ourselves as creators. It is this dependence, fundamentally aesthetic, of our film vis-a-vis the American and European film, its biggest limitation. And this could not be understood separately from the analysis of the Argentine cultural situation. The official Argentine culture, the culture of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie, is a culture of imitation, second-hand, old and decadent. A culture built with the cultural models of the oppressive, imperialist bourgeoisies. A culture European-style today Americanized. That is why the greatest part of Argentine films made today are built upon the productive, argumentative and aesthetic models of Yankee films or on the so-called "author-oriented" European film-making. There are no inventions, no search of our own. There is translation, development or copy. There is dependence...

Godard: American film is film to be sold...

Solanas: Exactly, a film tied up with shows and business; subservient to and conditioned by capitalist exploitation. Of this profit-seeking mode of production are born all genres, techniques, language and even the duration of present day films. It was to break with these conceptions, with this conditioning what gave us the most difficulty. We had to liberate ourselves: film made sense if we could use it as a writer or a painter accomplish their task, if we could bring about our experience starting from our needs. So we decided to risk, to try, to search before conditioning ourselves to the masters of the "seventh art", who could only express themselves through the novel, the short story or drama. We started to liberate ourselves of the "viscontis, Renoires, Giocondas, Resnais, Pavese, etc."..., committed to find a new form, our form, our language, our structure... That which would coincide with the needs of our audiences and with the needs of the total liberation of the Argentine man. Meaning that this search in the film media, did not come about as an aesthetic category but as a category of the liberation of our people and our country. This way a new film was

born that gave up the holding of the theme-novel, or the actor that is a film of actors, stories and feelings, to become a film of concepts, of thoughts, of topics. History as a novel gave way to history told with ideas, to a film to see and to read, to feel and to think, a film of research equivalent to the ideological essay...

Godard: What role can this film play in the process of liberation?

Solanas: First of all, to transmit the information that we do not have. The means of communication, the mechanism of culture are in the hands or are controlled by the system. The information that is made available is that which the system wants to make available. The role of the film of liberation is, above all, to prepare and to propagate our information. Bringing up one again: that which is theirs and that which is ours. From another point of view, the whole concept of our film--open film, film of participation, etc. -- points to one and only one fundamental objective: to help set free, to liberate man. A man who is oppressed, repressed, inhibited and manacled. It is a film for this combat. To raise the level of consciousness and understanding of those sectors of the people who are the most uneasy about their condition. Will it just reach a limited circle? Maybe...But the so-called film of the masses only transmits that which the system allows, that is, it becomes an instrument of escape, of evasion, of mistification. Film of liberation, on the other hand reaches at this stage smaller groups but reaches them in greater depth. It comes with the truth, it is better to disseminate ideas that help liberate a single man, than to contribute to the mass colonization of the people.

Godard: The Cubans say that the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution. What is the duty of the revolutionary film-maker?

Solanas: To use film as a weapon, or as a gun, to transform the work itself in an act, in a revolutionary act. What is for you this duty or commitment?

Godard: To work fully as a militant, to make less films and be more militant. This is very difficult because the film-maker has been educated in the realm of individualism. But in films too it is necessary to start anew...

Solanas: Your experience after the "May events" are paramount, I'd like you to share them with our latin american colleagues...

Godard: The "May events" have brought us a fantastic liberation. "May" has imposed its truth, it has forced to talk and to articulate the problems in a different light. Before "May" here in France all the intellectuals had an alibi which permitted them to live comfortably, that is, to have a car, an apartment...But, "May" has created a very simple problem, that of changing our life styles, of breaking with the system. To the successful intellectuals, "May" ushered in a situation analogous to that of a worker who must abandon the strike because he owes four months to the grocer. There are film-maker like Truffaut who sincerely say that they are not going to change their life styles and others just keep on playing a dual game, like those of "Cahiers..."

Solanas: Are you still with "Cahiers du Cinema"?

Godard: No, I left them completely since they supported the Venice Film Festival (1968) in spite of the boycott initiated by the italian film-makers...it is not that I am against film-makers getting together, it is that I am against what film festivals represent today...

Solanas: Have you given up the benefits the system used to give you?

Godard: Yes Sir. I realized I was being oppressed, that there is an intellectual repression less evident than the physical repression but which nonetheless victimizes and I felt myself oppressed...The more I wanted to fight, the more they wanted to keep me quiet. Besides, I was oppressing myself completely...

Solanas: In Latin America, every film-maker finds himself in the same situation, aggravated by existing censure laws and even crimes of opinion as in the cases of Brazil and Argentina. The position of the film-maker today is so grotesque as to place him in an already defined field of action and set of choices. If the film-maker scrutinizes any aspect of life, be it love, family, social relations, work, etc., he is revealing the existing crisis of the society; he is showing the naked truth. And truth, given the political climate of our continent is subversive. For this reason film-makers are condemned to self-imposed repression, censure, and creative castration. They are confronted with either playing the impossible role of being "author" inside the system, or breaking away from the system and trying an independent and realistic way. Today, there are no options: either you accept the truth of the system, that is, you accept its lies; or we accept the only truth, the one defined by our actions: we are either accomplices with the system through anti-septic films or we accomplish total liberation...

Godard: It is true that it is easier to film in France than in Greece or Argentina. In Greece if you don't do exactly what the military junta orders, the police represses what is done. In France we have a soft fascism, which has become harder after the events of "May"...this soft fascism is the same that either deports you to your country if you are a foreigner or sends you to a remote place if you are a professor at the Sorbonne...

Solanas: What is the situation, then, of the French film-making industry, of the European film-maker?

Godard: I would say there is no European filmmaking, but that there is an american filmmaking everywhere, in the same manner as there is no English industry but an american industry based in England; just as you have said that there is no Argentine culture but a European-american culture which works through Argentine intermediaries...In the era of the silent film, a German film did not look like a silent Italian or French movie. Today, there is no difference between an american, a German or an Italian film...They make co-productions...Italian westerns, american movies filmed in Russia...everything has been domesticized by the United States, everything is americanized...and what do I mean by americanized? That every European film has been made only for sale, to make money. Even the art film and the essay film. All this contributes to falsify everything...even in Russia where films are distributed to cine-clubs, they are sold through the offices of the bureaucrats of the Politbureau, in other words it is exactly the same...This way films are not born out of a concrete analysis of a concrete situation, they are instead something else...

Solanas: Which is...?

Godard: Look...it is an individual imagination which is sometimes very generous or very "leftist"...which is alright...but that is at the same time made to be sold because it is the only means by which this imagination can keep functioning and selling. That is why there is no difference between Antonioni, Kazan, Dreyer, Bergman...and a bad filmmaker like Delannoy in France...there are differences in qualities but not in content; all their films play the game of the dominant classes which is what I have done for ten years...although my intention was different...but I have been used all the same.

Solanas: Is the "author-oriented" film a bourgeois film category?

Godard: Exactly. The "author" is something like a professor in a University...

Solanas: How do you ideologically define this type of "author" film?

Godard: Objectively today's "author" films are allied with the reaction.

Solanas: Who stand out as examples?

Godard: Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti, Bresson, Bergman...

Solanas: What about the young ones?

Godard: In France, I before "May"; Truffaut, Rivette, Demy, Resnais...everyone...in England Lester, Brooks...in Italy Passolini, Bertolucci...lastly, Polanski...everyone.

Solanas: Do you think these filmmakers are integrated within the system?

Godard: Yes. They are integrated and they do not want to be de-integrated...

Solanas: And the more critical filmmaking, is it also recovered by the system?

Godard: Yes, these films are also recovered by the system because they are not strong enough in relation to their integrating potentialities. For example the American "Newsreels" are as poor as you and me, but if CBS offered them \$10,000.- to project one of their films they would refuse because they would be integrated... and why would they be integrated? Because the structure of American television is so strong that it recuperates for the system everything that it shows. The only way in which we could get back at TV in the USA would be not to project anything during two or four hours that the TV station pays precisely for showing and recuperating. In Hollywood they are preparing now a film about Che Guevara and there is even a film with Gregory Peck about Mao Tse Tung... Those Newsreel films, if they were to be shown by French TV they would not be recuperative, at least not totally, because they are coming from another country... Similarly, my films, which here are recuperated keep certain value in Latin America.

Solanas: I don't agree with the last thing you said. I believe that when a national film deals with a subject from the point of view of the oppressed classes, when it is clear and deep, it becomes practically indigestible for the system... I do not believe that CBS would buy a film about black power, or a film with Carmichael talking to Black people about violence, or that French TV would show a film about Cohn-Bendit saying everything he believes... In our countries there are a lot of things allowed when they refer to foreign problems, but when these same problems are international, because of their political nature, they cannot be absorbed... a few months back censorship prevented "The Strike" and "October" by Eisenstein... On the other hand the greatest part of all "author - oriented" European films deal with bourgeois problems and from the point of view of the bourgeoisie. They are not only recuperated by the system, they actually become in our countries the aesthetic and thematic models for our neo-colonized "author" filmmaking.

Godard: I agree, but when here in France the political becomes difficult for them they can no longer recuperate like before... this is the case with your film which I am sure will not be recuperated and will be censored... but it is not only in the political scene that recuperation occurs, it also happens in the aesthetic field.

My most difficult films to recuperate were the last ones that I made within the system, where the aesthetic was turned political like "Weekend" and "La Chinoise"... A political position must correspond to an aesthetic position. We must not make an "author-oriented" cinema but a scientific cinema. Aesthetics must also be studied scientifically. Every investigation in science as in art corresponds to a political line even if you ignore it. In the same manner as there are scientific discoveries there are aesthetic discoveries. This is why we must have consciously clear the role we have chosen and with which we are committed. Antonioni, for example, at a certain moment realized some valid work, but he no longer does... He did not radicalize himself. He makes a film about students as it would be done in the United States but he does not make a film coming from the students... Pasolini has talent, lots of talent, he knows how to make films on a particular topic as one learns how to make compositions at school... For example he can make a beautiful poem about the Third World... but it is not the Third World that has made the poem. Then I believe it is necessary to be the Third World and then one day it is the Third World who made the poem and if you are the one who sings it, it is simply because you are a poet and you know how to do it... It's as you say, a film must be a weapon, a gun... but there are still people in the dark and they need more than a pocket flashlight to bring light around themselves and this is precisely the role of theory... We need a marxist analysis of image and sound. Even Lenin when he talked about film he did not make a theoretical analysis but rather an analysis in terms of production, so that there could be films everywhere. Only Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov occupied themselves with this topic.

Solanas: How do you film now; do you have a producer?

Godard: I have never had a producer. I had one or two producers friends of mine but I never worked with the usual production houses. When I did it, once or twice, it was an error... it is now impossible for me. I don't know how the others do it. I see some of my comrades, like Cournot or Bertolucci, for example, who are forced to ring the bell at the house of a cretin to save their work. But I never did this. Now I am the producer with whatever I have... and I film much more than before, because I film in a different way, in 16 mm. or with my small TV equipment... And different also in another sense, even if it sounds preposterous to use the Vietnamese example. I refer to the use the Vietnamese give to the bicycle in combat or in resistance. Here a champion cyclist could not make use of the bicycle as a Vietnamese does. Well, I want to learn to use the bicycle as a Vietnamese. I have a lot to do with my bicycle, a lot of work ahead and this is what I have to do and this is what I must do. This is why now I film so much, this year I made four films.

Solanas: What is the difference what you used to do and the sort of film you make now?

Godard: Now I try to make a film that consciously tries to participate in the political struggle. Before it was unconscious, a sentimentalist... I was in the Left, if you want, although I started from a position in the Right and also because I was a bourgeois, an individualist. Afterwards I evolved psychologically to the Left, until I reached not the position of a "parliamentary left" but a revolutionary Left, radicalized, with all the contradictions that this presupposes...

Solanas: And cinematographically?

Godard: Cinematographically, I always tried to do that which was never done, even when I worked with the system. Now I try to tie up "what is never done"

with the revolutionary struggle. Before, my search was an individual's struggle. Now I want to know if I am wrong, why I am wrong, and if I am right, why I am right. I try to do that which is not done because everything that is done is almost totally imperialist. The cinema of the East is imperialist cinema; the Cuban cinema --with the exception of Santiago Alvarez and one or two documentary film-makers--is a film that functions half-way with an imperialist model. All the Russian cinema has turned rapidly into imperialist, it has been bureaucratized, with the exception of two or three persons who have struggled against this: Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Metrekin who is absolutely unknown... Now I make cinema with the workers I do that which ideologically they want, but I also say: "careful!"... It is necessary that in addition to making this type of film, they do not on Sundays patronize the system's crappy films. This is our obligation and our way to help "the struggle of the film-makers". In short I have reached the conclusion that the movie scene being so confused and complicated, it is important to make films with people who are not film-makers, with people who are interested with what they see on the screen having a relationship with themselves...

Solanas: Why do you work with people who do not belong to film-making?

Godard: Because in regards to the language of film-making it is a small handful of individuals, in Hollywood or in Mosfilm or wherever that imposes their language, their speech to the whole population and it is not sufficient to get away from this small group and to say "I make a different cinema"... because one still has the same ideals about film-making. This is why to overcome this one must give the opportunity to make cinematographic speech to those people who up to now never had this opportunity... A very extraordinary thing about the events of last May in Paris happened when all the people started to write on the walls... the only ones who had the right to write on the walls were advertisers... People were made to believe that writing on the walls was dirty and ugly but I also had the impulse to write on the walls and I have kept it up since "May"... It was no longer an anarchistic idea but a deep desire... also for film-making it is necessary to begin anew... I made a film with students talking to workers and it was very clear: the students talked all the time and the workers never... The workers among themselves talked a lot... but where are their words... not in the newspapers, not in the films. Where are the words of the people who constitute 80% of humanity? We must force the minority who has the floor to give it up to the 80%, we must allow the word of the majority to be expressed. That is why I do not want to belong to the minority who talks and talks all the time, or the minority who makes film, but I want my language to express what the 80% want to say... This is why I do not want to make films with film people but with the people who constitute the great majority of humanity...

Solanas: What is the idea of "The Strike", your next film?

Godard: It is a woman telling about the strike. She has a child and so she tells it from her home, since it is a week of strike and also the relationships between sex and work. When you work 10 hours a day, intellectual or manual work, you can't make love... and if the woman stays home the opposite may occur... This situation poses many problems and here we talked about these things. I will make this film with my small TV camera. It is very economical and practical. We film right here and we see right away what we have done, in image and sound without having to depend on a laboratory, montage, etc... if we don't like it we do it again... I will do almost the whole film in one place. The work will be in the dialogue.

Solanas: And then how do you show it?

Godard: We show it in TV sets of neighborhoods cafes in the industrial areas...we discuss it, we talk to the people and this alone makes us all grow.

Solanas: What role can film play in the process of liberation?

Godard: A fundamental role. As you were saying to inform and write after the information comes the reflection... We must make clear and simple films that will help clarify things...and films technically simple because technology is very expensive. If synchronization and montage are too expensive, let's work in few places or with the sound off...and if they are necessary, inevitable, let's keep in mind that it is important to simplify. That's all!

Solana's film.
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