The Social Documentary in Latin America

EDITED BY

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The SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY in LATIN AMERICA

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

DESPITE the thematic, stylistic and "generic" variety of Latin American documentary, despite the extent and duration of the region's prolonged documentary "renaissance" and its broad social and cultural impact, the existing literature on Latin American documentary practices is sparse indeed – a handful of essays and interviews appearing primarily in specialized periodicals of limited circulation. No book surveying the evolution of documentary practices in Latin America exists in any of the relevant languages – Spanish, Portuguese, French, or English.

This volume assembles some twenty essays originally written in all these languages, making several translated pieces available in English for the first time. Most of the contributions that have already appeared in print have been extensively revised for this volume, and many have been updated. Several essays were written expressly for this collection and have not appeared elsewhere.

More a selective survey than a systematic history, this book is primarily concerned with documentary filmmaking as a specific set of social practices and representational strategies that constantly negotiate and renegotiate the distance between lived experience and its audiovisual reembodiment.

Part I, "Establishing Shots," develops a number of historical, conceptual, and theoretical concerns. The first chapter attempts an overview of Latin American documentary history and its points of intersection with and divergence from an international "documentary tradition" as currently defined. Chapter 2 examines Latin American documentary practices from the point of view of concepts and categories developed within the Latin American context. Chapter 3 offers a close examination of modes of visual and verbal address in a number of historically significant texts.

Part II, "Wide Angles," examines the uses of documentary in particular countries during specific historical periods: Chilean production

from the 1950s to the present, Santiago Alvarez's work in Cuba during the 1960s and afterward, dissenting practices in Brazilian documentary during the difficult decade of the 1970s. Nearly half of this section is dedicated to Central America, with essays on the appropriation and modification of modes of documentary representation by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and on the current Salvadorean conflict as viewed from opposing political perspectives. Part II ends with an account of one North American videomaker's journey through Latin America in search of independent video work and of the collection which she assembled.

Part III, "Texts in Close-up," focuses on specific films of recognized historical importance, offering sustained analysis of the representational strategies of pivotal works, from the historical compilation *Memories of a Mexican* (1950), through the more sociological depiction of the vicious cycle of rural-urban migration in Brazil, *Viramundo* (1964), to two epic political documentaries – *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Argentina, 1968) and *The Battle of Chile* (Chile/Cuba, 1974–79). The concluding essay, on three recent works by women filmmakers who have produced more intimate accounts of personal life and the socio-ideological construction of gender, serves as an essential counterweight to the epic works discussed in the preceding chapters, and reflects the notable increase in media-making activity among Latin American women dating from the 1970s.

Part IV, "Beyond the Documentary/Fiction Dichotomy," examines a series of films that fuse fictional and documentary discourses, combining historical contextualization with individual subjectivity. The hybrid forms challenge the arbitrariness of the conventional distinctions between the documentary and fictional modes. Implicitly, if not explicitly, they also challenge the authority of all existing social, epistemological, and ideological dichotomies. This persistent challenge is perhaps the most signal contribution of what might be most effectively termed the new Latin American cine-media – a movement which, for all its singularity, has remained persistently, provocatively plural.

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PART I

Establishing Shots

1

TOWARD A HISTORY OF SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY IN LATIN AMERICA

Julianne Burton

Beginning with a "Provisional Typology of Social Documentary," this chapter proceeds to set the evolution of Latin American social documentary in the context of parallel international developments in the medium, discussing the formative impact of specific events, figures, and technological advances. It stresses documentary's close association, in Latin America, with key historical events, political tendencies, and social movements – including the Mexican, Cuban, and Central American revolutions, populist and developmentalist ideologies, cultural nationalism, and regional solidarity. This introduction concludes with a summary of the central concerns and problematics that emerge from the historical overview and that inform the subsequent chapters in this collection.

A Provisional Typology of Social Documentary

THE FOLLOWING typology[1] attempts to map the principal modes of social documentary: documentaries with a human subject and a descriptive or transformative concern. Each of the "modes" described below is most usefully considered as an emphasis or tendency in documentary practice. Most filmmakers combine aspects of various modes in their work to achieve a particular effect, in a given cultural context, at a specific historical conjuncture.

Two groups of examples accompany the first four modes identified below: Group A invokes works that are generally available and presumably familiar to North American audiences; Group B cites specific Latin American examples. Most of the Latin American documentaries mentioned in this introductory chapter, as well as many of those discussed in chapter 3, can be located below.

EXPOSITORY MODE

Characterized by:

- voice of omniscient narrator in direct verbal address
- images of illustration
- general predominance of nonsynchronous sound

Emphasizes objectivity, generalization, economy of analysis, filmmaker's privileged knowledge.

Process of gathering and presenting that knowledge is omitted.

Examples:*

A. *Why We Fight, 28 Up* – conventional newsreel and much television news reporting
B. *The Sugar Mill, The Battle of Chile*

OBSERVATIONAL MODE

Characterized by:

- voice of observed in indirect verbal address
- images of observation
- general predominance of synchronous sound and long takes

Emphasizes impartiality, intimate detail and texture of lived experience, behavior of subjects within social formations (families, institutions, communities), and at moments of historical or personal crisis.

Interaction between observer and observed is kept to a minimum.

Examples:

A. *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, Bitter Melons, High School, Seventeen*
B. *Ciclón, Carlos* – for primarily technical and economic reasons, both lack synchronous sound; the former has no spoken sound track; the latter employs "indirect interviews" in voice-over.

INTERACTIVE MODE

Characterized by:

- voice of filmmaker in relation to social actors
- images of testimony and demonstration
- general predominance of monologues and dialogues with varied use of interviews in direct or indirect address

* Titles used here as examples are given in English translation except in those cases where the original foreign-language title is the more common form. Elsewhere in the text, each title is given in the original upon first mention, followed by an English translation.

Emphasizes partiality, interpretation, the lived experience of social actors as apprehended and conveyed through a process in which subjects and filmmakers are both instrumental.
Filmmakers acknowledge the determining nature of their own intervention directly or indirectly.
Latitude for self-presentation by social actors varies.

Examples:

A. *Housing Problems,* "man on the street" encounters," *Chronique d'une été, Sad Song of Yellow Skin*
B. *For the First Time, Hablando del punto cubano, Man Marked to Die: Twenty Years Later*

REFLEXIVE MODE

Characterized by:

- voice of filmmaker in metacommentary
- images of "reflection"
- predominance of strategies that generate an awareness of the cinematic apparatus

Emphasizes epistemologial doubt, (de)formative intervention of the cinematic apparatus.
Construes a critical stance toward all other modes of documentary practice as a mode unto itself.
Questions conventions of representational realism as well as the status of empirical knowledge, lived experience, and processes of interactive interpretation.

Examples:

A. *Man With a Movie Camera, Daughter Rite, Reassemblage*
B. *Of Great Events and Ordinary People, Unfinished Diary*

MIXED MODES

Combinations of two or more of the above. Since few documentaries are pure examples of their form, this is the category in which most documentaries will fall – those from an oppositional tradition that encompasses experimentation, innovation, and marginality all the more abundantly. For example: *Tire dié, The Hour of the Furnaces, Brickmakers, Man of Leather, A Time of Daring, A Man When He Is a Man.*

Additional *categories* of social documentary, which overlap with one or more of the preceding *modes,* include, among others: ethnographic (*Man of Leather*), biographical (*Alicia,* on Cuban prima ballerina Alicia Alonso; or Luis Felipe Bernaza's cinematic biographies of "everyday Cubans"), agitational (*I Like Students*), poetic (*Letter from Nicaragua,*

Prayer for Marilyn Monroe), celebrational (*Men of Mal Tiempo*), performance (*Simparele*), compilation (*Now, Memorias de un mexicano*), collage (*Seventy-nine Springtimes*), reconstruction (*Muerte y vida en El Morillo*), and hybridized fictional/documentary forms (*Memorias de un mexicano, Patriamada*).

* * *

Today in the United States, documentary is a vital and varied form that has, during the past decade especially, enlisted renewed interest on the part of filmmakers, audiences, and critics. This resurgence in "nonfiction" filmmaking is the product of many converging factors: the rise of independent film and video efforts; the proliferation of social movements and special interest groups that see documentary as a tool for communicating their specific concerns to a larger constituency; the growth of community television as well as educational and other alternative outlets; the increasing accessibility of new technologies, particularly video. With the enhanced visibility and versatility of American documentary filmmaking, there emerges a heightened interest in the nature and uses of documentary not only in our own society but also in other places, other times.

Nowhere have the manifestations of documentary been as multiple and their impact so decisive as in Latin America. From its inception in the mid-1950s, the New Latin American Cinema movement accorded to documentary privileged status. Socially committed filmmakers embraced documentary approaches as their primary tool in the search to discover and define the submerged, denied, devalued realities of an intricate palimpsest of cultures and castes separated and conjoined by an arbitrary network of national boundaries. This documentary impulse, and the frequent aesthetic preference for a raw realism that replicated the compelling immediacy of certain techniques of reportage, has marked much of the fictional production throughout the region during the last three decades.

Today's Latin American artists and activists continue to embrace documentary as an instrument of cultural exploration, national definition, epistemological inquiry, and social and political transformation. Documentary provides: a source of "counterinformation" for those without access to the hegemonic structures of world news and communications; a means of reconstructing historical events and challenging hegemonic and often elitist interpretations of the past; a mode of eliciting, preserving, and utilizing the testimony of individuals and groups who would otherwise have no means of recording their experience; an instrument for capturing cultural difference and exploring the complex relationship of self to other within as well as between societies; and fi-

nally, a means of consolidating cultural identifications, social cleavages, political belief systems, and ideological agendas.

These functions go far beyond conventional conceptions of documentary as an educational medium that "simply" packages and transmits information to passive receivers. The uses of documentary in Latin America over the past three decades have redefined the social function of cinema (and video). Latin American documentarists have both appropriated and challenged transformations of the form elaborated elsewhere, as well as the technology (16mm, sync sound, Super-8, video) with which it is produced. These various documentary practices have left a deep imprint – not only on fictional filmmaking and literary discourses but also on social, political, and cultural life.

Yet in existing English-language documentary histories and theoretical-critical anthologies, references to Latin America, when indeed they exist at all, are scattered, vague, perfunctory. The single exception, Thomas Waugh's *"Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (1984), dedicates five out of the seven selections in its third and final section, "Contemporaries: The Third World," to Latin American examples. Earlier books strike a very different balance.

Louis Jacobs divides *The Documentary Tradition* (1971, rev. 1979) into six periods spanning the years 1922 to 1978. The anthology's Euro-American emphasis admits Asia, Africa, and Latin America only as locations for the activity of European or American filmmakers: Mexico as site of Eisenstein's ill-fated *Que Viva Mexico!* project (1931–1932), Fred Zinneman's and Paul Strand's *The Wave* (*Redes,* 1933), and Herbert Klein's *The Forgotten Village* (1941) (all fictional films with documentary dimensions); Cuba as the location of Len Giovannetti's *Cuba: Bay of Pigs* and *Cuba: The Missle Crisis* (both 1964). The presence of Alberto Cavalcanti, the only Latin American filmmaker included in the volume, is motivated not by any activity in his native Brazil, but rather by his work in France in the 1920s and especially with John Grierson in England during the following two decades. Only in Jacobs's introduction to the final section, 1970–1978, added for the revised edition, is there mention of a Latin American documentary by a Latin American director. Patricio Guzmán's three-part *La batalla de Chile* (*The Battle of Chile,* 1974, 1977, 1979) elicits the following paragraph:

> A frankly partisan film, but impressive nonetheless, was a chronicle of the overturn of the Allende government in Chile by right-wing forces. *The Battle of Chile* (1977, [*sic*]) directed by a young Chilean Marxist, Patricio Guzmán, and put together in Cuba with the assistance of Chilean and Cuban associates, was an enterprise of cinematic excellence, convey-

> ing the sweeping drama of this historic event with an astute selectivity of material and an emotional texture that gave it startling dimensions and made it one of the major political documentaries of the period.[2]

In the absence of any reference to the long tradition of political and social documentary that preceded the remarkable achievement which is *The Battle of Chile,* a token paragraph such as this one tends to confirm rather than dispel the impression that Latin America has offered few contributions to "the documentary tradition."

Richard Meram Barsam's *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (1973) makes passing mention of Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!*, the Zinneman-Strand collaboration on *The Wave* (the original Spanish title, *Redes* [Nets]), is inexplicably rendered *Pescados* [Fish]) and Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*). The volume contains no references to films made in the region by Latin Americans. In his anthology *Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism* (1975), Barsam restricts the scope of his earlier work still further, confining his selections to the Anglo-American documentary tradition with but three exceptions: Leni Riefenstahl, Joris Ivens, and Alberto Cavalcanti. Again, Cavalcanti's European contribution is emphasized, but in this case the writer is a fellow Latin American (the late Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal) who tries to render an accounting (still difficult in 1955, when the essay was written) of Cavalcanti's unsuccessful attempt, between 1949 and 1954, to reroute his career to his native Brazil.

In the acknowledgments for *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1974), Eric Barnouw informs us that, while researching the book, he traveled "to some twenty countries, visiting film archives and studios and interviewing documentarists."[3] The United States, England, Canada, and the nations of Western Europe account for less than half of the countries studied. The inclusion of several Eastern European and Asian nations (among the latter, Japan, India, Hong Kong, South Korea), as well as Egypt, confers a rare geopolitical balance to this study. Though concrete references to Latin American films and filmmakers are few, their range reaches beyond the cursory references of the earlier volumes. Far more important, however, Barnouw's carefully conceptualized and judicious analysis of the development of documentary on a more genuinely representative international scale provides a serviceable framework to which specific studies of the uses of documentary in Latin America – or Africa, or elsewhere – can be anchored.

The obstacles to constructing a history of documentary in Latin America, though perhaps not insurmountable, remain staggering. First, geopolitical boundaries divide the region, which includes the Caribbean,

into more than thirty separate nationalities whose populations speak half a dozen Indo-European languages and scores of indigenous ones. Second, only an infinitesimal proportion of the region's silent films survived into the sound era. Subsequent cinematic endeavors have barely been more fortunate. Few countries have managed to allocate the funds and equipment that proper archives require. Fires have devastated two of the most important repositories – the Cinemateca del SODRE[4] in Montevideo and Mexico's Cineteca Nacional. Military regimes dismantled other important national collections – the Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo in Uruguay, numerous Chilean archives – upon seizing power in those countries in the early 1970s. While a centralized archive for documentary production from throughout Latin America has yet to be created, the Cinemateca de Cuba has the most complete collection in the Americas. In Europe, that distinction belongs to the Parisian Mediathèque du Tiers Monde. The sample of Latin American documentaries currently in North American distribution is lamentably incomplete and shrinking, as many important works continue to be gradually withdrawn from circulation. (See "Guide to Distributors" at the end of this volume.)

A third limitation to attempting a history of Latin American documentary involves the dearth of secondary sources. Reliable scholarly histories of national film production are only now coming into print for a number of countries (for example, Michael Chanan's *The Cuban Image,* 1985, and Alfonso Gumucio Dagrón's *Historia del cine boliviano,* 1983). Too many of the earlier national histories, where they exist, pay scant attention to the role of documentary in the development of national cinemas.[5]

A further obstacle to constructing a full history of Latin American documentary lies in the difficulty of tracing the "traffic in documentaries" between countries and regions. Political and economic barriers to commercial distribution often dictate that Latin Americans cannot view documentaries from other countries in the region on their home soil. Even the most renowned documentaries must usually be seen on the festival circuit or in video format if they are to be viewed at all – a process that may, in fact, take decades.[6] Finally, a growing proportion of documentary production is becoming increasingly conjunctural, strategic, intentionally short-lived. The newer formats, both Super-8 and video, lend themselves to carefully circumscribed uses; they do not have to recoup enormous financial outlays through efforts to find distribution beyond the specific social, political, or regional sector for and with whom they were conceived and produced. Though these new technologies offer greater latitude to filmmakers and their target audiences, the increasing tendency to exhaust Super-8 prints without striking new

copies, and to recycle videotape recordings, reduces still further the documentary "sample" available to the historian.

In view of these obstacles and the limited scope of this introduction, I can only attempt to lay out here the most general and tentative outlines of the evolution of documentary practices in Latin America as they converged with and differentiated themselves from international developments and tendencies.

Louis Lumière's *cinématographe* was a model of technological self-sufficiency. Lightweight, hand-cranked (thus independent of electricity), and capable of transforming itself from camera to projector to laboratory and back with only a few simple adjustments, this ingenious invention offered its operators a mobility and independence unrivaled until today's porta-paks. The prototype of those first pioneers, itinerant artisans in full control of every aspect of their production and exhibition, is still compelling to the Latin American social documentarist. This artisanal paradigm stands in diametrical opposition to the industrial model initiated by Lumière's rival, Thomas Edison, which soon came to prevail as the normative mode of film production – even in those "peripheral" regions like Latin America where, with the single and problematic exception of Mexico, studio-based film production has never been effectively sustained. To the degree that the documentary impulse in Latin America responds to an independent stance and an oppositional vision, it has retained an affinity with the artisanal mode, which returned to prominence in the avant-garde experimentation of the late 1950s, in the *cine urgente* of the 1960s, and again in the current video era.

The first decade of film history, 1896 to 1906, was in Latin America (as elsewhere) characterized by the predominance of nonfictional (or prefictional) modes of filmmaking. Early cinematographers, a disproportionate number of whom were trained by Lumière as part of a concerted campaign to introduce his *cinématographe* in countries around the globe within the short span of two years, concentrated on "views" and "actualities" – notable sights that would render themselves "exotic" when screened for non-nationals or citizens who resided in more remote areas – and civic events, generally presided over by heads of state or other dignitaries.

In Latin America, as in other peripheral regions, many first-generation cinematographers had been born and bred in Europe. Opting for permanent residence in the New World, they tended to retain a European cultural matrix and to seek out European affinities in their new environment. Their Eurocentric attitudes replicated those held by the creole oligarchy in the countries where they settled. The patronage of this powerful sector, and of the military hierarchy, was essential to

guarantee these early film pioneers access to the kind of public spectacles which soon became their stock-in-trade. Yet these associations also instilled a highly ethnocentric, elitist view of what aspects of society were appropriate for filming. This restrictive definition of the national would persist in Latin America for over half a century, severely circumscribing political and cultural participation.

In his history of documentary, Eric Barnouw dedicates considerable attention to a "genre" he calls the "bugle-call film"—"adjunct to military action, weapon of war"—as it developed during World War II. Though Barnouw does not do so, the historical antecedents of this genre can be clearly traced to the U.S. military intervention in Cuba in 1898, in the closing months of Cuba's thirty-year struggle for independence from Spain. The role of the Hearst newspapers, and William Randolph Hearst himself, in stirring up prointerventionist sentiment is notorious. Less well known is the way moving footage of the conflict, the first of its kind, was manipulated for the same expansionist ends. Early American silent films like *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba, Raising Old Glory Over Moro Castle,* and *The Battle of Santiago Bay* compensated for the disappointingly humdrum nature of the first on-the-spot war footage with dramatic simulations of naval battles—two-dimensional cut-out boats doing battle in an inch of water under clouds of cigar smoke in a Manhattan apartment, as pioneer cameraman Albert E. Smith tells it in his autobiography *Two Reels and a Crank.*[7] In *The American Newsreel: 1911–1967,* Raymond Fielding includes a photograph illustrating the faking of Spanish-American War footage on a slightly larger scale—in a swimming pool.[8] Like the yellow journalists with whom they are so closely tied, these early "newsreel" producers felt little compunction to adhere to the facts; a professional code of objectivity did not yet prevail. Humble ancestors of today's "special effects," these early dramatizations-cum-document apparently succeeded in arousing the patriotic fervor of gullible Americans, but Cuban audiences, struck by the disparity between the actual events and their recreation, viewed the same footage more skeptically, as a warning of the cinema's potential for manipulation and falsification.[9]

A decade later, another Latin American war, the first of the great twentieth-century popular revolutions, again called forth the cameramen—this time with much more historically significant, if still underacknowledged, results. The second half of Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz's thirty-year reign coincided with the introduction of the film medium. More than any other Latin American ruler of the period, he made the cinema a tool for the ostentatious promotion and glorification of his regime. Movie theaters proliferated—not only in the capital but also in literally scores of cities and towns throughout the provinces.

Strategies of self-representation: the War for Independence through Cuban eyes. Credit: Courtesy ICAIC

By 1910, the year the Mexican Revolution broke out, "actualities" had become synonymous with a ritualized recital of official processions, formal dedications, and diplomatic encounters as presided over by this prototypical Latin American dictator, whose extended reign achieved new heights of self-congratulatory redundancy that year with the elaborately orchestrated civic celebrations on the anniversary of 100 years of independence from Spain. Much of this footage has survived and was given new circulation in 1950 in Carmen Toscano's compilation, *Memorias de un mexicano* (*Memories of a Mexican*), its style as staid and predictable as its subject matter.

The outbreak of the revolution – which overthrew not only Díaz but a number of aspiring successors – transformed the way the film medium was used in Mexico. High angles, immobile cameras, and long shots of indigenous peoples performing and workers parading before a Europeanized oligarchy, gave way to shots of swirling masses in motion on their own behalf. From their position of privileged superiority, often literally as well as figuratively on the dais of the dictator, cameramen descended into the street; from the sheltered urban spaces of the bourgeoisie, they fanned out into the contested countryside.

Díaz had brought railroads to Mexico to facilitate the exploitation of the country by foreign investors. The masses appropriated the railroads to transport political and military leaders, soldiers, supplies. During more than a decade of revolution and counterrevolution, battles were fought along the rail lines that traversed the country. Cameramen boarded the trains with the soldiers and their leaders. The resulting "tracking shots" of mounted Villistas and Zapatistas, with their wide sombreros, crossed cartridge belts, and intense expressions, retain their dynamic charge even today. (In *Memories of a Mexican,* the exuberant energy of this spontaneous, democratic footage threatens to undermine the carefully sanitized, "officialist" historical discourse imposed by Toscano's editing and by the putatively "autobiographical" voice-over that narrativizes the archival footage.)

In the 1930s, long after the conflagration had died down, feature filmmakers, motivated by economy rather than by any will to authenticity, inserted actual documentary battle footage from the great unassembled "archive" of the revolution into their fictional films. In his comparative history of film in Latin America, Paulo Antonio Paranagua writes:

> The Mexican Revolution spurred [film] production, with filmmakers accustomed to capturing miles and miles of images, one after another. . . . That [documentary] production prefigures in Latin America (and perhaps worldwide) a political cinema closely linked to the present, in symbiotic relationship to great social movements, a form of expression whose con-

The dynamic iconography of the revolution unleashed: *Memorias de un mexicano.* Credit: Courtesy M. de Orellana

> temporaneity broke with the [prevailing cinematic tradition of] simple curiosity directed at the leisured classes in public squares. Certain historians (Aurelio de los Reyes, for example) don't hesitate to claim that this was the true golden age of Mexican cinema and Mexico's real contribution to international filmmaking.[10]

In the 1980s, the Central American conflict gave new currency to the use of documentary as a call to arms. The kind of transformative broadening of the medium that occurred during the decade-long Mexican struggle has its contemporary equivalent in films and videos from El Salvador and Nicaragua. A work like *Tiempo de audacia* (*A Time of Daring,* 1983), by El Salvador's Radio Venceremos group, sounds a call to revolution in a new key. A startlingly intimate view of both sides of the Salvadorean conflict, the government and the guerrilla forces, *A Time of Daring* is no less ironic and (self-) critical for its own candid partisanship. In its eclectic mixture of media – odds and ends of 16mm and Super-8 footage, in both black-and-white and color, which display different grains and color ranges: 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch video and "second-generation" television footage – *A Time of Daring* is typical of many Central American media works. Their "look" testifies to circumstantial constraints, but it also posits a model for the creative synthesis of a

range of contemporary media. Salvadorean practice in particular dispenses with the "definitive text" by recombining the same images in different works and formats, varying the product according to whether the intended audience is within or beyond national borders. Anonymous collective authorship and the determining intervention of the editor(s) render an auteurist conception of the medium obsolete.

Given the power of the documentary footage of the Mexican conflict, it was not coincidental that film censorship was introduced in Mexico in 1913, curbing but certainly not suppressing the first "complete" war coverage in film history through its attempt to enlist documentary reportage as another branch of official, government-sponsored discourse. There and elsewhere in Latin America, the coming decades (from the teens and twenties, up to the introduction of the talkies in the early thirties) would produce a still quantitatively unequaled crop of fiction films, while documentary expression was confined within narrow channels: travelogues, promotional films for government or commercial concerns, scientific and educational applications. The principal manifestation of documentary during this extended period was the weekly newsreel, which proliferated throughout Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s, at least a decade behind most Euro-American models and the early adoption of the format in Brazil and Argentina.

The changeover to sound, which began in Latin America in the mid-thirties, was a costly undertaking that effectively curtailed production in all but the richest and the most populous countries. In the United States, as Barnouw and others have argued, the transition to the new technology was a "desperate gamble" undertaken by producers in response to another transition: from relative prosperity to economic collapse and worldwide depression. According to Barnouw:

> To the documentary film the [depression] brought sharp change. During the 1920s explorer, journalist, artist, and others had experimented with the moving image in a spirit that was usually zestful and optimistic. Their films had seldom been contentious. But economic collapse brought tension and strife. Ideological combat began to dominate all media. Documentary film, acquiring the spoken word at this precise moment, was inevitably called on to join the battle.[11]

Later in his book, Barnouw describes the formal characteristics that would, for many years, dominate documentary discourse: "[The rise of advocacy in documentary] also involved matters of form. . . . The typical film of advocacy was shot like a silent film, with "voice-over" narration added. . . . Some narrators were characterized but most were abstract voices . . . resonant with authority and backed by impressive music."[12]

In some areas of Latin America, namely, Cuba and Nicaragua, the

newsreel format, creatively redefined to reflect contemporary political transformations, retains its vitality and appeal a quarter century after the introduction of television began to make it obsolete in the developed sector. But the general situation in Latin America was different. If American and European newsreels suffered from increasing ideological and formal regimentation because of both corporate sponsorship and government intervention, the uses of the genre in Latin America from the 1930s through the 1950s were doubly alienated. The screening spaces that weren't filled with *Fox Movietone News, Hearst Metrotone,* the *March of Time,* and other imports from the United States were colonized instead by domestic imitations, thinly disguised self-promotions for local businessmen and political bosses. (In *The Cuban Image,* Michael Chanan refers to the corporate documentaries that circulated in prerevolutionary Cuba as an "ideological protection racket.") In Chile, as in a number of other countries, half a dozen commercial newsreel series vied for public attention. In many nations, this activity constituted the only regular film production, such as it was, because fictional efforts never attained more than sporadic levels after the coming of sound. Prerevolutionary Nicaragua offers a more monolithic example: the country's sole film production company, Producine, operated as a "vanity studio" to promote the political and economic interests of the Somoza dynasty – considered (by the Somozas and their allies, at least) to be one and the same with those of the nation. The meager and monotonous Producine archive constituted the entire cinematic legacy of the triumphant Sandinistas.

In the aftermath of the First World War and especially the Second, U.S. distributors strengthened their hold on Latin American markets, discouraging local production. The consolidation of Hollywood hegemony meant that a medium that had been, at its inception and in its early distribution and exhibition patterns, broadly international (Lumière's 1897 catalogue numbered 750 titles from several dozen countries) became increasingly associated with a single national culture.

The early founding of European film societies (1924 in Paris, slightly later in other European capitals) provided alternative exhibition space for noncommercial films, many of which elaborated different conceptions of the relationship between cinema and national culture – from avant-garde works produced by the members of these early cine clubs to the remarkable products of Eisenstein, Vertov, and other participants in the great national experiment that was Soviet cinema of the 1920s. In Latin America, with the exception of Brazil where the Chaplin Clube and a number of important film magazines date from the 1920s, the film society movement did not emerge until two decades later – its inception ranging from the early 1940s in Uruguay and Argentina to

the 1950s in countries like Chile, Bolivia, and Cuba, and the mid-sixties in Peru and elsewhere. This temporal lag meant that Soviet cinema of the 1920s, early surrealist works and other examples of the European avant-garde, as well as subsequent landmark documentaries by Robert Flaherty, Joris Ivens, and the disciples of John Grierson in England, Canada, and elsewhere could not be seen with any frequency in Spanish-speaking Latin America until the 1950s and after. In addition to film society screenings, foreign embassies occasionally made important documentaries available, as did organizations like the National Film Board of Canada, UNESCO, and affiliates of the Communist International.

World War II, and the Spanish Civil War that immediately preceded it, brought documentary to the forefront once again. Sixteen-millimeter equipment, which had been available as a less cumbersome alternative to 35mm as early as 1923, finally came into widespread use. This format allowed the camera operators greater agility on the front lines and, with the war-related campaign to distribute 16mm projectors around the globe, also commanded access to broad and diverse audiences.

Hollywood's preoccupation with the war effort freed space on Latin American movie screens, stimulating local feature production in several Latin American countries, particularly the "big three"—Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. The foremost Latin American fictional genres—all related to indigenous musical forms—developed during this period: the Argentine tango film, the Mexican *comedia ranchera* with its obligatory mariachi accompaniment, and the carnival-based Brazilian *chanchada.*

Hollywood's dominance of Latin American screens persists to the present day, even in a country like Brazil—despite high levels of national film production in the 1970s and into the 1980s, a rigid exhibition quota system, and state intervention in favor of the domestic product. Since that brief World War II hiatus, protectionist legislation, exhibition quotas for national films, admission surcharges to help finance national production, and other forms of legal intervention have sought, with only limited success, to create space for Latin American films on Latin American screens.

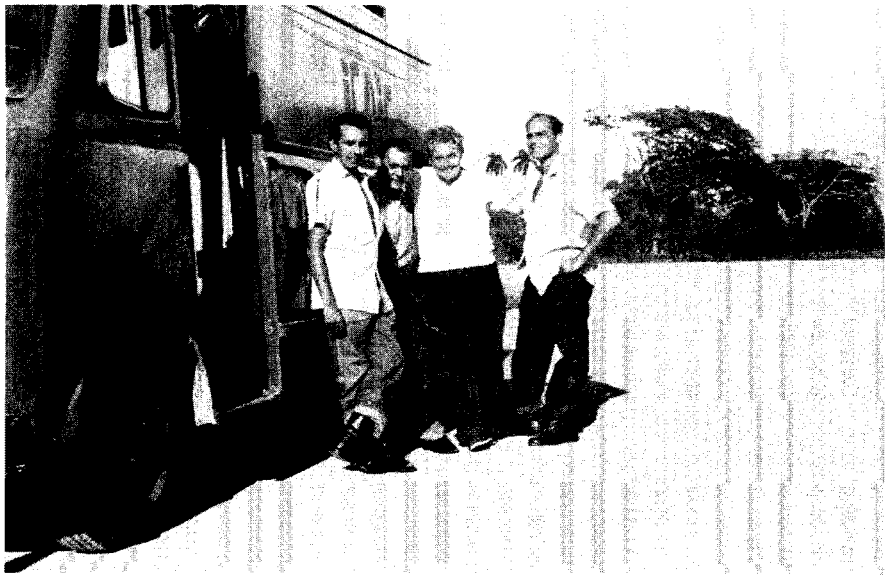
The postwar years witnessed the beginnings of a dual reevaluation: of the role of the United States among its southern neighbors (giving rise to renewed political nationalism and developmentalist ideologies), and of the role of film and other forms of cultural expression in the life of individual nations and the region as a whole (giving rise to cultural nationalism and to concepts of dependency and decolonization in the cultural as well as political spheres). Though the ways of conceptualizing these issues have evolved over the past several decades, the basic question of how to guarantee national and regional political and cultural autonomy persists.

The 1950s marked a major turning point, politically and culturally. That decade saw the spread of film societies to all but the most cinematically underdeveloped Latin American countries. By the 1960s, a number of these cineclubs had founded film magazines. Amateur filmmaking courses and contests proliferated. International film festivals in Punta del Este (Uruguay), Mar del Plata (Argentina), and elsewhere also began in the 1950s, but by the end of that decade, the focus of a few strategic festivals had begun to shift from foreign to regional film production. Uruguay's SODRE festival had, by 1958, become an important showcase for Latin American documentarists. That year John Grierson, guest of honor, closed the event with a salute to Fernando Birri, founding director of the Documentary Film School at Santa Fe, who had come to Montevideo with a number of his students to exhibit the photo reportage which would lead to their first film production – now revered as the founding social documentary of the New Latin American Cinema Movement – *Tire dié* (*Throw Me a Dime*, 1958-60).

John Grierson's visit to Latin America in the late 1950s had been brief, his function largely ceremonial. Joris Ivens, who visited Cuba in 1960, Chile on two separate occasions a few years later, and Uruguay at the end of that decade, would leave a more lasting imprint on actual documentary production, particularly in the former countries. During this period, Ivens represented the engaged documentarist par excellence, a man whose career itinerary recapitulated the chronology of national liberation movements around the world – the Soviet Union, republican Spain, Indonesia, China, Mali, Cuba, Vietnam, Chile. No more appropriate international figure could have been found to inaugurate Uruguay's reorganized Marcha Festival, which – after the first pan-Latin American gathering of filmmakers in Viña del Mar, Chile, in 1967 – redirected its focus to *cine de combate* in a global context.

The proliferation throughout the region of cineclubs, 8mm and 16mm equipment, amateur filmmaking courses, and contests all recruited to the cinema the best and brightest of the postwar generation – people who might otherwise have been, or were also, writers, poets, painters, researchers, scientists. In part, this burgeoning amateur and independent filmmaking activity, often completely artisanal in its mode of production, was consistent with international trends. As Barnouw observes: "After the war, short films in a personal vein provided the starting point for many young filmmakers. Such films were often conceived, photographed, and edited by a single artist – a reaction against the assembly-line projects of wartime. Instead of reasons of state, the individual sensibility became the point of departure. . . . Economy and personal control were among the attractions of the genre."[13]

In Latin America, however, the urge to self-expression was almost



Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens (second from right), one of the first European filmmakers on the scene in postrevolutionary Cuba. Credit: ICAIC

invariably circumscribed by inescapable social, economic, and political realities. This explains why, even when not explicitly political in origin or orientation, this surge of experimental and documentary activity would soon acquire a political dimension. As Uruguayan documentarist Mario Handler, whose own initial predilections were toward scientific cinema, has said, "The filmmaker inevitably begins to become politicized, because the existing situation prevents him from being simply a filmmaker." On the other hand, to the degree that, in the aftermath of World War II, the creation or resuscitation of a national cinema began to be viewed by countries around the world as a requisite expression of nationhood – a coming into history and modernity, an objective correlative of self-determination – this cinematic effervescence was political to the root.

Film's ability to capture particularity – specificities of faces, places, and customs – is closely related to its nationalistic appeal. This might partially explain why the descendants of one of the early experimental genres, the "city symphony" film (most notably exemplified by Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures*, 1926, and Walter Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, 1927) populate successive decades of Latin American production. Examples may be seen in films as diverse as Sabá

Cabrera Infante's *PM* (1960), a "celebration" of nocturnal Havana that was banned by a new regime unwilling to have precisely *that* aspect of the nation's capital celebrated; *Che, Buenos Aires* (1960), a combination of four documentary tributes to the Argentine capital assembled by Fernando Birri; Nelson Pereira dos Santos's uncompleted fictional trilogy based on Rio de Janeiro, *Rio, quarenta graus* (*Rio, Forty Degrees,* 1955); *Rio, zona norte* (*Rio, Northern Zone,* 1957); Aldo Francia's neorealist-style feature, *Valparaíso mi amor* (Chile, 1969); and Antonio Eguino's four-part feature *Chuquiago* (1977), a study of social stratification in the Bolivian capital.

Memorias de un mexicano (Mexico, 1950) is the first notable Latin American example of the history-of-the-nation-on-film compilation documentary. (A European equivalent is the Italian production, *Cavalcade of Half a Century,* 1951.) However divergent its ideological orientation, *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces,* 1968), as a compendium of representations of "Argentineness," displays its link to this tradition. The neorealist-style feature *Cuba baila* (*Cuba Dances,* 1960), however different in approach and tone, testified to a similar urge to capture a national "essence" on film. At the end of that decade, Humberto Solás's epic trilogy *Lucía* (1969) allegorized national history in a trilogy of love stories, each presented in a style appropriate to its period. More recently, Tizuka Yamasaki's *Patriamada* (*Beloved Country,* Brazil, 1985)—a jubilant reappropriation of the symbols of nationhood in response to Brazil's return to civilian government—strikes a similarly rich balance between realistic representation, symbolic equivalency, and formal experimentation. The documentary dimension of Solás's film is highly modulated and largely indirect: hand-held, high-contrast sequences juxtaposed to classical camera movements and modulated tones. In the Yamasaki film, fictional narrative and documentary chronicling of contemporary events are intricately, exuberantly entwined.

Film festivals in Viña del Mar, Chile (1967), and Mérida, Venezuela (1968), both of which concentrated on documentary production, bore witness to the explosion of cinematic energy that had occurred in the decade since Birri and Grierson crossed paths in Montevideo. Among the films screened at Viña for Latin American filmmakers from around the continent, gathered together for the first time in such numbers, were Santiago Alvarez's *Now* (Cuba, 1965), Jorge Sanjinés's *Revolución* (Bolivia, 1963), Mario Handler's *Carlos* (Uruguay, 1965), and a revival of Fernando Birri's *Tire dié.* Also included in the seventeen Brazilian documentaries screened at the event was Geraldo Sarno's *Viramundo* (1964–65). Among the sixty films screened at Mérida's Muestra de Cine Documental Latinoamericano the following year were premieres of Fernando

Solanas's and Octavio Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Argentina, 1968), Marta Rodríguez's and Jorge Silva's *Chircales* (*Brickmakers,* Colombia, 1968–70), Octavio Cortázar's *Por primera vez* (*For the First Time,* Cuba, 1967), and Mario Handler's *Me gustan los estudiantes* (*I Like Students,* Uruguay, 1968).

The first seeds of this remarkable harvest of independent documentary production had sprouted in the mid-to-late fifties in far-flung corners of the continent: in Venezuela, Margot Benacerraf's *Araya* (1958), in Uruguay, Alberto Miller's *Cantegriles* (1958) and Ugo Ulive's *Como el Uruguay no hay* (*There's No Place Like Uruguay,* 1960), in Brazil, Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda* (1959), in Chile, Sergio Bravo's *La marcha del carbón* (*The Coal March,* 1960).[14] Though often inspired by film society activity, many of these filmmakers worked in relative isolation and saw their careers prematurely truncated precisely because they lacked a larger supporting context. Their successors, through film festivals in Latin America and abroad, and through other forms of collaboration and mutual support, consolidated a sense of shared endeavor that would become known, after the Viña del Mar gathering of 1967, as the New Latin American Cinema movement.

Internationally, it is the movement's fictional works that have generated the most widespread interest and acclaim. Anyone familiar with Latin American literature, painting, or still photography can testify that the boundaries between art and actuality, fabrication and found objects, the fictional and the factual have always been tenuous. It should therefore come as no surprise that many of the most memorable Latin American features retain close ties to the documentary mode: from Brazil *Os fuzis* (*The Guns,* 1964), *Como era gostoso o meu frances* (*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman,* 1971), *Iracema* (1975), *Bye Bye Brazil* (1980), *Pixote* (1981), and *Patriamada* (1985); from Chile *El Chacal de Nahueltoro* (*The Jackal of Nahueltoro*), *Tres tristes tigres,* and *Valparaíso, mi amor* (all 1969); from Mexico *Los olvidados* (1950), *Tarahumara* (1964), and *Reed, México Insurgente* (1973); from Peru *Gregorio* (1984); from Bolivia *El coraje del pueblo* (*The Courage of the People,* 1971), and *Chuquiago* (1977); and from Cuba *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment,* 1968), *La primera carga al machete* (*The First Charge of the Machete,* 1969), *De cierta manera* (*One Way or Another,* 1975), and *El otro Francisco* (*The Other Francisco,* 1975), *Son o no son* (1980), and *Hasta cierto punto* (*Up to a Certain Point,* 1983).

The regional film "cycles" that flourished in Brazil in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the early Argentine social realism of fictional filmmakers like José Augustín Ferreyra, Homero Manzi, Leopoldo Torres Ríos, Mario Soffici, and Hugo del Carril, are increasingly recognized

as predecessors to the new wave of Latin American fictional films that swelled in the 1960s, crested in the 1970s, and gathered renewed force in the 1980s. At its inception, this new cinema recognized one primary source of inspiration: Italian neorealism, a feature film movement acutely indebted in both its aesthetic and its mode of production to the documentary resurgence that accompanied World War II.

In its theme, genesis, and testimonial impulse, in its location shooting and its use of nonprofessional actors, Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950—his first major feature after moving to Mexico) is fully consistent with the precepts of neorealism. Four years later, in Cuba, a group of aspiring filmmakers collaborated on a medium-length documentary-style feature in the neorealist mold, *El mégano* (*The Charcoal Worker,* 1954). The film's director, Julio García Espinosa, and his assistant Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, had both been students at Italy's Centro Sperimentale a few years earlier. In Brazil the following year, Nelson Pereira dos Santos produced *Rio, quarenta graus* (1955), the first of a projected trilogy of fictional works shot in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro with the participation of many local residents. Pereira dos Santos, pioneering and prolific leader of Brazil's Cinema Novo movement, has often asserted that the movement would have been unthinkable without the Italian example. Fernando Birri's first feature, *Los inundados* (*Flooded Out,* 1962), again made with the collaboration of the students at the Documentary Film School of Santa Fe, bears the neorealist stamp of another former student of Rome's Centro Sperimentale. In the early years of ICAIC, neorealist scriptwriter and theorist Cesare Zavattini would come to Cuba to collaborate on the first postrevolutionary feature, Julio García Espinosa's *Cuba baila* (1960).

In Argentina from the late 1940s through the 1960s, in Cuba from the founding of ICAIC (the Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry) in 1959, and in Brazil and Chile during the 1960s, aspiring feature filmmakers got their start making documentary shorts. Leading historians of Brazil's Cinema Novo note that it arose largely within a documentary mode of production. Certain key Cinema Novo directors produced influential documentaries at the inception of their careers, among them Arnaldo Jabor (*Opinião Pública* [*Public Opinion*], 1967) and Leon Hirszman (*Maioria Absoluta* [*Absolute Majority*], 1964). Others like Glauber Rocha and Ruy Guerra would wait until later to try their hand at documentary. In Argentina, the "publicity generation" that included Fernando Solanas began their careers in advertising. In Chile, where incipient film activity was centered in university film societies, university control of major national television channels gave young directors of documentaries and fictional shorts unaccustomed access to a mass audience. Consistent with a policy established at its inception,

Echoes of Italian neorealism in a Cuban swamp: *El megano* (Julio García Espinosa, with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1955). Credit: Courtesy ICAIC

the Cuban Film Institute continues to accord privileged status to documentary production and training; aspiring feature filmmakers serve a documentary apprenticeship that may last a decade or more.

The situation in Cuba was markedly different from that of the rest of the continent. The armed struggle gave way to organizational and ideological battles. The first intimations that the *fidelistas* might also be carrying cinema along in their revolutionary wake came in the mid-sixties with a little six-minute compilation film called *Now!* Its maker, Santiago Alvarez, a music archivist at a Havana television station under Batista, became editor of the Latin American Weekly Newsreel under the Castro government. Like Dziga Vertov, his counterpart in post-

Arresting images of the underclass: *Maioria absoluta* (Leon Hirszman, 1964). Credit: Courtesy Cinemateca Brasileira

revolutionary Russia (whose work he did not view until his career as a film editor was well advanced), Alvarez was charged with assembling an amorphous collection of bits of still and moving footage – borrowed from archives, rescued from oblivion, pirated off Miami television broadcasts, or caught on the fly by photographers whom, initially, he could in no sense "direct" – into a coherent, meaningful whole for circulation throughout the island. Alvarez revitalized a moribund format with wit, passion, humor, graphic ingenuity, and a commitment to drawing connections where conventional newsreel formats erected walls of dissociation; thus he forged the newsreel into an effective and popular tool for unification, edification, and entertainment.

In addition – like Vertov before him – Alvarez revealed himself to be a masterfully innovative documentarist in his own right. In films like *Now.*' and *Hanoi, martes 13* (*Hanoi, Tuesday the Thirteenth*, 1967), *LBJ* (1968), *Despegue a las 18:00* (*Takeoff at Eighteen Hundred Hours*), and *79 primaveras* (*Seventy-nine Springtimes*, 1969), Alvarez elevated the collage film to a pinnacle of artistic expressiveness and political impact. In the intervening decades since Vertov brilliantly assembled "fragments of actuality" into a cohesive vision of national endeavor and

identity, the kinds of material available to the cinematic chronicler have been vastly expanded. Techniques for animating still images with a moving camera, inspired in the National Film Board of Canada's *City of Gold* (1957), encouraged the film chronicler "to consider almost any historic relic or artifact a potential narrative instrument."[15]

Alvarez literally took the whole world – and particularly the "forgotten" continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America – as his potential subject and source. *Seventy-nine Springtimes,* a eulogy to Ho Chi Minh, opens with a sustained juxtaposition: time-lapse shots of buds opening into flowers are intercut with real-time footage of mushroom clouds, in the wake of descending bombs, billowing into analogous spherical forms. Images of mourners filing past Ho's casket are slowed and manipulated to keep pace with the orchestral music on the sound track, by the American rock group Iron Butterfly, a combination that is as culturally and ideologically unlikely as it is emotionally effective. Such startling, even defiant, eclecticism was the cinematic correlative of the ideological and practical experimentation of the young revolution that provided the impetus and the context for Alvarez's work.

ICAIC's commitment to the documentary mode has nurtured a number of other talented documentarists. In contrast to Santiago Alvarez's montage-based style, with its dramatic juxtapositions of "found" imagery and nonsource sound, Octavio Cortázar, whose career began after the introduction of synchronous sound to Cuba, explored the possibilities of mise-en-scène, direct address, and the synchronous recording of the self-presentation of his subjects, often encouraged by his own off-camera questions. *Por primera vez* (1967) and *Hablando del punto cubano* (*Talking About "Punto Cubano,"* 1972), the most compelling examples of his early work, carry the tradition of direct testimony, pioneered by Grierson and Cavalcanti (*Housing Problems,* 1935) and Humphrey Jennings – and vastly expanded three decades later by practitioners of French cinema verité and American direct cinema – to an uncommon level of achievement. The history of postrevolutionary film in Cuba is punctuated with brilliant documentary gems too numerous to name, much less to describe in this limited context. The witty, highly personal styles of documentarists like Luis Felipe Bernaza, Rolando Díaz, and Enrique Colina have won them a large following in Cuba, but their films remain unknown abroad – not simply because of their specificity, which is one of their virtues, but due to the restricted international market for documentary shorts.

By now it should be abundantly clear that this Latin American documentary renaissance has gone hand in hand with social and political ferment. Production activity continued to accelerate and innovation to flourish in those countries which, in the late sixties, seemed on the verge

of sweeping transformations: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, among others. The installation in the 1970s of a series of iron-fisted military regimes in the first five of these countries, and sharp moves to the right in the latter group, endangered many filmmakers – halting their efforts, driving many underground or into less controversial areas of media production, and forcing others into exile. The two most monumental examples of Latin American documentary, both three-part, collaborative works incendiary in content and innovative in form, date from this tumultuous period.

The Hour of the Furnaces (Argentina, 1968) surveyed the history of the nation and the continent from a Peronist perspective, provoking a reassessment of the exiled leader both within and outside of Argentina and contributing to his eventual return to the country and, briefly, to the presidency. The filmmakers – Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, and Gerardo Vallejo – used a freewheeling, iconoclastic editing style that emphasized stark juxtapositions of both image and sound to structure their amalgamation of highly diverse footage – archival material, candid and clandestine footage, publicity clips, quotations from films by Fernando Birri, Joris Ivens, and others – into a coherent and provocative "essay on neocolonialism, violence and liberation" in Argentina and Latin America. In Solanas's and Getino's widely reprinted essay, "Towards a Third Cinema," as well as in numerous other writings and interviews, the filmmakers insist that any innovations in cinematic language in a film that was hailed for its originality, sparking imitations throughout Europe and the Americas, derive from their desire to facilitate a more active relationship with the spectator. Assembled after the clandestine distribution of part I, parts II and III include several breaks in which the audience is encouraged to discuss among themselves issues raised by the film. These are presented throughout as a call to action. The historical importance of *The Hour of the Furnaces* cannot be separated from its makers' commitment to undertake, with it, the simultaneous and interdependent transformation of structures and relations of cinematic production, diffusion, and reception.

The Battle of Chile (1974–77–79) was shot by a group of six people over a ten-month period prior to and immediately after the violent overthrow of Chilean president Salvador Allende. After the coup, the footage and sound bands were promptly smuggled to safety in Europe. Five members of the Grupo Tercer Año, including its director, Patricio Guzmán, managed to leave the country in unobtrusive and carefully orchestrated fashion; the sixth, cameraman Jorge Muller, was abducted by the secret police in late 1974 and never heard from again – one of several militant Latin American filmmakers who paid for their political commitment with their lives. The editing of the three parts – *The In-*

surrection of the Bourgeoisie, The Coup d'État, and *Popular Power*—took five years. The scope and density of this record of a tumultuous, unpredictable, and ultimately tragic political process is unprecedented. *The Battle of Chile's* creative synthesis of documentary approaches, its collaborative mode of production, its methodology for breaking history-in-the-making into discrete components susceptible to cinematic recording make it a film of lasting importance.

A commitment to political transformation has indeed motivated much of Latin American social documentary production over the past four decades. Many filmmakers have found themselves acting, through the agency of their films, as advocates and accusers, agitators and dissenters—if not voluntarily, then compelled by the contradictions of their situation. But other orientations and tonalities—poetic, ethnographic, celebratory, experimental—also warrant attention.

The ethnographic contributions of the Peruvians Manuel and Víctor Chambi, founders of what film historian Georges Sadoul identified as "the Cuzco school" (1955–65), of Argentines Jorge Prelorán and Raymundo Gleyzer during the subsequent decade (e.g., *It Happened in Hualfín,* 1969); of producer Thomaz Farkas's *Condiçao Brasileira* cycle of nineteen documentaries by various directors life and culture in the Brazilian Northeast (among them, *Man of Leather* and *The Sugar Mill*); of Gabriela Samper and the team of Colombians Marta Rodríguez and the late Jorge Silva, have yet to receive the critical attention they deserve.

Many important works are difficult to classify—Cuban director Humberto Solás's *Simparele* (1974), a performance documentary that reconstructs a people's history of Haiti through song and dance, for example. Or Argentine Alejandro Saderman's equally experimental and visually stunning *Men of Mal Tiempo* (Cuba, 1968), a "fiesta of memory" which records an encounter between centenarian veterans of Cuba's war for independence from Spain and a group of actors preparing for fictional roles based on their exploits. Examples from the past decade, a time of remarkable fecundity for Latin American feature and documentary filmmaking, multiply beyond counting. Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra marcado para morer: Vinte anos depois* (*Man Marked to Die: Twenty Years Later,* Brazil, 1984) juxtaposes the neorealist style of the early 1960s with a self-reflexive contemporary news-gathering style in order to retrace the lives of a peasant family and their community, dispersed by the 1964 military coup. Marisol Trujillo fuses performance and testimony in her *Mujer delante del espejo* (*Women in Front of the Mirror,* 1984) in which a young Cuban dancer recounts her entry into motherhood and reentry into ballet through interviews, verité sequences, and choreography. Trujillo's *Oración por Marilyn Monroe* (*Prayer for*

Marilyn Monroe, 1986) uses techniques of collage and montage to illustrate Ernesto Cardenal's poem of the same name. In *Rte: Nicaragua, Carta al mundo* (*Letter from Nicaragua,* 1985), Fernando Birri compiles an audiovisual ode to Nicaragua's struggling autonomy by combining his own poetry with images recycled from INCINE's (the Nicaraguan Film Institute's) discarded out-takes.

Various works by Chileans living abroad demonstrate a remarkable degree of critical and self-critical incisiveness along with a "polyglot" approach to film language – both qualities clearly the distillate of the painfully broadening experience of exile. Valería Sarmiento's *El hombre, cuando es hombre* (*A Man When He Is a Man,* Costa Rica, 1985) gently but decisively pulls the rug out from under Latin machismo through its imaginative juxtaposition of romanticized expressions of popular culture, observational footage, and startlingly candid interviews. Marilú Mallet's *Journal inachevé* (*Unfinished Diary,* Canada, 1983) uses self-reflexive discourses of intimacy (the "diary" format, interior domestic space, mirrors, family relations) to convey the inner experience of exile and transculturation. Raúl Ruiz's meditation on local elections as viewed from his Parisian neighborhood, *Des Grands événements et des gens ordinaires: Les élections* (*Of Great Events and Ordinary People: The Elections,* 1979), with its successive, accelerating reprises of its own exposition, is an observational and self-reflexive tour de force – an anthropological reversal in which the "native" scrutinizes the exotic rituals of the European.

Any list of directors, titles, and genres is problematic because of its inevitable partiality, in both senses of the word. My purpose is not to compile the definitive catalogue of Latin American documentary. I question the value of attempting to substitute or supplement the prevailing ethnocentric canon, though if such canons are to be perpetuated, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of a more socioculturally representative set of criteria. My primary goal in preparing this volume is to encourage a reconsideration of the social uses of documentary by making accessible for examination and comparison specific strategies and practices that have expanded those uses in the Latin American context, innovating and renovating not only the content and form of documentary, but also its modes of production, diffusion, and reception and, in a more epistemological dimension, prompting a reconsideration of notions of the real, the national, the popular, the revolutionary.

It is my hope that the general issues raised in these introductory pages – and in the ones that follow – will be as salient as individual films, filmmakers, and national and regional trajectories. Foremost among those general issues are: the viability of existing documentary typolo-

gies; modes of verbal and visual address; methods for activating social actors and viewers; the particuliarities that distinguish documentary from fictional mediations; the centrality of historical, sociopolitical, and ideological urgencies to the Latin American documentary project; the relationship between political systems and documentary practices; the implications of intermingling diverse media and modalities; the essential symbiosis between text and context; the imprint of history upon documentary and documentary upon history; and, finally, the implications of all of the above for an increasingly transcultural world. If dominant cultural and economic forces enable the audiovisual media to play an increasingly alienating, dehumanizing, deracinating role, the films and approaches discussed in the following pages pose an enriching, empowering range of alternatives.

NOTES

1. In the development of this paradigm, Bill Nichols made numerous criticisms and suggestions that have substantially enriched the final product.

2. Lewis Jacobs, *The Documentary Tradition,* rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 516.

3. Eric Barnouw, *Documentary, A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. v.

4. The Sociedad de Difusión Radio-Eléctrica (Radio-Electric Broadcasting Society) was, in the words of the head of one of its many sections, a kind of "unofficial national ministry of culture" (interview with Danilo Trelles, head of SODRE's film section for many years, Madrid, 1981).

5. Paulo Antonio Paranagua, *Cinema na America Latina: Longe de Deus e Perto de Hollywood* (Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul: Coleçao Universidade Libre, 1985), the first synthetic history of the film medium in Latin America, makes a major contribution. Not the least of its virtues is its careful attention to the development of documentary forms and practices.

The most extensive history of Latin American cinema is still *Les Cinémas de l'Amérique Latine,* ed. Guy Hennebelle and Alfonso Gumucio Dagrón (Paris: L'herminier, 1981). In this collection of essays on the cinematic histories of all the countries in the region, the degree of attention to documentary varies from chapter to chapter. Part I of my collection of interviews, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers,* is dedicated to the "documentary impulse." Jean-Claude Bernardet, *Cineastes e imagens do povo* (Rio de Janeiro: Brasiliense, 1987) examines documentary production in a single country (Brazil) from the 1950s through the 1970s.

Finally, for the assessment of three "generations" of national film histories published between 1959 and 1982, see Ana Lopez, "A Short History of Latin American Film Histories, *Journal of the Latin American Film and Video Association* 37, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 55–69.

6. For one visiting Latin American actor and director, the Toronto Film Festival's 1986 "Winds of Change" retrospective (ninety-six films from Latin America made over the preceding twenty-five years) was memorable above all for one particular screening. After almost two decades, he was finally able to view *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*), the most important Latin American documentary of the 1960s. He had waited twenty years and traveled thousands of miles to view a film made by his contemporaries only a few hundred miles south of his native Brazil. Such instances are distressingly common.

7. Albert E. Smith, *Two Reels and a Crank* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952), p. 66n.

8. Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel: 1911–1967* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1972), p. 19.

9. Fielding provides lists of genuine and fake footage from the Spanish American War (ibid., p. 31).

10. Paranagua, *Cinema na America Latina*, pp. 20–21 (my translation). In his fifty-year history of the American newsreel, Raymond Fielding devotes several pages to the Mexican Revolution, "one of the few military conflicts before World War II which received moderately good motion picture coverage." He notes, "All the major American newsreel companies sent correspondents south of the border, as did a number of smaller firms," giving particular attention to the unprecedented contract between Mutual Film Corporation and General Pancho Villa for "exclusive" film rights to battle scenes (*The American Newsreel*, pp. 110–15).

11. Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 81.

12. Ibid., p. 161.

13. Ibid., pp. 191, 194.

14. Bolivia had made an early start in this direction with the collaboration, from the late 1940s, between Jorge Ruíz, Augusto Roca, and Alberto Perrin Pando. In a uniquely prolonged trajectory that spanned three decades, their production company, Bolivia Films, would move from independent social documentary to fictional features and finally to contract documentary work for U.S. agencies and corporations.

15. Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 202.

2

REDISCOVERING DOCUMENTARY: CULTURAL CONTEXT AND INTENTIONALITY

Michael Chanan

*Michael Chanan considers documentary typologies as they have developed in Latin America in response to concrete practices—individual, national and regional. Though Chanan concentrates on two categories—*cine didáctico *and* cine testimonio*—he draws his arguments and insights from a broad range of filmmakers: Argentines Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, the Mexican Eduardo Maldonado, Colombians Jorge Silva and Marta Rodríguez, and Cubans Julio García Espinosa, Jorge Fraga, Pastor Vega, and Víctor Casaus, as well as the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire. Chanan's Cuban emphasis responds to his belief that, because of the way postrevolutionary film culture has privileged documentary modes, Cuba has served as a kind of "testing laboratory" for Latin American documentary in general. He begins his essay setting documentary into a world-historical framework, and concludes by differentiating among the conflicting viewpoints on the relationship of film to reality that characterize the developed and the underdeveloped regions. The question of intentionality forms the core of his essay, but in his conclusion he notes the need for inquiry into the modes of documentary address—the "radically different ways that oppositional cinema positions both the viewer and the filmmaker."*

FOR MORE than twenty-five years a new cinema has been developing in Latin America, carving out spaces for itself even under the most inimical circumstances, a cinema devoted to the denunciation of misery and the celebration of protest. When these diverse films first began to arrive in Europe and North America in the 1960s, they challenged many of the norms of established film narrative, unequivocally announcing the existence of a new avant-garde in world cinema: Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Glauber Rocha in Brazil, Tomás Gutiérrez

Alea and Humberto Solás in Cuba, Miguel Littín in Chile, Jorge Sanjinés in Bolivia, and many others.

Among these films were several eye-opening documentaries. From Cuba, a number of explosive short films by Santiago Alvarez – among them *Now* (1965) and *LBJ* (1968), with their biting satire and sense of urgency – seemed to reinvent the concept of agit-prop. From Uruguay Mario Handler's *Me gustan los estudiantes* (*I Like Students*, 1967), another modest masterpiece of agit-prop, captured the explosive energy of the national student movement. From Argentina, a mammoth four-hour film in three parts, *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968), made by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, described by its makers as "an act of liberation," caused a sensation at its European premiere in Pesaro, Italy. From Colombia, *Chircales* (*Brickmakers*) by Jorge Silva and Marta Rodríguez, extended ethnography into systematic political analysis.

These were only isolated examples of a growing mass of films and filmmakers throughout Latin America. In this burgeoning movement that would become known as the New Latin American Cinema, documentary held a central position. Part of the originality of numerous fiction films derived from their incorporation of documentary techniques and styles.

The question has been asked whether all this activity really amounts to an artistic movement, whether these characteristics are concrete and specific enough to give a sense of unity to the extremely diverse ways in which they are employed. This is a question, however, as much about the forms of cultural development in Latin America as about cinema per se. First of all, not all artistic movements have the same kind of logic. There are significant differences among, for example, impressionism, fauvism, futurism, surrealism, and so forth. Second, we should not assume that artistic movements work the same way in Latin America, Africa, or Asia. Is it not possible that the basic concepts of cultural history enlisted to identify broad cultural movements like Renaissance humanism, classicism, or modernism are quintessentially European?

The New Latin American Cinema, whether or not it is thought of as a movement, certainly possesses a bewildering diversity of styles and forms. Cuban filmmakers are given to observe that the idea of socialist realism is an empty one if it can be taken to include both a Bondarchuk and a Tarkovsky. What should we say of the contrast between Rocha and dos Santos, or Sanjinés and Antonio Equino, his former cameraman? Or between the vastly different works of other directors? What do Latin American filmmakers mean by the New Latin American Cinema, a term they themselves often greet with suspicion? Is it, perhaps a piece of bravura?

The paradigmatic role of documentary cinema can shed light on these complex questions. Nowhere can documentary's importance be observed more vividly than in Cuba. As a kind of testing laboratory for the New Latin American Cinema, Cuba has produced the most fascinating and contradictory findings. Before the 1959 revolution, Cuba had been a leading Latin American producer of commercial radio and television and a leading consumer of Hollywood movies. The chronic absence or distortion of images of national life in films before 1959 helps explain why documentary would carry such weight in Cuba's postrevolutionary film production.

The historical moment of the Cuban revolution was also, by coincidence, a period of aesthetic revolution in documentary cinema. Within the space of a few years, 16mm, previously regarded as a substandard format like 8mm or half-inch video today, became viable. Technical developments, inspired by the needs of space technology as well as television, stimulated the production of high-quality 16mm cameras light enough to be raised on the shoulder and equipped with fast lenses and film stocks that reduced or even eliminated the need for artificial lighting. Portable tape recorders and improved microphones provided synchronous sound, allowing the sound technician a mobility commensurate to that of the camera operator. No longer forced to shoot with bulky 35mm equipment that restricted them to studios or prepared locations, documentarists felt as if reborn. New-style documentary filmmakers sprung up on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe the style became known as cinema verité, in the United States as direct cinema.

The concepts and practices of documentary film go back to the 1920s and three developments in particular: the appearance of a small avant-garde movement in European cinema; the work of a maverick filmmaker of Irish descent in North America, Robert Flaherty; and the creation of a revolutionary film industry in Soviet Russia which included the agit-prop of Dziga Vertov and the comrades of the Kino-Train. These developments were consolidated in Britain during the 1930s at the GPO Film Unit under the leadership of John Grierson.

With the coming of sound, documentarists had responded at first with more imagination than was characteristic of other branches of cinema. The rich principles of montage developed in the 1920s were applied, within the technological limitations of early sound systems, to the construction of the sound track. But the cumbersome equipment and the narrative and ideological requirements of the commercial film industry constrained and even straitjacketed the development of the form. The message of the sponsor was required to dominate, directly or indirectly, the prerogatives of imagination. Only the special condi-

tions of the Second World War kept a small space open for aesthetic exploration by a few gifted propagandists like Britain's Humphrey Jennings.

For the most part, however, the documentary was free to develop only within the bounds of a conventional sense of realism that had become pretty well established by the end of the 1930s. Ideologically consolidated in the postwar period, this is the basis of the aesthetic which was then inherited by television, a style many filmmakers felt excessively confining.

Grierson had argued for a concept of documentary as a didactic and social rather than a poetic and individual form, within which the image was to be employed for its status as a plain, authentic record of the actual. This aesthetic was based on a thoroughly empiricist philosophy that closely corresponded to certain practices in journalism. Though Grierson didn't put it this way himself, he wanted the documentarist to regard the nonfictional image as an authentic document of social reality (to be filmed as artistically as one likes but with appropriate discretion) in rather the same way that journalists take documents like parliamentary reports or the sworn statements of witnesses as authoritative and unimpeachable versions of events. For the journalist actually to believe the authority of such documents, however, is plainly naive, and tends to cause problems. On similar grounds, the aesthetic that treats the authenticity of the film image uncritically can be called naive realism. There is an antagonistic tension, a contradiction, between the material capacity of the camera to make a record of a segment of the real world, and the way in which this capacity comes to be treated, which the documentary revolution at the end of the 1950s both exposed and intensified.

The constraints of 35mm encouraged documentarists to resort to filming reenactments according to the rules that had been developed in commercial cinema for the fictional narrative, adding an explanatory commentary. The rise of commentary reduced large chunks of the image to the status of mere illustration, and in the face of the demands of the sponsor, the ideals that inspired the first flowering of the social documentary now dissolved. The best documentaries in the postwar years mostly took the shape of individual poetic essays by directors like Georges Franju and Alain Resnais.

It would be natural to suppose that the Cubans eagerly took up the revolution in documentary occurring at the same moment as their own political and social revolution. Watching the documentaries of the revolution's early years, however, one rapidly discovers that this was not the case. Sometimes, indeed, the styles and forms of cinema verité are most noticeable by virtue of their absence. One reason is that the

first task of the new film institute, ICAIC, was to set up operations in 35mm. By the time this was accomplished, the U.S. blockade had been imposed and there were no longer funds available for developing 16mm. One is tempted to ask, would it have been any different if there had been? Examination of the evidence both on and off screen leads to the conclusion that it would not.[1]

The rapid expansion of ICAIC's documentary output, from four films in 1959 to twenty-one the following year and forty in 1965, makes it a hopeless task to attempt to survey these films individually without looking for a way to categorize them. This exercise is fraught with the most thorny problems. Any system of classification is liable to backfire, through imposing a conceptual scheme foreign to the material it is trying to classify. Caution therefore urges that we look first at systems of classification the Cubans themselves have employed.

In an interview published in 1971, Julio García Espinosa was asked how nonfiction output was classified.[2] He cited four categories: popularizing documentaries (*documentales de divulgación*), scientific subjects for popular consumption, newsreels, and cartoons. These divisions correspond to the way production in ICAIC was organized. The first is a general category; the second refers to specifically didactic films. (A department for didactic documentaries was set up in 1960, and though the catalogue classification under this heading came to an end in 1970, the types of films it included continued to be made. There was also a series entitled Popular Encyclopedia for which thirty-one films were produced during 1961–1962.)[3] The last two categories refer to the departments of newsreel and animation headed by Santiago Alvarez and Juan Padrón, respectively, which continued to function as separate units within ICAIC through the 1980s because their specific organizational requirements remained distinct.

Clearly these categories do not have any great aesthetic relevance. It would be more useful to look for a system of classification according to subject or theme, which might at least tell us something about the relative weight the Cubans have given to different fields of interest and could also serve as a starting point for more detailed analysis. A group of students under Mario Piedra, using ICAIC's own Cuban-assembled computer, have analyzed the institute's documentary output over the years 1959–1982.[4] Using thirty-three categories, they made a simple count of the numbers in nine broad thematic groups, and arrived at the following percentages:

working-class themes (*tematica social-obrera*): 24.27
artistic or cultural topics: 20.38