

naive about the relationship of the camera to the event. When they began making fiction features, they also began to combine traditional fiction style with what they had learned to do in documentary.

Manuel Octavio Gomez' *First Charge of the Machete*, for example, pretends that a news crew is filming a documentary during the 1868 independence war. Officials pontificate at their desks while horsemen charge up a hill; bourgeois housewives comment on the war while men puffing on cigars argue with each other on the street. Cinematographer Manuel Herrera's ceaseless experimentation resulted in *Machete*, in contrasting use of solarized, sepia-toned and sparkling black-and-white footage, all making different comments on the quality of reporting. The live-from-the-combat-zone style brought a revolutionary immediacy to century-old history.

Perhaps the most challenging example of a fiction-documentary mix in Phase Two of Cuban cinema was *One Way or Another*, whose director Sara Gomez died of cancer before the film's editing was complete. In the film, a young idealistic social worker tries to teach kids from an underclass where African folklore traditions are maintained in a hermetic and macho environment. She falls in love with a local man who is struggling to break out of the neighborhood's defensive insularity. The film starkly juxtaposes three film styles: survey shots of street scenes and construction, overlaid with cool, factual narration; a traditional fiction love story; and *verite*-style workplace scenes (some real and some staged) in his factory and her school. *One Way or Another* is a ruthlessly honest view of the pain and struggle involved in changing relationships. Shocking at the time, the film still has a disturbing effect on viewers.

"I think Sara Gomez was the one who most intensively used the language of documentary in fiction," says Marisol Trujillo, one of the women among the new generation of filmmakers. "Unfortunately, her death stopped some projects in progress, and we're still waiting for someone to pick up her flag."

That moment may be arriving, however, since Cuban cinema is flourishing with experiments in filming-the-real in all directions. Not only are documentary styles surfacing in fiction, but fiction is becoming part of documentary work. One example is a recent documentary about a pre-revolutionary scandal, *Cronica de Una Infamia (Story of a Scandal)*. Except for a few feet of archival footage, most of the film is reconstructed to look as if it were filmed then.

Filmmaker Miguel Torres, who was a child when the 1949 incident occurred, had been fascinated by the public uproar caused when a U.S. Marine scaled a statue of national hero Jose Marti and urinated on it. He wanted to recreate the sense of that moment, not through interviews or through a montage of contemporary documents, but by making a movie that "would have been made by the ideal documentary filmmaker—someone in the right place at the right time with the



right equipment—at the time." *Cronica* does indeed have a shocking you-are-there quality.

Of course, other documentaries continue in a more straightforward critical tradition, although their subject matter may be anything but expectable. For example, *Historia de Una Descarga*, by Melchor Casals, looks at the start as though it will be a piece of promotion for a new harbor facility in the interior port of Cienfuegos. But it turns out to be the record of a debacle—an attempt to unload a pulp shipment to a factory that is shut down without proper papers or storage facilities or even the right unloading equipment.

New film language.

If Cuban filmmakers are indeed creating a new language as they claim, it is not for the pleasure of hearing themselves talk. As Gutierrez Alea says, "The most important thing to realize is not just that there is a new Cuban cinema, but there is a new spectator as well."

Havana is full of film buffs. On any evening you'll find long lines for Havana's city-center cinemas, and in neighborhood movie houses there is a steady flow of mothers with children, dating couples and adolescents.

In 1969, filmmaker Julio Garcia Espin-

osa argued in an essay called "For an Imperfect Cinema" that filmmakers had to transcend the traditional division between an artistic elite and a passive mass audience. Now in 1984 he says, "we still need to develop a cinema that has a direct relationship with the popular class. But I think we have seen some fundamental change—we have spectators who are richer and more complex than before the revolution, and they are pushing us."

Cuban audiences are cinema sophisticates, especially in the younger generation, according to Juan Padron, who has now watched the reactions of children to his films for more than a decade. "These days kids understand flashback, special effects, ellipsis much quicker than they did 10 years ago," he says, although he says there are still big differences in reaction between the urban and the rural audiences.

Then how do Cuban filmmakers explain popular taste for lowest-common-denominator movies? "Look, these films use failsafe techniques of spectacle, like the circus does," says Gutierrez Alea. "There will always be an appeal in spectacle, and there's no need to throw it away."

The Cuban spectator has plenty of opportunity to learn about cinema. Besides the spectrum available in theatrical release, movies are also shown on television—sometimes even the latest American releases, which are lifted off satellite transmissions to cable channels. The "mobile moviehouses" that in the '60s brought movies to peasants who had never even seen an electric light bulb still operate in rural areas, and are now in the hands of the local government, or Poder Popular. ICAIC has also been upgrading sound and projection quality in regional theaters and improving distribution outside major cities.

Although ICAIC has its own film periodical, *Cine Cubana*, television is the most important source of movie criticism and information. Rarely is a film shown on TV without some attempt to provide a context for it. For example, the "Historia de Cine" series offers background information explaining the historical importance of the classic film shown that week. The weekly "Cinemateca" show runs back-to-back two or even three films on a

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Cuban films in the U.S.

It's not easy to see Cuban films in the U.S., for good reason. Although Cuban films are allowed to be shown, the U.S. government freezes all profits from U.S. bookings. Despite this, some Cuban films are available. New Yorker Films has taken over distribution of 14 Cuban features from Unifilm, ICAIC's main distributor before going out of business. Young Filmmakers Video Arts rents Cuban documentaries and organizes a touring program.

Also, Cuban film regularly shows at Filmex and other U.S. festivals, although a Cuban film has never shown at the New York Film Festival.

Even in other countries, the shadow of U.S. disapproval falls on international sales. "A lot of the big distributors won't buy our films because they say they are afraid their access to North American movies will get cut off. I'm sure it's not all political. After all, no one wants a new competitor," says Pastor Vega, in charge of ICAIC's international relations.

One of ICAIC's more dependable sources of international income is, as it is for independent filmmakers internationally, European television. "They buy a lot of documentaries, and the subject doesn't seem to matter much. They do demand an authentic tone, and of course, that is our special area of excellence," says Vega.

For more information, contact New Yorker Films, 16 W. 61st St., New York, NY 10023; Young Filmmakers, 4 Rivington St., New York, NY 10002.

—P.A.



Cuban cinema enters a new phase—one that addresses the questions of a maturing revolution.

EDITORIAL



The private sector's new charitable role

After a period of remarkable self-restraint by the media—something President Reagan and members of his administration have enjoyed since coming to Washington—the case of Edwin Meese and his dubious loans has finally become big news. For that, we have to thank Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), whose persistent digging and dogging of Meese in the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearings on Meese's nomination as attorney general forced the issue into the light.

Meese, of course, is the conservatives' conservative. *Newsweek* describes him as Reagan's political alter ego—a man who vigorously attacked the U.S. Civil Rights Commission for its defense of equality under the law, and who saw hunger as an exaggerated issue in the U.S. and people eating at soup kitchens as freeloaders who were cheating on restaurants. In short, someone who has never said anything Reagan disagrees with.

But these attitudes, though they may have motivated Metzenbaum, have nothing to do with the trouble Meese is in now. Rather, it is the result of evidence that Meese is himself something that he and his boss love to get worked up about—especially on TV. He is a welfare cheater. Not that Meese prefers getting hand-outs of food stamps and generous welfare checks to a hard day's work. He does put in a day's work. No, Meese's welfare cheating consists in receiving benefits he

would not be entitled to as an ordinary citizen. The receipt of these benefits raises the question of whether or not he gave something of value in return.

The facts are these:

- Meese's wife Ursula received an interest-free loan of \$15,000 from Edwin W. Thomas shortly before Reagan's inauguration, which Meese forgot to report in filling out his disclosure report on taking office. Thomas later became Meese's deputy at the White House and his wife, Gretchen, and one of their sons ended up with federal jobs.

- In 1981 San Francisco tax accountant John R. McKean arranged a \$60,000 unsecured loan for Meese. At the time, Meese was supporting McKean's appointment to the Postal Service board of governors, of which he was later elected chairman.

- In 1982 Thomas J. Barrack Jr., a real estate developer, arranged the sale of Meese's home in La Mesa, Calif., for \$307,500. Barrack gave \$70,000 of his own money to the purchasers to facilitate the sale. Later, he became deputy under-secretary of Interior.

- In 1983 Edwin J. Gray, former first vice-president of Great American Savings and Loan Association—which had allowed Meese to fall 15 months in arrears in mortgage payments on his La Mesa house—was named chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board. The chairman

of Great American Federal, Gordon C. Luce, was named alternative U.S. representative to the United Nations.

- In addition, there are still unanswered questions about Meese's role in filching documents from Jimmy Carter's 1980 re-election campaign, and an apparently improper promotion in the Army Reserve that resulted in an increase in pension benefits.

Meese claims there was nothing wrong in all this, because these people would all have gotten the jobs they did without having been so generous to Meese. He may, of course, be correct, in which case the special prosecutor now being appointed to investigate these matters will give Meese a clean bill of health and the Senate may approve his nomination as attorney general—assuming the special prosecutor also finds no serious wrong-doing in regard to the filched documents and the improper promotion.

In all this, Reagan is standing by his friend. He wouldn't withdraw Meese's nomination even if Meese asked him to,

Reagan says. And Meese insists that he "never got any special treatment." He discussed the matter with the president, and they "both feel that if we were to allow character assassins to take totally innocent situations and build them, through distortion and misrepresentation, into something that looked bad" then "the integrity of appointments in government, generally, is in jeopardy."

It is possible that Meese and Reagan are telling the truth—that they really believe this to be a totally innocent situation that the nasty old Democrats are blowing up into an election-year issue. Certainly, what happened to Meese—the benefits he received as favors from private businessmen—are part of Reagan's New Morality.

After all, isn't the point to get government off people's backs and to have private charities assume many of the functions now performed by government welfare agencies? Meese was clearly a man in need. A self-motivated, hard-working man on the way up who got a bit over-extended and needed a helping hand. How nice that the private sector stepped in to provide relief. And Meese himself avers that he was truly needy, and therefore not a welfare cheater.

Too bad all those less worthy people, the ones who prefer soup kitchens to restaurants, can't find friends who will give them \$70,000 or lend them \$15,000 without interest. With that kind of help they, too, could buy their own homes and set up their own soup kitchens. Then it wouldn't look as if we had hungry people in America and it would be more difficult to embarrass patriotic Americans who come to Washington to bring morality back into public life at great personal sacrifice.

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Tens of thousands will converge on California in July for the biggest national and international people's event of the year at the Summer Olympics. SurvivalFest will be a two-week, cultural festival including the following events in Los Angeles:

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Peace Flame from Hiroshima to accompany a
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 Jim Thorpe Memorial Run
 American Indian Movement. Speakers
 International Peace Museum

Events in the Bay Area during this time will be:

A People's Convention
 Gay & Lesbian Community March

Vote Peace in '84 March & Rally
 Labor March

The Olympics have always been a symbol of excellence and a celebration of international cooperation. But unfortunately, the Olympics are being exploited by the Reagan administration during this election year. Reagan's policies — nuclear war, racism, sexism, intervention, poverty — go against the spirit of the Olympics. The grim legacy of the Reagan administration has pushed us to the brink of economic ruin and world war.

With the eyes of the world on Los Angeles, we will make a positive statement in the true spirit of the Olympics by letting the whole world know what the American people really want. If survival is important to you, be there to let the world know what we stand for:

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SurvivalFest is being initiated by a broad-based coalition in L.A., '84 Mobilization for Peace and Justice. Supporters from around the country are joining the planning efforts, local organizing committees, and growing momentum. Help the efforts grow! Lodging will be arranged, but advance notification is encouraged.

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