AN/OTHER VIEW OF NEW LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

--B. RUBY RICH

I.

"Everyday events proceed now in another way. The image of revolution has become ordinary, familiar. In some ways we're achieving transformations even more profound than earlier ones, but ones that aren't so 'apparent' now, not immediately visible to the observer. (...) Thus we find it no longer sufficient just to take cameras out in the street and capture fragments of that reality. (...) The filmmaker is immersed in a complex milieu, the profound significance of which does not lie on the surface."

--Tomas Gutierrez Alea, "The Viewer's Dialectic" 1

"The critics of our movement see it with eyes that do not comprehend what is going on in our movement. Anything that doesn't correspond to the old formulas, they don't recognize as being genuine New Latin American Cinema. In other words, they're trying to impose a model on us which is alien."

--Ruy Guerra & Fernando Birri, Park City, Utah, 1989 2

These two quotations provide a necessary starting point to any discussion of the New

1. Tomas Gutierrez Alea, "The Viewer's Dialectic" in Reviewing Histories: Selections From the New Latin American Cinema, ed. Coco Fusco (Buffalo, NY: Hallwalls, 1987), p.179.

2. Panel on New Latin American Cinema, moderated by author, U.S. Film Festival, Park City, Utah, January 26, 1989.

Latin American Cinema of today, its identity or its obstacles. [3] The films and filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema movement have in recent years become the victim of a stereotype, in that the entire history of New Latin American cinema has come to be judged by the yardstick of its early classics--as though history were static, as though the relationship of aesthetics to politics, once fixed, must remain in that same equation forever. Because Latin American cinema was able to penetrate North American and European consciousness and markets with a particular style and set of concerns, the terms of that debut have continued to set the standard governing the interpretation of all the work that has followed.

In fact, the 1980s have seen a profound transformation of that history and a marked change in what the "new" New Latin American Cinema may be seen to stand for, in the people who are creating it, and in the context within which its works are now being produced and exhibited. [4] Of course, history has never really been a matter of linear progress marching ever more efficiently and homogenously toward the horizon. There are refinements, reversals, denials, rebellions, leaps forward, regressions, revivals, and

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3. This article had its beginnings in an earlier and very different version, "After the Revolutions: The *New* New Latin American Cinema," Village Voice, February 10, 1987, which was inspired by the massive retrospective, "The Winds of Change," organized by the Toronto Festival of Festivals in September 1986, and by the women's symposium at the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, December 1986.

4. Recent writing has begun to take note of this evolution. See, for example: the special "Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano" issue of Areito (ed. Lisa Davis and Sonia Rivera), Volume X No. 37, 1984; Pat Aufderheide, "Awake Argentina," Film Comment, April 1986, ps. 51-55, and "Cultural Democracy: Non-Commercial Film Distribution in Latin America" Afterimage, November 1986, ps. 12f; Julianne Burton, Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); my own "New Argentine Cinema" essay in the U.S. Film Festival catalogue, Park City, Utah, 1988; and most recently, Latin American Visions (ed. Pat Aufderheide and Lois Fishman), catalogue commissioned for the Latin American Visions retrospective organized by Linda Blackaby and Beatriz Vieira of the Neighborhood Film/Video Project of International House, Philadelphia.

wholly new developments that appear to hold no echo of the past whatsoever.

Before assessing the present, a return to the past is in order. The New Latin American Cinema may be seen to have had a beginning far more complex than usually acknowledged and thus a development that has in fact been less hegemonic than perceived. The starting point is the 1950s and the post-World-War-II moment in our global cultural history. It is a moment that could be seen as, in its very essence, anti-hegemonic, in that it signified a rupture both with previous balances of power and with previous modes of representation in cinema (with causes at once economic, philosophical, political, and technological). Or, at the very least, it was a pre-hegemonic moment, one that preceded the U.S. global ascendancy that would last for some 30 years, right up to the 80s.

This post-war period significantly gave rise, in Italy, to neo-realism, which would cross over to Latin America in three steps.

The first crossing was made from Europe to Mexico, when Luis Bunuel went there ~~to~~ and made ~~film~~ Los Olvidados, a portent of things to come in its emphasis on the dispossessed, the 'real' life of the Third World, on pictures not pretty enough to have made it into the movies before and a camera style fluid enough to match. But Bunuel wasn't Mexican. Despite the shared language between Mexico and Spain, Bunuel's film was not aimed at evolving a national identity nor a Latin American aesthetic. It was, however, a forceful announcement, in 1950, that neo-realism had arrived (though Bunuel, of course, was himself pre-neo-realism in his aesthetic strategies) and could have a role to play in Latin American cinema.

The second crossing was a round-trip one. During 1952-55, four young Latin Americans travelled to Italy to study at the legendary Centro Sperimentale (Center for

Experimental Cinematography) at the University of Rome. Their names? Tomas Gutierrez Alea, Fernando Birri, Julio Garcia Espinosa, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. When Birri returned to Argentina, he founded the Film School of Santa Fe, which would become as legendary as the school he'd attended due to the generation of filmmakers he trained there. When Tomas Gutierrez Alea and Julio Garcia Espinosa returned to Cuba, they collaborated on El megano (The Charcoal Worker), completed in 1954, banned by Batista, and considered the first work of the new Cuban cinema; Garcia Espinosa became the head of "Cine rebelde" during the insurgency period. [5] Both thus became key participants in the fashioning of a cinema that would attempt to fuse new subjects with new forms and in so doing set a standard for the New Latin American Cinema movement. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the would-be screenwriter, ended up (as we know) turning to literature instead. In the past few years, however, he has become a singular influence upon Latin American filmmaking -- through his role as head of the FNCL (New Latin American Cinema Foundation) which among other things oversees the film school established in 1986 in Cuba to train young filmmakers; through the screen adaptations of his writings and his own screenplays; and most recently through his initiation of the "Difficult Loves" program with Spanish television (a series of six co-productions with Latin American or Spanish filmmakers, all based on Garcia Marquez stories or ideas),.

Finally, the third step illustrates that the influence of Italian neo-realism was not limited to those who physically journeyed to the mecca of Rome to study with its masters. Nelson Pereira dos Santos, back in Brazil, was part of a circle that recognized the import of this aesthetic and political strategy for Brazilian cinema. They were stimulated by the arrival in Brazil of Alberto Cavalcanti, who exposed the young cinephiles to the new neo-realist

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5. Julianne Burton, Cinema and Social Change in Latin America, op. cit., chapters 9 and 19.

cinema. Pereira dos Santos's first short film, Juventude, was made at the same time as Bunuel's Mexican debut (produced for the Brazilian Communist Party, it was lost when sent to a European festival) and his first feature, Rio 40 Degrees, built on the neo-realist example to become the founding work of cinema novo in 1955.

> "Without neorealism, we would have never started, and I think no country with a weak film economy could have made self-portraying films, were it not for that precedent." -- Nelson Pereira dos Santos[6]

The influence of Italian neo-realism coincided with political shifts in Latin America: then, as now, aesthetics and politics could not be sequestered into separate arenas. In Brazil, Pereira dos Santos's stance was part of a larger position articulated through two key film industry conferences (of 1952 and 1953). The growth of a cinema defined by its national position, in turn, was made possible by the nationalistic government of Getulio Vargas (1937-45 and 1951-54), nurtured by the atmosphere of increasing democratization under the elected government of Juscelino Kubitschek in 1955, and stunted by the military coup that overthrew Joao Goulart in 1964.[7] The political stage was never incidental. The coup within a coup of 1968 greatly eroded the cultural zones of tolerance, and led to the emphasis in Brazilian cinema of this period upon metaphor and symbolic allusion. The establishment of Embrafilme in Brazil in 1969, ironically, provided an ambiguous freedom of expression for filmmakers during the years of military rule: Embrafilme itself was notable for its lack of censorship, but the produced films were frequently censored by the

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6. Luis Elbert, "Neorealism," in Latin American Visions, op. cit., p. 27.

7. Randal Johnson, Cinema Novo X 5 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 2.

government. [8]

Similarly, when Fernando Birri returned to Argentina in 1956, he felt able to do so because of the ouster of Peron; the film school which he established upon his return could flourish in part due to the democratic Fronzini government (which fell in 1962, the beginning of Birri's long exile). Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's The Hour of the Furnaces has been long acknowledged for its cinematic rupture of the preexisting spectator/film relationship. Less acknowledged has been the explicit political agenda that led to the creation of the third part of the trilogy (so clearly Peronist that it was largely omitted from screening after Peron's disastrous return to power) or to Getino's service as head of the film censorship board under Peron (1973).

In Cuba, extraordinary films could be made not simply because of a particularly inspired generation, but because of the massive change in social , economic, political, and -- yes -- aesthetic relations caused by the revolution in 1959. The awareness of this interconnection (and of the new cinema that might be created within a revolutionary context) was made explicit when Fidel Castro's government founded ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, as one of its first official acts. It is no coincidence that The Battle of Chile was shot during the period of Allende's presidency in Chile (though finished, of course, ~~tragically~~, after), nor that Allende's brief term as president coincided with a film renaissance in Chile as filmmakers sought to implement the ideals of his government at an aesthetic level. After the coup of September 11, 1973, the military immediately destroyed the university's film equipment and banned all the films made by Chile Films in the

8. For descriptions of this period, see Guillermo Zapiola, "Cinema Under Dictatorship" in Latin American Visions (op. cit.), ps. 38-39 and Richard Pena, "The Legacy of Cinema Novo: An Interview With Nelson Pereira Dos Santos" in Reviewing Histories: Selections From New Latin American Cinema (op. cit.), ps. 51-52.

preceding three years.[9]

In sum, then, the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema cannot be separated from the political events during the period of its development in the utterly distinct regions that make up Latin America, nor can the very different direction being taken today be separated from the political circumstances of our decade.[10]

For a (North American and European) critical perspective that tends always toward some form of auteurism, toward a celebration of individualism and heroic genius, the fundamentally political preconditions of cinematic achievement in Latin America may seem beside the point. But they have been very much the point throughout the history of the New Latin American Cinema movement, and continue to be today. Just as Latin American culture has occupied a pivotal spot between nationalism and regional coherence, the New Latin American Cinema between aesthetic innovation and ideological motivation, so too have its filmmakers positioned themselves in a pivot point between individualism and popular identification.

II.

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9. E. Bradford Burns, Latin American Cinema (L.A.: UCLA Latin American Center, 1975), p. 27.

10. Similarly, the development of Latin American Cinema in the post-war period cannot be separated from the U.S. embargo of Argentina during World War II, part of then Secretary of State Cornell Hull's overall agenda for overthrowing the Argentine government. In 1942, allegedly punishing Argentina for its neutrality in the war, the U.S. placed an embargo on the shipment of raw film stock to the country, a policy initiated by Nelson Rockefeller's Office for the Coordination of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) and its Motion Picture Division. At the same time, U.S. interests (including Rockefeller) began investing capital rapidly in Mexico instead. This tactic led to the decline of Argentina as the preeminent film producer to the continent and to the rise of Mexico as its market competitor. See Tim Barnard, "Popular Cinema and Populist Politics" in Barnard (ed.), Argentine Cinema (Toronto: Nightwood Editions, 1986), ps. 32-39, and John King, "The Social and Cultural Context" in The Gardens of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema (ed. John King and Nissa Torrents, The British Film Institute, 1987), p.

The early years of the New Latin American Cinema were characterized by the identifying characteristics of a Neo-realist style as adapated from Europe to meet Latin American needs and realities. Objecting to the long-dominant Hollywood style of studio shooting and seamlessly-composed narratives, the artists of the New Latin American Cinema immersed themselves in the opposite: freeing the camera from its confinement and isolation, the eye of this movement roamed the streets. Instead of continuing to buy into the customary Latin replication of the Hollywood system of studios and stars, they sought out nonprofessional actors and actual locations. The subjects of exploration changed from the preoccupations of a leisure class, or a sanitized history, to the here-and-now, historical reclamations, the lives of a class that had not seen itself reflected in the cinema.

It was an oppositional cinema at every level, self-consciously searching for new forms to embody new sentiments of a Latin American reality just being uncovered. It was a cinema dedicated to decolonialism, at every level including, frequently, that of cinematic language. A cinema of necessity, it was different things in different countries: in Cuba, Julio Garcia Espinosa called for an "imperfect cinema," while in Brazil it was an "aesthetics of hunger" that was called for, and in Argentina a "third cinema."

As the first classics began to make their way to U.S. and European screens, their image was imprinted on a critical consciousness just discovering Latin American cinema as a fresh depiction of urgent realities, a wail of despair combined with a cry of identity, a weapon in the struggle for change. The filmmakers of this movement were unambiguous in their empathies and identifications. Theirs was a cinema dedicated to the downtrodden, the dispossessed, the "people" whose images had never before been seen on the screen. It

became a model for all revolutionary cinema that would follow.

Even in the beginning, however, the New Latin American Cinema was more complex than such a unilateral model would indicate. In Brazil, for example, the eloquent grittiness of the neo-realist cinema was paralleled by the baroque mysticism of Glauber Rocha (to take just one example). In Cuba, Tomas Gutierrez Alea made Memories of Underdevelopment, but he had also made Las Doce Sillas, a madcap comedy, six years earlier. Only one year after The Hour of the Furnaces was made in Argentina, Brazilian director Joaquim Pedro de Andrade made Macunaima, a film which drew on a visionary Modernist novel to create a film that was anti-rational, anarchistic, and fantastical in its mix of folkloric and popular-culture iconography. There are many such examples of the heterogeneity of even the early years of the New Latin American Cinema, despite the fixity of a more popularized and unilateral definition. So many, indeed, that the very notion of any unitary definition ought to be abandoned.

If the point needed to be proven any further, there is Fernando Birri. For years, the legendary film Tire Die, made in Birri's workshop with students at the Film School of Santa Fe in Argentina, stood as a kind of marker for the New Latin American Cinema movement due to its unprecedented portrayal of marginal life among the trash-pickers of Santa Fe and the boys who ran along the train trestles, risking or actually suffering an early death for a few pennies tossed by wealthier travellers from the comfort of their railroad cars. Birri's reputation and the birthright of New Latin American Cinema rested on this work.

Shortly after making Tire Die, however, Birri made another film : Los Inundados (The Flood Victims). [11] The railroad motif re-appears, but as though turned inside-out,

because this time around Birri made a comedy -- a comedy about the homeless and dispossessed.

In mainstream film history, all of cinema is often traced back to the twin polarities of Lumiere or Melies, the start of documentary and the start of fiction, the recorder and the magician. In Fernando Birri, the movement turned out to have both polarities in one filmmaker.

Los Inundados is important because it establishes from the very beginning, from the opening salvos of the movement, a parallel development within New Latin American Cinema that would go unacknowledged in the First World reception to the movement's new film strategies and aesthetic evolutions. It becomes a sort of "exhibit A" that can testify to the joie de vivre of a cinematic movement that became more acceptable, perhaps more marketable, when it could be packaged as the testimony of victims or the exoticism of underdevelopment.

Revisionism is part of any redefinition of direction. Just so, surveying the status of the New Latin American Cinema at the turn of a decade, it is necessary to begin with revised antecedents in order that today's actual precedents can be made visible. It might be claimed that a major change has occurred. Alternately, it could be noted that a parallel history, always present, has now become accentuated enough to claim as such. The shift has to do with individuality as well as populism, with frivolity as well as profundity, hope as much as despair, an attention to chronicle equal to that paid to epic, an embrace of the trivial as much as the historic act.

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11. Long unseen and lacking any North American distribution, Los Inundados was shown for the first time ever with English subtitles at the Toronto Festival of Festivals and Pacific Film Archive in 1986. A 16mm print was struck for the Latin American Visions series by the Neighborhood Film/Video Project, and will be distributed by the Museum of Modern Art Circulating Film Department after its initial tour.

and vote against him. It was 1953 before women got the right to vote in Mexico. [13]

Landeta created a film in which the daughter of a famous revolutionary is ostracized for her refusal to marry and her insistence on carrying her manly *marimacho* attributes along past adolescence. After the death of her father, she becomes a revolutionary in her own right. Yet the film turns the codes of revolutionary cinema upside down: the scenes of heroic action turn out not to fit so naturally with a woman protagonist, and the true passion and drama of the film increasingly occur in the battles, not between revolutionary fighters and a corrupt government, but between men and women.

The film's most notable battle occurs in two parts: a would-be rapist's assault on Angustias, and her later revenge when she captures him and has him castrated (off-screen). The greatest struggle takes place, not on a battlefield, but on the field of emotions, as Angustias struggles to differentiate her role as a woman from that of a leader of men, and seeks to find a way out of the trap in which her purportedly female heart has landed her. Thus, the film's actual dramatic line is drawn consistently along the ground of sexuality, as Angustias seeks over and over to reconcile competing gender identities and demands.

Apart from its prescient attention to race and gender, roles and contradictions, La Negra Angustias is unusual for its ending, which leaves Angustias strong, active, and fighting still after her momentary surrender to the subjugation of romantic love. In an era when Mexican cinema routinely relegated women to positions of subservience -- if not throughout the film, then certainly in its final scenes -- this was a radical break. If, as Jean Franco has suggested, films such as these (made by El Indio Fernandez et al) were key to a national agenda for a family model within which women were subservient, then Landeta's

13. Thanks to Jean Franco for her perspective and information on Mexico in the Forties.

film has a landmark political importance. She laid the groundwork for the Latin American women's films of the 80s, which began to incorporate women's struggles for identity and autonomy as a necessary part of a truly contemporary New Latin American Cinema.

In Argentina in 1962, Fernando Birri was installed in what was in retrospect a temporary bastion, his film school of Santa Fe. Though most films made there were collaborative efforts, and all were documentaries, Birri conceived a momentous departure from these norms with his project to make a comedy. In Los Inundados, Birri traced the lives of a homeless family living in an abandoned railroad car, who become a cause celebre when governmental bureaucracy lands them first on a moving train, unable to get off, and then on a disused siding where notoriety wins the family a place in the community.

The film's most striking feature is Birri's insistence on joy, his emphasis on the vital subjectivity that characterized the squatter colony and the family's bouyant responses to its sequence of reversals. Equally important is the film's creation of particularized characters who do not so much as stand in for "types," let alone archetypes, but rather, manifest marked identities, an expansion of individualism rather than a denial of it. With this film, Birri shifted the terms in which the downtrodden of society had been viewed, exchanging the singular term of "the people" for the third-person plural so seldom used rhetorically, "persons." In this sense, Birri created the preconditions necessary for the attention to subjectivity characteristic of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1980s.

Moving as did Birri from documentary to fiction, but in quite a different context, Cuban director Sara Gomez made One Way Or Another in 1974 (due to her death during post-production and damage to the negative, the film wasn't released until 1978). [14] The film

14. The film was completed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea, who had been her mentor and has been the most dedicated champion of her memory and her example.

makes its points both formally and ideologically, using documentary and fiction against each other, interrupting its own melodrama to insert footage of "a real person in this movie" or intercutting a social worker's smug summations with documentary footage to delegitimate her. Its story of a love affair becomes the story of the couple's sociocultural formations and deformations in terms of the differences between the bourgeois class and marginal class, blacks and whites, men and women, official prescriptions and subcultural traditions--a story, in short, of unresolved contradictions. In the end, Yolanda must learn how to deal respectfully with the children and mothers in the "marginal" neighborhood where she's teaching, while Mario must decide whether to expose an unregenerate friend who has cut out of his factory job to shack up with a girlfriend, claiming to be at his mother's hospital bedside.

Long exemplary for its formal innovations, One Way or Another becomes important, in the context of this overall history, for its challenge -- posed in both psychological and experiential terms -- to ideological and sociological assumptions. Gomez systematically refutes revolutionary platitudes and politically-correct analysies in favor of depicting the full scope of life in the black and "lumpen" neighborhoods she knew so well. The only woman ever to direct a feature film in Cuba, Gomez offers clear critiques of *machismo* and the consequences of male pride.

Combining humor with documentary-like expose, Gomez repeats Birri's achievement in claiming the strengths of both. Focusing on both race and gender, she follows Landeta's success in initiating a narrative examination of both. Perhaps One Way or Another is the first "post-revolutionary" Cuban film in its assessment of problems neither caused by nor cured by the revolution, but fast becoming endemic to its existence. In this

sense, it demonstrates an early awareness of a potential disjunction between the portrayal of the individual and that of society, with an influential demonstration that new aesthetic alternatives would have to be investigated for this trajectory to continue.

All three films -- La Negra Angustias, Los Inundados, One Way Or Another -- share one pronounced characteristic: the refusal of "otherness" to subjects formerly marked as such, accompanied by a commitment to the narrative inscription of an "other" selfhood, identity, and subjectivity. In this sense, all three share a contemporaneity with our current concerns that lift them even further out of the historical moment of their making, in which, at any rate, they were so anomalous, each in its own very different national and historical context.. Spanning a period from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s, they offer a fitting platform from which to view today's movement.

If the period of the early New Latin American Cinema movement was strongly identified with the reclaiming of the dispossessed and with the portrayal of the sweep of history, in both ideological and folkloric terms -- and if exceptions to this tendency, like the three mentioned here, were either written out of the histories or perceived as solitary exceptions -- then it is fitting that the current phase of the New Latin American Cinema should follow their lead, turning away from the epic toward the chronicle, a record of a time in which no spectacular events occur but in which the extraordinary nature of the everyday is allowed to surface. Its films mark a shift from "exteriority" to "interiority." In place of the explicitly and predictably political, at the level of labor or agrarian struggles or mass mobilization, we often find an attention to the implicitly political, at the level of banality, fantasy, and desire, and a corresponding shift in aesthetic strategies. Such a shift has also, not coincidentally, opened up the field to women.

The move from exteriority to interiority holds implications for our sense of

individualism and collectivity. The new films advance a reclaiming of the individual (which can hold either progressive or reactionary consequences, as the very concept and practice of individualism carries the potential for either direction). In today's New Latin American cinema, the old phrase "the personal is political" can almost be heard, murmuring below the surface. Its expression, however, is not a privatized one at all but very much social, political, public.

The films of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1980s are engaged in the creation, in cinematic terms, of what I would term a "collective subjectivity." They are concerned, nearly obsessed, with a new form of looking inward that offers the possibility of a radical break with the past, with an approach that can put on the screen, now for the first time, the interior world of persons whose lives first reached these same screens, in their stage of struggle, more than thirty years ago.

And the reasons for such a redirection? Just as the earlier development of the movement had its roots in the political climates of the distinct nation-states that pass for a single entity under the misleading term of Latin America, and which do nevertheless have a common unity in spite of their different cultures and histories, so too do the films of the 1980s reflect the political circumstances of the continent at the time of their making. The early 80s were a time of sweeping change for a number of Latin American countries. In Cuba, the Mariel exodus led to changes and reassessments. In Argentina, the defeat of the military in the Malvinas led to an end of military rule and a new elected government. In Brazil, the military surrendered power through a national process instituting a constitutional government. In Uruguay, too, the years of dictatorship came to an end. And in Venezuela, the end of the oil boom shifted society from largesse to shortfall.

To be sure, the democracies that have superceded military rule in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay may well be pseudo-democracies, unstable and vulnerable to both military and economic pressures. Many in the hemisphere are suspicious of the U.S. agenda behind the election panacea. Even more to the point, the crisis in Latin America today is more apt to center on the economic than the governmental, as the Debt becomes a sinister updated name for imperialism. Even so, the 1980s are indisputably different from the 1960s, and filmmakers -- even those veterans who have continued to work and produce films throughout this brief history of the New Latin American cinema -- are demonstrating that they know the difference, as demonstrated by their narrative strategies.

IV.

"When a dictatorship falls, the people become great devourers of culture. They need to exorcise the horror."

-- Beatriz Guido [15]

As political arenas change, from anti-fascist to post-fascist, for example, an oppositional cinema inherits the same obligation to change as do the oppositional parties in the electoral sector. In this new environment, a cinema which turns inward and which begins to enable viewers to construct an alternate relationship -- not only with their government but with an authentic sense of self -- is an indispensable element in the evolution of a new sociopolitical environment. Slogans, pamphlets, organizing, have been

15. Nissa Torrents, "An Interview With Beatriz Guido" in The Garden of Forking Paths, op cit., p.47.

key to political change; character, identity, empathy, and most important, a sense of personal agency, are of equal importance now to political evolution.

It could perhaps be argued that the democratic (or pseudo-democratic) process has itself become the foremost aesthetic influence on contemporary New Latin American Cinema, as its emphasis has shifted from the "revolutionary" to the "revelatory." Just as oppositional political action demanded one kind of cinema, so does the individual's participation in a newly-legitimate and public form of government demand another. To quote a young Brazilian critic, Joao Carlos Velho, from the Jornal do Brasil: the "aesthetics of hunger" of *cinema novo* has given way to a "hunger for aesthetics." [16] Similarly, an Argentine actress at the women's symposium of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana in 1986 told of the explosion of new body workshops and body-therapy classes then taking place, as people tried to discharge the years of repression literally, physically, from their bodies. In this same period, an article appeared in the N.Y. Times detailing the therapy methods being employed to ease the pain of the children of the disappeared, concluding that the most effective therapeutic intervention thus far had been the coming of democracy because it allowed the telling of secrets necessary to drain the political -- and emotional -- wounds.

The telling of secrets is an important theme in recent works of the New Latin American Cinema. In Argentina in 1987, a young filmmaker by the name of Carlos Echeverria used the documentary form to try to dig up secrets that were no longer welcome in a society more intent on creating a picture of 'normalization.' His Juan: Como Si Nada Hubiera Sucedido (Juan: As If Nothing Ever Happened) set out to investigate the case of one disappeared youth. A young radio journalist, alter ego to the disappeared youth, fronts

16. Thanks to Joao Luis Vieira for this citation.

the filmmaker as they journey through Argentine society like the most dogged of detectives, interviewing on camera all the surviving principals of the original scenario. The film's grim lesson is that secrets are only liberating to the extent that they imply some action, to the extent that they are valued and not just buried once again. In this film, however, there is no happy ending, no 'truth' to be uncovered, only a persistent trail of deception and subterfuge leading up to the *punto final* ruling that ensured future immunity for the military.

Similarly, Eduardo Coutinho's Twenty Years After (Cabra Marcado Para Morrer) could not function without the telling of a major secret: the identity of a legendary figure in the history of labor struggles (the widow of a martyred union leader who has been in hiding under an assumed identity for twenty years), whom Countinho and his camera crew track down. Coutinho pushes his unearthing of secrets from the publically political to the familial, finally tracking down her children and investigating the emotional consequences of the military repression that fractured the family. The film was the hit of the first Rio film festival, awarded a standing ovation just at the moment of the transition to democracy in 1984. Significantly, Coutinho makes the telling of private secrets as important as the public ones and, in so doing, reflects the increased emphasis on the personal that is so central a feature of the current wave of New Latin American Cinema.

Raul Tosso's Geronima mixes documentary with fiction to expose another kind of secret: the survival of Indians despite the official proclamation in Argentina of their extinction. By describing in visceral and painstaking detail the incarceration and interrogation of Geronima and her children in a hospital for the singular sin of living a non-assimilationist life marked by Indian customs, Tosso makes his point that ethnocide is as

bad as genocide. He inscribes the private as a sphere of struggle, particularly since all that is meant by "cultural" is sequestered within the unstable receptacle of individual identity.[17] The point is made particularly chilling by two aspects of the film: first, the role of Geronima Sande is played by an actress who is herself a member and activist of the same tribe (the Mapuches) to which Geronima belonged; and second, the soundtrack is composed predominantly of actual audiotapes of Geronima's voice, taped during her interrogation sessions by the hospital personnel. Here, then, psychic alienation is equated with, and leads to, death.

The uncovering of secrets in these films is one aspect of the move toward "interiority," but it is carried further away from the concrete and into the imaginary by the fiction films of the decade. Moreover, here in the arena of fiction the influence of women directors and feminist ideas regarding behavior, gesture, and pacing, becomes most pronounced. Interiority in this sense is not a retreat from society, but a re-engagement with it. New social orders mandate a narrative cinema that constructs a new spectator, both through deploying processes of identification and through the structuring of new formal strategies; while the first has been more widespread than the second, both may be found represented in the New Latin American Cinema of the 80s.

From this perspective, Suzana Amaral's The Hour of the Star is a key work. Her subject may be classically oppositional (story of a downtrodden Northeasterner comes to the big city and has the life smashed out of her) but her treatment owes nothing to historical or sociological perspectives.

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17. See Jean Franco's essay for an elaboration of this idea.

"What's important is what's behind people, the interior life (...) The facts may be important, but what's more important is what's behind the facts. (...) My film shows that poor people also have fantasies, that they, too, dream and want to be stars." [18]

Her central character in the film, Macabea, is a regendered update and revision of the above-mentioned Macunaima: her inchoate self becomes both a metaphor and a concrete representation of Brazil. For Macabea isn't just an anti-hero, she's virtually an anti-character in a film that Amaral has termed "anti-melodrama." Macabea has a terrible job that she performs terribly; marginal or exploitative relationships with her co-workers, roommates, and boyfriend; a terror, awe, attraction and repulsion of/to men; and a fearsome faith in the detritus of modern consumer culture.

Amaral explicitly critiques the role of mass culture in the lives of the disenfranchized, showing for example the rush of Macabea and her roommates to watch the daily telenovela through the window of a neighbor's adjoining apartment. Similarly, she represents the reality of lumpen consciousness through its mass-media determinant: Radio Reloj, a station that broadcasts meaningless information constantly on the soundtrack, reiterated constantly throughout the film by Macabea, its devoted listener. Finally, in the film's ending, Amaral summarizes the effects of underdevelopment, neo-colonialism, and the mass media by her creation of a pop-culture fantasy which Macabea embraces as her last will and desire, but which because of its very origins, can be nothing other than obscene ... and fatal.

One scene in the film signifies most unambiguously the distance travelled emotionally

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18. Personal interview with author, Toronto Festival of Festivals, September 1986.

and ideologically from the early years to the present: it is the one in which Macabea orchestrates a moment alone in her room, illicitly, during the day. Locking herself in, she turns up her beloved radio, swings the sheet off her bed, and begins to dance around the room. It is her first moment of solitude, probably unlikely to recur for a hundred years, and it's represented with all the desperate urgency of a commodity. It is also Macabea's first moment of experiencing the self, the person who had never had the luxury of taking shape before. In her alternation between feeling and seeing (herself in the mirror), listening and luxuriating, she presents the audience with a scene of victory every bit as glorious, as liberating in its implications, as heroic in its triumph, as those reflected in the films of the 1960s. This moment of self-identification and self-definition, in a space that feels at first like a vacuum for its removal from the domain of pseudo-information that has permeated Macabea's environment, is emblemmatic of the new cinematic direction that is becoming so marked, yet still so unremarked by First World critics or audiences.

Other films made by Latin American women directors in the 1980s further strengthen the case for seeing emotional life as a site of struggle and identity equal to those more traditional sites by which the New Latin American Cinema was once, and continues to be, defined.

Tzuka Yamasaki is an interesting case in point, for her Patriamada (Beloved Country) tries mixing documentary with fiction to get at the emotions behind events. [19] Filming at the time that all of Brazil was debating its transition to a civilian government, Yamasaki took three actors along on all her shoots of mass public events and historic meetings, and

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19. For an in-depth analysis of both this film and the Coutinho film, see: Julianne Burton, "Transitional States: Creative Complicities with the Real in Man Marked to Die: Twenty Years Later and Patriamada," Studies in Latin American Popular Culture, Volume 7, 1988, ps. 139-155.

managed to insert her own melodrama into the proceedings. Her film, which illustrates just how contradictory the codes of fiction and documentary can be from one another, insists upon the equality of private and public, man and woman, the sexual and the political. The planning of a baby and the planning of a government somehow become mutually metaphoric.

Thus, it may be no accident that Maria-Luisa Bemberg was filming Camila as democracy came to Argentina, in mid-shoot. Camila pointedly redefined the site of political struggle as the sexual, in her interpretation of the famous story of an artistocratic young woman and a priest, whose love affair presented the ultimate challenge to the repressive patriarchalism of their day and whose ultimate murder proved the equation between sexuality and liberation inherent in the narrative.

By seeing the sexual struggle as one on an equal plane with other kinds of ideological struggle, Bemberg was able to include women in the ranks of heroes and freedom-fighters without falling prey to the contradictions with which the character of Angustias, years earlier, in Mexico, had to contend. In this case, the radical shift in the area of inquiry was not accompanied by a parallel formal shift but rather by a dedication to creating seamless art cinema (lush, transparent, and perfect periodicity) in the service of a new idea.

Similarly, Bemberg's Miss Mary situated rebellion in the realm of sexuality, both for the children of the aristocrats that a governess (played by Julie Christie) is brought to oversee and for the repressed British governess herself. The story concerns the self-realization of the governess and the coming of age of her charges, set within the world of wealthy Anglophile Argentines on the eve of World War II. The elaboration of the girls' sexual identity and the patriachal modes of its repression are explicitly made parallel to the

rise of Peronism by Bemberg's intercutting of archival footage in the midst of an otherwise flawlessly period art-direction. For Bemberg, women are the lynchpin in the ongoing battle between repression and liberation, a battle which she views atomistically as launched inside the family to explode throughout society. In this film, then, menstruation is trauma, sexual acts involve psychic risk, and Peronism is built in the bedrooms of the nation.

At a time in Mexico (1985) when there was as yet no sign on the horizon of any fracture in the endless fortification of PRI, the party seemingly sworn to rule the country forever, Paul Leduc fractured cinematic traditions with Frida. The film emerged from this very traditional national filmmaking tradition to call into question its comfortable assumptions, both cinematic and ideological. Leduc made a film inspired by the life of Frida Kahlo, an artist whose reputation today is an accurate index of the difference made by recent feminist scholarship and the reevaluation of art-history hierarchies. This difference, precisely that between the public and private, parallels exactly the shift being described herein from the early days of the New Latin American Cinema movement to the present and is echoed interestingly by Leduc's own evolution from the public canvas of Reed, Insurgent Mexico (in 1972) to the private one of Frida.

Frida Kahlo is now known for a variety of reasons: revered painter, wife of Diego Rivera, victim of physical disabilities caused by accident, intimate of Leon Trotsky, supporter of the Communist Party, wearer of Indian costume, collector of folk art, lover of her own sex. Leduc chose to eschew none of this and to subordinate no one part to the demands of the other. He followed the lead taken by so many historians of submerged "others" and relied, not on the obfuscating texts but, rather, on what he termed "the history

of gossip" to compose the details of her life. Even more radically, he chose to reprise Kahlo's commitment to the visual, basing his film in image, color, gesture, and sensuality instead of the relentless dialogue more common to Mexican cinema.

Probably the most formally daring of the recent films here enumerated, Frida as a project carries a particular ideological importance as well. Kahlo's paintings were long ignored or undervalued precisely because they represented woman, the body, a gendered pain, a psychic split. At a time when politically correct art pictured workers -- not braces or babies -- and when the acceptable scale was massive and public -- ie. murals -- not small and enclosed, the paintings of Frida Kahlo were doomed to be dismissed as an eccentric avocation, the irrelevant pastime of an otherwise politically-committed person who, alas, was born female. Given the evolution from exteriority to interiority that this article seeks to describe, Paul Leduc could hardly have chosen a more relevant subject. Significantly, he is aware of his choice: "Frida was closed up in her body, in her house, in her studio. In the midst of all these *noises* of her time (the politics, the demonstrations, in which she also took part), there was her expressive silence. Of images." [20] By according Frida Kahlo's journey inward a place in history equal to that of John Reed's journey outward, Leduc cast his hat into the ring of a bold revisionism committed to replacing the epic with the chronicle and to synthesizing a new sense of pleasure with the pain that has been present all along.

Jorge Toledo's Vera, made in Brazil later (1987) in the democratization process than Bemberg's films, fits well onto the trajectory pioneered by Leduc since it carries the examination of sexual identity as political act even further.

Taking as its starting point the release of a young woman from an orphanage/reform

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[20]. Personal interview with author, Toronto Festival of Festivals, September 1986.

school, Toledo's film traces Vera's life backwards and forwards as she attempts to unravel her particular riddle of gender and reinvent herself, literally, as a man. Her ambition survives the sadistic prison administrator's attempt to humiliate her and her kind: "I'm concerned about this butch-girl business .... Okay, you're so butch, let's see your pricks." He tries to topple the standards by setting up dances with a brother institution, importing real boys to dance with the femmes. Meanwhile, the girls discuss among themselves the ambiguity of life outside the joint, where guaranteed butch-girls have been known to get knocked up.

In her total isolation, self-invention, alienation, and hopelessness, the character of Vera (based in part upon an actual woman who came out of a similar joint, wrote poetry and the story of her life, and killed herself) has much in common with the everywoman figure of Macabea created by Toledo's fellow countrywoman, Suzana Amaral. Taking anti-hero as heroine, Toledo anchors his tragedy in the details of gender identity and sexual structuring. It is a drama that is specifically, achingly, female. It is a drama that is concerned most fundamentally, not with action, but with language itself: at the keyboard of the word processor, Vera meets defeat as total as in the bed. Yet, nonetheless, Toledo never quite abandons metaphor, the possibility that Vera represents not only a woman, not exactly a lesbian, not just a woman who wants to be a man, but perhaps Brazil itself -- the country that emerged so recently from prison, unsure of its identity, formed and deformed by its captivity, cast so adrift in the land of object-choice that its own desires are opaque, unspoken, transgressive but unattainable. Vera orchestrates its erotic tension so successfully that finally the struggle for gender definition seems to the viewer as worthy of respect as any other fight in the Latin American struggle for self-determination.

V.

"We fought for the people to have a right to education, a right to housing, a right to food,but forgot that people also have *el derecho a la alegria* , the right to joy."

--Ruy Guerra [21]

If Paul Leduc can be seen to have made a film that is nearly the opposite of the one that first established him in the canon of the New Latin American Cinema, how much more so Fernando Solanas, auteur of the theoretical classic of Third World revolution, La Hora de los Hornos (Hour of the Furnaces), who went on to make, of all things, musicals: El Exilio de Gardel (The Exile of Gardel) and the recent Sur (South). In Sur, as in Toledo's film, prison plays a central role. This time, however, in a thematic strategy that would seem to turn the early tenets of Solanas himself on their ear, he posits as the central drama not the released man's political re-engagement but how and whether he'll be able to reclaim his emotional life by forgiving his wife her infidelity during his years in jail. It is the private life which is assigned priority; now the emotions demand as much commitment, engagement, and action, as events did a few decades earlier.

Solanas thus takes the notion of interiority and transforms it into an aesthetic. The urban landscape of Buenos Aires is made artificial, its streets a cityscape of the soul, a screen onto which memories and longings can be projected. The film's drama is an interior one made exterior, as the protagonist passes his long first night of freedom debating the figures of his imagination on street corners suffused with the mysterious smoke and fog of

21. Personal interview with author, Toronto Festival of Festivals, September 1986.

memory.

After years of exile, Solanas was able to return at last to Argentina to continue his filmmaking. Back at the time of The Hour of the Furnaces, it would have been the spirit of Che or Peron that presided over Argentina. Now, with Sur, it is the spirit of Carlos Gardel -- redolent of nostalgia, romance, feeling -- that Solanas chooses to enshrine. The time in jail was matched to the political activity that preceded it; the future is tied to acts of emotional restoration that can activate the feelings shut down during years of military rule.

Ruy Guerra, the Brazilian director who like Solanas is identified with the early golden age of New Latin American Cinema and in his case specifically the foundations of *cinema novo* , similarly returned from long exile to make a musical. His Opera da Malandro likewise mixes romance and rebellion, this time in the unlikely setting of Brecht's "Threepenny Opera" rescripted for the underworld of Rio on the eve of World War II and rescored by Chico Buarque. Ruy Guerra defends his move from post-neo-realism to musical: "opera is a political form." The late Manuel Octavio Gomez would agree. His last film, and Cuba's first musical, Patakin paid homage to the subcultural powers of *santeria* with ritual characters who acted out the oldest struggles of all: man versus woman, good versus bad, industry versus sloth, all coded to signify commentary on the state of the Cuban revolution in the 80s.

The contemporary search for the meaning of pleasure and the pleasure of meaning in a post-fascist or post-revolutionary or post-economic-boom society reaches a kind of suggestive apotheosis in Best Wishes, a recent film by Brazilian director Teresa Trautman. Here, numerous themes already activated by other Latin American directors take an even more surprising form than the recyling of the musical: the form of melodrama, nearly soap

Brazilian Toledo, she situates sexual construction at the center of political life.

Best Wishes takes a clicheed structure -- an artistocratic family gathering at its summer estate for one last weekend before mother sells it off, complete with a long cathartic night in which secrets are revealed and couples realigned -- and sneaks ideological meaning into the mix. She makes explicit her insistence upon challenging the old order of political priorities with a new gender agenda, as the commercial look and pace of Best Wishes is matched by a transgressively female comic sense and an ephiphanic revelation that disrupts the previous order. The film's central family is dedicated to the memory of its favorite son, a *deseparacido* who vanished during the years of military rule. When the daughter of the lifelong family groundskeeper, drunk and panicked over where she and her aged father and adolescent daughter will live after this last night, finally reveals the identity of her daughter's father -- he turns out to be this very same son, who had raped her, all those many years ago. This is dangerous stuff, mixing political messages into the genre of sex comedy, but it suggests how far the New Latin American Cinema has come in reconsidering its own issues and history from new perspectives. Certainly the presence of women directors where almost none had ever tread is a factor in this reconsideration.

VI.

"An idea about the cinema that reigned when we began on this road is today dead. (...) We need to look collectively toward the future. As cinema

becomes an extinct dinosaur, lizards and salamanders appear that survive the catastrophe. Today, facing reconversion and crisis, the response must be to include the species. It must derive from collective action and solidarity. (...) We have a lot to do. To survive. Yes. To survive not only as filmmakers or videomakers, but as cultures, as exemplars of national dignity."

-- Paul Leduc [22]

"In the 80s, national debt is the biggest problem. (...) It would seem we've gone backwards, as though we haven't made any progress. It may seem that the 60s were radical, and the 80s regressive. (...) The danger now is an attempt to make a 'more perfect' cinema to try to attract a public. It's a danger because politics cannot regress, but cinema can."

-- Julio Garcia Espinosa [23]

The conference in Bellagio which occasioned this paper had hardly begun before we participants were spending our spare time, huddled in the library, trying to translate from the Italian papers the news of the food riots that had broken out in Venezuela. In Venezuela! It shattered all the fondest stereotypes of Latin American stability. So much for the vaunted promise of democracy, when faced with the international pincers of economic shortfall and IMF negotiations. Notions of self-determination had already been crushed, anyway, with PRI's theft of the Mexican election just months before. Soon after the Venezuela debacle, Brazil witnessed the murder of Chico Mendez and the intensification of

22. Paul Leduc, "Dinosaurs and Lizards" in Latin American Visions (op cit.), p.59.

23. Statement in response to this paper, Bellagio, Italy, 1989, author's notes.

~~anyway, with PRI's theft of the Mexican election just months before. Soon after the Venezuela debacle, Brazil witnessed the murder of Chico Mendez and the intensification of~~ the Amazon crisis, Cuba underwent the disaster of the Ochoa revelations, and Argentina suffered its own food riots, an unimaginable inflation rate, and the election of Menem, the new Peronist president. The last year of the decade is turning out to be a costly one for the continent. Within each country, the economics confronting film production are disastrous: local markets that can no longer return the investment necessary for late-80s budgets, plans that require international stars and co-production money to get off the ground, movie theaters that are closing down by the hundreds as a combination of videocassette distribution and operating costs make them unprofitable.

The 1980s have been a time for optimism regarding the revision and re-invention of the New Latin American Cinema in a contemporary guise. The breaking of taboo and prohibition, the freeing of the imagination to fantasy, a respect for the mundane and everyday, the introduction of humor and music, the construction of new narrative strategies, and the reconsideration of the relationship to the audience, have all contributed to what I've identified as the monumental task of forging a new "collective subjectivity." While I've chosen to interpret these tendencies optimistically, I could also make another point about the less salutary effects of a certain kind of individualism at the level of "auteur."

In tracing the kind of strategies that have become necessary in the wake of the declining film economies of Latin America and the loss of self-sufficiency they have brought about, I might identify as significant the recent alliance between a traditional, essentially

conservative, form of authorship and a traditional, international form of co-production. "Amores Dificiles" ("Difficult Loves") was a series of feature films, based upon ideas or scripts by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, utilizing the talents of notable Latin American or Spanish filmmakers, and produced by and for Spanish television. The deal, jokingly referred to by some as the 'return of the conquistadors,' got terrific ratings on its Spanish broadcast, premiered at the Museum of Broadcasting in New York and at the Sundance Institute's U.S. Film Festival, and is currently being discussed for PBS carriage.

Some of the films are excellent, but there are incipient problems with the series, not least of which is the absence of a single woman director in the line-up of makers. [24] The very real danger of such a series is that it tends to remove any political specificity from the works that comprise it. Packaged as a Gabriel Garcia Marquez commodity, it falls easily into the co-production ~~picture~~ pattern: the novelist is slotted into the attraction slot in place of a famous actor. Just so are the qualities of individual national cinemas subordinated to the creation of a homogenous product, one that often valorizes the novelistic qualities of cinema by valuing the screenplay over all other elements. Obscuring questions of intentionality and urgency, "Amores Dificiles" sells itself as a product on the basis of its *don* -auteur. Meanwhile, the dependence of the entire package upon Garcia Marquez's participation gives him inordinate control over the contracting of principals and the handling of the treatments.

The threat of such packaging under the sign of a single personality is that, should its success and the concomitant lack of financial alternatives lead to a proliferation, the New

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24. The Venezuelan film, Un Domingo Feliz (A Happy Sunday), was originally slated for direction by Fina Torres. Unconfirmed rumors had her dropping out of the picture after irreconcilable differences with Garcia Marquez.

Latin American Cinema could enter a baroque phase: historical subjects would no longer be chosen for their particular ideological implications for a particular country at this juncture, contemporary fictional themes would no longer arise out of the specificity of a particular set of national circumstances, documentary would no longer have any place at all, and the heterogeneity that has always made "Latin America" itself such a near-fictional construct would vanish under the homogeneity of brand-name magic realism.[25] Still, given the direness of the economic forces arrayed against cinema (and life itself, sheer survival) in most of Latin America, it is not surprising that most filmmakers are grateful that Gabriel Garcia Marquez exists and that Spanish television has seen fit to bankroll his film ideas. With Spanish television recently poised to expand this entry into a large-scale agenda of co-productions, similar fears regarding the influence of such European input must again be weighed against the necessity for just such marketing and financing strategies if the New Latin American Cinema is to survive the end of the decade at all (and, at least Spanish money won't require English as the production language).

Meanwhile, the influence of the political and economic situation in each Latin American country continues to affect its cinema far more forcefully and decisively than any co-production deal could ever dream of. In Argentina, on the eve of Menem's election, not a single film was in production thanks to the hyper-inflation ravaging the economy. In Chile, on the other hand, in the wake of the *si* vote in favor of ending Pinochet's reign, the strength of its current cinema is starting to attract notice at film festivals internationally. The school established by Fernando Birri and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Cuba already has

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25. I'd argue that it's not just coincidence that makes Milagro en Roma (Miracle in Rome) the very best of the series. In part due to the extraordinary talent of director Lisandro Duque, its success may also be ascribed to being the only Colombian production in the series and thus benefitting from its grounding in the specificity of Garcia Marquez's own culture.

its own victories and problems, its own student insurrections, and an unprecedented energy that's being launched continually in the form of new incipient filmmakers from throughout Latin America.

Such a constantly evolving situation demands an improvisational rigor from Latin American filmmakers, but also demands that critics and audiences outside of Latin America give up their attachment to outmoded scales of value in assessing the cinemas that emerge from such conditions. *La lucha continua* , the struggle continues, but the site of the battle and the choice of weapons changes by the decade. The New Latin American Cinema is dead, long live the New Latin American Cinema.

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