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The Revolution is History: Filming the Past in Mexico and Cuba

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As is their nature, social revolutions in Mexico and Cuba dramatically altered the lives of millions.[1] During the «effervescent» periods which followed the uprisings's triumphs, political and socioeconomic transformation bettered the lot of most people, and cultural creativity flourished; unfortunately, the revolutions were later deformed into dictatorships -of party in Mexico, of individual in Cuba.[2] Caught up in the midst of these soul-shaking metamorphoses, filmmakers have reflected critically on the legitimizing myths of the New Orders, as well as participated enthusiastically in their construction. The revolution itself is the founding legend, the keystone chronicle of these cultures; it is history in the simplest sense of the word, for the films are reconstructions of times past. I want to examine how some of the best directors of the better films in Mexico and Cuba have portrayed the revolutions in their countries, as well as interrogate their use of history in constructing concepts of nation and identity. I also wish to focus on how the filmic visions of both revolution and history have changed as the post-revolutionary States have mutated from their open, pluralistic beginnings into institutionalized, reified authorities. Here, one of the most interesting facets is to observe how the representations of history varies between «histories», heterogenous and pluralist stories about the past, and «History», master narratives of totalizing epics designed to legitimate the present.

These are unfashionable reflections, caught as we are in a «post- modern» world of neo-liberal orthodoxy which denies both the possibility of revolutionary transformation and the relevance of history. Nonetheless, I believe that change is at least conceivable, and I am struck by the continuing fascination of the film-going public for historical pictures. In the only research I know of which attempts to quantify the number of films set in the past, Garth Jowett estimates that some 40% of the movies produced between 1950-1961 were historical.[3] More recently, the extraordinary success of Titanic -in terms of being able to find the 270 million dollars for the production, as well as itssubsequent box office triumph -would seem to indicate that people want to see the past on the screen. Infact, *Titanic* may be just that proverbial tip of reality, for ten of the past thirteen Oscar-winning films are set in the past, as were all the nominees for 1998.[4]

Historical cinema is of particular importance in a revolutionary context. Social revolution sweeps away old ways of doing things, and makes problematic the very structures of identity which until that cataclysmic moment had reigned unquestioned. Confronted with this sudden melting away of all that seemed so solid, cultural figures such as filmmakers attempt to provide alternative versions of their history, as well as offer new visions of this reality-in-transformation which they are living. At odds with the past from which they have sprung, they have a need to give *their* rendition of how they got to where they are, a version presumably different from both the prior histories produced within their cultures and that offered by Hollywood. Moreover, filmmakers will confront different historical moments, and individual contexts, in which to work. It would seem that the better cinema is produced during the period shortly after the triumph of the revolution, when cultural effervescence results in transcendant cinematographic explorations into the national past; the Russian Revolution offers an indisputable example in *Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925). However, as institutionalization sets in, film is captured by the bureaucrats and put to the service of legitimizing the new rulers; one result is Stalinist movies such as *Chapayev* (Vasiliev, 1934).[5]

More than sixty films have been made in which the Mexican Revolution serves as the context for the movie's story.[6] The best films made on this struggle are *El compadre Mendoza* (1933) and *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1935), both directed by Fernando de Fuentes.[7] Contrary to the great majority of movies about this event, these works by de Fuentes do not in any way glorify the civil war and the people -usually male leaders, rarely women -who made it. Rather, looking at *Mendoza* and *Vámonos* in terms of Mexico's best known twentieth-century muralists, I find them more in the tone of Jose Clemente Orozco's pessimism than the officialist optimism of Diego Rivera or the Marxist stridency of David Alfaro Siqueiros: they emphasize the pain and torment, rather than the transformations; they exude a disenchantment with the revolution's shortcomings, instead of celebrating its achievements.

De Fuentes's choice to focus on the ultimate losers in this conflict has interesting implications, because they also happen to be the forces with the greatest social commitment. *Compadre Mendoza* awakens sympathy for Zapatistas, the agrarian radicals who followed Emiliano Zapata. *Vámonos* focuses on the Villistas, men who joined up with Pancho Villa, the popular leader in the north. His unique portrayal of these forces may have resulted from the fact that he made these films in what was still a period of intense cultural creativity: that immediately preceeding the accesion to power of Lázaro Cárdenas, and during his first years of the presidency he held from 1934 to 1940. In this sense, these films are as much a part of the revolutionary effervescence as the murals or Tina Modotti's photography.

When de Fuentes directed *Mendoza* and *Vámonos,* the ideological consolidation of the 1940s -a key element of the Revolutionary institutionalization- had not yet produced the official history which would become characteristic in films about this conflict. The most pervasive officialist myth of the Mexican Revolution is that this was a prolonged struggle of the Revolutionaries -Emilio Zapata, Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza, Francisco Madero, and Alvaro Obregón- against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) and its counter-revolutionary reincarnation, Victoriano Huerta (1913-1914). Concerned to legitimate the ruling party as sole heir of the founding cataclysm, the official account conflates the Revolutionaries into the same camp, eliding the fact that the differences between these parties were almost as great as those they had with the Díaz-Huerta governments, and that this struggle was defined more by the warfare between the Revolutionaries than by the battle of Old and New Orders.[8] Movies made after 1940 would almost always be set in either the absolutely unproblematic period of 1913-1914, when the Revolutionary forces were united against the evil usurpation of Victoriano Huerta, or in an abstracted, ahistorical situation, where the exact allegiances of the protagonists remain unclear.

El compadre Mendoza narrates the travails of Rosalío Mendoza, a *hacendado* caught between the warring forces. His survival depends on feigning allegiance to whichever force appears on his doorstep: when the Zapatistas arrive at his hacienda, he celebrates their appearance, feeds the troops, and dines the officers under a photo of Zapata; with the Huertistas, he does the same, except beneath an image of Huerta; at the moment the Carrancistas replace the Huertistas as the anti-Zapatista force in the area, he exhibits a photo of Carranza when his followers are present. [Frame enlargements 1, 2, 3] .On the night of Mendoza' s wedding, he receives a surprise visit from the Zapatistas. A Huertista officer is present, and Mendoza is at the point of being executed when he is saved by a Zapatista general, Felipe Nieto. They become such close friends that eventually Mendoza and his wife ask Felipe to be their son's *compadre.* The war intensifies, and the *hacendado's* plan to take his family to the safety of Mexico City is made impossible when the train carrying his entire harvest is bummed. The Carrancistas offer Mendoza enough money to abandon his hacienda, in return for betraying Felipe; as Mendoza and his family escape, Felipe is killed.

The film's bitter finale was a sardonic reflection on the opportunism of the New Order inaugurated by Carranza. However, de Fuentes argued that his real interest had been in finding a Mexican aesthetic to replace the customary Hollywood happy ending:

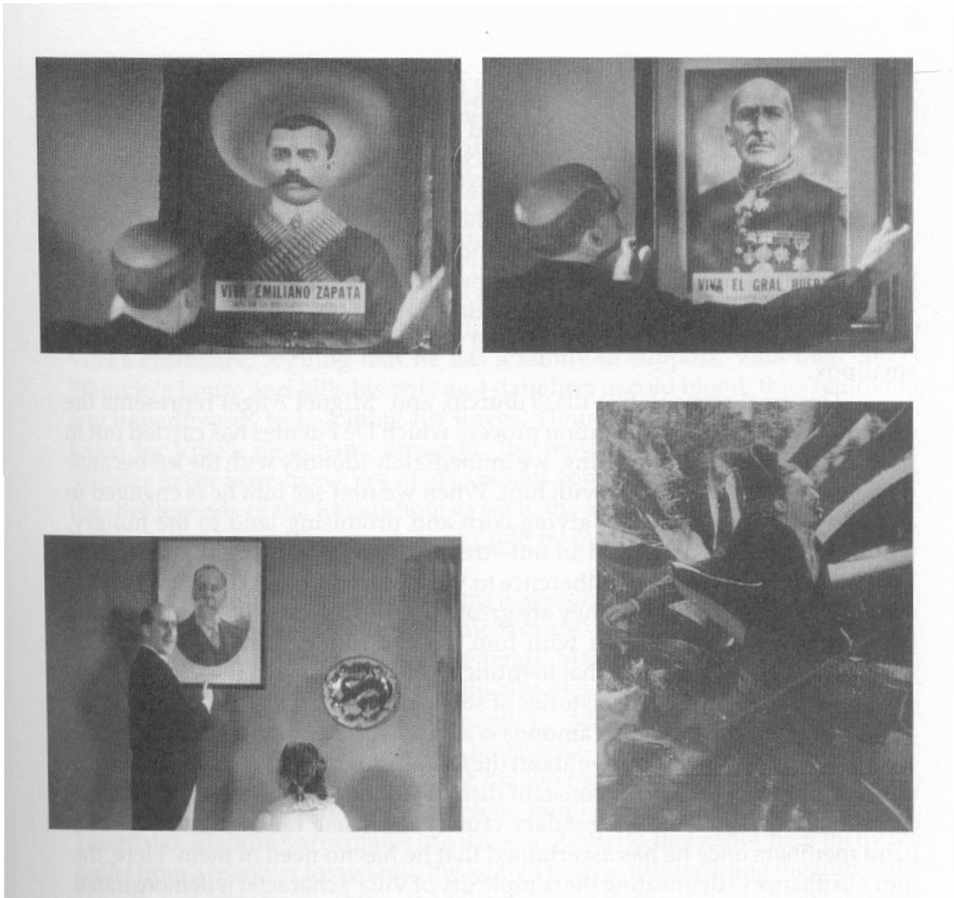
> We believe that our public is sufficiently cultured to be able to stand reality's bitter cruelty .It would have been easy to make the story so that the final outcome was happy, as we're accustomed to see in America [sic] films; but we think that Mexican cinema ought to be a faithful reflection of our severe and tragic way of being... not a poor imitation of Hollywood.[9]

De Fuentes evinces a clear sympathy for the zapatistas. The movie opens with a tracking shot that follows what appears to be a ploughed furrow; but, as the camera catches up with the «plough,» we see that the «furrow» was made by the rifle's butt an exhausted Zapatista is dragging. This opening sequence serves to create identification with the Zapatistas, the «underdogs» for whom the audience naturally roots against the more powerful forces of Huerta and Carranza. However, the sharpest difference with official history in the film is the fact that the Carrancistas take on the role of the enemy earlier occupied by the Huertistas. Embodying the Zapatista point of view, the movie's heresy consists of equating the two factions; to place in the same camp Carranza, the Revolution's winner, and Huerta, the usurper, would be anathema in almost any form of Mexican history, filmic or written, up until very recent times.

If *El compadre Mendoza* demystifies Carrancismo as a revolutionary movement, *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* «demythifies» one of the great legends of that struggle. *Vámonos* follows the fates of six campesinos, «Los Leones de San Pablo» -Tiburcio, Melitón, Martín, Máximo, Rodrigo, and Miguel Angel -who join up with Villa's forces after they are harassed and threatened by the Huertistas who occupy their *pueblo.* The Leones encounter Villa distributing corn from a train, and he accepts them in his army. During one battle, Máximo rides across an open field and ropes a machine-gun, only to die after giving it to Villa. The next to be killed is Martin, again heroically while blowing a hole in the enemy's

fort. Rodrigo, Melitón, and Miguel Angel are all victims of «friendly fire,» albeit in different forms. Disheartened by the death of all his friends, and disenchanted with Villa, Tiburcio walks away from the Revolution down a train track, into the dark.

The allegiance of the Leones is to Pancho Villa, not to the Revolution: they refer time and again in the film to the need they feel to demonstrate their manliness to the *jefe,* and their actions are motivated by this goal, rather than any other consideration, even their own interests. In depicting the charisma of Villismo -its personalism and lack of ideology- the film is an accurate representation of the way in which individual loyalties functioned as the cement of that movement. Nonetheless, what de Fuentes accomplishes with the personage of Pancho Villa goes beyond immediate historical realism, for he demystifies Villa through a complex process of identification and alienation. He does this first of all in the title, which creates the expectation that Villa will be the main protagonist. Nonetheless, it is the six Leones who are at the heart of this work, and with whom we identify unconditionally. Villa only appears when he is historically important: performing public feats such as dispensing food, goading his men in battle, and making decisions about the army's well-being, as in ordering Tiburcio to shoot Miguel Angel and bum his body for fear of smallpox.



Frame enlargement 1: Portrait of Erniliano Zapata, *El compadre Mendoza* (1933). Filmoteca de la UNAM.
Frame enlargement 2: Portrait of Victoriano Huerta, *El compadre Mendoza* (1933). Filmoteca de la UNAM.
Frame enlargement 3: Portrait of Venustiano Carranza, *El compadre Mendoza* (1933). Filmoteca de la UNAM.
Frame enlargement 4: Killed in a heroic action against the Huertistas, Martín lies forgotten in the grasp of a maguey, *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1935). Filmoteca de la UNAM.

This final scene with Villa, Tiburcio, and Miguel Angel represents the culmination of the long alienation process which De Fuentes has carried out in relation to Villa. In the beginning, we immediately identify with the *jete* because the Leones decide to join up with him. When we first see him he is engaged

in a socially beneficial activity , giving corn and promising land to the hungry, whose gratitude is registered in out-stretched hands and smiling faces. The Leones' admiration for and adherence to Villa is strengthened through various encounters, and the fact that they are greatly impressed by Villa's feats furthers their (and our) identification with him. As the film continues, however, it insistently cuts back against that identification. In contrast to the vast majority of films about Villa, it is the histories of some followers rather than the History of the Centauro del Norte[10] *Vámonos* is an anti-epic: though it contains all the elements for an grand narrative about the Revolutionary caudillo, it holds Villa- the-legend at bay through a constant distanciation. One alienation-effect is the confrontation with Villa's legendary cruelty , as in the execution of captured band members once he has ascertained that he has no need of them. Here, the film's brilliance in delineating the complexity of Villa' s character is demonstrated in the fact that it is Villa himself who creates sympathy for these musicians; they never appear on camera. When asked by one of his subordinates whether they should be executed, Villa responds: «No man, how barbaric. Poor musicians, why would we shoot them? Put them in one of the brigades.» Informed that all the units have their own bands, and some even have two, an irritated Villa replies: «Well then, shoot them. Why are you bugging me with this?»

The Leones play their part in alienating us from Villa, for his callousness is made evident in his increasing indifference to their deaths. When the first (Máximo) dies, Villa pats his body on the back, rendering homage to his courage; however, by the time the third (Rodrigo) is killed, Villa shrugs and says that it's a shame, but everybody has to die. The process of distancing the audience from Villa is completed in the last scene, when he arrives to check the train car contaminated with small pox. Tiburcio is despondent, but on seeing Villa his face brightens up. He moves toward and attempts to establish contact with *el jefe,* the one real commitment of the Leones and the only thing that could make sense of all his suffering. But Villa, terrified of smallpox for both himself and his army, makes Tiburcio keep his distance: we are repelled by Villa's fear and insensitivity , and our rejection is corroborated by Tiburcio' s disillusionment.

The intentionality of this distanciation can be appreciated clearly in the extremes of an alternative version of the film. In a shockingly powerful scene, Villa arrives at Tiburcio's house some years later to recruit him anew. They chat amiably outside, but Tiburcio, living happily with his wife and children, resists Villa's entreaties, arguing that he has a family to support. Villa then enters Tiburcio's house and kills his wife and daughter in cold blood, thus removing any impediments to re-joining his forces. Tiburcio is enraged, and has to be killed by Villa's lieutenant; however, the remaining son rides off with the Villistas to the now-ironic cry of «¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!» Villa is one of the core legends of the Revolution; as such, the alienation de Fuentes achieves in relation to this personage is applicable by extension to the Revolutionary myths in general.

The process of the Leones' deaths is also demystifying, particularly when compared to the heroic demises to which we are well accustomed in films about the Revolution (or war movies in general). Máximo dies a hero's death and receives Villa's commendation; Martín also dies heroically, but his body is left abandoned in the embrace of a maguey, symbol of *Mexicanidad.* [Frame enlargement 4] The deaths of the remaining Leones could all be seen as metaphors for the self-destruction of the Revolution. Rodrigo is killed by his own *compañeros* when they try to rescue him in a failed attempt to trick the Huertistas. Melitón participates in a Russian Roulette-like game: he is hit by the bullet from a revolver tossed into the air by Tiburcio (underlining the fratricidal aspect), and after being wounded kills himself to proves his courage. Miguel Angel is shot by Tiburcio because he is dying of smallpox. And, in the alternative ending, Tiburcio is killed by Fierro, Villa's lieutenant. Through this structure, de Fuentes is referring not so much to the way in which the civil strife was a «fraternal bloodbath,» as he is creating a metaphor for the murder of the revolution by the Revolutionaries.

In these films by Fernando de Fuentes, history is an incessant force which unceasingly bears upon individuals, pushing the narrative forward. Protagonists are committed to defined groups -Zapatistas, Villistas, Carrancistas, Huertistas -which have identifiable interests reflective of their class allegiance. The fates of individuals are shown to result from the forces unleashed by this cataclysmic civil war, which narrows choices and hedges people in, mediating the decisions they make in the situations within which they find themselves. Thus, trapped between the warring factions, Mendoza finally chooses his class, the bourgeoisie, and betrays his *compadre.* In *Vámonos,* the Leones's election to join the Villistas is portrayed to be a product of Huertista repression and Villa's charisma (and vague social program). The Revolution, in its ultimate sense, is pictured by de Fuentes as a total failure: in *Compadre Mendoza* it is Mendoza's opportunism which triumphs; in *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* It is the disappointment of the Leones and the demystification of Villa which most remain with us.

In 1940, the Mexican Revolution took a turn to the right and, along with much else, its representation underwent a significant transformation. Before this watershed, Mexican nationalism had been a vital and many-faceted effort to search for a new identity; with the institutionalization of the Revolution, *mexicanidad* became an officialist doctrine designed to institute the homogeneity of «National Unity». As Carlos Monsivais remarked, «Nothing of a 'pluralist country' or of' cultural diversity', *Mexico is one.»* [11]

Mexican moviemakers participated eagerly in this state-funded orgy of nationalist uniformity , and the great majority of their films are only of sociological interest. However, the team of Emilio «El Indio» Fernández and his cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa, produced some visually striking movies in the 1940s which attained international prestige, enjoyed great popularity in Mexico, particularly among the cultural elite, and even today continue to attract attention. Enthusiastic participants in the officialist search for national identity , Fernández & Figueroa provided a powerful aesthetic articulation of *mexicanidad.* Evidently, Fernández was particularly attuned to the ruling ideology, and he mirrored its contradictions:

> My own films have been based on the experience of my life with my own people. I belong to a very humble family. On a social level we all form one c class in Mexico, this was assured by the Revolution. Everyone is alike with one conscious thought, which is Mexico. I think in a few more years we will have a very solid and wonderful country.[12]

The most important of Fernández & Figueroa's films on the Mexican Revolution are *Flor Silvestre* (1943) and *Enamorada* (1946), both of which are trite melodramas rescued by their extraordinary visual style. *Flor Silvestre* recounts the tale of a rich man's son, José Luis, who loves a poor woman, Esperanza. Their relationship causes friction with the parents of José Luis, and he joins the Revolution. However, these difficulties are soon resolved and they live happily together until some bandits, posing as revolutionaries, capture Esperanza and their son. The outlaws force José Luis to surrender to them and, in an exquisitely painful scene, he is executed. Esperanza remains with her son, who represents the Revolutionary Mexican State. *Enamorada* is essentially a version of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew.* General José Juan Reyes takes the city of Cholula, and meets Beatriz, the rebellious daughter of a wealthy city elder. Theirs is a tumultuous relationship but, after much ado, Beatriz leaves the *gringo* she was to marry at the alter, and tags along behind José Juan's horse as he goes into battle.

In *Compadre Mendoza* and *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*, history is a living mesh which imposes itself upon the lives of those caught in it, shaping their social relationships. With the films of Fernández &Figueroa, the Revolution is converted into a confused tangle of meaningless atrocities, and historical contexts are reduced to «trappings,» ornamental facades which have no relation to the situations they purport to be representing. We are, of course, accustomed to encounter trappings in what we generally define as «costume dramas,» films which utilize the past simply to provide a period setting, but demonstrate no respect for, nor interest in, the «otherness» of different times. We tend to think of trappings as bothersome but inoffensive violations of history's reality , but *Enamorada* intimates that they may not be innocent. One example of the ways in which trappings secrete ideology is the representation of General Juan José (Pedro Armendáriz), who dresses in three different uniforms. When he first appears in the film he is outfitted as a Zapatista, with a large *sombrero* and bandoleers crossed over his chest [Frame enlargement 5]; later, he is evidently a Villista officer, for he wears a hat characteristic of that army [Frame enlargement 6]; at another point, he is clearly clothed in the uniform of the federal army which is fighting against the Revolutionaries who he apparently leads [Frame enlargement 7].[13] What is the meaning of such an historical aberration as having the lead character dress indiscriminantly in the uniforms of opposing armies? As noted above, the crucial officialist myth of the Mexican Revolution is that it is a struggle of the «good guys» -Zapata, Villa, Carranza, Madero, Obregón -against the «bad guys», Porfirio Díaz and Victoriano Huerta, Fernández replicates the official line and, in line with his abstract and ahistorical vision, goes it one better by conflating Zapatismo, Villismo, and the Federal Army, through the device of Juan José' s uniforms.

By turning history into trappings, Fernández & Figueroa remove the social origens of character motivation; this, in turn, reduces the Revolution to a variety of still-life forms. One is the natural landscape: panoramic valleys marked by the sudden thrust of volcanic formations provide the backdrop; majestic magueys and statuesque cactus jut into the images and frame the protagonists; and over it all, the monumentally statuesque masses of rolling clouds are made impossibly luminous by infrared filters and curvilinear perspective[14] Architectural landscapes are also important stages, whether they be long takes of the seemingly endless arches of Cholula's plaza or the extended play of the camera over the interior of Puebla's Chapel of El Rosario, with its golden, baroque convolutions. People as well are converted into a

form of still life by Fernández & Figueroa: stony Indian faces set off by white blouses, steely *charros* astride raging stallions, picturesque *campesinos* with broad *sombreros* and bandoleer-crossed chests, women whose abnegation is registered in the dark *rebozos* wrapped around their beings.

The faces of the films's stars are yet another form of landscape. Actors such as Maria Felix and Pedro Armendáriz were celebrities, a phenomenon which makes its appearance on the Mexican scene in the 1940s, largely impelled by the visual culture of cinema and the illustrated magazines. The films of Fernández & Figueroa are «vehicles» for these actors, whose factions are converted into phantasmagoric representations of the Revolution: the flashing eyes, fixed stare, and raised eyebrows of María Félix face off against the prominent teeth, abundant mustache, and piercing glare of Pedro Armendáriz. It is crucial to once again contrast this esthetic structure with the films of Fernando de Fuentes. The actors in *Compadre Mendoza* and *Vámonos* were known, but they were not stars in the sense that Félix and Armendáriz were, and they were certainly not celebrities. Vivian Sobchack's comments on the role of such figures in historical epics is appropriate to the works of Fernández & Figueroa:

> Stars people the represented historical past with the present Stars are cast not as characters, but *in* character -as «types» who, however physically particular and concrete, signify universal and general characteristics Indeed, the very presence of stars in the historical epic mimetically represents not *real historical* figures but rather the *real significance* of historical figures. Stars literally lend *magnitude* to the representation.[15]

In the films of Fernández & Figueroa, the centrality of stars combines with the curvilinear form, the wide angle lens, and the low camera angles to monumentalize the Revolution as History, an epic still life which is the cinematic equivalent of fatalism and immobility. All the extended «landscape» scenes -be they of nature, colonial architecture, anonymous extras, or the faces of celebrities -offer the same master narrative: the Mexican Revolution is the timelessness of a being given once and for all, of volcanos and clouds, of ancient structures, of picturesque clothing, of superficial beauty , of the Institutionalized Revolution.[16]

Whatever their shortcomings, *Flor silvestre* and *Enamorada* are nonetheless the most transcendent films made by Fernández & Figueroa, just as *El Compadre Mendoza* and *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* are clearly the best works of Fernando de Fuentes. What might be considered the last gasp of decent cinema about the Mexican Revolution is Paul Leduc's *Reed, México Insurgente* (1971). This work essentially recounts the experiences of the radical us journalist, John Reed, as he follows the Villistas around northern Mexico. Choosing a *gringo* as the centerpiece of a story about the Mexican Revolution is indicative of Leduc's iconoclasm, but *Reed* is in other respects as well a theoretically complex film which utilizes realist conventions to effect a simultaneous identification with and distanciation from itself. For example, the movie is shot in sepia which calls to mind the look of old newsreel footage or, more appropriate to the Mexican experience, the ubiquitous photographs from the Casasola Archive. On the one hand, this technique alleges the reality of what it is showing; but, on the other, it dismisses the Revolution as history in the way that Henry Ford conceptualized it when he said, «History is bunk»; that is, it is useless musings about an irrelevant past.

Reed takes an ironic stance in relation to the Revolution, and maintains spectators at an arm's length through different instances of narrative distanciation, many of which revolve around the camera which Reed carries in the film. One example is the extended sequence in which General Urbina laboriously constructs the scene which he wishes Reed to photograph. The recurrent references to the camera's presence serves to intimate that what we take to be the realities represented by documentary forms are stories, whether that be photography or this film or Reed's journalism or history itself. Nonetheless, stories are shown to have the potential to transform consciousness, as occurs with Reed at the end of the film when he implicitly enters into revolutionary action by launching a rock through a store window in order to replace the camera lost in battle.

The context in which *Reed* was produced was one in which an epic representation of the Mexican Revolution was no longer possible. Within Mexico, the Tlaltelolco massacre of 1968 had torn the mask from the face of the ruling party (and its official history), and no filmmaker with any degree of consciousness or self-respect could continue to direct works which evoked the Revolution, as even implicit reference to that event served to legitimize the PRI dictatorship. (For that reason, the most powerful and interesting film which has been made recently about Mexican history is *Rojo amanecer* [Jorge Fons, 1993], which depicts the carnage in Tlatelolco Plaza through the experiences of one family trapped in their apartment above.) An important international influence on *Reed* was the development of the New Latin American Cinema in the late 1960s, for Paul Leducis probably the Mexican cineaste who was most connected to that movement. History is crucial to the filmmakers of the New Latin American

Cinema; Octavio Getino, one of its founders, stated that «The memory of our peoples...is the backbone of our cinema.»[17] However, Getino clearly differentiated between the official History of the dominant, and the histories of the people which are passed down through generations in the form of testimonies, stories, legends, and myths. The New Latin American Cinema has generally tended to produce self-reflexive histories about the experiences of the inhabitants from its *pueblos* rather than legitimizing epics about the ruling governments.

Cuban cinema has been the mainstay of the New Latin American Cinema, and history has been a cornerstone of Cuban film since the founding of ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) shortly after the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959.[18] Very few movies have been made about the actual fighting against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista; they would necessarily be too immediately laudatory of Fidel Castro-and the other leaders of a war which was largely a two-year guerrilla struggle by a small nucleus of men in the *Sierra* -to be digestable to the filmically sophisticated Cuban public. Instead, the most interesting Cuban films about the Revolution and history deal with the transformations experienced by living in a post-revolutionary situation of constant change.

Intrinsically linked to the Revolution, history takes on a variety of forms in Cuban cinema. One of its countenances looks backward: here it is represented as vestiges from the past, psychological residues left over from the distortions produced by living in an alienated situation. Another visage looks at today as tomorrow, documenting the «history-in-the-making» of Revolutionary transformations. The bonding of history to the Revolution has produced varied results, and their meaning depends largely upon the context within which the films were produced. During the Revolution's effervescent period (1959-1968), this fusion resulted in the representation of social change as it is played out in individual lives. Here, the better Cuban films utilized formal reflexivity to distance the public and insist on the fact that these are stories, rather than History as epic. However, as institutionalization proceeded, it produced the hypostatization of *Fidelismo* as both History and Revolution incarnate.

Memories of Underdevelopment (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1967) is arguably the most important historical film produced in Latin America[19] Utilizing the diary-like form of the book which inspired it, the movie follows the experiences and musings of Sergio, a well-off outsider who has decided to stay in Cuba.[20] Placed in the period 1961-62, the film depicts Sergio as he bids farewell to family and friends who leave for Miami, strolls about the streets, daydreams erotic fantasies in his apartment, reflects on the Bay of Pigs invasion, and faces the Missle Crisis. He eventually «conquers» a young woman, Elena, and introduces her to the film's director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, at ICAIC; she later attempts unsuccessfully to coerce him into marrying her. There is very little «action» of the type we normally associate with fictional movies, for the focus of Memories is on analyzing the relationship of self and society, of historical circumstance and individual psychology .It carries this out through contextualizing Sergio's ruminations, contrasting the fictional footage shot from his point-of-view with documentary images which rise up and contradict Sergio's way of seeing the world. Through this juxtaposition of visual forms, the film «objectifies» the internal monologue of Sergio-criticizing his psychological subjectivism and contronting his attempt to retreat into his pre-revolutionary frame of mind, and way of seeing, with the «fact of history» presented by the revolutionary situation. Thus, the film shows and creates an identification with what it is simultaneously criticizing, insisting that what we see is a function of how we believe, and that how we think is what our history has made of us.

History is presented first of all in the form of Sergio's past. Sergio was formed in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, and he perceives the world through a psychological structure attuned to the forms of alienation required by that context: conquest and colonization instead of real human relations, money rather than self-fulfillment, imported culture in the place of national identity , and individualism instead of the collectivity given impetus by the new situation. As a member of the educated elite, he developed a disdain for Cuban reality and a scorn for those who believe that it could be changed. Critical of his bourgeois family and friends (who are, however, capable of making the commitment to leave the island), he is nonetheless unable to overcome his alienation and link himself to the Revolution. His way of being in, even seeing, the world is suddenly inappropriate: in the midst of Revolutionary effervescence, Sergio remains the «ultimate outsider.» The past hangs around his neck like a stone.

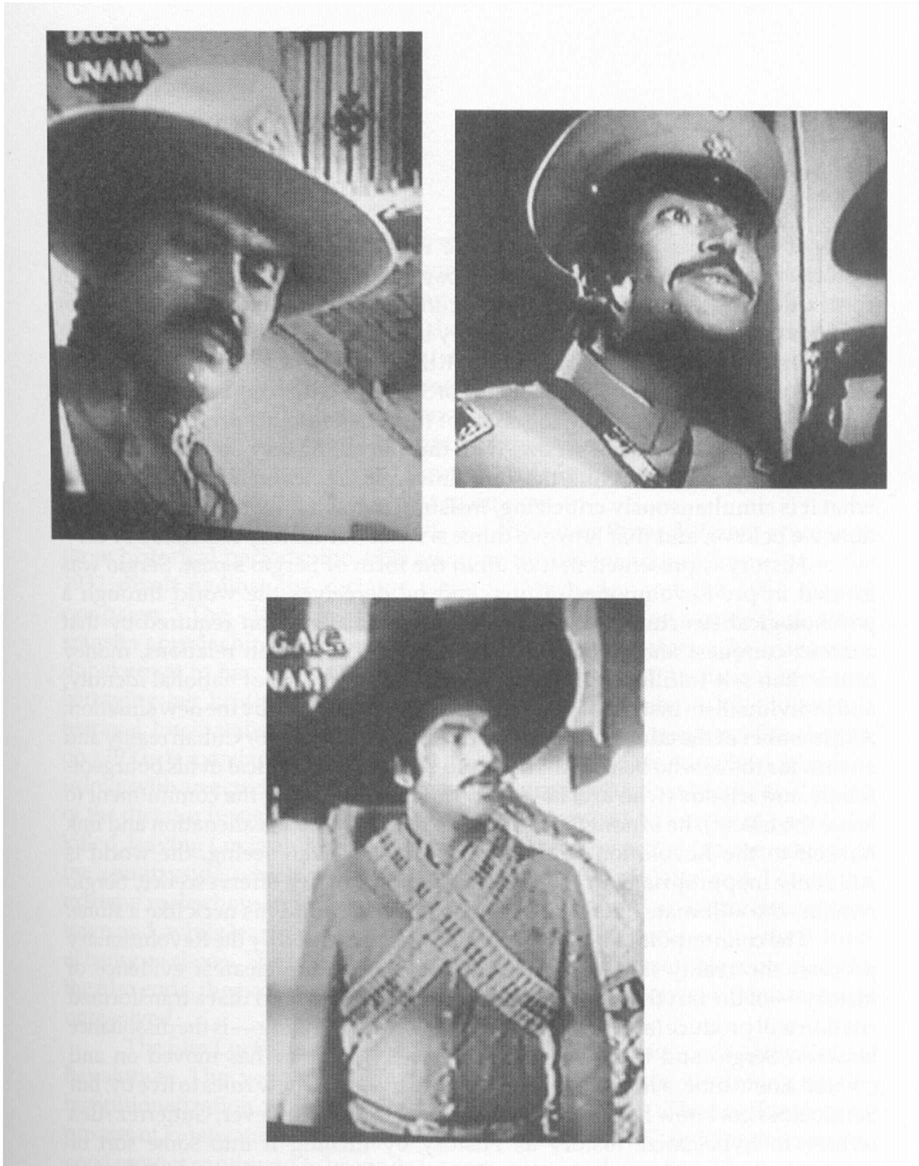
The counterpoint to Sergio's mentality is presented by the Revolutionary process, the reality in transformation. Obviously, the clearest evidence of history -of the fact that context creates consciousness, and that a transformed situation will produce (and require) different ways of thinking-is the dissonance between Sergio and the Revolutionary society. History has moved on and created a new time, a new context in which to live, with new rules to live by; but Sergio does not know how to exist in these new forms. However, Gutiérrez Alea refuses to hypostatize history as History by turning it into some sort of totalizing force which remakes minds at will. Rather, changes are linked to personal will and decision

through the appearance of men from Sergio's generation who grew up in the same context but made fundamentally different choices. One such individual is Fidel Castro, who encapsulates the film's message in a documentary sequence with a marvelously dense statement from his speech during the 1962 Missle Crisis: «We have to know how to live -with dignity -in the age we have been given to live in.» At the center of the world stage, and faced with the possibility of total annihilation in the first phase of a nuclear world war, Castro calls for will, courage, and social consciousness in confronting the danger, the same elements on which he had relied in «knowing how» to live under Batistain making a revolution. Another figure who «knew how» to live differently than Sergio during the Batista regime is Gutiérrez Alea, the film's director, who participated in the uprising against the dictator. Gutiérrez Alea appears during the sequence at ICAIC, where they see movie bits that were cut out by Batista's censors. Not only does the realism of true-to- life characterizations serve the descriptive function of showing history in action; it is also prescritive, for we learn through these individuals what Sergio could have done under Batista, and ought to do now.

Lucía (Humberto Solás, 1968) is a trilogy of three different women in three historical periods: the 1895 struggle for independence from Spain, the 1932 revolt against the dictator Gerardo Machado, and the 1961 literacy campaign.[21] The «1895» segment is the melodrama of an upper-class white spinster approaching middle age; she falls in love with Rafael, a Spaniard who, unbeknown to her, is a spy for the colonial government. Lucía is duped into betraying her brother, an anticolonialist guerrilla, and he is killed. For this betrayal, Lucía stabs her Spanish lover to death in the town square. The chapter on «1932» is a melancholy realist drama of a middle-class schoolgirl who falls in love with an activist, Aldo, engaged in the struggle against Machado. The fall of the dictator brings no real change, and Aldo returns to terrorism only to be killed, leaving Lucía alone and pregnant. The «196-» sectionisa comedy set in the countryside which portrays the marriage of a mulatta and Tomás, an extreme male chauvinist. The Literacy Campaign brings an instructor to their town and, while learning to read and write, Lucía also decides that she is tired of being a «slave». She leaves Tomás, but they are both miserable separated. As the film ends, they come together again, but the conflict between them remains unresolved.

The film *Lucía* stands, in certain respects, at the crossroads of the Cuban Revolution. The year in which it was made marks the beginning of the institutionalization which resulted in Fidel's deification. The «trickle-down» process of Fidelization, however, took time to reach ICAIC and, for that reason, good movies continued to be made for several years thereafter. Those elements of *Lucía* which might be said to pertain to the effervescent period include the choice to focus on the histories of three unexceptional women caught up in the drama of particular moments in history. Here, Solás made the decision not to treat the great progenitors of Cuban History -for example, José Martí or Máximo Gómez -heroic figures of a master narrative who could have provided examples to emulate. Though the film has operatic tendencies, it might be considered a materialist melodrama, for the personal tragedies of the Lucías are embedded in, and products of, their historical situation. Too, the juxtaposition of three very different film styles in the three segments is an immediate sensual insistence on the fact of history as well as historical interpretation; the structure is a reminder that each epoch has its own way of seeing and experiencing the world, and that any recounting of the past is necessarily interpretative. Finally, Solás follows Gutiérrez Alea in representing the vestiges of the past. Resisting the temptation to argue that the Revolution has been able to transform psychologies overnight, he uses a wide-angle lens in the last shots of the film to distort the faces of Lucía III and Tomás to indicate that they both remain trapped in an antiquated and deformed relationship.[22]

However, *Lucía* was made in the same year as the «Padilla Affair,» when the problems of the well-known poet, Heberto Padilla, demonstrated the constraints which began to take hold over the Cuban Revolution. He had been given a major Cuban poetry prize by an international jury, but the bureaucrats considered his work counterrevolutionary and attacked mercilessly. By 1971, Padilla had been arrested and forced into a public recantation of his sins. The future of the Revolution was clear: there was to be increasing control over cultural activities. This was already becoming apparent in 1968, for *Lucía* was an outgrowth of the celebration of «100 Years of Struggle,» an officialist historiography invented to prove that the Cuban Revolution was the legitimate offspring and the most recent expression of the islanders's battle against oppression in the «Ten Years War» (1868-1878), the 1895 uprising, the 1932 revolt against Machado, and the Castro Revolution. Hence, the concept of history in *Lucía* is linear and progressive. The opening shots of the segments with their titles, «1895,» «1932,» and «196-,» set the scene, but the essence of *Lucía*'s history is embodied in the representation of the transformation of class, race and gender relations. On the one hand, we must laud Solás for understanding that the metamorphosis of social relations is the ultimate «proof» of history , and a useful corrective to Hollywood's universalism; on the other, however, it feeds into the broader notion of history as progress.



Frame enlargement 5: General Juan José (Pedro Armendáriz) dressed as a Zapatista, *Enamorada* (1946). Filmoteca de la UNAM.
Frame enlargement 6: General Juan José (Pedro Armendáriz) dressed as a Villista, *Enamorada* (1946). Filmoteca de la UNAM.
Frame enlargement 7: General Juan José (Pedro Armendáriz) dressed as a Federal officer, *Enamorada* (1946). Filmoteca de la UNAM.

The transformation of race relations, as they are presented immediately following the title shots in each segment, offers an example of history's advance. In « 1895,» the film opens by showing Lucía and her mother in a carriage pulled by a horse on which a black servant is seated. This is the only black person seen in the segment until the appearance of the naked black cavalry toward the section's end, and the representation functions as a concise remark on the abyss which existed between the races during the colonial period. [Frame enlargement 8] In «1932,» the camera zooms out directly in the opening sequence to reveal a black woman seated near Lucía and her mother on the boat. Thus, we are told visually that race relations are somewhat different than in the preceeding segment, though later dialogues make it clear that prejudice still exists. [Frame enlargement 9] In the beginning of «196-,»

Lucía is exhorted to hurry and join the other women workers by Angelina, a black who is in a position of authority . This presentation alleges that the Revolution has fundamentally altered race relations. [Frame enlargement 10]

The institutionalization which was creeping into culture during the production of Lucía can be seen fullblown in a documentary made by Santiago Alvarez in 1979, *Mi hermano Fidel*. Alvarez was the best-known Cuban documentarist, a genre which accounts for some 90 percent of ICAIC's production.[23] During the 1960s, he was reknown for the rapid-fire montage form he developed in memorable films such as *Now* (1965), *Hanoi Tuesday 13* (1967), *LBJ* (1968), and *79 Springtimes* (1969). However, in the 1970s, the dramatic montage of these earlier works was supplanted by long takes and sync-sound recordings, and many of his films grew lengthy and tendentious, particularly those which were long, static and tedious reprises of Fidel's speeches. *De América soy hijo...y a ella me debo* (1972) was a three-hour, fifteen-minute record of Castro's visit to Chile; *...Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto* (1973) was a chronicle of Fidel's tour of Eastern Europe and Africa which lasted more than two hours. Though Alvarez defended these films as challenging capitalism's genre conventions and consumer habits, even those who agreed with his intentions have criticized them for the degree to which the focus on Castro impedes any real analysis.[24]

Frame enlargement 8: A black slave drives the carriage in which are seated Lucía and her mother in 1895, *Lucía* (1968). Tricontinental Films.
Frame enlargement 9: A black woman is seated near Lucía and her mother on the boat in 1932, *Lucía* (1968). Tricontinental Films.
Frame enlargement 10: Angelina, the black community leader, exhorts Lucía to hurry and join them in work in 1961, *Lucía* (1968). Tricontinental Films.

Mi hermano Fidel encapsulates the shortcomings of Alvarez's path after 1969. The film is essentially an interview between Fidel and Salustino Leyva, a 93 year-old peasant who remembers meeting José Martí, the «Apostle» of Cuba's independence, and Máximo Gómez, the «Bronze Titan,» when they landed in Cuba in 1895. The style is basically that of a long-take, sync-sound interview, with the camera panning back and forth between the two men. The conversation, initially of limited interest, takes a revealing turn: after reminiscing about the meeting with Martí and Gómez, Leyva describes the difficulties he faces, and Castro tells him that the Revolution will have to do more for him. What that more is becomes immediately clear when it is «discovered» that the old man cannot read because of poor

eyesight. Fidel says that an opthalmologist will be sent for, and the film cuts to the doctor's arrival, eye chart in hand. After Leyva's eyes are tested and he is given glasses, we learn that he had not previously recognized his interviewer. The old peasant had been speaking of Fidel in: the third person, without realizing to whom he was actually speaking! The recognition produces Leyva's assertion, and the film's title: «I am Martí's brother and Fidel is Martí's brother, so Fidel is also my brother.»

Obviously, the film suffers from very real problems of credibility , for example, Leyva's failure to recognize Castro's voice, to be informed by his family with whom he was speaking, or to question the filmic appartus which must surely have been present. But more important is the fact that it represents *Fidelismo* at its worst by showing how all Leyva's problems are resolved through the direct agency of the leader. In this way , the Revolution is portrayed as functioning only because Castro has his hand in everything, precisely that aspect of his leadership which has been most criticized by analysts of Cuban government. The personality cult is further enhanced by the slow and lyrical dissolves of Castro's face with which the film ends, lingering on his features as he asserts in a voice-over that he is often confused with Martí because, «We' re brothers.» Thus, the film affirms Fidel's legitimacy through conflating him with the Revolution and history , in the mystical continuity he claims as the direct heir of Cuba's most revered forefather, José Martí. But then, by 1979 the Cuban Revolution -like the Mexican Revolution since 1940- was history .

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

This article began as talks given at two different congresses: «Cine y política en América latina,» at Tel Aviv University , and «100 Years of Latin American Cinema,» at Georgia State University; I am grateful to Raanan Rein and Seth Fein for the cordial invitations they (respectively) extended me to develop these ideas. I also thank Eli Bartra and Chuck Churchill for their critical observations, and the Filmoteca de la UNAM for providing most of the frame enlargements which appear in this article, particularly Salvador Plancarte, who has been a constant source of images, information, and stimulation.

(1) These are the two Latin American countries in which the violent overthrow of existing governments resulted in the creation of post-revolutionary states capable of retaining power long enough to permit the development of Revolutionary cultures, including cinema. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 led to the establishment of a party dictatorship (PRI, Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada) which only today appears to be weakening; the triumph of Fidel Castro in 1959 gave him in the power he still maintains in Cuba.

(2) I consider 1920-1940 to be the effervescent period in Mexico, and Cuba's to be that of 1959-1968.

(3) JOWETT, G. «The Concept of History in American Produced Films: An Analysis of the Films Made in the Period 1950-1961,» *Journal of Popular Culture,* Vol. III, No.4 (Spring, 1970): 799. It is at least curious that, despite the ever-increasing number of books on historical cinema, no one else has yet seen the importance of quantifying their production.

(4) See TOPLIN, R.B. «Film and History: The State of the Union,» *Perspectives*, Special Issue, «*Reel History,*» Vol. 37, No.4 (April, 1999): 8.

(5) On *Chapayev*, see FERRO, M. *Cinema and History*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

(6) See the first issue of *Filmoteca*, the journal of the UNAM Filmoteca, which was dedicated to the theme, «El cine y la Revolución Mexicana.» Published in 1979, it lists sixty films in «La Revolución mexicana: filmografía básica.» Though this filmography is 20 years old, the number of films on the Revolution made since 1979 is probably not significant.

(7) Recent polls of Mexican film critics always name *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* as the best Mexican film ever, with *Compadre Mendoza* included among the top ten. I have discussed these films, as well as a third, *Prisionero 13* (1933), in «How Real is Reel?: Fernando de Fuentes's Revolutionary Trilogy,» *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by STOCK, A. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997: pp. 92-119.

(8) A thumbnail sketch of the Mexican Revolution may be useful. Francisco Madero, a wealthy *hacendado,* led the revolt against Porfirio Díaz in 1910. He was joined by Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón. In 1913, Madero was overthrown by Victoriano Huerta. Huerta's usurpation led to the alliance of Villa, Zapata, Obregón and Carranza against Huerta. When Huerta was overthrown, the revolution became a battle between the lower-class forces, led by Zapata and Villa, who were interested in making a social, especially an agrarian, revolution, and those representing the middle classes, Carranza and Obregón, who were more concerned to limit the revolution to political reforms. The armies of the latter had triumphed by 1917.

(9) Anonymous interview, «Lo que piensa Fernando de Fuentes de su película *El Compadre Mendoza*», *El Universal*, (6 April, 1934); cited in GARCIA RIERA, E. *Fernando de Fuentes (1894-1958),* Mexico City: Cineteca Nacional, 1984, p. 28. (My translation.)
(10) According to Gustavo García, as of 1974, there had been more than twenty films made in which Villa appeared in some form; cited by Gustavo Montiel Pagés, who observed that these films were inevitably epics. See MONTIEL PAGES, G. «Pancho Villa: el mito y el cine,» *Filmoteca,* p.103-104.
(11) MONSIVAIS, C. «Sociedad y cultura,» in *Entre la guerra y la estabilidad política: El México de los 40,* edited by LOYOLA, R. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990, p. 264.
(12) «After the Revolution,» *Films and Filming,* (London, June, 1963): 20.
(13) Juan José would have to be a Zapatista for the film to make any historical sense.
(14) See the visual analysis of Fernandez & Figueroa carried out by RAMIREZ BERG, C. «Figueroa's Skies and Oblique Perspective: Notes on the Development of the Classical Mexican Style,» *Spectator*, Vol.13, No.1 (Fall, 1992).
(15) SOBCHACK, V. «'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,» *Representations*, Vol. 29 (Winter, 1990): 36.
(16) Asin the quaint anamoly of the name chosen by the ruling Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI).
(17) GETINO, O. *Notas sobre cine argentino y latinoamericano*. Mexico City: Edimedios, 1984: 97.
(18) See MRAZ, J. «Absolved by History: On the Aesthetics and Ideology of History in the Cuban Film Institute,» *Film Historia*, Vol. III, No.3 (1993): 385-410.
(19) Among the awards given to *Memories* was its selection as the best Third World film made during 1968-1978, according to a pole published by MONACO, J. «What's the Score? The Best of the Decade,» *Take One*, 6:8, (July, 1978). It was also picked as one of the ten best films shown in the US during 1973 by the *New York Times.* I have discussed this film at greater length in, «Memories of Underdevelopment: Bourgeois Consciousness/ Revolutionary Context,» *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, edited by ROSENSTONE, R. Princeton: Princeton University Press,1995:102-114.
(20) Edmundo Desnoes originally published the novel, *Memorias del subdesarrollo,* in 1962. It has been re-printed several times since. An English version appeared under the title of *Inconsolable Memories* in 1968.
(21) I have conducted a visual analysis of this film. See MRAZ, J. «Visual Style and Historical Portrayal,» *Jump Cut,* No.19 (1978): 21-27.
(22) These frame enlargements were published in MRAZ, *Film Historia*: 390.
(23) See MRAZ, J. «Santiago Alvarez: From Dramatic From to Direct Cinema,» in *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, edited by BURTON, J., Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990: 131-149.
(24) See the exchange between Alvarez and an audience in Barcelona, published in Santiago Alvarez: *Cronista del tercer mundo*, edited by ARAY, E., Caracas: Cinemateca Nacional, 1983: 268-289.

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