

Central del Curt

In 1974 Joan Martí Valls and Martí Rom created *Central del Curt* (CDC). This alternative film distributor made it possible for what is typically called 'marginal cinema' to be seen more widely throughout Spain during the last years of the Franco regime and the early years of the transition to democracy. The activity of CDC continued until 1982, a period marked by several significant changes, including the death of Franco in 1975, the first democratic general elections (June 1977) and municipal elections (April 1979).

CDC was a politically heterogeneous group, though all its members were united by the desire to work in cinema from the ground up and in a spirit that was clearly anti-Franco. The organisation included some who were close to the anarchist movements and others who occupied positions of responsibility within C.C.O.O. (*Comissions Obreras* – one of the main syndicalist organisations), though the majority were simply 'of the left'. Apart from Martí Valls and Martí Rom, other producers whose films were already being distributed quickly joined in the management of CDC, as did other people involved in socio-political activity. Particular mention should be made of members such as Llorenç Soler, Helena Lumberrer and Mariano Lisa (*Colectivo de Cine de Clase*). The members of CDC also organised themselves under the banner of the *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu*, for the production of their own films.

The CDC catalogue contained some one hundred and twenty titles, the majority of which were short or medium length films. They ranged from the most militant cinema practices, with a very clear socio-political content, to some quality 'amateur cinema' films with a certain social edge, while others were nearer to the aesthetic avant-garde. Apart from the producers already named, amongst the directors whose films were distributed mention should also be made of Pere Portabella, Antoni Padrós and the Baca-Garriga *amateurs*. In addition, some full-length feature films were also distributed, for example *Viridiana* (1961) by Luis Buñuel, the Argentinian *La hora de los hornos* (1968) by Solanas-Getino, the Italian *Appollon, fabbrica occupata* (1968) by Ugo Gregoretti and Eisenstein's classics *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927).

The figures of this distributor give some idea of the considerable scale of the showing of marginal cinema: there were an average of 327 sessions contracted with some 610 films being shown per year, which works out at an average of some thirty hours of cinema per month. The audience could be divided into three

roughly equal groups, one in Barcelona and its immediate surroundings, another in the remainder of Catalunya, and the third in the rest of Spain.

Within the sphere of marginal cinema, the most widely seen films were: Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu: *Entre la esperanza y el fraude* (Between Hope and Fraud) (1977), *Can Serra, la objeccion de conciencia en España* (Conscientious Objection in Spain)(1976) and *Un libro es un arma* (A Book is a Weapon)(1975); Llorenç Soler: *Santa Maria de Iquique* (1975), *El largo viaje hacia la ira* (The Long Journey to Rage)(1969), *Sobrevivir en Mathausen* (Surviving Mathausen)(1975); Colectivo Cine de Clase: *El campo para el hombre* (The Country for the People)(1975), *O todos o ninguno* (All or None)(1976).

It must be highlighted that this diffusion would not have been possible without the extraordinary collaboration of many people on the ground who worked to organise the sessions. Thanks to them, the films were able to make the rounds with 'tours' of Spain being organised around the showing of a particular film. An example of this would be *Viridiana*, which spent more than a month travelling from one place to another (Barcelona, Lleida, Zaragoza, Bilbao...), leaping from one train to another and being shown somewhere every day. Never, not even once, did anyone forget their responsibility to send the film on, which meant that the sessions could be held on fixed days.

The source of the unfortunate demise of this distributor can be found, above all, in the call for cultural and political demobilisation issued by the parties of the left once they came to (municipal) power. The majority of the films that CDC distributed were deposited in the *Filmoteca* of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. Some years later, tribute was paid to the activity of this distributor by several film festivals that dedicated special sections to its work. Amongst these, special mention should be made of the 10th International Filmmakers Week in Benalmádena (November 1978) and the cycles that the film libraries dedicated to it (January and February 1978 in Barcelona and Madrid, and November 1994 in Barcelona).

Cooperativa Cinema Alternatiu

The *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu* was the production arm of the CDC. It was organised in two groups that filmed independently, though they both received financial support from other members of the *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu*.

One of these groups was the *Col·lectiu S.P.A.* (the initials of Salvador Puig Antich), also known as the 'L'Hospitalet group'. Its members produced *Viaje a la explotación* (Journey to Exploitation)(1974), dedicated to the Moroccan immigrants in Barcelona, and *Entre la esperanza y el fraude* (1977), a feature film dealing with the Spanish Civil War.

The other group was formed by people from the city of Barcelona whose origins were in the cine-clubs 'Informe 35' and

'Ingenieros'. There are the films *Carn crua* (Raw Flesh)(1975), dealing with the brutishness of war; *Un libro es un arma* (1975), about the attacks by the extreme right on cultural organisations; and *Can Serra, la objecci3n de conciencia en Espa1a* (1976), that dealt with the first conscientious objectors movement.

As a result of the experience in distribution – as CDC – and of the earliest film productions, a theoretical text was drawn up that allowed the elaborating, in conjunction with Tino Calabuig, of the *Colectivo de Cinema de Madrid*, of the so-called 'Manifesto of Almeria', which dates from August 1975. Going beyond the terms 'independent cinema', which dated from the late-60's, or 'marginal cinema', coined in the early seventies, both of which implied facing questions like financial and/or political independence, and the forced or voluntary exclusion from the system, this manifesto called for an 'alternative cinema', one that would work for political change.

Between December 1976 and February 1977, the *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu* produced three newsreels as an alternative to the still omnipresent No-Do newsreels originally created by the Franco regime. Each of them lasted seven minutes and they were titled "*La Marxa de la llibertat*" (The Freedom March), "*La dona*" (Women) – a recording of the first feminist meeting held in Barcelona, and "*El Born*". They were the first attempts to challenge the hegemony of the Franco-era newsreels. The experience, however, was a failure, the result of the lack of support offered by the owners of the art and documentary cinemas. The alternative distribution network was not up to supporting the production of a newsreel per month.

The last production by the *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu* was *Las energías* (The Energies), one of the first ecological documents to be produced within the Spanish State, and certainly the CCA's most collective film (in terms of shooting, editing and production). In fact, it must be pointed out that the cinematographic works of this collective were not signed, and the reason for this was not simple personal wariness given the political situation, but rather, above all, a reflection of their collective conception of the work.

**Reflection by the
*Cooperativa de
Cinema Alternatiu*
regarding the work
undertaken in the
context of 'marginal
cinema, 1975**

"At the end of the '60s, in opposition to the industrial cinema (the cinema of the State) a movement sprang up that was labelled independent cinema. This movement produced a series of films, principally shorts, in sub-formats (16 and 8 mm) informed by a fundamental political vision which distinguished it from the so-called amateur cinema.

Amateur cinema was a craft cinema, a reproducer in reduced contexts of the same ideological and structural systems that define the industrial cinema. It has now degenerated into an almost exclusive production of films for self-consumption, films that are shown to very small circles of people. Amateur cinema did not create (nor did it set out to do so) any alternative to the mainstream industrial cinema...

Under the name of independent cinema the intention was to bring together a series of filmmakers who were producing works that were marginal in terms of the industry, and that were more or less supported and publicised by magazines such as *Nuestro Cine* (Madrid) and *Fotogramas* (Barcelona). The latter, in its desire to invent a kind of cinema in Spain that would correspond to the latest trends in cinema that had appeared in the western democracies, also labelled these filmmakers as underground. As a logical consequence of the enormous disparity in perspectives, since the range ran from determinedly marginal filmmakers to those who were operating within the marginal space in the hope of subsequently being able to find a niche within the mainstream industry, and the absence of any specific proposals that would have made it possible to organise a minimal structure of channels of distribution... the label independent cinema disappeared in the same way that it had appeared: spontaneously...

The term independent cinema turned out to be void of any specific aims or intentions... The economic independence determined an accepted marginality with respect to the film industry... Its filmmakers only considered entering into the industry once the latter had accepted their works of art... The ideological independence determined a marginality that was imposed (and assumed politically) and that followed from the repressive socio-political structures of the Franco regime. Within this, we can also locate a small group of snipers whose film work, isolated and hardly ever seen (and even then, only within already conscious and committed circles) made it possible, in the mid-'70s, to develop the idea of an alternative cinema that aimed to make a space for itself within the popular movements and participate in their urgent struggle to achieve democratisation..."

Manifiesto of Almeria (extract)

August 1975

Published in full in *Cinema 2002*, No. 8, October 1975, p. 64.

"...It is agreed to term ALTERNATIVE CINEMA that which proposes a change with respect to the dominant ideology, presenting a clear alternative that breaks with the culture that this kind of ideology implies and with the normal structures of production and distribution of this type of cinema...

Calls for: 1.- a structural change that involves a form of production and its diffusion (distribution and showing). 2.- a film practice that forms part of the socio-political context in which it is produced.

An essential characteristic of this ALTERNATIVE CINEMA is the necessity that it fulfils a social function in opposition to the industrial cinema.

Special emphasis shall be placed on that referring to an alternative system of diffusion, which should set out to channel this type of cinema through the potential socio-cultural platforms that are nearer to the people: cine-clubs, cine-forums, residents' associations, cultural organisations..."

**Films by the
Cooperativa de
Cinema Alternatiu in
the cycle *The
Brigades of Light*.**

Viaje a la explotación

"Drawing on the life experience of a Moroccan emigrant, Mustapha – if one can talk of life experiences when describing the series of misfortunes that befall him following a work accident, the film presents the latent discrimination and racism that exists in our society. Since 1969, when many thousands of Spanish workers had already emigrated, Algerians and Moroccans have been arriving and heading for our most industrialised cities, the places that have most need of unskilled labour, like Barcelona... Despite the growing unemployment that already existed... capitalism used these North-African immigrants principally in the construction sector, a sector that is perfectly suited to the most blatant forms of exploitation... With no chance of demanding their rights, unorganised, without any contact with their Spanish colleagues (mainly because of the language difficulties), with no health insurance, isolated in authentic ghettos... These are the co-ordinates on which the film has been based, a true social document that fits fully within the tenets that the alternative cinema proposes..."

Santiago de Benito, *Cinema 2002*, No. 8, October 1975, p. 62.

Un libro es un arma

"It doesn't interest us, I repeat. Burning the awning of a cinema or a miserable little bookshop is stupid. These things, if you are going to do them, have to be done properly, tearing out the evil at the roots. Once we come to power, we will organise our own Day of the Book, burning absolutely all the red trash that's lying around. A great pyre like when Hitler took power... Better: all the reds and all the Jews on the upper floors of the College of Architects in Barcelona and all the Marxist books on the lower floors. Set fire to all the books and there you are, everything sorted..."

Voice Off in the film, reading an interview with some 'ultra' youngsters, published in the press in 1974.

This film is an inventory of the attacks by members of the extreme right aimed at the world of culture during the last years of the Franco regime, the early '70s. The film covers the attacks against the Taller Picasso, the Cinc d'Ors bookshop, Nova Terra, Distribuciones del Enlace... It includes interviews with,

amongst others, Joaquim Romaguera (from the Viceversa bookshop), the publisher Beatriz de Moura and the writer Alfonso Carlos Comín. The latter explains “we live in a country where the cultural grievance is a matter of the first order, in which some fight using intelligence and others with the arms of violence, fire, the bomb and the terrorist attack... It is extraordinarily significant that these attacks... have begun to take place just when the country was emerging from a cultural desert, from the frustration that we had lived with for decades ... These gentlemen of Down with intelligence... are not aware that bell is tolling for the barbarians, that all of that is coming to an end... Culture can’t be buried. You can burn culture, incinerate it, but you can’t bury it, I mean, that at some time or another the ashes of the books become seeds that are scattered widely and reproduce...”

In February 1975, before shooting the film, an extensive dossier was drawn up entitled “Attacks against culture”, containing all the press cuttings relating to the attacks made since November 1971. By selling this dossier through clandestine circuits the finance required to make the film was obtained. The prologue, unsigned, was by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, who finished by saying: “...They are the same complicities that can be noted after any attempt to slow the irreversible march of the whole of the Spanish society towards democracy. The ‘ultras’ have attempted to stop this process by throwing up smoke screens and making lots of noise, trying to obscure the printed word and the filmed image. They have never understood that books and films are always closely bound up with the state of the historical consciousness of the society. And this consciousness, dynamic, critical, is unstoppable.”

“Given the difficulties implicit in this kind of report, the makers have managed to produce a living and real document that shows the state the premises that were attacked were left in... Simply for enabling us to contemplate this authentic demonstration of what alternative cinema should be, we should congratulate the collective who made it possible...”

Santiago de Benito, *Cinema 2002*, No. 8, October 1975, p. 63.

Can Serra, la objeción de conciencia en España

Until 1976, the only information that Spanish society had about conscientious objectors was that Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to do the compulsory military service. From time to time, the pro-Franco press referred to this, trying to make out that it was simply an isolated and ridiculous protest. However, it was true that there had been some non-religious objectors, and the case that received most publicity – though admittedly very limited – was perhaps that of Pepe Beúnza from Valencia.

At the end of 1975, just after the death of Franco, a group of fugitives from military service got in touch with the *Cooperativa*

de Cinema Alternatiu. They had decided to start a campaign in favour of conscientious objection; their intention was to spend a year doing community service in the neighbourhood of Can Serra and, then, call a Press Conference to explain their reasons and what they had done.

Can Serra was a newly formed neighbourhood in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, bordering Barcelona, in which many of the people who had arrived in the waves of immigration of the '60s had settled. The CCA accepted the proposal to document the various tasks and activities that the members of this group undertook during the year. Finally, shortly before the Press Conference, recordings were made of their opinions and arguments against war and military service. It was evident that once they made public their decision, they would be imprisoned. For this reason the film set out to give them a voice, and to publicise their intention to undertake a great campaign throughout Spain.

Perhaps this is the 'marginal film' of which the greatest number of copies were made, and that which had the greatest diffusion through a very wide variety of channels. Looking back from here, 2005, several aspects of the film are worth commenting on. At that time, in the '60s, when there was just one State-run pro-Franco television channel, Spanish society had no visual reference, depicting the brutish reality, of the wars that were being fought in the world, unlike now. That's why it was important to include images of the Vietnam War in the film *Can Serra*. The scenes of American soldiers, cigarette dangling from the mouth, having their photo taken as they stand with one foot on top of a Vietnamese corpse, or brutally beating and killing other soldiers at point-blank range, recall the sadly famous images shot in the prisons of Iraq. The film also made clear, in the mid-sixties, the dangers associated with that new consumer society whose development could already be glimpsed.

(c) Martí Rom