

NEW MAN/NEW IMAGE
CULTURE/COMMUNICATION AND LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITY

by

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B.A., World University, Puerto Rico
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ABSTRACT

This work attempts to present the development of a new self-image of Latin American iden-

tity as manifested in the New Latin American Cinema Movement. Also, it attempts to help articulate intentions, strategies, and final products that are being formulated throughout the continent. The main part of this thesis is a compilation/documentary (in the form of a 3/4 inch video cassette) comprised of interviews with filmmakers and excerpts

from these films as presented at the Second New Latin American Cinema Festival (held in Havana in November of 1980). This tape will illustrate the author's efforts to examine, present, and contribute to this growing movement.

Thesis Supervisor:
Muriel Cooper
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Preface

What follows is a summary of the main points which I'll be addressing in this thesis. This work is a direct outgrowth of my involvement with culture and communications throughout my professional career in graphics and journalism. My interests have always been both in the formal aspects of image-making and its content value or ideological function within society.

Traditionally, images were the inheritance and the treasures of a culture, used within the culture for specific purposes. They were understood by all of its members. New technologies and mass communications have changed that. Images now can



Hotel Nacional, Havana

transfer from one medium to another, from one culture to another at speeds that were unheard of just a few decades ago. These images have an incredible cultural impact on those that receive them. They shape the way we think, the way we feel, the way we respond to our environment,

This situation continues to be an issue within the international community. The United Nations, specifically UNESCO, has held many conferences and prepares position papers dealing with culture and communication as a means of national and personal development,¹ The transfer of culture from one society to another, its

impact, and its desirability have also been examined.

•In Latin America, images have traditionally been imported by an outsider or mimicked as a model for Latin America by Latin Americans. These images have come from other cultures. Their value and their relevance for cross-cultural communications, and for understanding each other cannot be denied. But if there is no two-way communication, then I feel that it's a detriment. What is happening is one culture dominating another which can only lead to the destruction of the receiving culture. I have been working in Latin America and have been directly

involved with the problem of imported images. Working in graphic design and visual communications, I have had to deal with this problem. This thesis deals specifically with the visual image as it is imported to Latin America from Europe, from North America, and from the Eastern countries. It deals with the problem in the respect that it presents the response of Latin American filmmakers and artists to this flood of information of images from the outside. In response to this problem, new images are being created, images from within the cultures of Latin America that are combatting in an effort to neutralize, for

the moment, this cultural assault. What I am presenting, essentially, is the character of this struggle for cultural manifestation, the aesthetics, the strategies, the methods that are being used in order to respond and to affirm a cultural identity for Latin America.

In Latin America, the arts have traditionally been an area of struggle, as have been other areas, such as economic and political. Because of the colonial past and in some cases neocolonial present of Latin America, its arts have had to struggle for a self-identity. This struggle is still going on. This struggle has been

going on in literature and in painting. It is now being addressed in the mass media which is the dominant media of our times. Therefore, this struggle, this battle, is now taking shape, is now being fought, is now being responded to throughout Latin America — not in an isolated sense, but as a movement. It is starting to define its parameters and it is my hope that in this work I will contribute to its understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The history of cinema in Latin America has been one of dependency on imported models. Since the very beginning of cinema history, Latin Americans have been subjected to films that either were imported from Europe or North America. Because of commercial interests, native cinema industries, where they have existed, have relied on emulating imported models that avoided reflecting the needs and realities of the majority of the people.

The old cinema, on the whole, functioned, at its best, as entertainment, which in most cases operates as a distraction from the real conditions affecting national life. And,



at its worst, manipulating the audience to identify with the dreams and fantasies of the ruling classes of Latin America, or, from the country from which the film originated.

Curiously enough, throughout this old cinema history, and occasionally in the present where Hollywood has attempted to portray Latin Americans, it has done so by stereotyping them as lazy-good-for-nothings, bloodthirsty bandits, buffoons, prostitutes, or as domestic help. This stereotyping goes back to a series of 'greaser' films (greaser being used synonymously for Latins), such as: "Tony the Greaser"² (1911), "Bronco Billy and the Greaser"²

(1914), and "The Greaser's Revenge"² (1914). This type of representation of the Latin image provoked the following response of Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, the Chilean Ambassador to the United States:

"Imagination in the production of motion pictures has clothed the men from the other Americas with a mental and material garb which only belong in the property room of a touring musical comedy."²

Recently, Latins in the United States have boycotted and protested the way they are being portrayed in Daniel Petrie's "Fort Apache, The Bronx," a film about a policeman's life working in the South Bronx,

This film portrays the Puerto Ricans as dope addicts, pimps, prostitutes, and criminals.

Given this historical context, it might be useful to apply Fanon's definition of culture.

"A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the actions through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence."³

Cinema, as do most cultural products, functions at least as much in what it does not say (i.e., in what it keeps quiet) as in what it does say. In recent history, some well-meaning attempts have been

made to show the poor conditions of the majority of Latin Americans. These efforts, however, for the most part have not shown the struggles that are part of the national realities. By not showing the struggle, these films weaken the ability to struggle and reinforce the self-image of misery. In Kenneth E. Boulding's book, The Image, subtitled "Knowledge and Life in Society,"⁴ we find this quote that might give us some indications of the needs of positive, realistic images and their role in the building of a society. "The individual or nation which has no sense of direction in time, no sense or

clear future ahead, is likely to be vacillating, uncertain in behavior, and to have a poor chance of survival."⁴ Of course, in the past, films have been made in Latin America that represented the needs and aspirations of the majority of its people, but only rarely, and in isolated cases,

Before we address the characteristics of the New Latin American Cinema Movement, it might be fruitful to review some of the more general thoughts that have influenced our understanding of modern media in the advanced industrial societies. In his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"⁵

(1970), Walter Benjamin guides us through the transition from a unique, one-of-a-kind work of art to the cinema, which made possible mass participation in culture. And, through the introduction of television, which can be used to organize the family around the TV set. In Latin America, as, indeed, anywhere in the world where a TV set can be reached by a satellite signal, we can be distracted while we are sold a commodity and/or an ideology. In Hans Magnus Enzensberger's essay, "Constituents for a Theory of the Media"⁶ (1974), addresses the potential that the new media has for democratizing society. His thesis

depends on the media in control by a majority and not by a privileged minority of intellectuals and commercial interests as it now stands.

The attempts to create alternative channels for reaching and involving the popular and marginal sectors of the population has been one of the unifying characteristics of the New Latin American Cinema Movement. These attempts have varied from country to country depending on the state of the existing channels of distribution and depending on the political climate of the country. This occurs through organizing screenings in disenfranchised 'barrios', film

clubs, union and student organizations, or through 'film acts', where a film is viewed and then analyzed as to its relevance to a given social situation, which in some countries can lead to arrests or worse. In some of the countries, attempts have been made at creating a popular cinema through the existing distribution channels controlled by commercial interests.

The role and impact of television is another area of growing importance to the filmmakers. The New Cinema is united in its awareness of the necessity for continuity in representing an alternative view of national life.

In his essay, "Television and the Politics of Liberation,"⁷ Enzensberger points out the capacity of television for creating the illusion of democracy by affording us with the impression that we are participating in national, or even in an international dialogue.

Media theorist, Louis Althusser, in his essay, "Ideology and the Ideological Apparatus of the State," in his book, Lenin and Philosophy,⁸ describes this one-way dialogue inherent in the media: "Ideology equals imaginary relations to real relations." This so-called 'objective', detached representation of reality, pretends to present people and things on

the screen as if they were not aimed at the audience, as if it did not matter at all whether you were a witness. The fact is that what is on the screen is indeed constructed so that it plays on the audience's feelings, dreams, and fantasies at the expense for a more balanced and intellectually critical presentation. Althusser⁸ presents us with the difference between media that is used as an ideological instrument and authentic art, which does not hide, but instead makes us aware of or feel the "ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes,"⁸



In Godard's film, "Vent d'Est (Wind from the East)," a young, pregnant woman with a movie camera asked Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha, who was standing at a crossroad, "Excuse me for interrupting your class struggle, but could you please tell me the way towards political cinema?" Rocha pointed in front of him, then behind and said, "That way is the cinema of aesthetic adventure and philosophical inquiry, while this way is the Third World cinema, a dangerous cinema, divine and marvelous, where the questions are practical ones like production, distribution, training three hundred filmmakers to make six

hundred films a year for Brazil alone, to supply one of the world's biggest markets." The woman starts off down the path to the Third World cinema, stops, kicks a red ball she sees on the road and gets off anew in a different direction on the road of aesthetic adventure and philosophical inquiry.

The metaphor of the crossroads in Godard's film and Rocha's interpretation of the Third World cinema may be too far down the road of history to fit the complexities of the situations that the New Latin American Cinema faces in contemporary Latin America. For to understand the new cinema

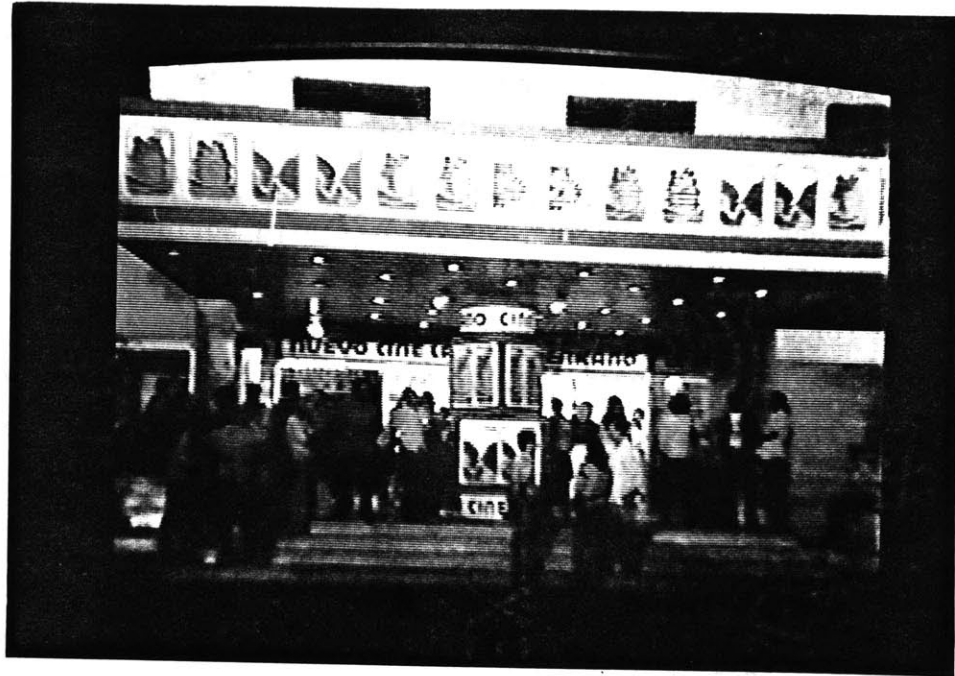
movement we must ask: Where does each filmmaker stand on the mosaic of roads that make up the Latin American reality? The contradictions that arise are many, yet there is a direction that attracts this movement.

A new cinema is coming out of Latin America and places itself as a medium for raising consciousness and as a medium for critical analysis which acts as an element towards the transformation and unification of the 'new man' within the new Latin American society.

The concrete circumstances affecting each of the countries where the New Cinema operates

give birth to the variety of goals and responses that are adapted by the filmmakers. The New Cinema is responding by experimenting with new and traditional cinema forms. The movement is as eclectic as necessary in order to accept and promote change.

Whatever the diversity of the movement, its highs and lows in the quality of its productions, there are common characteristics which unite it. The following is a compilation of those characteristics: its resistance to cultural domination, either local or imported; its role in rescuing the cultural memory of the continent; the role of cultural identity



Cuban Film Institute

as a necessary element for just interdependence and unification; its emphasis on ethnography and on the daily national life of the people; its concern with the historical context, both as a cinematic form and in its relationship to its audience; its analytic approach in presenting cause and effect; its promotion of active participation of its audience, both emotionally and intellectually; its attempts at being a catalyst and an agent for individual and social change; its anti-racist and anti-imperialist stance, its Pan American and internationalist outlook is based on cooperation, both in terms of human

and technological resources as in distribution and financing; its technological flexibility and adaptability; and, its awareness of its function in both its roles as avant-garde cinema and popular cinema.

The interviews that follow are translations from my video tape and they are included here in the order in which they appear. The interviews and film clips have been structured and edited to give an overview and to represent the personal concerns of the filmmakers, the variety of cinematic styles that the movement encompasses, and to indicate the historical and actual development of the movement in each of the coun-

tries. They are responses to specific national situations and to continental-wide concerns that are defining the New Cinema Movement.

FERNANDO BIRRI
Argentina

Twenty-five years have past. It is a quarter of a century for the New Latin American Cinema. That, in reality, seems a much longer time. Because in a quarter of a century, there have been condensed tendencies, works, authors, films, that in the initial moment were only from Argentina, from Brazil, and Mexico, and that were in some way contradicted in its common areas by its ignorance of the realities of Latin America by this new Latin American cinema. And, most of all, by the new films that came afterwards. For the innumerable amount of works that, like a great river pulled, brought this new Latin American cinema.





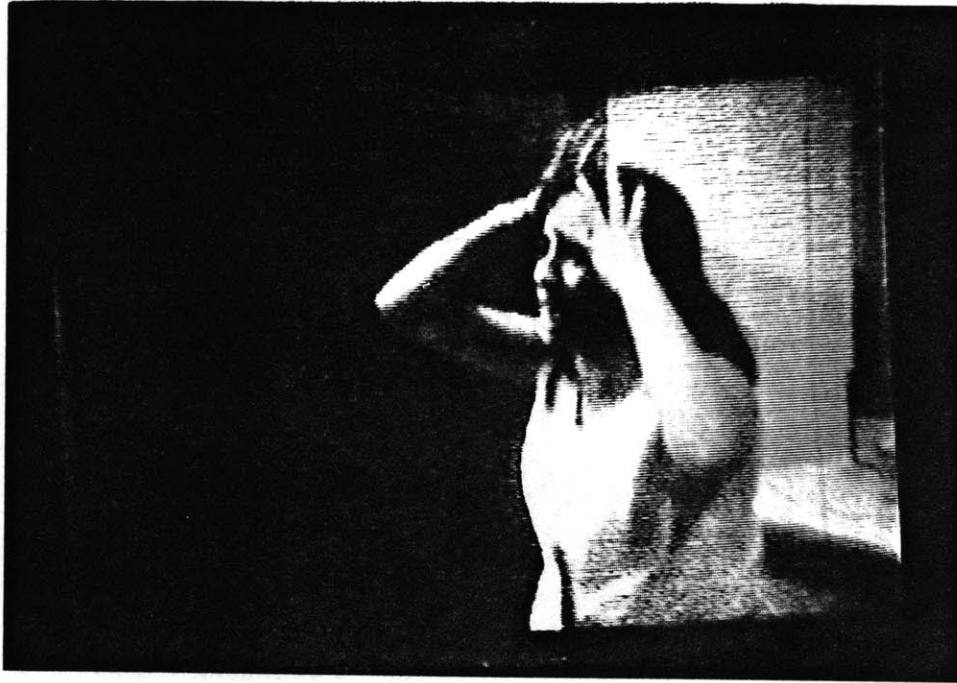
"Tire die"

Twenty-five years — that is not enough time — when measured in days, hours, seconds, of efforts, struggle, sacrifice, to bring forth a new cinema. In most of our countries of this great American nation to bring forth a new cinema out of a world.

PASTOR VEGA
Cuba

The fact is that the movement exists organically across the whole continent and the islands of the Caribbean, and it needs a place to meet, a place where we can see each other's work and reflect over our own work, see the work which we have produced throughout the year in our respective countries, share experiences, listen to criticism, project as to what we are going to do in the future, what challenges we should address —





that is to give a certain organization to this new Latin American cinema and, obviously, this needs to be organized around a film festival and theoretical seminar.

"Retrato de Teresa"

MIGUEL LITTIN
Chile (exiled)

The new Latin American cinema is the one that collects the popular memory in the history of the continent. In the reality of the struggles of its countries, those elements that serve to raise consciousness of liberation and of struggle. It is that cinema that is committed with the causes of liberation of the Latin America, Is the one that attempts to integrate leaving aside localisms to accede to the great country — to be a cinema of our America? Is the cinema of battle, the cinema that struggles and denounces? It denounces the evils which our countries are oppressed by, but also it is the poetry and beauty of our





"La Tierra Prometida"

traditions, in the beauty and
profundness of our culture.
For the aesthetic elements, to
elaborate a new form of saying,
a new form of speaking, a new
form of seeing the world —
that is the form of the Latin
American self.

JULIO GARCIA ESPINOSA
Cuba

We understood that the technology is a medium, and not an end in itself; and, on the other hand, not to reduce ourselves to impotency because many of our filmmakers do not have the necessary resources, funds — nor do they have the means of getting the necessary equipment so that they can make a film that culturally can be legitimate. That is why we can't reduce ourselves to impotency if we don't have certain technology. You can always make films with whatever cameras and whatever technology you have. There are times that a small documentary, filmed in conditions that are adverse, but which touches a reality that

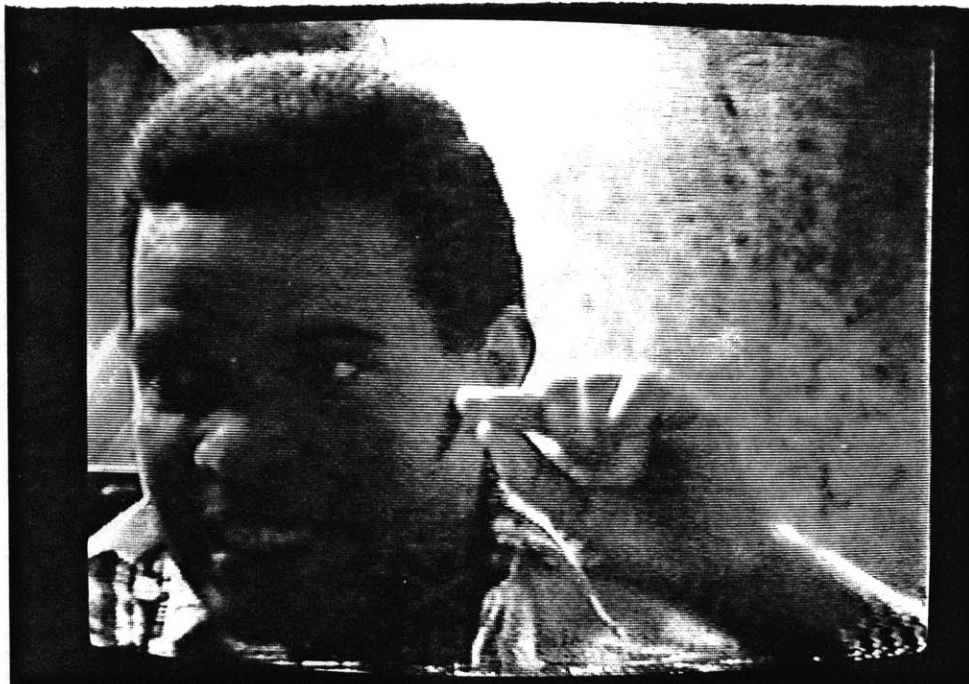




culturally is important for our countries. It is more significant and relevant than a film made with all of the technology that is required today.

JIMMY SIERRA
Dominican Republic

We are all so characterized by the systematic use of white and black — not only because of the technical problems and the material difficulties, but because often reality can't be beautified. It must be treated as it is. And if we overuse color, we are just beautifying it. We are just giving color to misery and hunger, and this should not be done. Also, the employment of 8mm and 16mm — and now video. Because these are formats and procedures they do not require great investments; and, as we know, poor countries as a consequence have poor cinema. A lot of people are surprised because they don't see super productions. The





super productions require large investments, and there are millions of dollars involved that we need to educate those who need to learn how to read and write in America. Then we need medicine to supply to hundreds of thousands of people who are dying of fundamental sickness. Then we need to feed children, senior citizens, men, women — who are dying of starvation a few steps from the United States of North America. In a way, these are some essential characteristics of the new Latin American cinema; and, in reality, it's the only one because there was no old Latin American cinema. Only foreigners were doing cinema in

Latin America and passing it off as Latin American cinema, making us accustomed to their images and their form of cinema — where there is no Latin American reality.

KARVEY DUTTA
U.S.A./Granada

The claim that Latin American cinema and cinema from the Caribbean is purely political, and therefore devoid of art, is a senseless one. Each cinema reflects a country, a society, a people — a certain environment. If you take El Salvador, for example, there is a short film about what is happening in El Salvador today at the festival. Of course it's a political film, it's about the struggle that is going on there right now —





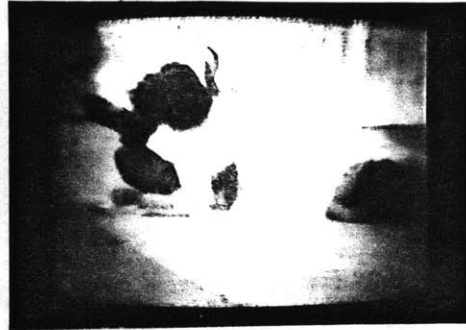
but, at the same time, it has its art too. It's shot with little means, but it's shot well. It's put together nicely, and it reflects what's going on in El Salvador.

to his new head of state, the new man in power can be seen in some way to be like international volunteers. Scenes of pain Salvadoran mothers seeing their husbands and sons dying. When people that had been killed are buried by their own people. Also, the calendar

DIEGO DE LA TEJERA
El Salvador/Puerto Rico

The most important thing is unity among the filmmakers, especially in critical regions like Central America where there is a great need for crews — a need for people that can work, equipment, and resources. These are poor countries, revolutions that are poor, that need from all of us that can in some way contribute like international volunteers. Scenes of pain, Salvadoran mothers seeing their husbands and sons dying. Wakes where people that had been killed are buried by their own people. Also, the culmination





of another wake where a boy laments the death of his father and how he joins the popular militia of liberation and then joins the war. The boy is only twelve years old.

"El Salvador"

NORA DE IZUCE
Peru

It's a cinema that, if viewed without knowing all the struggle that lies behind its making, then it's not understood and does not reach you. We have so much influence — all of us from North American and European cinema — that usually there is a rejection to this cinema. But I think that that rejection is due to the lack of understanding of the problems involved. If Latin American cinema is seen as something belonging to you that is struggling to emerge, simply by understanding — by feeling this — I am sure that it will be seen as something different. It will be seen with a feeling of involvement. It's something



that belongs to all of us. It touches all of us. It's our cinema, and when they see it they will say it's our cinema. This film was made in a mar-

ginal neighborhood in Lima, Peru, that goes by the name of El Salvador. It's about the problems of children having to abandon their studies to enter



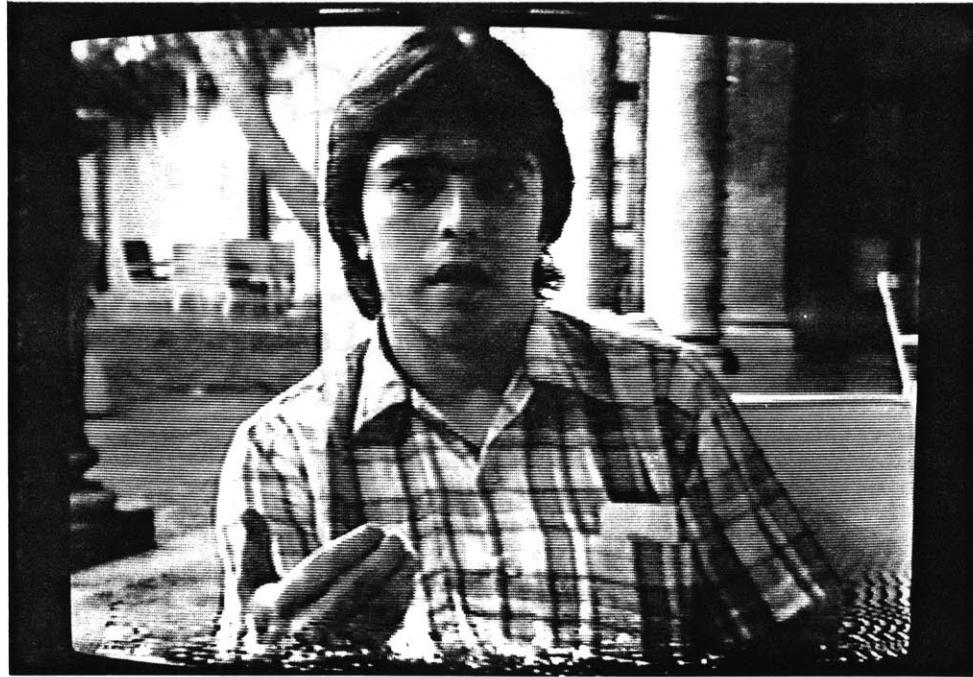
"Manos Pequeñas"

very early into productive work, with them. The script was prepared with them. They themselves act in the film. It was made with very limited technical resources, but I

think the results have been very good, and it points out this new approach in film. Indeed, in the only festival of Educational Television in Peru at the Catholic University, this film won the public preference award, which is always more important than the jury's award. We presented it in Brazil where it was liked very much and they were very interested because it presents the problems in a very straightforward and clear way without being demagogic. Besides being fictitious, it is based on statistics on the situation of children in Peru.

JASON JOHANSON
Chicano/U.S.A.

This new cinema also combats Hollywood's past and stereotypes where they describe the Mexicans as either lazy or gangsters — if the woman is not a servant, she is a prostitute. As we all know, there is a humanity of the Mexican/American that must be seen,



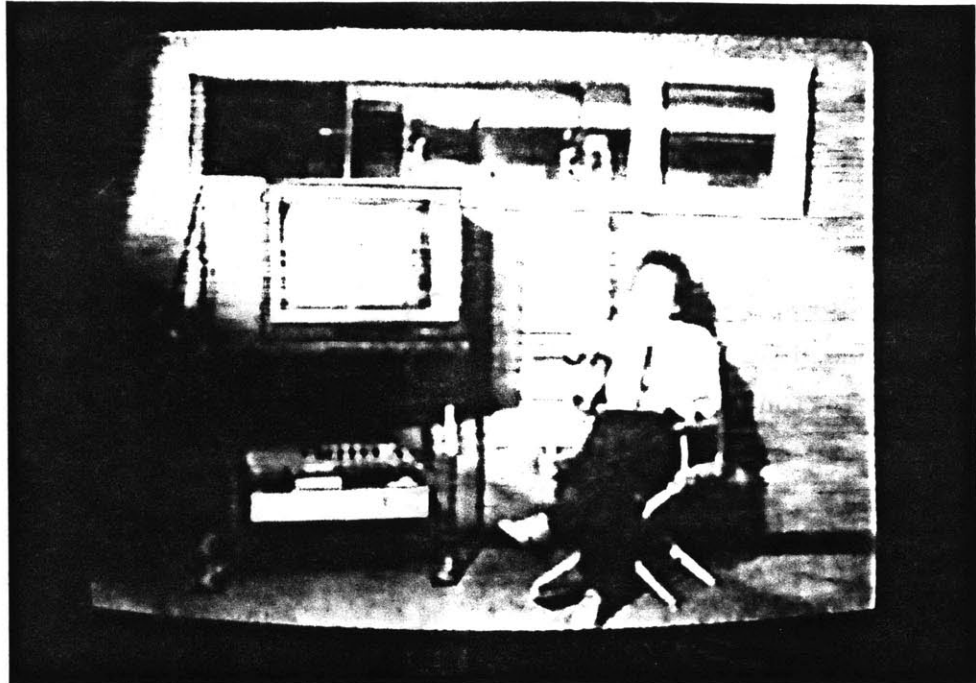
EDUARDO DIAZ
Chicano/U.S.A.

Well, the initial purpose is the rescue of our cultures, our roots, and our reality because of the way racism functions, how it functioned, and how it will function in the future. Racism has discriminated against us in relation to the projection of our images on television, radio, and in film. Therefore, our work, our principle purpose has been to rescue all that has been forgotten.



JOSE LUIS SEDANO
Chicano/U.S.A.

This film, entitled "The Touch," was produced in Los Angeles by a group of Chicanos that were very preoccupied and still are with the use of spray paint that is used by young people, not only to get inebriated, but also used positively to express themselves through their art (mural painting). Now, when we speak of the aesthetic of the Chicano cinema, it



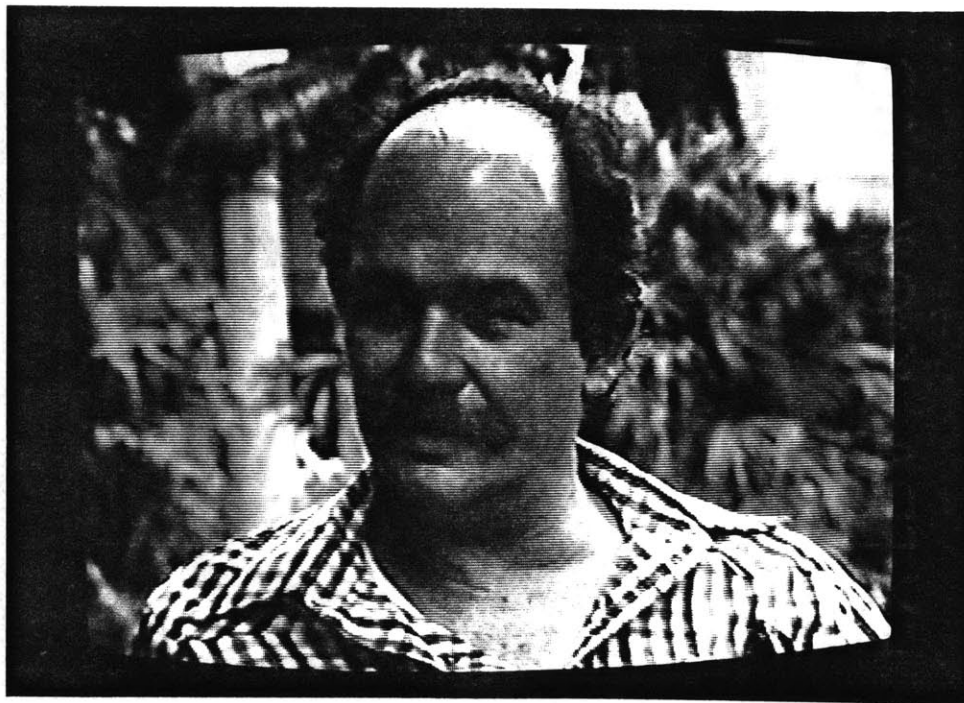


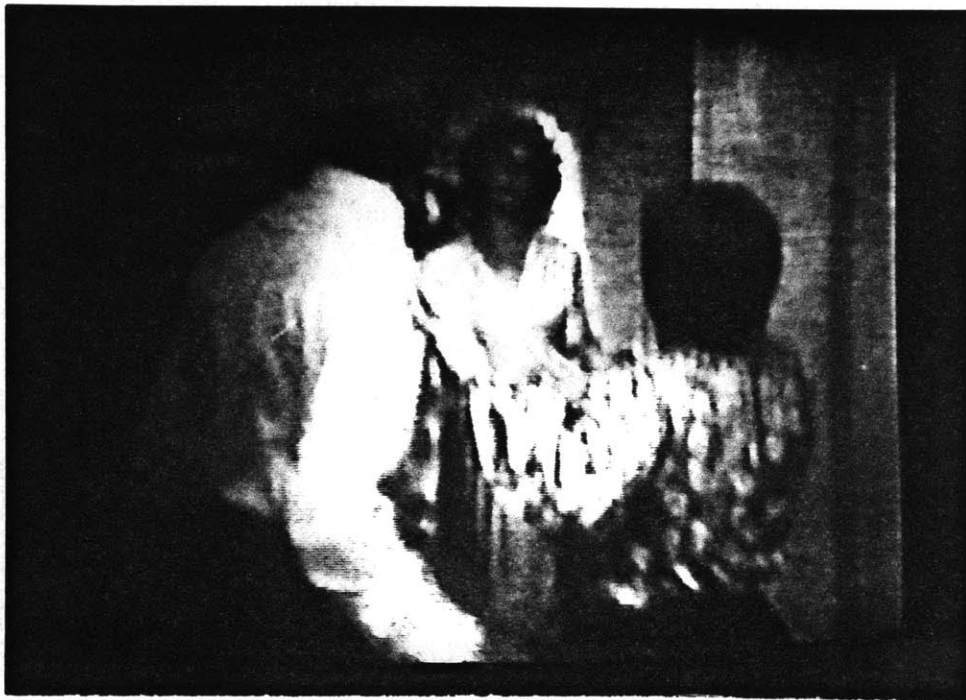
is very realistically based on the daily lives of the Mexican/Americans, as well as being surrealistic too, which demonstrates itself in this film entitled "The Touch."

"El Toque"

JACOBO MORALES
Puerto Rico

The time has past in Puerto Rico for making efforts. We don't pretend to make efforts, but to make films. Films produced with seriousness, with dignity — films that we feel comfortable in exporting and of which we are proud of. I think that with "God Unites Them" we have achieved that. "God Unites Them" is a very straightforward film. It was based on Puerto Rican realities in terms of the economic limitations and in terms of distribution. Like I said, it is a very simple film, but made with great care — made seriously with Puerto Rican actors and technicians. Also, this film has broken a lot of myths,



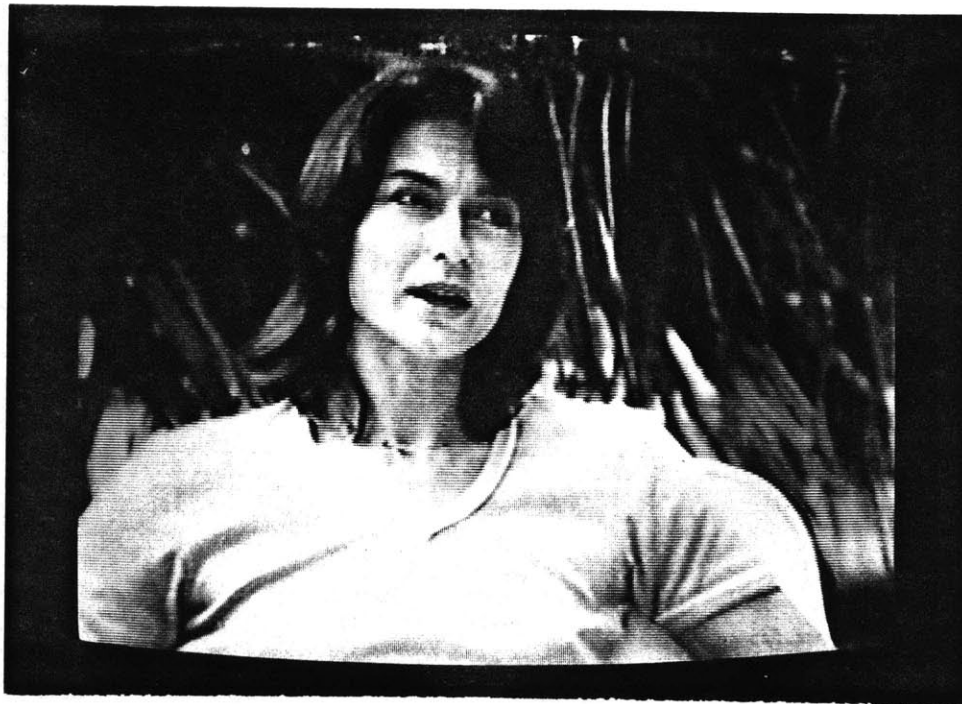


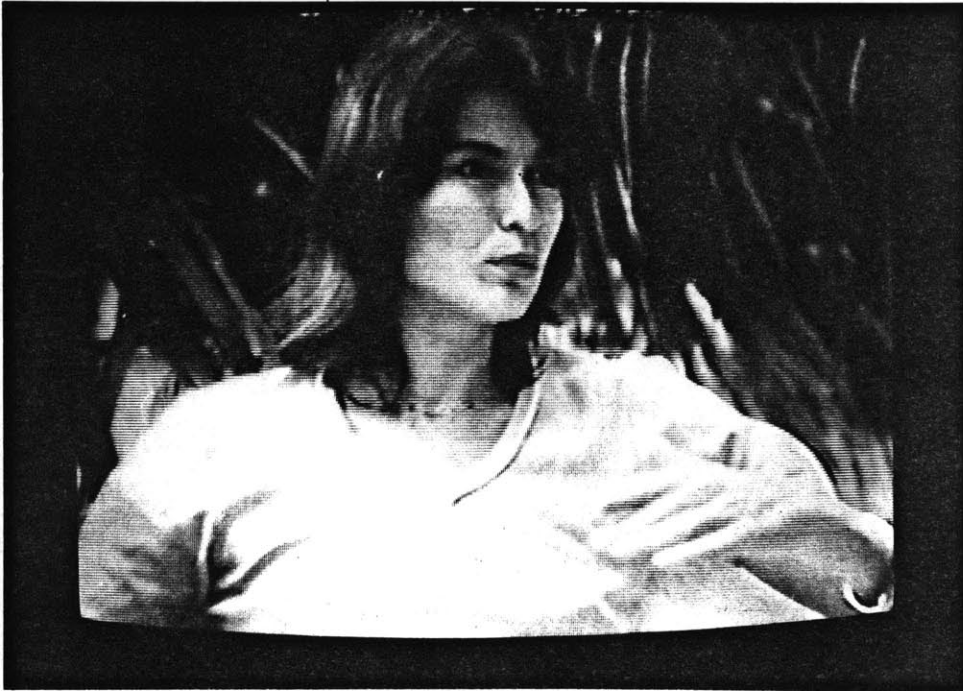
because in Puerto Rico another of the obstacles that we had to face in the past was that the principle exhibitors did not want to exhibit our films because they said that people came only to see films in English.

"Dios Los Cria"

SOLVIEG HOOGESTELJA
Venezuela

Women of today — for example, the ones that have made films in Europe, as well as the United States and Latin America — have opted to select as a central figure another woman. A question that has been raised more than once is why I select men as main figures and protagonists. There is a profusion of men in the film, and I interpret it as discrimination if I am not allowed to make films about men, about native men — just as men have made films about women. In my film, the woman is defined uniquely and exclusively as a sex object. She never has another alternative. It is done intentionally because I feel a great

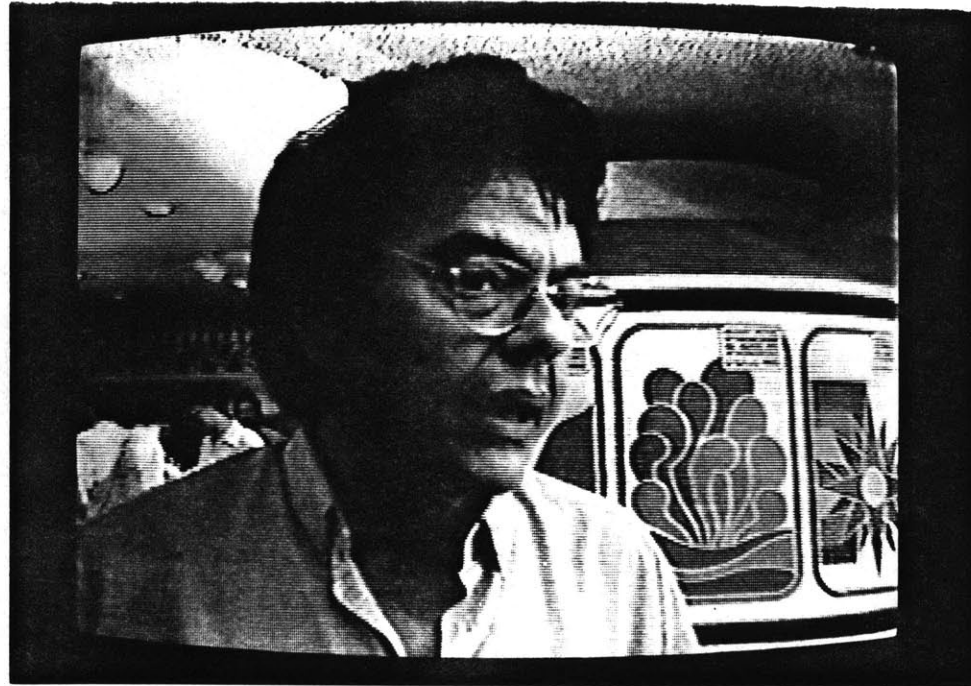




limitation. At the same time, I think the Latin American woman is the one that has to gain a lot of headway. There are many professional women. They are the head of the family. They have great responsibilities.

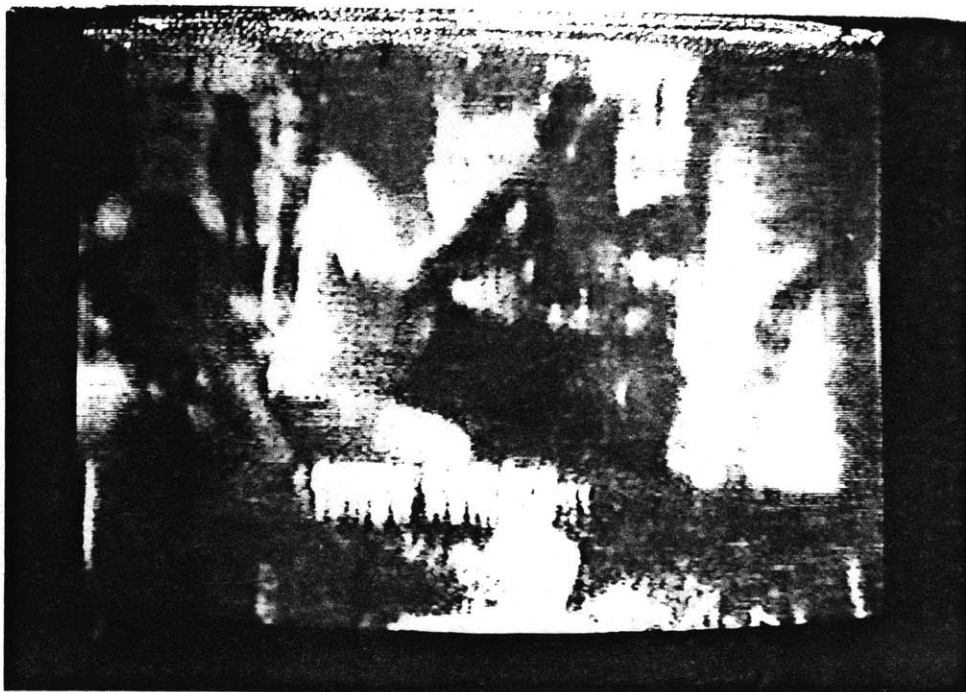
ZELITO VIANA
Brazil

The new Brazilian cinema — or 'cinema novo' — started around 1960 during the crisis in the cinema industry. The cinema in Brazil is very old, and it started about 80 years ago. But, in the beginning of the 1960s, with the liberation of the politics that existed with the popular government, and all that, Brazilian music started to become very popular, even though the film industry was still not in existence then. The new cinema started at that time and was recognized in the world as 'cinema novo' of Brazil. We made about 20 films that had a lot of importance, as well as influence in the new Latin



cinema, I have here in the Festival a film that is entitled "Land of the Indians." I found an old Indian woman from a tribe that does not

exist any more. She is the only survivor from her tribe. When I tape-recorded her and played back what I had recorded, She heard her voice and started to



"Tierra de los Indios"

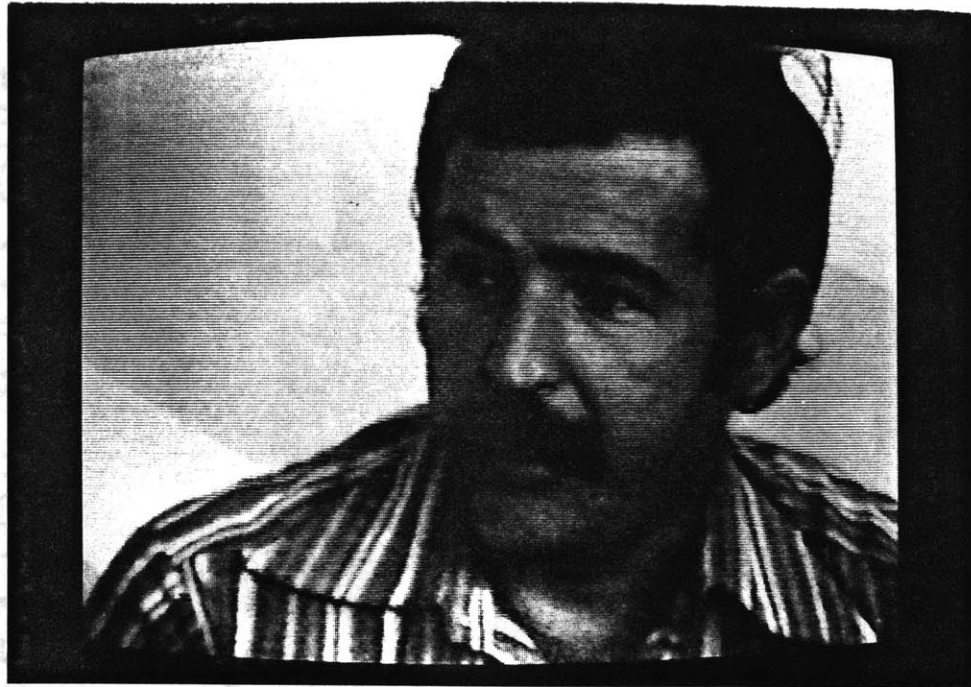
talk back to the recorder, thinking that there were other people from her tribe that was still alive. This is something that is very sad and

pathetic. She was the only survivor from a genocide which was carried out on this tribe that was once part of Brazil's culture. What we are trying

to make this year, in the '80s, I think, is going to be the struggle of the filmmakers in Brazil to obtain space on television. I think that television is the essential medium to gain communication among ourselves. I am sure that, through television, we will be able to communicate with a major quantity of our public and with major efficacy.

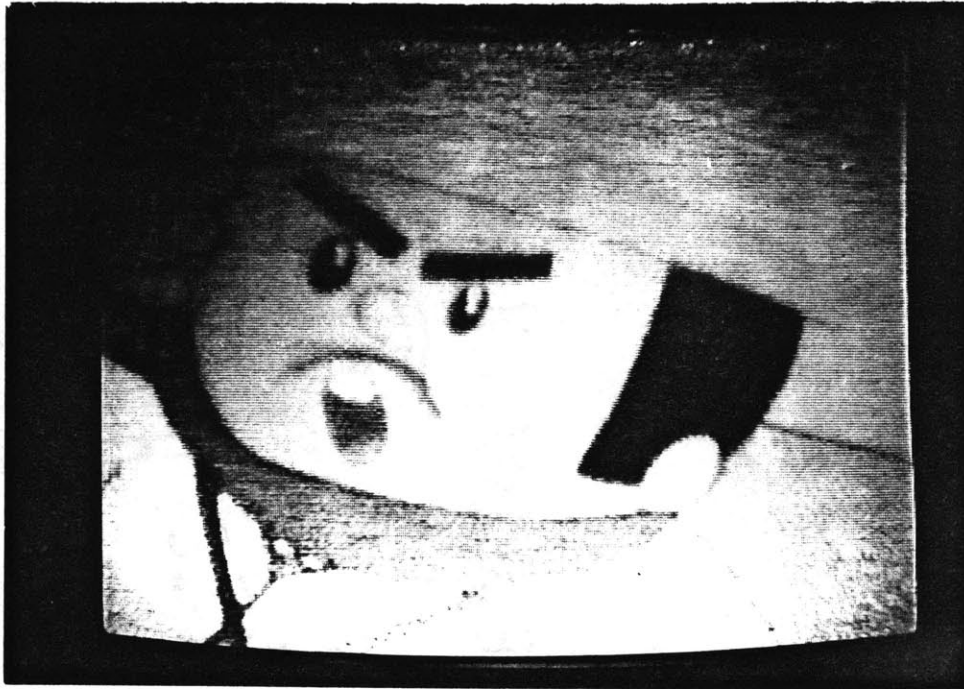
JUAN PEDRON
Cuba

In Cuba, animation did not exist — only commercials and advertising. When the revolution triumphed, I was only twelve years old. I remember all the drawings that I see to see were of Tom and Jerry, Mickey Mouse, and the drawings of Hannah and Barbera. I also remember that I had a certain quantity of comics like Superman. I used to draw soldiers and horses of the North American Civil War, as well as the Indians. When I was 20 years old, I had decided that I would like to create a Cuban character that struggles for the liberation of the country. I found out that I didn't have those elements, I didn't know what the arms looked like,



nor the military dress. It was simple because all of that was underneath those magazines and all that cinema that I used to see when I was a child.

GRADE SCHOOL STUDENT
Cuba



"El Pidio Valdes"

Well, honestly, I prefer 'El Pideo Valdez' because it teaches us moments in our history that we did not live, even though it teaches in a humorous way. I also learned a lot from a film that is called "The Last Supper," That film reflects how the foremen treated their slaves in order to make them work. When the slaves realized that, they started a rebellion against the foremen. There are parts of the film that are historic, and, at the same time, comic.

PATRICIO GUZMAN
Chile (exiled)

How should we face the new Latin American cinema? It should be faced like any other cinema. It is a cinema that is accessible to all audiences. It is a cinema where there is action, intrigue, and suspense. It's a normal cinema. It is not strange or extravagant. It is absolutely normal, with ups and downs like any other cinema. But, it is a common cinema — a normal cinema — that exhorts the cultures of Latin America, the values of our idiosyncrasies, and, of all things, it is anti-racist and anti-imperialist. A cinema that rescues all that is of value in our countries. It is a normal cinema and very





"La Batalla de Chile"

pleasant to see, and which I invite all people to see. I made the "Battle of Chile" in seven years. There are three parts. Three films that last two hours each and six hours of film that deals with the revolutionary process that destabilized the government of President Allende. This film has been presented in almost all the festivals of the world. It has won seven major international prizes. It is a film that pretends to deliver elements for the analysis of that period of great importance for the Chilean people.

FOOTNOTES

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9. MacBean, James Roy. Film and Revolution. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975:116.

COUNTRY

INTERVIEW

FILM

Argentina

Fernando Birri

"Tire die"

Brazil

Zelito Viana

"Tierra de los Indios"

Chicano

Jason Johanson

"Raíses de Sangre"

Eduardo Diaz

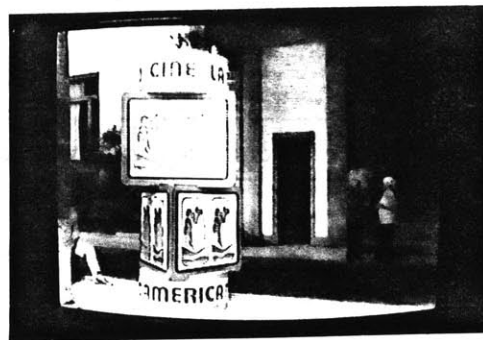
Chile

Miguel Littin

"La Tierra Prometida"

Patricio Guzman

"La Batalla de Chile"



COUNTRY

INTERVIEW

FILM

Cuba

Pastor Vega
Juan Padron
Felipe Barraza
Julio Garcia Espinosa

"Retrato de Teresa"
"El Pidío Valdes"
"Cayita"
"Por un cine imperfecto"

Costa Rica

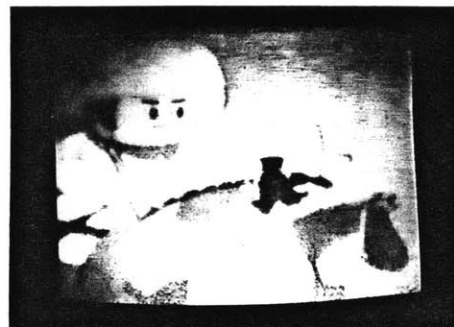
Patricia Howell
Eugenia Piza

"Nuestro Maravilloso
Mundo de la T.V,"

Granada/U,S,A.

Karvey Dutta

"Granada Nobody's
Backyard"



COUNTRY

INTERVIEW

FILM

Mexico

Sergio Olhovich

"Ilovisna"

José Estrada

"Matan el Leon"

Nicaragua

Carlos Ibarra

"Victoria de un pueblo
en Armas"

Peru

Nora de Izuce

"Manos Pequeñas"

Puerto Rico

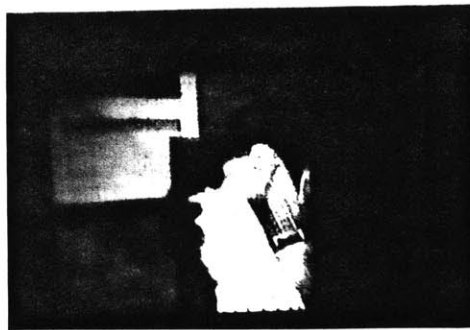
Jacobo Morales

"Dios los Cria"

José Garcia

"Festival"

"Destino Manifiesto"



COUNTRY

INTERVIEW

FILM

Dominican Republic

Jimmy Sierra

"El Hollo de Ciulin"

Arturo Matos Uribe

U.S.A.

Allen Francovich

"On Company Business"

Venezuela

Solvieg Hoogesteija

"Manoa"



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