

## Document Citation

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**November 5, 6, 7, & 8**

**Film/Video Showcase**

**THE FILMS OF TOMAS GUTIERREZ/ALEA**

Mr. Alea will be present at each of the evening screenings on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, November 6, 7, and 8 to discuss his work with the audiences.

**November 5 at 7 & 9 p.m.**

**DEATH OF A BUREAUCRAT**

**Cuba 1966 87 minutes Black & White**

Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Written by Alfredo del Cueto, Ramon F. Suarez, & Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Photography by Roman F. Suarez. Edited by Mario Gonzalez. Music by Leo Brouwer. Special Effects by Enrique Forg. Titles & Animation by Maria Consuelo & Ventura Carruara. Produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), the Cuban Film Institute. Print provided by Unifilm. Cast: Salvador Wood (Nephew); Silvia Planas (Aunt); Manuel Estanillo (Bureaucrat); Gaspar de Santelices (Nephew's Boss); Carlos Ruiz de la Tejera (Psychiatrist); Omar Alfonso (Cojimar); Ricardo Suarez (Tarafa); Luis Romay (El Zorro); Elsa Montero (Sabor).

**November 5 at 1 p.m. & November 6 at 3 & 7:30 p.m.**

**MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT**

**Cuba 1968 97 minutes Black & White**

Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Written by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, From the Novel *Inconsolable Memories* by Edmundo Desnoes. Photography by Ramón Suarez. Edited by Nelson Rodriguez. Music by Leo Brouwer. Produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), the Cuban Film Institute. Cast: Sergio Corrieri (Sergio); Daisy Granados (Elena); Eslinda Núñez (Noemi); Beatriz Ponchova (Laura).

**November 7 at 3 & 7:30 p.m.**

**THE LAST SUPPER**

**Cuba 1976 120 minutes Color**

Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Produced by Santiago Llapur & Camilo Vives. Written by Tomás Gonzalez, Maria Eugenia Haya & Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Photography by Mario Garcia Joya. Edited by Nelson Rodriguez. Music by Leo Brouwer. Produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), the Cuban Film Institute. Print Provided by Unifilm. Cast: Nelson Villagra (The Count); Silvano Rey (Luis Alberto Garcia); Jose Antonio Rodriguez; Samuel Claxton; Mario Balmaseda.

**November 8 at 3 & 7:30 p.m.**

**THE SURVIVORS**

**Cuba 1978 130 minutes Color**

Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Written by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Antonio Benitez Rojo with the Collaboration of Constance Dieago & Maria Eugeniz Haya. Photography by Mario Garcia Joya. Edited by Nelson Rodriguez. Music by Leo Brouwer. Produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), the Cuban Film Institute. Print Provided by Unifilm. Cast: Enrique Santiesteban, Reynaldo Miravalles; German Pinelli; Ana Vina; Vincente Revuelta; Carlos Ruiz de la Tejera.

**An Interview with Tomas Gutierrez Alea**

*The following interview was conducted in Spanish (and subsequently translated and edited) by CINEASTE Contributing Editor Julianne Burton in Havana in January, 1977.*

*Q: As I'm sure you remember, Memories of Underdevelopment met with great success upon its theatrical release in the U.S. in 1973. How would you evaluate U.S. film critics' response to the film?*



A: I am not fully informed of critical response to the film in the U.S., because the only thing I can base my assessment on is a file of clippings which the film's U.S. distributor, Tricontinental Film Center, has sent me. Naturally, the reviews range from good to bad to mediocre, but in general, I would say that several of them are extremely interesting. The tendency to interpret the film as a subversive act was not as manifest in the U.S. as, for example, in England, *Sight & Sound* published an absolutely sinister article which began by comparing the film to Bunuel's *Viridiana*—made under Franco's very nose and proceeding to blow up in his face—and ended up comparing me to Solzhenitsyn. It was obvious that the intention was to misconstrue both the film and the circumstances under which it was produced, for the actual situation had nothing in common with the version put forth in the review.

It seems to me that *Memories* was in general much better understood and evaluated in the U.S. because people perceived the attempt to

criticize a bourgeois mentality which, understandably, persists in our society despite the many changes we've gone through.

Q: *It also seems, however, that there were many critics who articulated that critique much less vociferously than what they perceived in the film as a critique of the revolution itself.*

A: Yes, of course, such a critique is also implicit in the film. But what was the nature of that critique? What I'm saying is that most of the U.S. critics were on target in that they realized that in contrast to the bourgeois mentality represented by the protagonist, the film reveals an entire people in the process of being born—with all the problems and difficulties which that involves, but with enormous vitality as well. This new world devours the protagonist in the end. That is the image we wanted to convey with the film, and judging from the reviews I read, it seems to me that U.S. critics grasped it more clearly than their counterparts in other countries.

Q: *I have shown and discussed the film with*





*many audiences in the U.S., and one striking thing is the tremendous urgency and persistence with which they search for a shred of optimism regarding Sergio's fate. Because they identify so completely with him, they desperately want to believe that he is somehow 'saved' at the end. Surely Cuban audiences view the end of the film very differently.*

A: Yes, they do. The film had a very good response here, relatively speaking. In fact, something happened with this movie which I had never seen with either my own films or anyone else's: many people went to see *Memories* more than once, and some returned as many as four or five times. That does not happen with many movies. It makes me think that the film hit its mark, which was, first and foremost, to communicate with the Cuban public—not with audiences from other countries. It achieved its goal in the sense that it disturbed and unsettled its audience; it forced people to think. When they return to see the film again, it means that it has kept on churning around inside them even after they leave the theater. As far as I'm concerned, this is the most important thing.

Q: *It's true that the film seems to achieve a remarkable growth in depth and coherency between the first and second viewing, and thus has a great deal to teach people about the possibilities of cinematic expression. The first time around, the film might seem a bit disconnected, but with the second viewing there is clearly nothing disconnected about it. On the contrary, all the implications and motivations of the interwoven documentary and fictional sequences begin to come clear.*

*Though it is quite conventional for a feature film to be based on a novel, the particular adaptation process by which Memories was generated has always struck me as somewhat unique. Would you comment on the collaboration of novelist Edmundo Desnoes on the production of the film? To what degree was he involved in the actual filmmaking process?*

A: Well, obviously, the film was based on a novel which he had written and which I found to be extremely suggestive. My work with him was very good because it was an extremely creative process. We did not attempt to

"translate" the novel into cinema. For me it turned out to be much easier, but for Desnoes it perhaps demanded a much higher level of violence against his own work and against himself, because at a certain point his novel was to be betrayed, negated, transformed into something else. He was fully conscious of this and worked over his novel as if it were raw material, not like something already fully achieved which was going to be 'translated' into cinema. Because he maintained this attitude, which is, of course, the only one to have if you are going to do this kind of thing, our work together was very fruitful. He often attended our shooting sessions, and made many excellent suggestions.

The original screenplay which we worked out together kept being transformed in the actual shooting process. There are even several scenes—and this is very significant—which carry great weight in the film but were never anticipated in the original screenplay. There were also details. The telescope, for instance, which becomes a very important image, a symbol of Sergio's alienation from his environment, didn't occur to us until the first days of shooting, almost at the last moment. Or scenes like the one where Sergio is returning home and comes across a group of people marching in the opposite direction on their way to a political gathering. The scene is very significant, because Sergio is always heading in the other direction from everyone else. As an image it functions very well. The sequence was filmed almost coincidentally, and at Desnoes' suggestion, because we just happened to come across a group that was preparing for a May Day demonstration or some such celebration. It was his idea that we take advantage of that situation, and I think that it turned out very well because we were able to film it very spontaneously. We simply had the actor begin walking through that group of people. There were no extras involved, no preliminary preparations.

Q: *What about entire sequences which did not appear in the original version of the novel, like the one which takes place in the Hemingway museum? Were these developed at your initiative and only later incorporated by De-*



*snoes in the subsequent English verison of the novel?*

A: Yes, he later included these sceens in the revised version of the novel on his own initiative. The fact was that I felt the need to say other things than those included in the original novel, and thus he would write something at my request which I would later expand and rework. But I think that even the second version of the novel is quite different from the film.

In my view, the Sergio character is very complex. On one hand, he incarnates all the bourgeois ideology which has marked out people right up until the triumph of the Revolution and still has carry-overs, an ideology which even permeates the proletarian strata. In one sense Sergio represents the ideal of what every man with that particular kind of mentality would like to have been: rich, good-looking, intelligent, with access to upper social strata and to beautiful women who are very willing to go to bed with him. That is to say, he has a set of virtues and advantages which permit spectators to identify to a certain degree with him as a character.

The film plays with this identification, trying to insure that the viewer at first identifies with the character, despite his conventionality and his commitment to bourgeois ideology.

But then what happens? As the film progresses, one begins to perceive not only the vision that Sergio has of himself but also the vision that reality gives to *us*, the people who made the film. This is the reason for the documentary sequences and other kinds of confrontation situations which appear in the film. They correspond to our vision of reality and also to our critical view of the protagonist. Little by little, the character begins to destroy himself precisely because reality begins to overwhelm him, for he is unable to act. At the end of the film, the protagonist ends up like a cockroach—squashed by his fear, by his impotence, by everything.

So then what happens to the spectator? Why does it trouble him or her to such a degree that he/she feels compelled to see the film again? Because the spectators feel caught in a trap since they have identified with



a character who proceeds to destroy himself and is reduced to . . . nothing. The spectators then have to re-examine themselves and all those values, consciously or unconsciously held, which have motivated them to identify with Sergio. They realize that those values are questioned by a reality which is much stronger, much more potent and vital.

I feel that it is in this sense that the film carries out an operation which is the most revolutionary, so to speak, the most dialectical with regard to the spectator. The film does not humor its audience; it does not permit them to leave the theater feeling self-satisfied. The importance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that it is the pre-condition for any kind of transformation.

*Q: It is interesting to observe how well the character of the film's protagonist corresponds to a whole stratum of not just Cuban, but Latin American intellectuals from the haute bourgeoisie. What has been the response to the film among Latin American audiences?*

A: Unfortunately, it has not been widely shown, but it has enjoyed great success in the countries where it has been seen, according to the news which I've received. For example, it was shown in Chile during the Allende



period, and I received very positive responses by word of mouth. Unfortunately, before the reviews could be assembled and sent to Cuba, the coup occurred and they were lost.

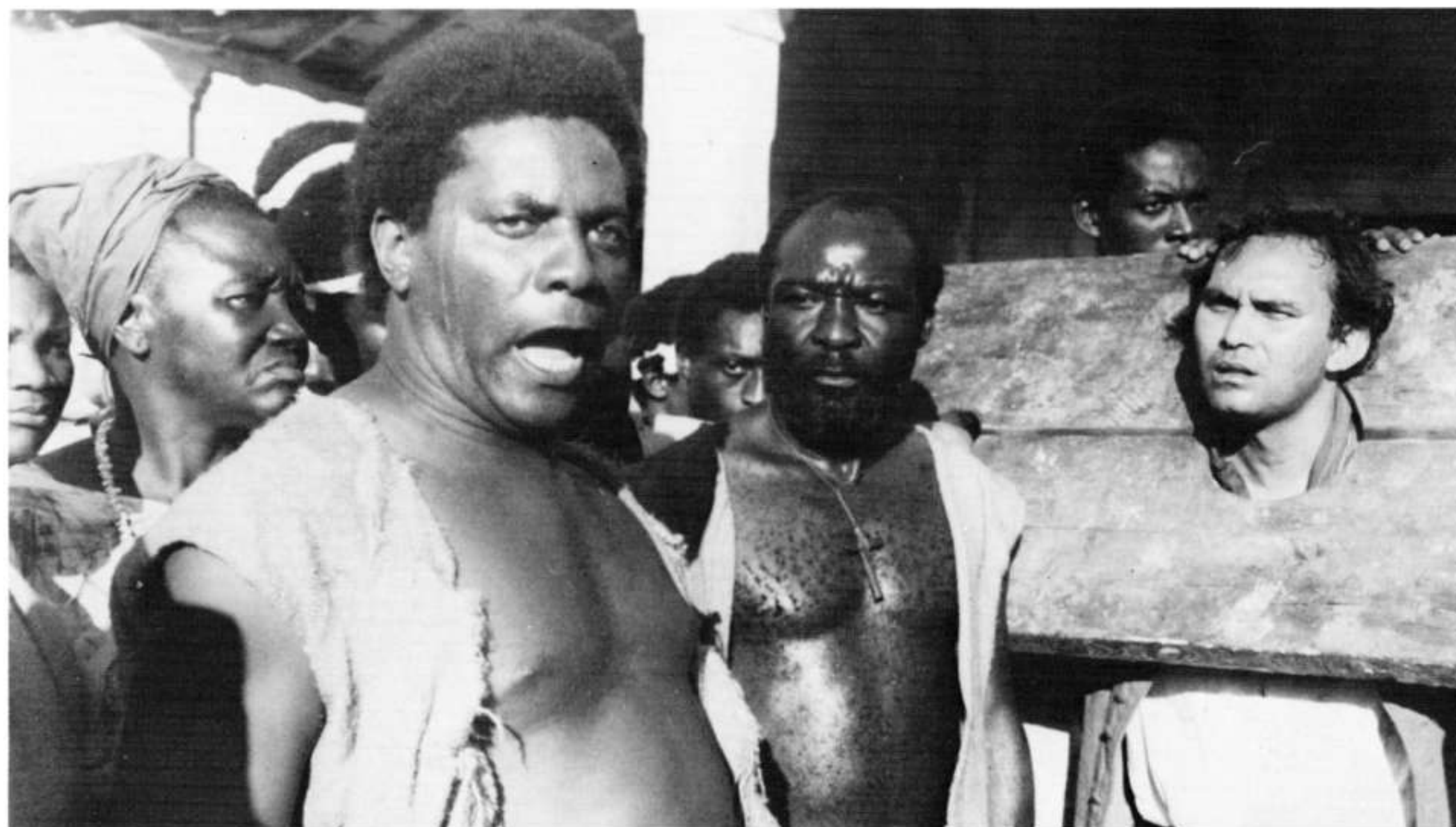
*Q: Speaking of the need that the audience feels to see Memories more than once, in your most recent film, The Last Supper, and in other films which we've seen here in Cuba, it seems that the narrative line has become flatter, more chronological, more linear. Do you see this change from a more narratively fragmented and 'deconstructed' kind of filmmaking as a current tendency within Cuban cinema, or have I begun to draw conclusions from too narrow a base?*

*A:* It's not really a matter of identifying a tendency since it seems a little risky and potentially premature to draw such conclusions. I believe that we are guilty of having overindulged our interest in historical topics despite their great importance at this stage in our national development. We are very much involved in reevaluating our past. All of us feel the need to clarify a whole series of historical problems because that is a way of also reaf-

firming our present reality. It is a genuine necessity. It has, however, led us to neglect our contemporary situation a bit. Clearly the challenge which we now confront is to develop a penetrating vision of our contemporary situation, and to make more films dealing with current problems.

*Q: At the Pesaro Festival in Italy in September, 1975, I was able to see Sarita Gomez' film De Cierta Manera (In a Certain Fashion) which I think you actually were the one to finish after her premature death. The film was extremely interesting to me precisely because of its exploration and treatment of contemporary Cuban reality.*

*A:* I see that film as a kind of model; I think it is quite extraordinary. Unfortunately, there have been some problems in getting a final print. The one you saw in Pesaro was somewhat deficient with regard to technical standards. It was filmed in 16mm, and the laboratory has many technical problems with it. We had to send it to Sweden to be restored. It's now back in Cuba and they're in the process of reassembling the film.





*Q: Related to this, there is a rather naive and superficial criticism of Cuban cinema which is quite common abroad. Because of the prevalent ahistoricism of our society, for instance, the vision of history which is operative in Cuba—of history as a living force central to understanding of the present and the shaping of the future—is very hard for most Americans to grasp. The criticism is that in Cuba the only topics which are permissible in the work of art, and film in particular, are those which confine themselves to the more or less remote historical past.*

*Your own Death of a Bureaucrat, Manuel Octavio Gomez's Ustedes Tienen La Palabra (Now It's Up To You), and most recently Sarita Gomez's film totally invalidate that criticism. Unfortunately, none of them as yet have been widely seen in the U.S. There is the possibility of certain political problems with De Cierta Manera because of the incredible frankness with which it looks at problems of race and sex and class marginalization in Cuba, because of the frank and critical way in which it challenges certain still incomplete aspects of Cuban social transformation.*

*A: Frankly, I'm not sure about that. I can't predict what the response would be, how the film would be handled, because, as you know, everything is manipulable in one sense or another. One can talk about this with films in particular, because whatever 'reality' is captured on film is capable of lending itself to tendentious uses. So in the ideological struggle in which we're involved, we have to cover ourselves, we have to refrain from giving ammunition to our enemies.*

*Personally, I think that De Cierta Manera is not such a case. In my view, that film, like many others which examine our present reality, merely registers a lived situation, that is to say, one in which the contradictions are manifest and in the process of being resolved. Because the only way to eliminate the contradictions is to have a sincere and open attitude towards them and to try to resolve the conflicts. I believe that this, in the long run, is absolutely and undeniably positive.*

*However, I'm not always sure how this should be dealt with in distributing films ab-*

*road. For example, when The Death of a Bureaucrat was made, someone from the U.S., I don't remember now exactly who, requested a print of it for exhibition there. At that time, the people here at ICAIC—and I was in complete agreement with them—decided that The Death of a Bureaucrat was not the best film to show in the United States at that particular time, before any other Cuban film had been seen there. That decision seemed to me at the time a very wise one.*

*I think that now it would be perfectly possible to show it, I don't think that there would be any problem. But, you see, these things depend on particular circumstances and thus must be treated with care. We cannot remain removed from the political questions or retain a liberal mode of thinking or anything of the sort. We have to be fully conscious of what our films mean and how they are viewed in a particular setting and at a particular historical moment.*

*On the other hand, The Death of a Bureaucrat in our own context—aside from the fact that it was a great success with the public—was very healthy because it revitalized the entire discussion, the whole polemic about the risks of bureaucratization in our incipient socialist society. It was very positive.*

*Q: Returning to the question of the relation of the form to the content of the film—more precisely, the way in which the audience is incorporated into the experience of the film—it seems that there is an enormous difference between a film like Memories, for example, or even De Cierta Manera, and a film like The Last Supper. In the latter, with its traditional storyline, the audience does not need to involve itself as actively in the film. Whereas in a film like Memories, if one is not constantly paying attention, asking oneself how a sequence relates to the ones which came before it, one either gets lost or fails to appreciate what is going on in the film. There is a level of active intellectual involvement required of the viewer because of either an intentional 'deconstruction' of the narrative line or because of a self-conscious effort to constantly expose, subvert, or call into questions the filmic forms which are being used.*



*I mention Memories as an example because I've seen the same phenomenon in other films as well—in Bay of Pigs, in The First Charge of the Machete, in The Other Francisco, and most recently in Mella—but in the most recent films it is much less apparent. Do you see this as characteristic of current film production?*

A: I think it is determined, in *The Last Supper* at least, by the theme itself, which is very linear, based as it is on a very simple anecdote. There is no reason to make it more complicated, to restructure it in any but a very natural and organic way according to the central concern of the theme itself. In historical films in general, it seems to me that this is more or less the case, because things can be seen more clearly.

Q: *What about an historical film like The First Charge of the Machete? Despite its flaws, despite the exaggerated use of high contrast, it is an historical film which operates as a presentation of an historical event, but always reminding the spectator that s/he is viewing not history itself, but an act of historical interpretation. In order to accomplish this, the director had to forsake traditional narrative devices for a much more disruptive presentation of events.*

A: As I see it, *The First Charge* is an extremely significant and important film—very revealing in its way of approaching history. I agree with you that it is flawed, especially at the end. That is, the Charge of the Machete, the actual battle, is so overworked that it almost remains unseen, or unseeable. It's a shame, since it is a film which is developed out of a very important idea. Its means of approaching the historical event are brilliant as far as I'm concerned.

Q: *What is interesting to me about Cuban cinema in this regard is that it is committed not only to exploring and reclaiming the historical event, but also to constantly revealing a self-conscious awareness about the process of historical interpretation. I regret having been unable so far to see your film, A Cuban Struggle Against The Demons, because I am very curious to see exactly how it deals with these issues.*

A: I'm afraid that film will be somewhat of a

frustrating experience for you. Aside from the fact that in and of itself it is very confused because it is too overlaid with various layers of meaning, and with excessively difficult metaphors, I also made a fundamental mistake in the editing. Because it turned out to be too weighty for the viewing public, I tried to lighten it up a bit by editing out some of the narrative. Afterwards, I realized that I had only confused matters further.

On top of this, I'm afraid that right now there are no complete copies. The last time I saw the film—a few months ago on television—the copy was damaged in many places with crucial portions of some scenes missing. The copies that exist are the ones that were shown in the theaters, and since it was not a film which enjoyed a great deal of success with the public, there has been no interest in making new copies to replace the worn and damaged ones.

Q: *Given that The Last Supper is the first feature film which you have made in color, I wonder if you have found any significant differences between working black and white and working in color.*

A: What I've found is that many more possibilities are available. It seems much more interesting to work in color, as long as it is handled in a disciplined way. I think that we did an extraordinary job with color in *The Last Supper*. This is primarily due to the director of photography, Mario Gracia Joya, who also served as director of photography for *A Cuban Struggle Against the Demons*, which was his first feature film. *The Last Supper* is his second feature, though he has filmed many documentaries. He worked out a very intensive and precise color analysis. Color is, after all, yet one more expressive resource, and as such, it has great attractions for me.

Q: *Do you think the fact that the film was made in color influenced the means you employed in making it? Would you have made the film differently had you been working in black and white?*

A: I never really thought about it in those terms, but I think I would have had to look for other solutions in order to create a similar atmosphere in black and white. For example,



the supper sequence, which has an ochre color, a kind of illumination which corresponds to candle light, would have been very difficult to create in black and white.

*Q: One concrete question I had about The Last Supper deals with the role of Don Gaspar, the Frenchman who emigrated to Cuba after the Haitian revolutions and who works on the Count's sugar mill as an engineer. How do you conceive his role within the social structure represented in the film?*

*A: Don Gaspar is a technician, and as such he serves as a sort of archetype. At that time, he found himself in between the landowning, slave-holding class and the slaves themselves. His position is that of a person who has a 'secret', that is, a particular skill which he is able to sell to the Count and thus obtain a certain degree of freedom. As a salaried employee, he continues to be dependent on the property owner, but not to the same degree as the slaves are.*

*Coming from Haiti, he is more marked by French culture, by the ideas of the French Revolution, etc. He would be best identified with the position presented by the Free-masons of the period. He played a progressive role because he was sort of philanthropist in that he was interested in finding a greater equality with his fellow man. His sense of justice was rather abstract, to say the least, but at least he was disturbed by the injustices he saw around him.*

*What we discovered in the course of making the film is that the character is simply too interesting. We didn't dare develop him as thoroughly as his importance demands because that would require another film. We had to reduce his importance within the film, leaving him simply as a spectator who is closer to us, the audience of the film. So that the role he plays is to underline certain significant moments in the film as a spectator who looks on with a critical eye.*

*Q: Since you have been so involved in the development of Cuban cinema, evn before the revolution with the filming of El Me-Gano, I would like to ask how you see the evolution of the Cuban cinematic process in the last decade. What do you see as the major influences*

*on Cuban film activity—not only in thematic and stylistic terms, but in terms of the mode of production as well, that is, the process by which Cuban filmmakers organize their filmmaking activity?*

*I know, for instance, that the influence of Italian Neo-Realism in the early years was substantial, and you are in an excellent position to evaluate its impact since you studied in Italy and have subsequently witnessed the whole evolution of Cuban filmmaking first hand. Then, of course, there are other influences as well—early Soviet cinema, the French New Wave, Hollywood films, other films from Latin America . . .*

*A: Perhaps I won't be able to answer your question with as much depth and precision as I would like because I am not very clear about the most recent years. As a matter of fact, at this particular time I am in the process of trying to analyze and weigh the various factors influencing this situation, but I have not as yet developed a full analysis.*

*However, one thing is obvious, From the beginning of the Revolution, our artistic foundation was in fact essentially Italian Neo-Realism. Very obvious considerations account for this, and not only the fact that Julio [Garcia Espinosa] and I had studied in Italy during that period and were pretty permeated with that mode of approaching filmmaking.*

*I have to say that when we returned we continued to hold a very positive estimation of that experience in an historical perspective, but when it came to our evaluation of Neo-Realism as an aesthetic we were no longer so positive, because we had conclusively seen all the limitations to which it was subject. What we were looking for was something else. However, Neo-Realism was our origin, and we neither are able nor want to deny it.*

*Q: Could you be more specific about the aesthetic limitations you mentioned?*

*A: At the time it appeared, Neo-Realism sprung up apparently spontaneously. It reflected a very confusing reality—that of post-war Italy. To the degree that it did this accurately and honestly, it was, of course, very constructive, because it allowed the essence of that reality to be shown. It was a very trans-*



parent kind of reality, since such convulsive historical moments virtually express themselves. Because everything seems so apparent at such times, the requisite analysis turns out to be much easier. Since film is a good medium for capturing apparent realities, the Neo-Realist experience is a very constructive one. That reality perceived by the camera in and of itself conveyed a situation full of contradictions; the act of documenting that historical moment could not in fact avoid bringing them to the forefront.

In our view, as that particular reality began to evolve and to change, Neo-Realism began to lose its early driving force. It did not evolve a parallel or proportionate way, but instead began to deteriorate, to accommodate itself to a commercialized concept of film as simply merchandise. Thus only those spectacular elements of Neo-Realism which were capable of maintaining a hold on the public continued to be exploited. We saw this very clearly.

What happened to us, then? We date the beginning of our filmmaking here from after the Revolution, since *El Megano* is nothing more than a forerunner which, if you like, reveals our concerns but without yet integrating them. So when we began to make films a post-revolutionary situation, that Neo-realist mode of approaching reality was very useful to use because in that early stage we needed little more. First of all, we were not developed enough as filmmakers to posit other approaches. Secondly, our own national situation at that juncture was convulsive, very transparent, very clear. All we had to do was set up a camera in the street and we were able to capture a reality that was spectacular in and of itself, extremely absorbing, and laden with meaning. That kind of filmmaking was perfectly valid for that particular historical moment.

But our revolution also began to undergo a process of change. Though certainly not the same as that which occurred in postwar Italy, the meaning of external events began to become less obvious, less apparent, much deeper and more profound. That process forced us to adopt an analytical attitude towards the reality which surrounded us. A greater disci-

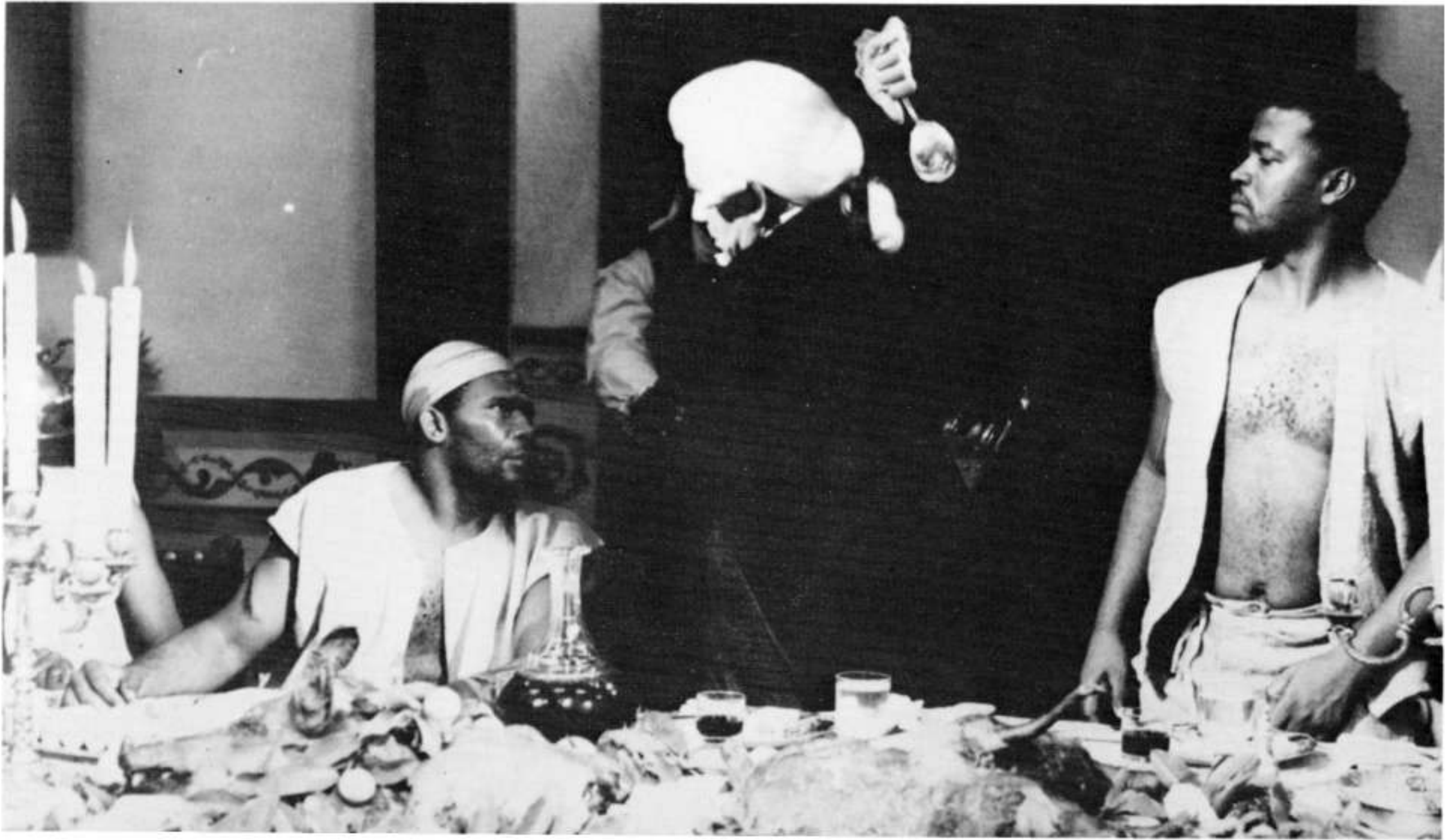
pline, a much more exact theoretical criterion was then required of us in order to be able to properly analyze and interpret what we were living through. We, of course, retained the clear intention of projecting ourselves toward the future, of fulfilling the social function of cinema in the most effective way possible.

I'm not sure that this is really a complete answer to your question. I should add that subsequently we have had access to the entire gamut of world film production. We have obviously been influenced by the French New Wave. Naturally this produced a few flawed efforts, since the concerns of the New Wave filmmakers had in fact very little to do with our own reality and with our own approach to it.

Godard, for example, has exerted an inescapable influence. Since he is such a brilliant destroyer of the cinema, he offers many challenges. From this distance, I think that the Godard phenomenon can begin to be properly evaluated, noting his limitations as well as his successes. His intention was clearly to make the revolution in the realm of the cinema before making the revolution in reality. However, his endeavor has a very constructive force because he succeeds to a certain extent in making us see, in making us question the degree to which we might be at the rear of the revolutionary process rather than in the vanguard.

Our role is to be united with the revolutionary process. Thus our language as filmmakers has to evolve parallel with the revolution. It is important to be conscious of this, because one can accommodate oneself very easily to stereotypes, to comfortable ways of doing things. Let's face it, there is tendency sometimes to resist change, don't you think? So that I think Godard's work has been useful to us in this sense. Besides, as long as you look at that phenomenon from within the revolution, it seems to me that you see it much more clearly. This permits you to be on guard against its limitations and false steps. What condemns godardian cinema in the last analysis is its own incommunicability. If it doesn't reach the people, it is of no use. For us, genuine communication is absolutely fundamental, so we must avoid falling into this







syndrome at all costs. However, as I've been saying, to the degree that Godard provoked the destruction of an entire series of models of bourgeois cinema, his work has been very valuable.

What other influences have we felt? There's the 'marginal cinema', with which we are only partially familiar. We have seen very little of the North American underground cinema, for example, so I am unable to evaluate it.

We are familiar, though, with the kind of alternative cinema which is being produced in several Latin American countries (Venezuela, for example): a militant cinema which aims at the poorest sectors of the country and seeks the kind of response that will spark a *toma de conciencia* about the social and political problems which those people face. It is a kind of filmmaking which I believe is valuable to an extent, a necessary kind of cinema, but one which must not forget that the cultural struggle must also be waged and won on the commercial screens. In making that kind of 'marginal' or alternative cinema, you can obviously not compete with the kind of Hollywood spectacles shown in commercial theaters, the kinds of films which attract, among others, that very section of the population which the militant filmmakers are trying to reach. It is thus also necessary to try to reach the commercial screens with a kind of cinema which is essentially different from, for example, *Jaws*. (Actually, I haven't yet seen *Jaws*, but I imagine that it is a fitting example of the Hollywood film-as-spectacle.)

*Q: Your emphasis on the importance of a commercially viable alternative cinema makes me think of the Brazilian Cinema Novo movement, because of the effort Brazilian filmmakers made throughout the 60's to ensure and expand their access to a broad national public in commercial theaters. Has the Cinema Novo movement exerted any influence on Cuban cinema?*

*A: Yes, Brazilian cinema also had an impact here. It was a kind of revelation for us. Primarily, the early works of Glauber Rocha, although a great deal of Brazilian cinema has been shown in Cuba.*

In fact, we see an extremely broad range of

films here. Of course, our situation is very different from that of most film-producing countries. This is due to the fact that in addition to controlling production, we also control the movie screens. That is, what we see is in fact what we choose to see. This is another way to educate the public.

This process of training the public taste is very interesting. Obviously, we made a revolution here, we won, and that revolution developed and was radicalized quite rapidly; in the process we became conscious of what socialism was. All this happened very fast, at an almost dizzying pace. But during this very fervid time, the Cuban public continued to see Hollywood and Mexican films—until the time when the U.S. imposed the blockade [1961], when it was no longer possible to continue to see the new Hollywood films, though the older ones continued to be shown with great success. Mexican movies also stopped coming, even though diplomatic relations with Mexico were never severed, once the Mexican film enterprises which existed in Cuba had been nationalized by the revolutionary government.

Initially it seemed that this cutting off of the feature film supply was a disaster. Our public was thoroughly accustomed to those films. But I think it was actually a great boon for us. Traditional Mexican cinema—apart from a few exceptions and some interesting things that are currently being done—is absolutely dismal. It conditions the public to respond to the worst commercial motives and devices, just as Hollywood films do to a very large extent (I don't mean to say that every Hollywood film functions this way, but certainly the vast majority do).

So what happened when the supply was so abruptly cut off? The film-going public, despite being at that time in full support of socialism, ready in fact to give their lives in order to preserve the revolutionary system of government which was being implemented here, and unreservedly enthusiastic about the revolution, was reluctant to go to the movies to see the films which we were able to show at that time—Soviet films, Czech films, in short, what was then accessible to us—because these films represented a new kind of film lan-





guage for them, one that was too alien.

There's another thing which should be noted. Because of the film shortage, we were compelled to import films rather indiscriminately, without a careful selection process to determine which films were more adaptable to the taste and needs of our people. Instead, it was necessary to bring in whatever we could because we had to fill the screens of our theaters. So, many things that were in fact quite mediocre (because mediocre films are produced everywhere) were brought in.

Subsequently, film exhibition became much more diversified. A great deal of European production was brought in. All the films imported from the socialist camp were subjected to more of a selection process. Currently, the film-going public in Cuba—well, you can see it for yourself—is massive. It's really very impressive. They have come to accept and understand other film languages, other approaches to filmmaking. I think it's very interesting that the evolution in the awareness and sophistication of our viewing public, though it was forced upon us by circumstances beyond our control, turned out to be very positive.

*Q: Have there been studies here in Cuba of audience response to various kinds of films?*

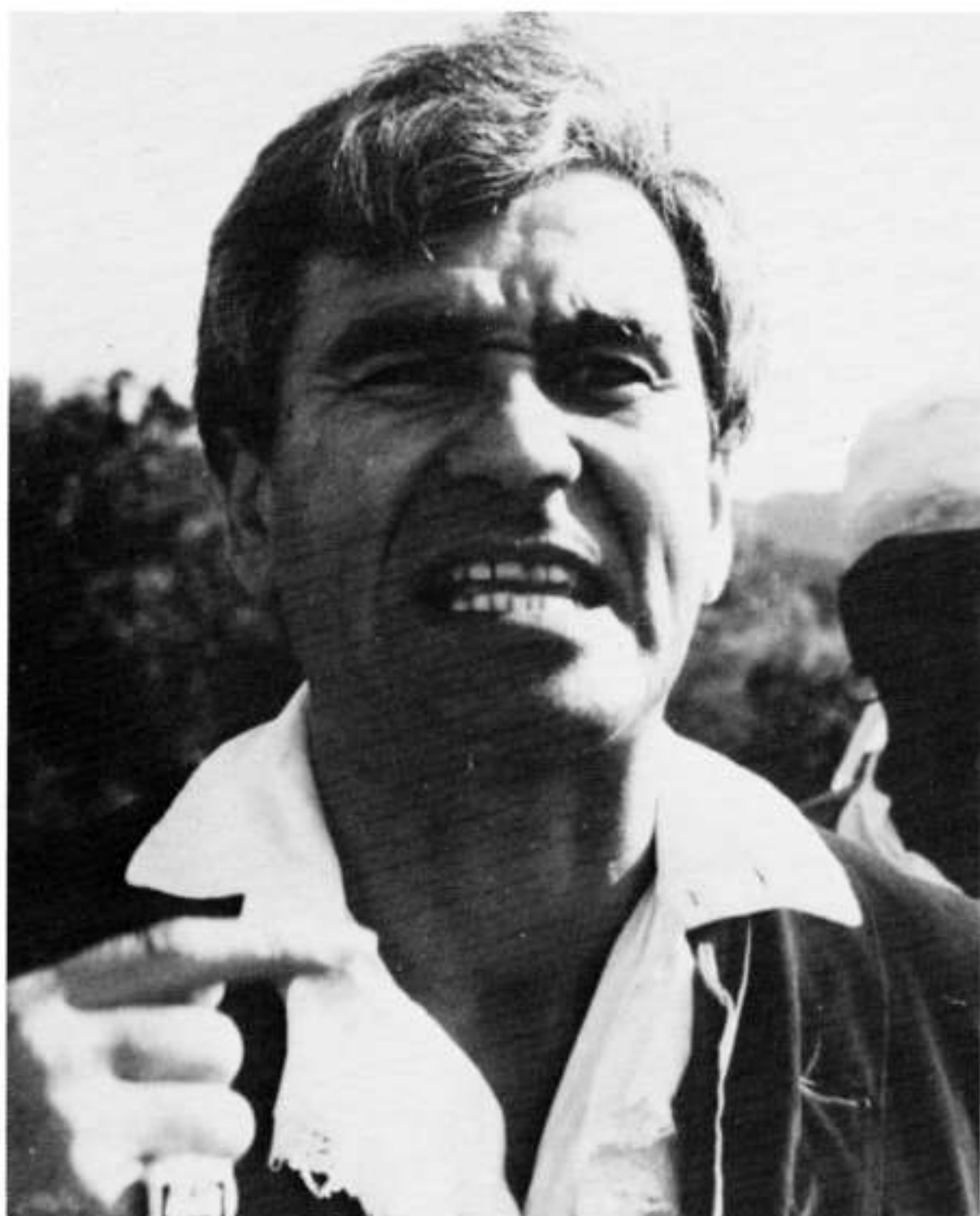
A: It's an area that we've just begun to work in. Personally, I think it is of cardinal importance. It grows out of something we were discussing before, of the necessity which all of us feel to delve deeper into the theoretical criteria with which we confront our cinematic task. As I've said, up until now those have been quite spontaneous and circumstantially imposed, but now—in our current stage of institutionalization—theoretical inquiry must acquire a new level and a new dimension.

*Q: Do you think it's possible to identify specific characteristics of Cuban cinema—not so much of the production process but on the level of the films themselves?*

A: I take it that you're asking whether there is an identifiably Cuban film 'language.' Well, let's see. Since our entire initial stage was marked by improvisation and emphasis on what was feasible, it may have been somewhat slow in its utilization of expressive resources and whatever, but it certainly manifested itself in a very fresh and direct way. It has continued, to consolidate a certain style which seems to mark each of us equally. This has been to our advantage. At this stage, the idea is not to abandon that style, but rather to take advantage of it—of its popular, authentic, organic elements. I think the formation of a certain style, a tendency or direction which marks us all is inevitable. But still there is a certain dispersion as well; many different styles and concepts continue to exist. We're still in a period of quest.

When it comes to trying to generalize as to the nature of this style, it is clear that our Neo-Realist foundation has not totally disappeared. Despite all of its ideological and political limitations, despite our own evolution which has gone in a different direction, one thing is sure and continues to condition us: our film production must of necessity be inexpensive. We do not have the means to undertake super-productions. So the kind of cinema which adapts itself to our interests, fortunately, is a kind of light, agile cinema, one that is very directly founded upon our own reality. We have never lost sight of this. In fact, I think





that the best of our cinema, the most fully realized works, are achieved through a very direct link with our particular circumstances. You must have seen this in *De Cierta Manera*, for example. The film seems a bit careless, a little awkward, almost as if it had been let loose on its own, but it also succeeds in penetrating our reality to an uncommon degree, producing an impact which is somehow charged with poetry. I think that it is there above all that our reality is shaped.

*Q: Changing the subject somewhat. I'd like to talk about how you see your role inside of ICAIC. Apart from directing, for instance, your name appears in many films as collaborator or consultant. What does this work consist of?*

*A:* This is merely a result of the fact that I am one of the oldest directors, and as such, I alternate my work in film direction with my younger directors, helping them in their development. This is completely natural, and I'm very interested in this work. I think I will be dedicating increasingly more time to it.

*Q: Have you worked with others besides Sarita Gomez (De Cierta Manera) and Sergio Giral (The Other Francisco, El Rancheador)?*

*A:* I've worked with them in particular because they have made feature-length films. I also work with a group of documentary directors. I am not the only one who provides this kind of assistance. Manuel Perez *The Man From Maisinicu* who is a lot younger than I, but has been involved in film a long time and has matured very rapidly, does the same thing. So does Jorge Fraga [*The New School*]. We have divided ourselves among all the documentarists. When it comes to feature-length films, Julio Garcia Espinosa usually works on them, though Jorge Fraga and I often do too.

*Q: Is it an explicit policy rather than just a prevalent practice at ICAIC to avoid always giving the best directorial opportunities to the more 'consecrated' directors, to give the opportunity to make feature-length films to younger people who are still very much in the process of artistic development?*

*A:* Of course. This is clearly a necessity. What happens is that not all of the young directors are sufficiently trained. Many have



reached the stage of making feature films without a solid enough background. This happens with shorts as well. We have gone about learning to make films through the practical, concrete experience of making them. This method naturally carries with it a great deal of imbalance, and notable shortcomings in some cases.

*Q: With regard to your future plans, will assisting in the development of younger directors be your primary activity?*

*A:* In fact my intentions is to keep alternating between making films myself and assisting developing filmmakers. This year I plan to make another film. I'm already to give this project priority when it comes to deciding how I will allocate my time. My second priority will be to continue working with that group of younger directors.

What I am also extremely interested in is to continue developing a level of theoretical activity. This is one of the things that most concerns us, because now, at this particular stage, we realize that we must dedicate much more attention to theoretical work, to formulating our concerns on a much more profound level. We have to analyze all that we have done in order to plan for the future with a greater awareness instead of leaving everything to spontaneous solutions, which is more or less what we have been doing up to now.

I should clarify that our work was never totally improvised; there have always been theoretical investigations, but never with the degree of discipline or insistence which we should now be able to achieve. It is not that this work is just beginning now. In fact it began some time ago, but these theoretical inquiries have to continue to expand. I think that now we will see increasing emphasis on this kind of work.

This is not likely to produce immediate results, but I'm committed to it even though I know it's a long-term process. I'd like to define more clearly all that we have done here at ICAIC. I've begun to work on the question of the relationship between the film as spectacle and the audience. Specifically, what are the different levels of relation between film as pure spectacle and a cinema of ideas? Clearly,

these are not mutually exclusive poles, but rather both kinds of filmmaking must be employed simultaneously because each fulfills an important social function. I'm interested in how audience response is produced and in the uses to which this knowledge can be put. My aim would be to achieve an even greater effectiveness in the socially-committed, revolutionary propositions which can be made through film.

*Q: Exactly what form does this theoretical work take? Is it primarily confined to group discussions within the organization, or do you intend for your theoretical work to reach a broader audience?*

*A:* For some time now all the film directors and camera people have been having weekly meetings. We almost always view and discuss a film made by one of us, or a foreign film which is of general interest. Then we have open discussion about the film. But in addition to this practice, there is still the need to do more directed theoretical work.

My intention with my own theoretical work is to ensure the widest exposure possible. Julio Garcia Espinosa is also continuing his theoretical writing and will soon publish a new essay on mass communications in the magazine *Casa de las Americas*.

*Cine Cubano* is obviously another outlet for this kind of work. As you know, the magazine ceased to appear for a time due to a vast reorganization here at ICAIC which is only now assuming its final form. But it will soon reappear, and, we hope, with much greater regularity.

*Q: Can you tell us something about the film project you're currently working on?*

*A:* It will be a comedy about an upper middle-class family—of the most seasoned (so as not to say rancid) aristocracy. It is a family which has descended from the conquistadors, so that their own personal history runs parallel to the entire history of Cuba. For this reason they have a sense of themselves as the true and rightful masters of the country, the virtual incarnation of the Cuban nation.

When the Revolution comes to power, this family does not opt to leave. They decide to stay here in a kind of state of hibernation, in



order to await the end of what they see as a kind of temporary *deluvium* in order to then reassume the position to which they are entitled.

The idea is to show how this family sustains itself more than anything on externals, formalities, ceremony—on all the cultural habits from which their identity as bourgeois 'aristocrats' derives. Their primary concern is to maintain, with the maximum purity and order, all the formalities of the bourgeois life style.

If we view this family as a miniature state, from a capitalist form of social organization they move on to a feudalist one. Initially, their servants remain with them voluntarily, because the family offers them protection from what they see as the chaos outside. However, a time comes when the family is no longer able to pay them. The servants come to a point when they would really like to leave, because they begin to receive news that the situation in the outside world is changing. But then their masters will not let them, and so the estate reverts to a kind of feudal organization, but always with an eye to the preservation of bourgeois ceremony.

That feudal period lasts only a short time because its structure is too weak. A more iron hand must be imposed, lest the servants escape. There's a kind of *coup d'état* within the family, and one of its members, a businessman, takes over. He creates a slaveholding fascist state. All the servants become slaves, and they are compelled to produce (they have cows, orchards, vegetable gardens) in order that the family can supply its own needs.

This situation lasts longer, about ten years, but it too proves unworkable. There comes a time when the slaves, as is only natural, begin to become conscious of their situation, and they rebel. They are exterminated. Not a single servant remains. That night the entire family sits down to dinner, but there is not a soul to serve them. They thus move on to a state of primitive communism. They convince each other they themselves must begin to work. They organize themselves like a primitive commune. But they still retain their candelabras, their sets of china, all the bourgeois

ceremonies.

When they begin to work, the older members of the family, of course, don't know how or don't want to know. They rely on the younger ones, who have a hard time of it. Many animals die, many harvests are spoiled. They begin to know what it means to go hungry. Many incidents occur, but the result is that they finally are driven to a completely savage state. They begin to eat one another—but with tablecloths and a full silver service, of course.

So you see, the film is a kind of metaphor for the tremendous and dreadful impact of bourgeois propriety. Though both they and their rituals will be swept away, it's a long, difficult and painful process.

*Q: As a final area of discussion, I'd like to ask what you see as the personal advantages of the kind of state-owned film production system that currently exists in Cuba, in contrast to the Hollywood system, for example, or to conditions in Italy when you studied filmmaking there in the early 50's.*

*A:* I imagine that this is a very difficult thing for the majority of people in a non-socialist country to understand, because they're clearly marked by bourgeois ideology, and they find the idea of giving up certain limited bourgeois freedoms to be a very painful one because they are unable to conceive of freedom in any other terms. For me, their point of view has very grave limitations.

To the extent that we are part of our revolutionary process, to the extent that we believe in it and (to ground the discussion in our specific situation here in Cuba) to the extent that we realize that for the first time we are in control of what we're doing, of our own actions, we are exercising a much greater freedom than that which can be exercised in any country where conflict between different classes continues to exist. For a social system based on unequal exercise of power and influence *always* works in favor of the most powerful, who sometimes grant some scraps of apparent freedom to those whose lives they dominate. However, these always turn out to be more illusory than real.

In contrast, the freedom that we feel





here—I'm sorry if this sounds a little abstract, but it's hard to express—derives from that fact that we are very aware of working together toward a common goal. We feel united around an idea and involved in implementing it together.

I'm not sure whether I've succeeded in conveying to you the full measure of our feelings and point of view. This freedom which we feel in working together is a completely different experience from the purely individual creative freedom so precious to people in capitalist society.

We too have to undergo certain contradictions. We discover things which we feel we have to fight against. But it is on another level. For example, the struggle against bureaucratization is one which we know we will win. It is not that despairing fight that reduces you to a state of frustration. On the contrary, we here have to be optimists. Not because anyone requires us to be, but because our real-life situation imposes that optimism on us in indicating to us that we are on the right track.

A state-owned, centralized production system like the one that we have is very different from what an 'independent' private company, for instance, might be. I put 'independent' in quotation marks because under such a system one is always dependent to some extent on those in power. When you attempt to free yourself from that dependence, you are reduced either to impotence or to total incommunication. So you see that there is really no means of comparison.

*Q: I remember in 1973 when there was all the commotion about the U.S. State Department's refusal to allow you to attend the National Society of Film Critics' awards ceremonies where you were to receive a special award for Memories of Underdevelopment. I think it was in the speech Andrew Sarris gave as President of the organization where he lamented that you had not been allowed to make another film here in Cuba subsequent to Memories. Even though the assertion was false—you had already made A Cuban Struggle Against the Demons—it is typical of strong de-*



*sire abroad to view you as a prisoner of the Cuban regime. Their idea is that you are a great director who should be putting out a film a year. If you are not, it must be because you are not allowed to.*

A: That was in fact the most unfortunate statement to be found in all the articles which I read, because it is evident that the man had a personal stake in giving his own interpretation, despite the fact that it had no connection with the actual situation. His lack of information was such that one suspects a kind of tendentious ignorance, if such a thing is possible. It's hard to know in such cases where ignorance leaves off and stupidity or malice begin.

The fact is that I have been dedicating a lot of my time to the kind of work which I was describing to you before—the process of acting as advisor for other *companeros*—which I view as being just as important as my own personal achievement as a director. For someone like Andrew Sarris it must be extremely difficult to understand, but I have to say that for me what I might achieve as an individual director is no more important than what the whole group of us here at ICAIC achieves together. I have no desire to stand out more than the others simply in order to fulfill my own creative needs at the expense of

my fellow filmmakers. Individual fulfillment is not everything. In a situation like ours, the collective achievement is just as important as the personal one. This assertion does not grow out of any attempt to appear more generous, less egotistical, but rather from my firm belief in what we as a group are doing.

In order to be completely realistic, in order to avoid appearing saintly, like some extraterrestrial being removed from all personal interest, I would like to state that in order for me to fulfill my individual creative needs as a director, I need for there to be a Cuban cinema. In order to find my own personal fulfillment, I need the existence of the entire Cuban film movement as well. Otherwise, it's impossible. Without such a movement, my work might appear as a kind of 'accident' within a given artistic tendency. Under such circumstances, one might enjoy some degree of importance, but without ever achieving the level of self-realization to which you really aspire. This is not measured by the level of recognition you might achieve, but rather by the knowledge that you are giving all you can and that the environment you work in guarantees you that possibility.

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