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An "Other" History: The New Latin American Cinema

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The notion of Latin America exceeds all nationalisms. There is a common problem: misery. There is a common objective: the economic, political, and cultural freedom to make a Latin American cinema. An engaged, didactic, epic, revolutionary cinema. A cinema without frontiers, with a common language and common problems.

—Glauber Rocha, *Revolução do Cinema Novo*

I □

By 1955–57, filmmaking in Latin America had suffered irreparable reverses. In Brazil, the bankruptcy of the Hollywood-modeled Vera Cruz studios in 1954 had proven that an industrial structure and capitalization were not sufficient to guarantee the development of a Brazilian cinema. From 1955 to 1957, production figures hovered between twenty-five and thirty-six films a year and consisted primarily of musical comedies called *chanchadas* made in Rio de Janeiro for domestic consumption.¹ In Argentina, the coup d'état that ousted Perón in 1954 also dismantled all state protection of the cinema and paralyzed an already-waning industry. Although Argentine production had topped fifty films a year in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by 1957 annual production had dropped to fifteen films. In Chile, the moribund state enterprise for the cinema, Chile Films, struggled for survival and only one or two national films were produced each year. In Cuba, a disastrous trend of Cuban-Mexican co-productions wound down and national production almost disappeared. Bolivia had never recovered from the advent of the sound cinema and had released no national films since 1938.

By 1968–69, although total production figures for most Latin American nations were not much greater, a tremendous difference in the nature of filmmaking and filmic reception was evident.² In Argentina, the efforts of Fernando Birri at the Documentary School of Santa Fe had challenged the otherwise prevalent industrial mode of filmmaking, and other radicalized young

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filmmakers had taken the cinema—conceived of as a tool for demystification and revolution—underground. In Brazil, the innovative Cinema Novo movement emerged from the ashes of the failed industrial efforts of Vera Cruz to revitalize the Brazilian cinema. In the decade following the triumph of the revolution in 1959, Cuba became the first Latin American country where it was possible to construct a new cinematic culture on a national scale by reorganizing all aspects of the cinematic experience. In Chile, the national cinema was already synonymous with Popular Unity and the Allende political experiment.³ In Bolivia, young filmmakers like Jorge Sanjines challenged the hegemony of the state filmmaking apparatus and subverted its principles to produce a cinema for the majority Indian population of the nation.

In all Latin American nations, the 1960s were years of cultural and political effervescence, and the cinema—conceived of as an aesthetic, cultural, and political-ideological phenomenon—was self-consciously immersed in the maelstrom of popular and intellectual debates. In Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Cuba, and Bolivia cine clubs, film societies, film magazines, and museum exhibitions mobilized an active interest in national film culture and amateur filmmaking as committed activities. Throughout the continent in nations as radically different as Argentina, Bolivia, and Cuba the cinema's role in society and its relationship to the continent's struggle for liberation were redefined in the late 1950s and 1960s. By 1968 or 1969, the cinema of Latin America could rightly be called the New Latin American Cinema, a pan-Latin American cinematic movement dedicated to the people of the continent and their struggles for cultural, political, and economic autonomy.

By comparison to the standard or dominant cinematic movements and national cinemas, the New Latin American Cinema is peculiar: a marginal, politicized, often clandestine cinematic practice that has managed to give expression to new forms and contents; to create alternative modes of production, consumption, and reception; to produce great box office hits as well as utterly clandestine films; and, in short, to change the social function of the cinema in Latin America. It is a challenge to scholars because it spans a somewhat nebulous period, from the late 1950s to the present, at least a dozen countries (that today include those of Central America), and every genre or cinematic mode of production, while maintaining a tenacious, albeit often problematic, unity.

It is a "movement," but one much larger than any of the cinematic practices usually studied under this category, and one more unified than the international modernist or avant-garde cinemas. Unlike other "new cinema" postwar movements (such as Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave, the New German Cinema), its unity is not limited to the desire for nationalist expression and differentiation from the Hollywood "pleasure machine." Furthermore, the New Latin American Cinema is a political cinema committed to praxis and to the socio-political investigation and transformation of the underdevelopment that characterizes Latin America. It is thus one that cannot

be properly understood in isolation from political, social, economic, cultural, and aesthetic forces.

The nature of the movement itself, then, demands that the analyst rethink the categories that are normally used to construct film historical discourses. Telling and analyzing the development of this movement entail much more than providing a list of "first films" and dates and identifying the "great men and women" and the "nations" behind them. If we cannot pin the movement down to a nation, to a hard-and-fast periodization, to the artistry of individual auteurs, or to a general dominant aesthetic, then we have to begin by investigating other alternatives for structuring history if it is going to explain the specificity of this cinema.

In this essay, I will provide an analysis of the historical development of the New Latin American Cinema. My primary concern is to analyze the difficulties involved in the historical study of this cinema and my focus will be on the complex network of determinants that catalyzed the movement's emergence and, later, its efforts to achieve pan-Latin American unity.

Some scholars have argued that the New Latin American Cinema as a movement is best defined in political terms: The movement coheres and exists because it is the cinematic elaboration of radical left aspirations for Latin America. As such, it represents a radical "break" from existing cinematic practices. Others have argued that the New Latin American Cinema is a "fiction" and that the national cinema movements that make up the New Latin American Cinema are far too different to be discussed as a coherent "movement." In this essay, although affirming the existence and continued political viability of the New Latin American Cinema, I present a different way of defining the movement that takes into account its historical evolution from and its transformation of national and international cinematic practices.

II □

What is the New Latin American Cinema? The term represents an attempt to impose unity on a number of diverse cinematic practices; a political move to create an order out of disorder and to emphasize similarities rather than differences. It acquires its cultural and political currency retroactively, because it is used to redefine and value contestational cinematic movements that emerged independently in different countries. Unlike other "new" cinemas in Europe, the New Latin American Cinema is not traceable to a "miracle year" (like 1959 for the French New Wave) or to a single manifesto (like the Oberhausen document for the New German Cinema). It emerged slowly, its difference from other practices becoming gradually more pronounced, its goals coalescing throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The term is fraught with as many definitional inconsistencies as the French "New Wave" or the "New" German Cinema, but whereas the labels for these other critical categories have become obsolete as the different concerns of their practitioners became evident in their third and fourth films, the appropriateness and cultural cur-

rency of the term *New Latin American Cinema* has continued to grow, and today it seems to have become completely institutionalized. Fifteen years ago we could speak of a "Third Cinema," an "Imperfect Cinema," or a "Cinema of Hunger," but these labels are now subsumed under the far more powerful and empowering "New Latin American Cinema."⁴

When the term is used today it always implies a sociopolitical attitude that constitutes the principal source of unity for these films and practices. That attitude can be summarized as a desire to change the social function of the cinema, to transform the Latin American cinema into an instrument for change and of consciousness-raising or *concientización*. Always conceived of as a challenge to the hegemony of the Hollywood import and foreign control of cinematic institutions and as an active agent in the process of cultural decolonization, the New Latin American Cinema is not just a filmmaking movement; it is a social practice intimately related to other movements struggling for the sociocultural, political, and economic autonomy of Latin America. And it is a social practice that revels in the diversity and multiplicity of its efforts to create an "other" cinema with "other" social effects as a prerequisite of its principal goal to reveal and analyze the "reality," the underdevelopment and national characteristics, that decades of dependency have concealed.⁵

In the 1950s, a confluence of factors gave rise to conditions that would set the stage for the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema as a movement. Politically, these were tempestuous years characterized by the rise of nationalism and militancy. Massive political changes took place throughout the continent: the *bogotazo* in Colombia in 1949, the unfinished workers' revolution in Bolivia in 1952, liberal reforms in Guatemala in 1954 that provoked U.S. intervention, the suicide of the populist Brazilian President Getulio Vargas in 1954, the military overthrow of Argentine President Perón in 1955, and, most significantly, the guerrilla war in Cuba that led to the establishment of a socialist regime in 1959. In the 1960s, the continued success of the Cuban revolution served as a central inspiration for social change and the rise of guerrilla and radical-left movements throughout the continent. With the mobilization of the middle classes in support of sweeping sociopolitical changes, this political turmoil was translated into a kind of cultural effervescence that, when linked to the traditionally *engagé* position of Latin American intellectuals and the growing student activism of the period, set the stage for broad cultural changes that decisively affected the cinema.

First, the context of filmic reception—of exhibition and consumption—began to change. The emergence of cine clubs, specialized film publications, film societies, and film festivals in the 1950s and early 1960s led to a different awareness of the cultural significance of the cinema. Although most of these organizations and activities were spurred by an interest in the burgeoning European art cinema, this interest shifted attention away from the Hollywood model to alternative practices such as Italian Neo-Realism. In the context of production—the second realm to be considered here—neo-realism was a

revelation to those struggling to create national cinemas in the face of underdevelopment and the failures of industrial efforts.

In the classical sense of the term, neo-realism constituted an epistemological break for international filmmaking by representing the formerly unrepresented.⁶ It explicitly rejected the Hollywood mode of production with its low budgets, non-actors, and location shooting; it demanded an awareness of the links between cinematic production and expression; and it upheld, in Rossellini's words, "a moral position from which to look at the world."⁷ Young Latin American filmmakers such as Fernando Birri in Argentina, Nelson Pereira dos Santos in Brazil, and Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in Cuba, who had either trained at the Centro Sperimentale di Roma, the birthplace of neo-realism, or who had been strongly influenced by the movement, produced the films that are cited as the precursors of the New Latin American Cinema: Birri's *Tire Dié* (Throw me a dime; 1956–60), dos Santos's *Rio, Quarenta Graus* (Rio, forty degrees; 1955) and Alea and Espinosa's *El Mégano* (*The Charcoal Worker*; 1954). Exhibiting a shared concern for representational authenticity and a rejection of the Hollywood mode of production in favor of more artisanal forms, these films were nevertheless part of national rather than pan-Latin American efforts to change the social position of the cinema.

III □

How do these independent, nationalistic cinematic movements become the New Latin American Cinema? Before addressing this question, we must examine two historiographical issues: influence and nationalism.

Influence is generally thought of as the opposite of originality and difference, the most desirable traits for identifying the specificity of cinematic practices. The film historian or film critic always struggles to establish the difference between the object of study and other practices.⁸ To a large extent, film scholarship's fascination with the identification of oppositional film practices—be they the film noir, the women's film, the structural avant garde, or the New Latin American Cinema—must be seen as an effect of our interest in discontinuity as a progressive strategy that can be contrasted to an assumed standard, fixed, and continuous history or institution—specifically, the Hollywood cinema. In the context of the New Latin American Cinema, our contemporary interest in difference, when combined with this cinema's own discursive reinforcement of its status as an "other" and the critics' own political commitment, has led many to overlook the essential function of influences in the process of forging a New Latin American Cinema from disparate and geographically distant national cinemas. And yet one of the most telling and defining characteristics of that cinema has been its ability to transform and improvise upon existing models of cinematic production.

Although distinct in style, function, and motivation from the European

movements, the strong national cinemas of Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba in the early 1960s were indeed developed in the context of the European, anti-Hollywood, innovations and in the context of each nation's cinematic history.⁹ These "new" national cinemas were neither radically different from nor complicit with the European models but a transformation of them. Their "otherness" is predicated upon their inseparability from and their relationship to the European "dominants" rather than upon radical difference or negation.¹⁰ The ideal for Latin American national cinemas ceased to be Hollywood and was replaced by a medley of European anti-Hollywood examples: Neo-realism, Grierson's work with the social documentary in England, later the French New Wave. This new frame of reference is significant because it is accompanied by a new attitude toward the foreign example. Whereas the desire to compete with the Hollywood mode of production led either to industrial failures and frankly imitative practices or to complete rejection, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the European models are creatively transformed when they are imported to Latin America. The foreign models served as a stimulus for contestation rather than as the source of limiting specific aesthetics (for example, "realism" or "auteurism"). Combined, transformed, and changed—cannibalized—their aesthetic propositions are reformulated according to the necessities of each nation's culture. Thus, rather than speak of "influence" as a pejorative lack of originality, one must think of a process of cultural hybridization that reinscribes the values of the "foreign" into the Latin American situation and which is a characteristic of the struggle for self-definition of all cultural production in colonial-dependent nations.

The issue of nationalism and the New Latin American Cinema is related to the question of influences. In fact, if it were not for the phenomenon of influence, the New Latin American Cinema could not possibly be thought of as a movement, for it is the reciprocal and collaborative influences among different national (and nationalistic) movements that give rise to this cinema. It is particularly important, for example, to consider the influence of Cuba and the Cuban cinema on the development of the New Latin American Cinema as a movement.

The specificity of a national cinema—its difference from others—hinges precisely on the degree to which it is perceived as being "free" from "foreign" influences. This "national question" acquires specific political connotations for those nations, like the Latin American ones, where it has not been possible to sustain industrial systems of film production and where the national cinema is always a postponed or frustrated desire. Although First World historians take for granted the notion of a national cinema and use it as a source of historiographical coherence, when dealing with the cinema in Latin America, it is impossible to make such an assumption: first, because in Latin America, as the post-1973 Chilean exile cinema proved, it is possible to have a "national" cinema that is produced outside the borders of the nation-state,

financed by non-national sources, and never exhibited within the national borders;¹¹ second, because in Latin America, the national cinema question has been hotly debated almost since the importation of the medium at the turn of the century.¹² The developed-colonizing nations have an unquestionably hegemonic national culture, but the underdeveloped-colonized must struggle with national culture as a problem, needing definition, recuperation, protection. Thus whereas the United States never concerned itself with Hollywood's status as the nation's cinema (even though, as Phil Rosen has argued, classic Hollywood films do indeed turn on the screw of national identity),¹³ in Latin America, the cinema was identified as a crucial site for the utopian assertion of a collective unity defined as the nation. In the face of the dominating and stifling presence of other cultures and ideologies, the national cinema was one place from which to speak one's own culture, where the "national" culture could begin to be created.

Albeit its pan-Latin American claims, the New Latin American Cinema is coherent with national cinema projects because the issue of how to define, construct, and preserve national cinemas has always been one of its primary concerns. The New Latin American Cinema posits a different response to the national problem than the dominant cultural forces: Its subject position of nationality is not based on an identification with the colonizer or on national chauvinism. Instead, the cinema is understood as part of a process of cultural renovation that, by making visible the specificity of particular social situations (the national context) will produce a critical understanding of social reality. That critical consciousness—a new subject position, a national culture in the process of becoming—will be simultaneously national and Latin American because of the many parallels among Latin American nations: Underdevelopment, dependence, colonialism are characteristics shared by all even though differentially at work in each society. One of the principal goals of the New Latin American Cinema has been precisely to promote a different kind of national and hemispheric consciousness by attempting to transform the function of the national cinema in society and the place of the spectator in the national cinema. Above all, the New Latin American Cinema is posited as a *critical* cinema that refuses emotional manipulation; it knits together "intelligence, emotions, and the powers of intuition" to permit a different kind of spectatorship.¹⁴ As Cuban filmmaker/theorist Tomás Gutiérrez Alea has argued, the goal is to promote a spectator who "ceases to be a spectator in the real world and . . . confronts reality not as a given but as a process in which one can have an active role."¹⁵

The films of the New Latin American Cinema, ranging from documentaries like *Por Primera Vez* (*For the First Time*; 1967, Cuba, Octavio Cortazar), *La Hora de los Hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*; 1968, Argentina, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino), and *La Batalla de Chile* (*The Battle of Chile*; 1973–78, Chile, Patricio Guzmán and the Equipo Tercer Año collective) to fic-

tion films like *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*; 1968, Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), *El Chacal de Nabueltoro* (*The Jackal of Nabueltoro*; 1968–69, Chile, Miguel Littin), and *El Coraje del Pueblo* (*The Courage of the People*; 1971, Bolivia) achieve this by consistently complicating the protocols necessary for their reception. They mix documentary and fictional modes to alter the signifying work of the cinema and thereby engage their audiences at different levels.

A different concept of nationalism and nationhood in the cinema lies at the heart of the New Latin American Cinema's attempts to change the social function of the cinema in Latin America. The processes whereby national cinemas begin to exhibit or articulate the principles of the New Latin American Cinema are complex and dependent upon mutually determining relationships among a series of sociopolitical, cultural, and cinematic changes. I shall briefly outline some of these changing relationships in Argentina as an illustration of the mechanics of the process of redefining the desire for a national cinema—a process that was also taking place in Brazil and in Cuba (albeit for different reasons and in different forms in each country).

IV □

Although the Argentine cinema already had a long history before World War II, the national industry was unable to recover from a crippling wartime decline even under the protectionist policies of the populist government of Juan Perón.¹⁶ The Cinema Law of 1957—also known as the Decreto Ley 62-57 and in force until 1973—was not a stimulus for the industrial development of the national cinema, but it had one positive side-effect. By providing as much as 50 percent of the production costs of national productions, it allowed directors to become their own producers and stimulated a series of independent productions that seemed to change the physiognomy of the Argentine cinema by reintroducing national characters.¹⁷ Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson, for example, managed to set up his own production company (Producciones Angel), to retain complete artistic and financial control of his films, and to become the first European-style, self-expressive auteur of the Argentine cinema. At the other end of the spectrum, filmmaker-producer Fernando Ayala used the cinema as a medium for social criticism and analysis by adapting films from contemporary critical-realist Argentine literature and bringing to the screen topics that had previously been considered taboo.

Stimulated by the intellectualized cinema of Torre-Nilsson and provoked by the social criticism of Ayala, young *cine-clubistas* took advantage of the general industrial decline to apply for state-guaranteed production loans and to debut their first features in 1959–61. The principal filmmakers that emerged in this period were Simón Feldman, José A. Martínez Suárez, Manuel Antín, David José Kohon, Rodolfo Kuhn, and Lautaro Murúa. With the exception of Murúa, these young cinéastes adopted the cinema as a vehicle of personal

expression. Sharing the spirit of the "Young Turks" of the *Nouvelle Vague* in France, their films were narratively experimental, personal, and cosmopolitan and exploited the streets of Buenos Aires as locales for almost autobiographical self-expression.¹⁸

Although the Nueva Ola coheres as the product of a specific Argentine historical conjuncture (delimited by the political optimism of the middle classes under President Arturo Frondizi, the state's film subsidy program, and the growth of cinema culture), it is not a traditional cinematic movement that exhibits many similarities in styles or themes. Instead, the coherence of the Nueva Ola lies primarily in its class positions and ambivalences, for it was (with the possible exception of the work of Murúa) an intellectualized cinema designed for a small, elitist, Buenos Aires audience, and its major achievement was to bring to the screen and assert, with the technical fluidity of the European cinema, the world-view and individualistic experiences of the Buenos Aires middle class.

Although deeply influential, the Nueva Ola was not able to transform the Argentine cinema or to become *the* Argentine cinema. The Nueva Ola was not a commercial success, and Argentina's position in the international market precluded the extensive exportation of most of its films. The overthrow of President Frondizi in 1962, the factionalized military government of 1962–63, and the ineffectual civilian rule of President Arturo Illía from 1962 until 1966, also politically crippled the burgeoning movement (and the hopes of the bourgeoisie). Although the Nueva Ola was formally and thematically innovative, it did not attempt to change the economic base of film production, distribution, and exhibition and was therefore unable to survive the constraints of a small and closed market struggling to generate profits. Furthermore, its thematic concerns—inscribed within the cosmopolitan, middle-class problematic of Buenos Aires—failed to generate a national character or identification that was appealing to the majority of the primarily working-class Argentine film-going public.

In the margins of the Nueva Ola, another group, however, was experimenting with a different kind of filmmaking at the Instituto Cinematográfico and the Documentary Film School of the Universidad del Litoral in the province of Santa Fe. Here, Fernando Birri, a graduate of the Centro Sperimentale in Rome, proposed that what Argentina needed was not a new cinema, but a new *Argentine* cinema:

It's a matter of a national *toma de conciencia* [consciousness raising], of a take-over of our country. This is what I propose to the Argentines: that they occupy Argentina, that they capture her spiritually and materially. . . . I am not interested in proposing an aesthetic defense of reality and/or realism. What interests me is that the cinema be good for something, and for that something to be of help in constructing our reality.¹⁹



12-1 Allende addresses a rally in *The Battle of Chile*, Patricio Guzmán and the *Equipo Tercer Año* collective, Chile, 1973–78. Courtesy of New Yorker Films.

Against the blandness of the commercial cinema and the elitism of the Nueva Ola, Birri proposed a popular cinema that would document previously unrepresented aspects of national reality and that could be accepted by larger segments of the population; a cinema that addressed the non-elites of Argentina. This cinema was not to be based on autobiography, intuition, or experience but on the systematic observation and study of the phenomenon being filmed. What Birri called for as a national cinema was a realist cinema with social commitments and aspirations. Neither Birri nor the Instituto was very productive in absolute terms, but their work reverberated deeply within Argentina and later throughout all of Latin America.²⁰

Although these cinematic activities and experiments in Argentina are articulated exclusively within the national sphere and are not yet linked to the New Latin American Cinema movement, they serve as an example of the transformations of "nationalism" and the "national" cinema that were necessary for the development of that pan-Latin American consciousness. Similar transformations were taking place in this period in Cuba and in Brazil. Both the Cinema Novo movement and the Cuban revolutionary cinema emerge as efforts to affirm a different kind of national consciousness and to redefine the role of the national cinema in society.



12-2 Memories of Underdevelopment, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1968. Courtesy of New Yorker Films.

The creation and maintenance of a different kind of national cinema are central issues for the discourses of Birri in Argentina and the filmmakers of Cinema Novo in Brazil (especially Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Glauber Rocha) and the Revolutionary cinema in Cuba (Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea). However alongside that nationalistic drive developed a critique and understanding of global capitalism that was necessary for these cinemas to acquire the pan-Latin American spirit of the New Latin American cinema: Not every textual/historical expression of nationalism in the cinema constitutes a rejection of the internationalization of global capitalism that attempts to transform all the citizens of the world into equal consumers of manufactured goods.²¹ Capitalism is also a system based on the commodification and isolation of all experience, on the breakdown of experience into discrete (and marketable) units among which we must include the creation and maintenance of underdeveloped nations serving the purposes of this system. Furthermore, dependence operates through internal as well as external forces and the national (or, as it is commonly called in this instance, bourgeois nationalism) may be articulated in the service of those same forces of international capitalism. It is precisely as a movement that stresses a particular set of nationalist positions and that articulates these positions across a terrain



12-3a and b Scenes from Lucia (1968), directed by Humberto Solas, Cuba. Courtesy of New Yorker Films.

much broader than the national sphere that the New Latin American Cinema acquires its revolutionary cultural significance. It represents not just a national cultural response to the specific forces of development and underdevelopment of a particular nation state but an attempt to incorporate the importance of the national within the necessarily pan-Latin American nature of any such class-cultural struggle.

In order to outline the development of the New Latin American Cinema, it is necessary to analyze the process whereby national cinemas throughout the continent coalesced into the New Latin American Cinema. How does the Latin Americanism of the New Latin American Cinema emerge? In what contexts? Given what incentives or motivations? How is it fostered and preserved?

V □

Once the national movements of Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba had established their own identities against the commercial products that preceded them, against the Hollywood cinema, and in relation to the more progressive strands of the European cinema, they began to turn toward the Latin American continent. Before the early 1960s the *cinemanovistas* in Brazil, the *nuevaolistas* and Fernando Birri in Argentina, and the filmmakers of the ICAIC (the Cuban Institute for the Art and Industry of the Cinema) in Cuba had known of one another's existence but had made few systematic efforts to establish cinematic exchanges. Most important, the filmmakers themselves had not begun to think of their work in relation to other Latin American filmmaking, nor had they begun to conceive of their overall cultural projects as exceeding the limits of their national borders. This cinematic isolation was as marked in Brazil and Argentina as it was in Cuba, where the ICAIC devoted most of its energies to producing a didactic national cinema (primarily documentaries) with scarce resources and inexperienced personnel.²² When the process of cinematic exchange began, it slowly changed the nature of the cinema that was produced in each country. It was no longer just a question of provoking a national *toma de conciencia* of underdevelopment through the critical realism of an engaged auteur: That *toma de conciencia* became more and more a Latin American priority that included the national but sought to be of Latin American consequence as well. The individual projects and goals of national cinemas always remained distinct and clearly identifiable, but the national became contextualized and articulated in relation to a "popular" and a "political" that exceeded the boundaries of exclusively national concerns and increasingly became Latin American.

The first articulations of the New Latin American Cinema project took place as a result of a series of international meetings that began in the early 1960s. Films from several Latin American nations had participated in the major international film festivals (Cannes, Venice, etc.), but few countries had been simultaneously represented at any one festival, and, most significantly,

there had been little discussion of the specific problems of the cinema in Latin America. Film festivals held in Latin America before the 1960s had been devoted to the European art cinema rather than to regional productions. Although Uruguay's Festival Internacional de Cine Documental y Experimental (International Documentary and Experimental Film Festival) sponsored by SODRE (the Radio-Electric Broadcasting Society) had already served as an important forum for Latin American films, its emphasis on the documentary had somewhat limited the scope of its influence.

It must be noted, however, that the 1958 SODRE festival, featuring British documentary filmmaker John Grierson as guest of honor and the photo-reportage work of Fernando Birri and the Documentary School of Santa Fe, was an important precursor for the New Latin American Cinema because the first pan-Latin American association of film producers and directors, PRIDAL (Productores y Realizadores Independientes de América Latina), was created there as an outcome of discussions among filmmakers. Albeit short-lived, this organization pioneered by calling for increased cooperation and collaboration among independent Latin American filmmakers. Its members included filmmakers Nelson Pereira dos Santos of Brazil, Patricio Kaulen of Bolivia, and Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and Simon Feldman of Argentina.²³

The first sustained encounters between diverse Latin American filmmakers took place, however, on foreign soil, in a series of festivals sponsored in Italy by a Jesuit cultural group dedicated to strengthening the relationship between the "New" and "Old" worlds. At the third of these events, the 1962 Festival of Latin American Cinema in Sestri Levante, a large and diverse group of film directors, critics, and producers (including Alfredo Guevara of Cuba, Rodolfo Kohn of Argentina, and Glauber Rocha and Walter da Silveira of Brazil) were able to meet and discuss the future of the cinema in Latin America and the collective responsibilities and goals of each nation, filmmaker, and critic. In the resolutions drawn up at this meeting, following a panel discussion chaired by Edgar Morin and entitled "The Cinema as an Expression of Latin American Reality," the participants agreed to "condemn the cultural and cinematic isolation provoked by the foreign control of film production and exhibition" and to work to establish a base for collaboration among the different Latin American national cinemas and cultures.²⁴ The Sestri Levante festival thus served to situate the filmmaking projects and problems of individual nations in the context of the entire hemisphere and it furthermore allowed for important contacts to be established among filmmakers working in markedly different national cinematic conjunctures.²⁵

Two years after the impetus of Sestri Levante, the Cine Club of Uruguay sponsored a festival featuring the independent cinemas of the Southern Cone countries, but the Latin American spirit was not officially reinvented as such until the 1967 Viña del Mar Festival and the first Encuentro de Cineastas Latinoamericanos (meeting of Latin American filmmakers). The activities of

this festival, although sponsored by a small society of amateur filmmakers and originally designed to increase tourism to this resort area of Chile, were to resonate for the next decade as the events that provided the impetus for the New Latin American Cinema movement.

By the 1967 festival, the promise of Sestri Levante had already begun to be realized: There were already a considerable number of Latin American films to watch, discuss, and attempt to distribute. It had become apparent that filmmakers could indeed begin to talk about a "New Latin American Cinema" that exceeded the boundaries of each individual nation and coalesced as a larger and far more powerful entity. Furthermore, the films that could be shown already exceeded the products of "national" movements (in Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina) and included the works of filmmakers working in relative isolation in countries as diverse as Uruguay and Bolivia (represented, respectively, by Mario Handler's *Carlos* [1965] and Jorge Sanjines's *Revolución* [Revolution; 1964]).

The Viña festival also provided the stimulus for the creation of the Latin American Center for New Cinema and the Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo in Montevideo. Although short-lived, the Center and the Cinemateca played a crucial role in the development of alternative distribution systems and of closer working relationships among Latin American filmmakers through pioneering collaborations, cross-national exchanges, experiments with alternative exhibition strategies, and, in 1969, the publication of a journal—*Cine del Tercer Mundo*—emphasizing Latin American oppositional filmmaking rather than a single national cinema.

In 1967, *Cine Cubano* published a report of this first meeting of Latin American filmmakers that proclaimed a new solidarity and the birth of the New Latin American Cinema:

Despite the diversity of its creators, its nationalities, and its modes of expression, there exists in Latin America a cinema strongly opposed to the denaturalizing marks of yankee imperialism and its Latin American branches. This is a cinema that is strongly tied to the aspirations and needs of its people, a cinema that has offered a number of proofs of its very serious professional and artistic commitments.²⁶

Recognizing the importance of this first meeting of Latin American filmmakers, the Cubans heralded it as a "first step" in the collaborative process of creating a cinema for Latin American liberation. And what was perceived as the most important effect of the Viña meeting was its demonstration of the unity of purpose of the New Latin American Cinema.²⁷

This unity of purpose was again displayed at the 1968 Second Meeting of Latin American filmmakers, which took place in Mérida, Venezuela, under the auspices of the Centro de Cine Documental at the Universidad de los Andes, alongside the first Muestra de Cine Documental Latinoamericano. Some of

the most influential films of what was already recognized as the New Latin American Cinema were screened at this festival: Solanas and Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces*, Mario Handler's *Me Gustan los Estudiantes* (I like students; 1968, Uruguay), Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva's *Cbircales* (The brick makers; 1968, Colombia), and Cortázar's *For the First Time*.

Different avenues for film practices, different alternatives for a cinema of and against underdevelopment within the New Latin American Cinema were already established and would be further developed. From fiction to documentary, from shorts to feature-length films, from clandestine productions to the products of an already established industry—all these options were exercised, debated, and evaluated in the context of the cinematic/cultural/political needs of individual nations and in the context of the New Latin American Cinema's project for Latin American solidarity and liberation. In the resolutions drawn up at this meeting, the following definition of the movement was proposed:

A cinema committed to national reality; a cinema which rejects all evasive and deformative formulas and indifference and ignorance, in order to confront the problematic of the sociological, political, economic, and cultural processes which each country, according to its particular situation and characteristics, is living through; a cinema which creates works permeated by realism, whether they be fictional or documentary; simple testimonies, profound analyses, or agitational tools. A cinema born in impossible conditions, because of the infinite passion of its authors, as an act of faith. An act of faith that must not only overcome material problems of production, but which must also struggle against problems of interpretation, the comprehension of new contents, and the formal elaborations of those contents. A cinema that even when produced encounters another obstacle: finding new and appropriate distribution/exhibition channels so that the films can be seen and truly accomplish their objectives.²⁸

At this and the several meetings that were held in subsequent years (Viña del Mar in 1969, Mérida in 1970 and 1977, Caracas in 1971 and 1974) the different projects of the New Latin American Cinema were consolidated and implemented and the movement and its practitioners gained strength and solidarity. From this point on, it was no longer a question of working to establish a New Latin American Cinema, for that cinema was already "un acto irreversible," an irreversible fact of history, as Julio García Espinosa would later herald at the opening of the IV International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Havana (1982).²⁹

VI □

In the period 1968 to 1973 it was fairly easy to discern what was and what was not part of this cinematic movement. The films of the New Latin American Cinema were revolutionary and explicitly political; they called for an end to underdevelopment, poverty, oppression, hunger, exploitation, illiteracy, and

ignorance. Many, like the powerful Argentine film-essay *The Hour of the Furnaces*, took on the medium as an explicit political instrument and insisted that the cinema should and could be used as a "gun" in the struggle for the political and economic independence of Latin America (for example, the films of Mario Handler in Uruguay and of Santiago Alvarez in Cuba).

Others, in the fictional domain, took on the cinema as a vehicle for entertainment but transformed and demystified its standard parameters: *Lucia* (1969, Cuba, Humberto Solas), *La Tierra Prometida* (The promised land; 1973–74, Chile, Miguel Littin), *Antonio das Mortes* (1968, Brazil, Glauber Rocha). They were films that showed Latin Americans the faces of their peoples and the problems of their nations, that celebrated national characteristics and popular culture, and that sought to contribute to the end of all the shared ills of the continent. They were realist, historical, inventive films that took up the margins of traditional filmic practices as their own terrain, that subverted and deconstructed the traditional distinctions and categories of the dominant cinema to tell "other" stories, to show "other" facts. From the documentaries' explicit call to arms to the fiction films' analysis and rediscovery of national history, the films of the New Latin American Cinema asserted a utopian dream of continental collectivity, the dream of José Martí's "Nuestra América" in cinematic form.

In less hyperbolic terms, it is perhaps simpler to identify the New Latin American Cinema by clarifying what it did not include. With the exception of Cuban films, in this period the New Latin American Cinema did not include industrial films, or any film that relied on the structures and strategies of the dominant sector in its production methods, aesthetics, distribution, or in its relationship to audiences. These were independent films, marginal cinemas on the fringes of existing industries (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) or artisanal practices in nations without a developed national cinematic infrastructure, such as Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia).

Cuba is a case apart. The only socialist nation of Latin America at the time, its films have always been seen as contributing to the New Latin American Cinema project. In fact, the Cubans have been instrumental in promoting the idea and—through extensive collaborative arrangement—the very existence of the New Latin American Cinema project. The role Cuba has played in fostering the New Latin American Cinema has yet to be fully detailed: a listing of co-productions and Latin American exhibitions and distribution agreements is not enough to explain the influential role of ICAIC and the Cuban Revolution itself throughout the continent. For example, in the 1980s, the annual International Festival of New Latin American Cinema has become a mecca for Latin American filmmakers, producers, and distributors who travel to Havana to simultaneously engage in film "business" and theoretical seminars. However, what must be clarified is that the New Latin American Cinema is far from being simply a Cuban "construct." The desire for this cinema—exemplified

in the Cinema Novo and in the Nueva Ola, for example—both predates and exceeds the boundaries of Cuba's influence and the national priorities of its own cinema.

It is important to emphasize the difficulties faced by the New Latin American Cinema project in the late 1970s and 1980s. In this period, Latin America was beset by a wave of repressive regimes, military coups d'état, failed socialist experiments and revolutionary efforts, ballooning foreign debts, and worsening economic conditions. Military coups (in Chile in 1973, in Uruguay in 1973, and in Argentina in 1976, for example) and long-term repressive military regimes destabilized the New Latin American Cinema project within many nations. In the early 1980s, the social promise of the 1960s seemed to exist only in the ashes of revolutionary efforts to change the continental order of things. The New Latin American Cinema, often forced into exile or silenced by censorship and repression at a national level, assumed an increasingly pan-Latin American character, as is well evidenced by the Chilean and Argentine cinemas in exile.

But the New Latin American Cinema was simultaneously challenged by another problem. From a practical standpoint, the New Latin American Cinema project seems antithetical to the industrialization of cinematic production.³⁰ A cinema designed to subvert, demystify, and challenge the dominant cinema, common-sensical developmental assumptions, and political givens is marginal almost by definition and not particularly concerned with commercial imperatives. However, to make the national cinema strong, to encourage sustained production, and to maintain and raise popular interest in the cinema: these are all concerns of the New Latin American Cinema that cannot be addressed from the margins but that demand discussion in the context of mainstream national cinematic production, state protection of the national cinema, and that cinema's commercial or popular potential. Thus, in those nations with a developed (or developing) cinematic infrastructure, the New Latin American Cinema, in its search for ways to become a popular cinema, gradually found itself incorporated into mainstream—albeit somewhat modified—commercial operations. When combined with political pressures, this trend toward industrial practices altered the nature of the New Latin American Cinema project. So, for example, in Brazil, we must take into account the hegemonic power of the state agency for the cinema, Embrafilme; in Argentina, the recent redemocratization has also made possible the growth of the industrial filmmaking sector and the production of a number of significant and very successful films; and in Cuba, although still a case apart, the longevity of ICAIC as the state apparatus for the cinema has also meant that the Cuban cinema is an official (rather than a marginal) cinema with different national imperatives.

Today it is no longer as easy to distinguish what is and what is not part of the New Latin American Cinema project as it was in 1968. On the one hand,

the ideals and practices of the New Latin American Cinema have become the norm for the continent. Even filmmakers working within different national industrial sectors have a different consciousness of their potential social effect and political goals and exhibit their concerns according to the options available in their specific political-social conjunctures. But on the other hand, there are constant claims (from within, but especially from outside the movement) that, in fact, the New Latin American Cinema is finished; that its specificity has disappeared; or, as Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán claimed at a round table discussion at the Havana Festival of 1980, that it repeats itself, with the implication that it has ceased to have a special utility or serve a social function: "It seems that we are still operating based on the premises of the sixties even though we are entering the decade of the eighties. In certain ways, some of our works are twenty years too late."³¹

However, the changes in the New Latin American Cinema since 1968 have, indeed, been significant: the range of options had grown, the range of social functions this cinema has been asked to play has changed. Here we must consider the important differences between a cinema of resistance in exile from Chile, an official cinema in Cuba, a revolution-in-transition cinema in Nicaragua, a cinema struggling for a revolution in Salvador, and a proto-industrial cinema in Argentina and Brazil. We must also consider that as a result of improved pan-Latin American relations (in the cinematic realm), co-productions are increasingly common. Co-productions provide the financial resources necessary for larger-scale productions, but they also make the definition of the "nationality" of many films problematic. (For example, Chilean director Miguel Littin's *Alsino y el Condor* [*Alsino and the Condor*; 1983] was shot in Nicaragua with the full cooperation of the state film organism [INCINE], with funding and technical assistance from Mexico, Costa Rica, and Cuba.) Furthermore, the introduction of video has increased access to the media and, as a result, in many nations video production has taken over the oppositional spaces occupied by the cinema in the early 1960s.

If, indeed, the New Latin America Cinema "repeats itself," then we must analyze the terms of those repetitions. Does it repeat itself thematically, stylistically, in its calls for specific kinds of actions, in its forms of expression, in its commitments? Some of these "repetitions" seem to be unavoidable for a committed cinema, others questionable. But wholesale assertions of a lack of accomplishment in the New Latin American Cinema must be challenged with the growth of filmmaking throughout the continent (even when challenged by the popularity of television), with the continued collaborative ventures among Latin American filmmakers and producers, with the increasing importance of the Havana Film Festival as the number of participating nations and films increases annually, with the efforts of the Committee of Latin American filmmakers and the recently formed Foundation of Latin American Filmmakers and Third World Film School (located in Cuba) to continue developing and fostering the future of a popular cinema of and for Latin America.

In light of these transformations, to claim that the New Latin American Cinema is dead—a corollary of the claim that it repeats itself—is to deny the movement the ability to adapt to changing conditions. The New Latin American Cinema is, for the most part, no longer necessarily a marginal cinema. But this does not mean that it has given up its politics. Rather than proclaim its death, what seems more appropriate is to call for an analysis of how it has changed, for close studies of its expressive and social strategies and commitments.

NOTES □

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1. The *Chanchada* is a unique Brazilian film genre that was the mainstay of Rio de Janeiro producers between 1940 and 1960. For more information about Brazilian film production in this period, see Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, eds., *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Associated Universities Press, 1982).

2. Argentina, 40 feature films for 1968 and 41 for 1969; Brazil, 54 for 1968 and 53 for 1969; Chile, 5 each year; Cuba, 3 each year; and Bolivia, none in 1968 and 2 in 1969. See Jorge A. Schnittman, *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1984) for data for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia; and Arturo Agramonte, *Cronología del Cine Cubano* (Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1966) for Cuban data.

3. Although Salvador Allende did not become president of Chile until 1970, when his *Unidad Popular* coalition won the national elections, Allende and his political platform had long been a factor in Chilean political life. In fact, in 1958 Allende and the FRAP party had almost won the national elections.

4. *Third Cinema* was the term used by Argentine radical filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino to distinguish their cinematic practice from the "first cinema" (industrial filmmaking) and the "second cinema" (auteurist cinema privileging the director). See their *Cine, cultura y descolonización* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Siglo XX, 1973). The term *Imperfect Cinema* was coined by Cuban filmmaker-theorist Julio García Espinosa as part of an argument proposing that technical "perfection" need not be the central preoccupation of Latin American filmmakers. See his *Por un cine imperfecto* (Caracas: Rocinante, 1973). Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha is responsible for proposing the term *cinema of hunger* to describe what the films of Latin America should emphasize: the continent's underdevelopment and its metaphoric and real "hungers." See his "An Esthetic of Hunger," reprinted in translation in Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 68–71.

5. It is important to note that the struggle against dependency in Latin America—in the cinematic realm as well as in other areas—has always had two fronts: first, the struggle against external control, domination, and influence; second, the struggle against the internal forces that ally themselves—consciously or not—with foreign interests.

6. As Robert Kolker argues in his *The Altering Eye* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

7. Maurice Scherer and François Truffaut, "Entretien avec Roberto Rossellini," *Cahiers du Cinema* 37 (July 1954), cited by David Overbey, "Introduction," *Springtime in Italy* (Hamden: Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), 1.

8. Influenced by contemporary crisis thought in theory (the theoretical tendency that—stemming from Foucault, Althusser, and others—searches for and valorizes gaps, breaks, and discontinuities in order to reject the linearity and teleology of traditional continuous histories), film scholarship of the last decades has often seemed to project into the film practices that constitute its "object" its own theoretical and practical desires.

9. For a detailed analysis of this process, see Ana M. López, *The New Latin American Cinema*, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming.

10. I am referring here to the debate among Julianne Burton, Teshome Gabriel, and others in the pages of *Screen*, nos. 3–4 (1985), and no. 1 (1986). The debate centered on the relationship between First World theory and criticism and Third World cinema. Although both sides emphasized the need to preserve the "otherness" of Third World cinema, one side argued for the impossibility of doing this without theory while the other focused on the inappropriateness of the theoretical structures of the developed world for this object of study. My position here lies between these two extremes: "Otherness" is an essential element of the New Latin American Cinema and other Third World cinemas, but this "otherness" consists of a hybrid transformation—a "cannibalism" as the Brazilian modernist movement argued—of foreign influences rather than a radical difference. And the critic/theorists must exhibit the same kind of cannibalism in the realm of theory, appropriating the force of all possible theoretical models without being dominated by them.

11. The Chilean "Cinema of Exile" is an outstanding example of how "national" concerns exceed geographical borders. There is already an extensive bibliography on this cinematic phenomenon. For a survey of films and filmmakers see, *Literatura Chilena* 8, no. 1 (1984), a special issue devoted to the Chilean exile cinema.

12. See Ana M. López, "A Short History of Latin American Film Histories," *University Film and Video Association Journal* 37, no. 1 (1985): 55–69. The importance of the issue of the national in cinema discourses in Brazil has been traced by Maria Rita Galvão and Jean-Claude Bernardet, *Cinema: Repercussões em caixa de eco ideológica (As ideias da "nacional" e "popular" no pensamento cinematográfico brasileiro)* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense/Embrafilme, 1983).

13. Philip Rosen, "Securing the Historical: Historiography and the Classical Cinema," in *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984), 17–34.

14. Julio García Espinosa, "Por un cine imperfecto," *Cine Cubano*, no. 66/67 (1970), trans. Julianne Burton, *Twenty-Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, ed. Michael Chanan (London: British Film Institute, 1983).

15. See Ana M. López, "At the Limits of Documentary: Textual Transformation and the New Latin American Cinema," in *Documentary Strategies: Society/Ideology/History in Latin American Documentary, 1950–1985* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming).

16. The reasons for the collapse of the Argentine industry during World War II

are too complex to elaborate fully here. Suffice it to say that Argentina's "neutrality" during the war and its subsequent problems, coupled with an internal lack of direction and weak capitalization, brought the once-successful industry to an almost complete standstill. For further data see, Domingo di Nùbila, *Historia del Cine Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Edición Cruz de Malta, 1959) and Schnittman, *Film Industries in Latin America*.

17. The most notable directors who became producers were Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and Fernando Ayala. See Ana M. López, "Argentina, 1955–1976: The Film Industry and its Margins," in *The Garden of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema*, ed. John King and Nissa Torrents (London: British Film Institute and National Film Theater, 1987), 49–91.

18. Among the Nueva Ola films premiered in 1959–61 were: Simón Feldman's *El Negoción* (Big business; 1959) and *Los de la Mesa 10* (Table 10; 1960); José Martínez Suárez's *El Crack* (The expert; 1960) and *Dar la Cara* (Facing up, 1962); Manuel Antín's *Carta a Mamá* (Letter to mother; 1961) and *La Cifra Impar* (The odd number; 1961); David José Kohon's *Prisioneros de una Noche* (Prisoners of a night; 1960) and *Tres Veces Ana* (Three times Ana; 1961); and Rodolfo Kuhn's *Los Jóvenes Viejos* (The young old ones; 1961) and *Los Inconstantes* (The inconstant ones; 1962). Less interested in exploring the cosmopolitanism of Buenos Aires, Lautaro Murúa's first two films *Shunko* (1960) and *Alias Gardelito* (1961) almost constituted a "rural" cinema because of their focus on the underprivileged rural sectors rather than on the elites of Buenos Aires.

19. Fernando Birri, "Nace una experiencia cinematográfica," *La Escuela Documental de Santa Fe* (Santa Fe: Editorial Documento del Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad del Litoral, 1964), 17.

20. Of the Instituto's projects, the best known are the mid-length social documentary *Tire Dié* and the feature-length "fiction" *Los Inundados*. However, Birri's theoretical and political propositions are so consonant with what was being expressed in other parts of Latin America that he is often referred to as the "father" of the New Latin American cinema.

21. See, for example, Armand Mattelart's discussion in his "Introduction," *Communication and Class Struggle: 1. Capitalism, Imperialism* (New York: International General, 1979), 57–70.

22. For a detailed history of the development of the ICAIC and the Cuban revolutionary cinema, see Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986).

23. See Julianne Burton, "Cinema," *Cambridge History of Latin America* 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

24. "III Exposición de Cine Latinoamericano," *Cine Cubano*, no. 7 (1963): 2.

25. Additional information about the Sestri Levante festival was obtained from Leonel Magin Hinojosa, "La Crisis: Componente Inseparable de la Vida; Entrevista con Manuel Pérez Paredes," *Cine Cubano*, no. 100 (1981): 29–45 and from texts of the festival proceedings in the archives of the Cinemateca de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.

26. "Viña del Mar y el Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano," *Cine Cubano*, nos. 42–44 (1967): 3.

27. See "Extractos de una Entrevista con Alfredo Guevara Publicada en Bohemia 31 Marzo 1967," *Cine Cubano*, nos. 42–44 (1967): 147.

28. "Editorial: El Desafío del Nuevo Cine" *Cine al Día*, no. 6 (1968): 2.

29. Julio Garcia Espinosa, "Somos un Acto Irreversible," *Cine Cubano*, no. 105 (1983): 3.

30. Cinematic industrialization entails not only extensive capitalization and production on a grand scale but also the establishment of distribution and exhibition circuits through which to reach the mass audience necessary to recoup costs and generate profits. Above all, an industrialized cinema is a mainstream cinema, that is, a cinema that is part of a society's ideological dominant and not one that can easily subvert or demystify that society's givens.

31. Patricio Guzmán, "Cine Latinoamericano: Exilio, crisis y futuro," *Cine Cubano*, no. 99 (1981).

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