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CINE MEXPERIMENTAL CINEMA

CATALOG ESSAY

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Interlude

Between the efforts those artists discussed above (working in the climate of post-Revolutionary fervor of the thirties) and the burst of experimental filmmaking surrounding the first two *Concursos* (1965 and 1967), the *nuevo cine group* (in the early sixties) and the super-8 movement (in the seventies), there is a period of relatively little activity. This lull in the pace of independent production corresponds to the much-heralded "Golden Age" of commercial Mexican cinema. In his useful survey of non-industrial film production, Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro concludes that "independent Mexican film between 1942 and 1965 was a series of isolated efforts, limited and practically disconnected from each other."

²¹ ["el cine mexicano independiente fue, durante el periodo comprendido entre 1942 y 1965, una serie de esfuerzos aislados, limitados y prácticamente desvinculados entre sí"]. The few non-industrial films made in the forties and fifties seem to have been largely within a social realist vein, for which the overwhelming influence was undoubtedly Italian neo-realism. This output is also largely the work of individuals with at least one foot in a more commercial realm—people such as Luis Magos and Adolfo Garnica, who made newsreels for *Cine Verdad*, or Sergio Véjar, a camera operator in the studios.

Several of these independent films addressed the plight of indigenous communities. Displaced by the Second World War the German photographer Walter Reuter, a veteran of the radical *AIZ* (*Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*) review, settled in Mexico. Though he is better known for his still photographs of Indians of Southern Mexico which appeared regularly in illustrated periodicals such as *Hoy*, Reuter also made many short documentaries: *Tierra de chicle* (1953), *Historia de un río* (1953), *La Viuda* (1957), *El hombre de la isla* (1957), *Tierra de esperanza* (1957), *Las botas* (1957), and *La brecha* (1957). These films explored subjects including traditional medicine, public works, and the exploitation of Indians employed in the chewing gum harvest.

Another individual who made films among with the most marginalized rural sectors of Mexican society was Archibaldo Burns. Working with non-actors, Burns directed a short entitled *Perfecto Luna* (1959) with cinematographers Antonio Reynoso and Rafael Corkidi. Burns originally planned to shoot two other shorts to complete a feature whose stated goal was to "discover what constituted the [Emilio 'el indio'] Fernández falsification" ["descubrir en qué consiste la falsificación 'indiofernandezca'"].²² *Perfecto Luna* was the only section completed, though Burns returned to a similar theme much later with his ethnographic fiction *Juan Pérez Jolote* (1973), based on anthropologist Ricardo Pozas' novel of Chiapas. Other independent filmmakers sought to document the plight of the urban poor. Antonio Reynoso collaborated with the theater director Rodolfo Usigli and the painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano on a fictionalized documentary about a young street vendor, *Una ventana a la vida* (1950).²³ Adolfo Garnica and Luis Magos made a short on impoverished urban youth *Ellos también tienen ilusiones* (1955).

Apart from these isolated efforts, attempts at creating the support mechanisms necessary to sustain experimental filmmaking were short-lived or in vain. In 1953, the first (and only) *Concurso de cortometraje experimental* awarded Jorge Durán Chávez's *La azotea*, Graciano Pérez *El huerfano*, and Sergio Vejar's . . . *Y san se acabó*. There existed a group called the *Club Experimental Cinematográfico*, which in 1949 produced Alfredo Pacheco's *Tu pecado es mío*. Working collectively, Ricardo Caretero, Mariano Sánchez Ventura and Julian Pastor succeeded in making three shorts: *Todos hemos soñado*, *Morir un poco*, and *Los primos hermanos*.

The still photographer Antonio Reynoso made several experimental shorts, subsidized by CineFoto, a business that he ran with Rafael Corkidi which principally made commercials. Reynoso directed a short, *Los escuincles*, sponsored by the 1968 Olympic Committee, and worked with Corkidi as the cinematographers for Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Fando y Lis* (1967) and Juan José Gurrrola's *Tajimara* (1965), as well as for many documentaries, including *Preparatoria 100 años* (Raul Kamffer, 1968) and *José Luis Cuevas* (Juan José Gurrrola, 1965). His greatest achievement in film may be *El despojo* (1960), directed by Reynoso, with camera by Corkidi and a script by Juan Rulfo. The film is essentially a hyper-Mexican reworking of Charles Vidor's early avant-garde short *The Spy* (1931-32), in that both start with the protagonist being killed, and then represent the getaway imagined by the victim at the moment of his death. Based on Ambrose Bierce's story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,"²⁴ the Vidor film contrasts the reality of the grim execution with what might have been the man's new found appreciation of life had he managed to escape. Reynoso's film is

more pessimistic, presenting a choice between two equally tragic scenarios. Suspended in mid-air while falling, the film visualizes the possible flight of the victim, his wife and child. The man promises to lead the way to a better place where they might thrive: "I'll take you to a place where everything is green, even the sky is green," ["Te voy a llevar a un lugar donde todo es verde, hasta el cielo es verde."] But no such Eden is found. Instead, the child dies of a fever, a death which precipitates erotic hallucinations and strange mirages in the desert. True to his fatalistic nature, the protagonist's voice-over is marked by resignation: "Should they kill me, well, it doesn't matter." ["Y si me quitan la vida, pos que importa."] The striking landscapes of Mezqital, Hidalgo, supernatural apparitions and the distorted soundtrack of indigenous music contribute to the magical Rulfo-esque world which Reynoso evokes so effectively.

In spite of the artistic success of *El despojo* and the other experimental shorts of this era, these did not lead to further projects.

The cinematic output of Mexico in the forties, fifties and early sixties was almost entirely commercial, and declining in quality. The unions acted as an obstacle for new talents, and the government successfully prevented the distribution of interesting independent efforts, such as Korporaal's *El brazo fuerte* (1958). There was, however, one notable exception, one filmmaker who consistently produced challenging, iconoclastic films throughout this period--the Spanish exile Luis Buñuel.

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21. From a letter to Nancy Cárdenas from Archibaldo Burns, quoted in Dirección General de Difusión Cultural, Sección de Actividades Cinematográficas, UNAM. Anuario 1963. Mexico City, 1963. n.p.
22. Díaz Ruanova, "Ventana a la vida" *Claridades* (8 October, 1950), pp. 16, 30.
23. Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York, 1967), p. 79.
24. Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York, 1967), p. 79.