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Introduction

This book grew out of a hunch – highlighted by my experience teaching documentary filmmaking at summer schools held at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba since 2006 – that Latin American film has as much to do with the step-changes in film technology as it does with the historical and political reality it memorializes. Or, to put it another way, that film historians have to be as sensitive to the implications of major paradigm shifts which have occurred in camera technology – such as the use of the hand-held camera in the 1950s or the emergence of digital film at the end of the 1990s – as they are alert to the major historical changes that occurred in Latin America in the twentieth century (such as the rise of dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, and the radical political polarizations that took place as a result in the political space of a number of Latin American nations). This hunch was partly based on Lev Kuleshov's argument that the best type of approach to film is one that blends theory with practice. As Kuleshov suggests, teaching film craft 'without being cognisant of fundamental cinematic theories demeans film craft to the mere level of an amateur workshop. Likewise, studying film history and theory without a corresponding experience in the elemental aspects of filmmaking leaves theoretical research without a solid basis, forcing students to plunge into abstraction.'[1] This book extends Kuleshov's thesis by arguing, for example, that to ignore the evolving technology by which, at a given time and in a given place, the image was captured, edited and produced is to run the risk of producing 'timeless' and 'static' interpretations of films. This basic insight has been used in this book as a key to reassess the

ways in which we think about the evolution of film as a discursive, investigative and imagistic medium.

Occasionally film historians look at the history of film as if it were a sideshow appended to the grand narrative of nations having wars with each other, and thus produce chapters entitled, by way of example, 'Post-World War II Film'. While, in some isolated cases, film may have coincided with enormous upheavals in history, in many others it did not. Film, indeed, has its own history. Thus the creation of cross-cutting by D. W. Griffith in his film *A Corner in Wheat* (1909), such that the wealth of the upper classes is contrasted with the poverty of the lower classes, was arguably just as important for the evolution of film as the brutal historical sequence of the First World War. Likewise the hand-held camera in the 35mm Canadian film *Les Raquetteurs* ('The Snowshoers', directed by Michel Brault and Gilles Groulx) which was used to film the convention of snowshoers held in Sherbrooke, Quebec, in February 1958, demonstrated the new flexibility of the camera to mingle in with the public, almost as if it were another spectator within the crowd that had gathered to witness the events. Filming with a hand-held camera was an innovation destined to have far-reaching consequences for the way in which filmmakers subsequently saw their craft. It radically democratized film, allowing for the creation of a living, 'breathing' camera.

The advent of digital film 30 years later – *Idioterne* ('The Idiots', 1998), directed by Dogme 95 Danish film director Lars von Trier, was the first film to be filmed entirely on a digital camera (a Sony DCR-VX1000) – led to one of the most radical changes ever experienced in the film industry. The digital camera in the new millennium, given its flexibility, low costs, portability and the fact that you can see immediately what you are recording, offered the opportunity for thousands to create new narratives about the world we live in. It signalled the birth of a post-35mm universe which eschewed the grand narrative of national destiny or world wars, focusing instead on the everyday lives of the world's citizens. It also introduced a new vision of the world. Since the digital camera never 'cuts' the film in the way the analogue film editor did, it allows the universe to be seen as an unbroken continuum. This continuum is perceived not only through time but also through space. Thus the traditional tripartite division of filmic space (foreground, mid-ground, background), which is itself based on a theatrical paradigm, no longer holds in the digital

world. The digital turn, indeed, led to new ways of formulating the space and time of the universe, questioning the past–present–future formula of time as much as it interrogated the foreground–mid-ground–background paradigm of space.

Latin American film has not, of course, remained impervious to major paradigm shifts such as these. As I hope to demonstrate in this book, Latin American film has reacted to the invention of the hand-held camera and digital film in innovative ways. In 2007 three Mexican directors, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro, were able to attract sixteen Oscar nominations between them (the Mexicans were therefore in second place, jointly tied with the United Kingdom behind the United States in first place).[2] A number of film critics at the time asked how this came about. The answer to this question lies not only in the meteoric careers of the 'Three Amigos', as they are known in Hollywood, but in the history of the seismic shifts within Latin American cinema whose strata over time finally produced cinematographic 'diamonds'. The success of Latin American cinema in the twenty-first century springs from the pioneering steps taken by film directors such as Fernando Birri, Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in the 1950s and 1960s, around whom the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Cinema) movement came to coalesce. As Birri once suggested to me in an interview, twenty-first-century filmmakers in Latin America are 'standing on our shoulders'.[3]

This book attempts to trace connections such as these – how, for example, the 'grit' of New Latin American Cinema led to the 'slick grit' of 'New' New Latin American Cinema – and it soon became clear that the best way to answer the question was by conducting a longitudinal study of Latin American film from its origins to the present. In order to do so this study draws on a number of essential books published on the subject, ranging from the early classics such as Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (1985), Julianne Burton, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers* (1986), Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil* (1987) and John King, *Magical Reels* (1990), to important recent studies such as Deborah Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films* (2003), Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison, *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity* (2005), Lúcia Nagib, *Brazil on Screen: Cinema novo, New Cinema, Utopia*

(2007), Joanna Page, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (2009), Demetrios Matheou, *The Faber Book of New South American Cinema* (2010), Laura Podalsky, *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico* (2011), Jens Andermann, *New Argentine Cinema* (2012) and Cynthia Tompkins, *Experimental Latin American Cinema: History and Aesthetics* (2013).[4] The analysis of this archive of celluloid film can provide what Laura Mulvey has called a 'historically unprecedented "time machine"' of the past.[5] As she goes on to suggest:

> The celluloid cinema may be there evidentially, a flawed but still indexical record of its movement, but also, and perhaps more crucially, it offers a more abstract, imaginative, means for reflecting on time itself. By a knight's move across into a different technological medium, it allows reflection on how time is inscribed into culture and politics and how it gets lost in the elusiveness of history.[6]

This book seeks to create its own knight's move by providing a new analysis of Latin American film as seen through the looking glass of the major step-changes in film technology. Other books have focused on the historical backdrop to the films, their production, how they are funded, and the stars who have delighted audiences.[7] This book, however, looks at the films themselves, analysing how their message is expressed – through technology, techniques and 'tricks of the trade'. By providing an in-depth, chronological study of Latin American cinema, from the early silent film era in the late nineteenth century to its boom in the early twenty-first, it seeks to provide some answers to the conundrum of the success of contemporary Latin American cinema.

This study of Latin American cinema, from its inauspicious beginnings in 1896 until the present day (2013), with Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón successfully directing new-look sci-fi movies with an auteurish flourish, focuses on the main paradigm shifts marking its evolution.[8] It has not been possible, for obvious reasons, to focus on every Latin American film made. The films chosen for analysis in this book have been included either because they have won awards or been commercially successful or because they are filmically significant. The

readings offered here have deliberately avoided the sociological turn – namely, tying the meaning of the films too closely to the history of human society – preferring instead to contextualize these films within the history of the camera-eye.

I

Inauspicious Beginnings (1895–1950)

Images in movement

As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze has argued, the earliest stage of film, epitomized by Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* ('Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station', 1895), was characterized by 'images in movement'. The 'cinématographe' – an early moving image projector to which we owe the word 'cinema' itself – was given its first public demonstration by the Lumière brothers in the Grand Café, Paris, on 28 December 1895, when they screened their film. There are reports of the audience running out of the Grand Café in horror when they saw the train approaching. As Paola Marrati suggests:

> In the early days of cinema, before the introduction of the mobile camera, the frame was defined in relation to a unique, frontal point of view: the spectator. In this context the shot was a purely spatial determination indicating the distance between the camera and the objects filmed, from the close-up to the long shot. At this stage, these first images produced by the cinema are not by their nature different from those in the theatre, for instance. They are what Deleuze calls *images in movement*.[1]

In this 'primitive cinema' phase, to use Deleuze's terminology, film was defined and mediated by the fixed frontal camera which would record objects in real time, rather like a cameraman simply filming some actors on a stage in a theatre. Filming, as a result of being still tied in performance terms to the mechanics of the theatre, sought to amaze audiences with

the screening of movement, ranging from the arrival of a train at La Ciotat station as mentioned above, or events such as people leaving a factory or a church, or the moving pictures of sports events. Given the portability of the 'cinématographe' – it weighed less than 20 lb (9 kg) – the Lumière brothers sent their cameramen around the world to give demonstrations of their new invention. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the first screening of what was then called the 'Omnigrapho' took place on 8 July 1896 at 57 rua do Ouvidor.[2] On 28 July 1896, *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* was screened in the Odeon Theatre in Buenos Aires, and subsequently at the Cinematógrafo Lumière, 9 Plateros Avenue, in Mexico City in August 1896; the cameraman was Gabriel Vayre.[3] The first film screenings took place in Lima, Peru, on 2 January 1897 and in Havana, Cuba, on 24 January 1897.[4]

Film soon developed into the screening of actualities, such as an official function attended by a state dignitary, as well as other newsworthy events. Examples of some of these early *actualité*-type films in Latin America are *Un célebre especialista sacando muelas en el Gran Hotel Europa* ('A Celebrated Specialist Pulling Teeth at the Gran Hotel Europa', dir. Guillermo and Manuel Trujillo Durán, Venezuela, 1897) and *Carrera de bicicletas en el velódromo de Arroyo Seco* ('Bicycle Race at the Arroyo Seco Velodrome', dir. Félix Oliver, Uruguay, 1898). It was not long, though, before audiences were craving more interesting material than a train arriving at a station or a dentist's antics. During the Mexican Revolution (1911–19), the flamboyant revolutionary Pancho Villa signed a contract with Mutual Film Corporation for $25,000, giving in exchange permission for the battles he waged to be filmed and broadcast in the United States, even agreeing to have his dawn executions filmed. As he promised the cameraman:

> Don't worry Don Raúl. If you say the light at four in the morning is not right for your little machine, well, no problem. The executions will take place at six. But no later. Afterwards we march and fight. Understand?[5]

Movement-image

The screening of actualities led – again quite rapidly – to a number of experiments with the new medium of moving images. It was once

photographers began to explore different ways of playing back and recombining the recorded images that the seventh art of the silver screen was born: montage. It was arguably with Georges Méliès' 30-scene, fifteen-minute narrative film *Le Voyage dans la lune* ('Journey to the Moon', 1902) that montage emerged most famously into filmic discourse, notably in the sequence in which the spaceship is depicted landing in the moon's eye. Though Méliès' editing was rudimentary it was the first hint of what Deleuze called the creation of 'movement-images', of a new sense of narrativity. As Marrati suggests:

> In primitive cinema, as in natural perception, movement depends on a body that is displaced through a space that is itself fixed. Movement remains attached to moving bodies; it does not emerge in itself. The emancipation of movement, its appearance in a pure state, so to speak, would come to be one of cinema's great achievements, but it would only happen progressively, with the introduction of the mobile camera and montage.[6]

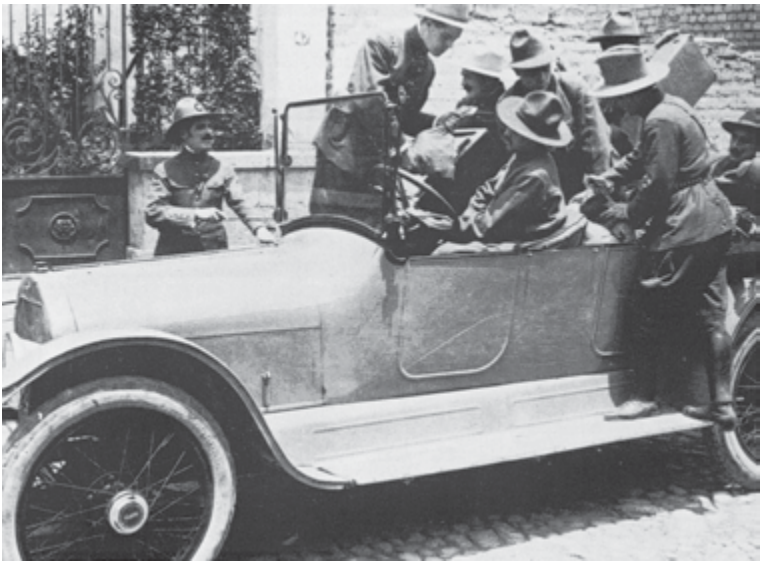
Film in Latin America, as elsewhere in the world, gradually developed from the screening of actualities to the creation of realist narratives. Over time a number of montage techniques were developed, such as film continuity (Edwin S. Porter), cross-cutting (D. W. Griffith) and point-of-view shots (Vitagraph), and this progression from actualities to realist film involved an 'emancipation of movement', to use Deleuze's term, which was expressed specifically as a transition from image-in-movement to movement-image.[7] The earliest narrative (movement-image) films were documentaries about famous individuals, such as *El fusilamiento de Dorrego* ('Dorrego's Execution', dir. Mario Gallo, Argentina, 1908), *Paz e amor* ('Peace and Love', dir. Alberto Botelho, Brazil, 1910), *A vida do Cabo João Cândido* ('The Life of Commander João Cândido', dir. unknown, Brazil, 1910) and *Revolución orozquista* ('Pascual Orozco's Revolution', dir. Alva brothers, Mexico, 1912).

This group of documentaries was followed by a number of fiction narrative films such as *El automóvil gris* ('The Grey Car', Mexico, 1919), *El húsar de la muerte* ('The Hussar of Death', Chile, 1925), *Luis Pardo* (Peru, 1927), *Brasa dormida* ('Sleeping Ember', Brazil, 1928), *Del pingo al volante* ('From the Country to the Town', Uruguay, 1929) and *La*

Venus de nácar ('The Venus of Mother of Pearl', Venezuela, 1932) which explore montage innovatively and embody the movement-image characteristic of classical-realist cinema as analysed by Deleuze in which the characters are embedded within a situation which has its own momentum. As Deleuze suggests, in classical-realist cinema 'objects and settings already had a reality of their own, but it was a functional reality, strictly determined by the demands of the situation . . . The situation was, then, directly extended into action and passion'.[8] The situations portrayed in realist cinema were subject to sensory-motor schemata which were 'automatic and pre-established', articulating a visible cause and effect relationship between the situation and the character's actions.[9] As Deleuze further suggests, 'The space of a sensory-motor situation is a setting which is already specified and presupposes an action which discloses it, or prompts a reaction which adapts to or modifies it.'[10]

An excellent early example of the movement-image narrative style in Latin America is *El automóvil gris*, directed by Enrique Rosas, the earliest silent film to emerge from Mexico, first screened in Mexico City on 11 December 1919. The film was originally intended as a documentary about the lives of a group of crooks who were targeting upper-class households in Mexico City in 1915. A local detective, Juan Manuel Cabrera, agreed to have Enrique Rosas follow him in his investigations. Enrique Rosas, however, decided to depart from the original documentarist approach, working with actors to reconstruct the robberies. The film began to reconstruct the scene of the crime, rather like an embryonic version of *Crimewatch*.

In the first scene we see the gang members swear an oath of allegiance to one another. Then we see a young girl kidnapped off the streets and bundled into the 'grey car' that becomes almost the protagonist of the crime. The event is pre-prepared by the creation of cinematic tension; we watch the girl walk past the car and then we see the gang jump out, pounce and bundle her into the car. In the following scene we see the forced entry into a house, the bullying of the women until they reveal where the money and the jewels are, the hurried escape and the sharing-out of the loot. As this first episode demonstrates, *El automóvil gris* works like a fiction film because it creates tension between interlocking episodes; the divvying-up of the loot is full of tension because the young girl who has been kidnapped is the *novia* (girlfriend) of one of the members of



The grey car in *El automóvil gris* (1919).

the gang, and she sees him when she looks through a crack in the door. *El automóvil gris* has an excellent sense of continuity and dramatic tension; it is an action-based drama more than a piece of journalism. And yet the documentarism of its genesis came back to haunt the film in its closing sequence in which we see the actual criminals – who had been captured and convicted – lined up against a wall and shot dead by firing squad. The film demonstrates the osmotic nature of the medium at this early period in Latin America. Enrique Rosas was director, screenwriter, cameraman and producer. But just as importantly, *El automóvil gris* demonstrates that the mixture between fiction and documentary was already in the DNA of the Latin American cinematic tradition by 1919. It was a legacy which would prove to be one of the distinctive characteristics of Latin American film.

Six years later, a very significant silent film was made in Chile, differing from the Mexican film in that it was an excavation of the historical past of that Latin American country. *El húsar de la muerte*, which premiered on 24 November 1925 in Santiago, was directed by Pedro Sienna. He also starred in the film, which tells the story of the adventures of the guerrilla leader, Manuel Rodríguez (1785–1818), during the Reconquista up until his death in 1818. The 65-minute film was reconstructed in 1962

and 1995 by the film unit at the University of Chile and is now considered a 'national monument'. Unlike the history books that focus on the liberation of Chile via the figures of José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins, this silent film tells the story via the perspective of the guerrilla leader, Manuel Rodríguez. Though José de San Martín does appear in the film Bernardo O'Higgins is airbrushed out of the frame, perhaps not surprisingly since the two men did not always see eye to eye. (After the Battle of Chacabuco in 1817, for example, won by José de San Martín, O'Higgins ordered Rodríguez's arrest, and Rodríguez only managed to escape his prison sentence as a result of San Martín's intervention.)

The film opens with the rout of the Chilean troops by the Spanish army at the Disaster of Rancagua in 1814. While the royalists are celebrating, Rodríguez sends them a message: 'No alegrarse demasiado. Se acerca la hora de la libertad. Mueran los tiranos ¡Viva la patria!' (Don't get too happy. The hour of freedom is approching. Down with tyrants. Long live our motherland!) Rodríguez rallies the Chilean troops, encouraging them to fight a rear-guard action against the Spanish, and he begins to take on various disguises, allowing him to travel around Santiago undisturbed. The royalist captain, Vicente San Bruno, is portrayed as disturbed by this via montage; the captain hangs his head in his hands when he imagines Rodríguez in his various disguises, as presented by some (rudimentary) cross-cutting between the captain's face and Rodríguez's different disguises. The film also adds a star-crossed love motif to the plot, having Rodríguez fall in love with the daughter of the Marquis of Aguirre, their union 'forbidden' since it cuts across political lines (the

The hoodlums swear allegiance in *El automóvil gris*.

Marquis of Aguirre, as his title suggests, is a royalist). Rodríguez's popularity among the lower classes is suggested by the introduction of a boy *guerrillero* called 'El Huacho Pelao' (The Ragamuffin Soldier) who is so fed up with being bullied by the Spanish troops that he decides to fight for Rodríguez. The film has all the types of 'errors' associated with early twentieth-century filmmaking (dialogue intertitles not synchronized with actors' dialogue, non-adherence to the 180-degree rule, abrupt transitions between events and over-reliance on subtitles to relate significant events, such as Rodriguez's death) – but it has raw energy, especially evident in scenes such as the discovery by Captain San Bruno that Rodríguez is hiding in the Aguirre residence, protected by Carmen, and the simple circumstances of Rodríguez's burial by some humble peasants. The final scene suggests most clearly that this film offers a man-in-the-street version of Chile's independence. It also shows the osmotic nature of the various roles associated with filmmaking in Latin America in the 1920s since Pedro Sienna was director, screenwriter and star actor of the film.

Another silent film of this period which focuses, like *El húsar de la muerte*, on a popular folkloric figure, was *Luis Pardo* (1927, directed by Enrique Cornejo Villanueva), which told of the life and adventures of Luis Pardo Novoa ('El Bandolero' [The Bandit], 1874–1909), a Robin Hood-type from Ancash in Peru who fought against the oppression of the common people in the large estates which spread across the Andres. Most of the surviving footage shows Luis Pardo's skirmishes before his eventual death at the hands of Leguía's troops. *Brasa dormida* (1928), directed by Humberto Mauro and arguably Brazil's most famous silent film, tells the tale of Luis Soares (played by Luis Soroa), a dissipated youth living in Rio de Janeiro who is rejuvenated though his work at a sugar factory in the interior and his love of the owner's daughter, Anita Silva (played by Nita Ney). It is beautifully shot.

Osmosis from without

It was inevitable, given its rudimentary nature at this time, that Latin American cinema should be overwhelmed by foreign imports, by osmosis from without. Sergei Eisenstein's famous film about the Mexican Revolution, *¡Que viva Mexico!* (1931; reconstructed by Grigori Alexandrov

in 1979) epitomizes Latin American culture of the early 1930s, a work in progress created by external osmosis. The film was funded in 1931 by the distinguished socialist writer Upton Sinclair and his wife, who were keen to encourage the famous Soviet film director to produce a revolutionary film about Mexico. But after the initial three months had run out, and Eisenstein was clearly not close to producing a finished product, Sinclair decided to withdraw the funding. As he later explained:

> What first led us to distrust him [Eisenstein] was that when the money was spent he wrote us that we'd have to send more or we'd have no picture . . . He kept that up, over and over, and we realized that he was simply staying in Mexico at our expense in order to avoid having to go back to Russia.[11]

As a result Eisenstein and Sinclair fell out, and Sinclair kept the raw footage Eisenstein had been sending him, and subsequently refused to allow Eisenstein to edit the film. Some of the negatives were sold by Sinclair, who was trying to recoup some of the capital he had raised for the venture, and released piecemeal as *Thunder over Mexico* (1933; based on the 'Maguey' sequence), *Eisenstein in Mexico* (1934), *Death Day* (1934; based on the Epilogue) and *Time in the Sun* (1939). Eisenstein was upset by this betrayal. When asked years later by Jan Leyda why he had not directed any major film since *¡Que viva México!*:

> he gave me the most genuinely anguished look I ever saw on his face and shouted at me: 'What do you expect me to do? How can there be a new film when I haven't given birth to the last one?' And he clutched his belly with an equally painful gesture.[12]

It is clear that Eisenstein went to Mexico because, like a number of artists and intellectuals of the time, including D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and Graham Greene, he felt drawn to the country as an image of an alternative to Europe.[13] Despite its truncated status, *¡Que viva Mexico!* is an extraordinary film which proved highly influential in Latin America. Eisenstein was hostile to the advent of sound in the cinema and in 1928 he, Grigori Alexandrov and Vsevolod Pudovkin co-signed a manifesto rejecting 'sound cinema'; sound, they argued, would 'degrade'

cinema and make it too similar to the theatre.[14] Eisenstein was more interested in exploring the artistry of the image and his film has some breathtaking cinematography.

The film's 1979 reconstruction by Grigori Alexandrov divides the film into six sections. The most striking feature of the first sequence, the prologue, which focuses on pre-Columbian architecture, is an attempt to bring out the visual similarities between the profiles on the monuments and modern-day models. The second section, 'Sandunga', is set in Tehauntepec in southern Mexico and tells the story of a young woman, Concepción, who is saving up for her dowry which will allow her to marry the man of her dreams, Abundio. At one point we see her combing her hair. Subsequently, a voice-over explains that her dowry is a necklace made of gold coins. A still image of the necklace – shown in a crescent shape – then dissolves by virtue of a visual rhyme to reveal a man in a hammock, the focus of her desire. The third section, 'Fiesta', focuses on the Virgin of Guadalupe and on bullfighting in order to draw out the conflict which is at the heart of Mexican society in Eisenstein's view. Though sketchy in terms of plot, the choreography is exquisite. The fourth section, 'Maguey', is the most accomplished of the sequences, and the only one with any semblance of a coherent plot. Sebastián and María are about to marry but the local custom ('derecho de pernada', *ius primae noctis*)

Soldier in a doorway in Eisenstein's *¡Que viva México!* (1931).

Clash of cultures in *¡Que viva México!*

means that María must visit the local landowner. She is raped, Sebastián tries to avenge her lost honour, and he and two accomplices are buried with their torsos revealed before being trampled to death by horses. During the gunfight between Sebastián, his accomplices and the landowner, a highly choreographed sequence of shots underlines the metaphorical connections between the maguey cactus and the workers' blood. Exchange of fire is cross-cut with images of the cactus being destroyed and its sap dripping out. This connection between blood and sap is used to enhance the notion of exploitation. The sap, which the peasants have to suck laboriously from the cactus plants in order for it to be fermented and then drunk by the rich, provides an example of how the workers are used as an agent of their own oppression. Later on, the same image of the sap is used to underline the notion of Mexico 'fermenting' during its Revolution.

The fifth section, the 'Soldadera' sequence, only existed in draft form, as did the sixth section, the epilogue, which, though truncated, is suggestive in that it overlays a religious, cultural ceremony, the Day of the Dead, with political significance. Rather than simply rehearsing the Aztec notion of the continuity of life and death, Eisenstein uses the masks which characterize the celebrations of the Day of the Dead to

make a political point. When the masks are cast off, some reveal the face of smiling young boys, while others show the skull of a socially doomed class, the military and the gendarmes. It is not insignificant that one of the people chosen to represent this class is wearing spurs, namely, the social class which in the pre-Revolutionary era had raped humble women such as María and murdered men such as Sebastián if they dared to rebel. The epilogue concludes with the shot of a face of a smiling young boy, a symbol of the future of Mexico in the post-Revolutionary era.

Eisenstein saw *¡Que viva México!* in terms of a woven garment, the Mexican *sarape*:

> A sarape is the striped blanket that . . . every Mexican wears. So striped and violently contrasting are the cultures in Mexico running next to each other and at the same time being centuries away . . . we took the contrasting independent adjacence of its violent colours as the motif for constructing our film: 6 episodes following each other.[15]

Though the six sections are distinct in many ways – focusing in turn on a pre-historical matriarchal society, the Spanish influence in Mexican culture (specifically Catholicism and bullfighting), the oppression of the Mexican working classes by the landowners in the pre-Revolutionary era, female agency within the Mexican Revolution – there are a number of common strands which suggest that Eisenstein was attempting to produce a unified artistic vision of Mexico. The Christological resonance of the final scene of the 'Maguey' sequence in which the three men are trampled to death, for example, was meant to be counterbalanced with the depiction of the re-enactment of Christ's passion in the third section (as in the later scene, there are three Christ figures, and the ropes used in each sequence mutually reinforce their interconnectedness). Eisenstein's notes suggest that he intended to splice the depiction of Sebastián's death with images of the Corpus Christi but because he was unable to edit the film, this remained an intention rather than an accomplishment.[16] The importance of *¡Que viva México!* is that it allows us to enter into the laboratory of a genius before he worked his magic. For this reason alone the footage is intrinsically valuable.

Death in a cactus
in *¡Que viva México!*

Religion and death
in *¡Que viva México!*

Sound and image

The 1930s, of course, were the decade in which sound began to infiltrate the otherwise image-centric world of film, producing new hybrid discourses. An early example was *La Venus de nácar* (1932), a seven-minute film made in Venezuela which told the story of the birth of the Venus of mother-of-pearl.

The establishing shot is of a young girl who sees her mother's pearls, remarks how beautiful they are and is told by her mother that mother-of-pearl has a story to it, at which point the story unfolds. A pearl fisherman catches a pearl, from which there emerges Venus who begins to dance seductively for him until he takes her off to a cave. Though hailed as the first example of sound cinema in Venezuela it should be noted that the sound component in *La Venus de nácar* signals the introduction of synchronic music used to accompany the dancing, rather than dialogue (the film uses intertitles to express the dialogue between mother and daughter). It would be another six years before Venezuela had a film with optical sound: *Tobago* (1938).

Indeed, it was not long before the sound heard in Latin American films was real sound rather than a synchronic music track. And the sound that audiences first heard – in Latin America as elsewhere – was the performance of vocal artists. If home-grown films were to be made, the safest route was

The three sacrificial victims in *¡Que viva México!*

to mimic foreign models – which meant a larger audience could be achieved eventually – and then add some home-grown ingredients. One of the best examples of this import-driven formula was the genre of the Mexican melodrama which dominated the scene from the mid-1930s until the early 1950s.[17] The Mexican film industry used the Hollywood notion of building a film around a star and a show and focused very much on the entertainment value of the film. The Hollywood musical, for example, which itself 'typically features musical and dance numbers woven around a backstage plot', is characteristic of an era which was still focused on the movie as a record of a cultural event, such as a Broadway show, which could be presented to a still larger audience.[18] The film was, in effect, still using the language of theatre in order to present its product to the larger world. The Mexican melodramas of the time followed the pattern, simply substituting American songs with Mexican *rancheras*, popular songs about how good life was back on the ranch.[19] *Allá en el Rancho Grande* ('Back Home on the Big Ranch', 1936), directed by Fernando de Fuentes, for example, inaugurated what became known as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. The plot of the film is built around the rivalry between the owner of the Rancho Grande, Don Felipe (René Cardona) and an itinerant ranch hand and crooner, José Francisco (Tito Guízar), for the affections of Cruz (Esther Fernández). Don Felipe is persuaded by Angela (Emma Roldán) to 'buy' Cruz for 100 pesos but he desists once he discovers that Cruz is engaged to José Francisco. At various junctures in the film the plot pauses in order to allow Tito Guízar the opportunity to sing 'Allá en el rancho grande', following in the popular U.S. tradition of the filmed vaudeville performance.

One striking feature of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was its working of the dilemma of the plot – would José Francisco still want to marry Cruz if she had succumbed to Don Felipe's advances the night before? – into the singing competition between José Francisco and a rival singer, which leads to José Francisco dramatically demanding that his rival say in prose what he has just said in song (that Cruz had lost her honour). The film has recourse to humour to vary its tone, mainly via Angela's partner, Florentino (Carlos López 'Chaflán'), whose drunken antics and irreverent comments provide a balanced counterpoint to the seriousness of the romantic drama. *Allá en el Rancho Grande* became the prototype of the *comedia ranchera*, and also led to the launching of Tito Guízar's

Tito Guízar (centre) in a scene from *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936).

career as a vocal artist as well as recognition for the cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa.

During this period of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema a number of stars were born, such as the beautiful Dolores del Río and the equally ravishing María Félix. Mexico was beginning to assert its dominance in the internal Latin American market (in 1939 it had managed only 39 films compared to Argentina's 50, but in 1950 Mexico produced 125 films, more than double Argentina's 56). *Flor silvestre* ('Wildflower', 1943), directed by Emilio Fernández and starring Dolores del Río and Pedro Almendariz, tells the story of the Mexican Revolution via a Mexican mother (played by Dolores del Río). A runaway box office success, the film used the tried and tested formula inherited from Hollywood and then Mexicanized, and combined Dolores del Río's feminine beauty with Gabriel Figueroa's cinematographic aestheticism – a winning formula for the times.

In Brazil a similar phenomenon emerged, that of the *chanchada*, which was partially based on the Hollywood musical, dominating Brazilian film production from the 1930s until the 1950s.[20] Both the *comedia ranchera* and the *chanchada* can be seen as symptoms of a culture

struggling to find its voice beneath the pressure of acculturation from without. It is clear that the Mexican melodramas and the Brazilian *chanchadas*, in that they were both essentially re-vampings of the Hollywood idiom, led to commercial success but also to an artistic cul-de-sac. They were always going to be the poor cousins, and Mexican melodramas eventually dried up, or rather they went underground in order to resurface in a new mass medium, television, and specifically the *telenovelas* (soap operas) which captivated audiences around the world in the 1980s and '90s. In the same way the Brazilian *chanchada* re-emerged years later in the form of the rather racy *pornochanchada*.[21]

By the 1940s and '50s, however, commercial film directors were attempting to develop a new language for film, seeking to present it as a new, unique art form, one which went beyond its theatrical roots to embrace what Deleuze would one day define as the 'emancipation of movement'. But by this time the vehicle by which it could come into being – film studios, actors, film production, trained camera teams and even in some cases a developed TV culture which could act as a safety net, inter alia – was already being controlled from elsewhere. This is why the first stirrings of a cineaste tradition, paradoxically enough, came via foreigners such as the Soviet Sergei Eisenstein and the Spaniard Luis Buñuel. Though they were cultural ventriloquists, these film directors brought a breath of fresh air to the evolving tradition of Latin American cinema.

Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* ('The Young and the Damned', 1950) was a landmark of Latin American cinema. In the 1940s, after a bad experience in Hollywood, Buñuel travelled to Mexico City and began making films; the best of this period was undoubtedly *Los olvidados*. Made on schedule in twenty-one days, it had a robust storyline about criminals in an urban setting which has led some critics to see the film as a revamping of a picaresque tale.[22] While acclaimed at the Cannes Film Festival (it won first prize for *mise en scène* in 1951), its uncompromising view of the down-and-outs of Mexico City aroused fierce reactions from some Mexicans: 'Many organizations, including labor unions, demanded my expulsion, and the press was nothing short of vitriolic in its criticism. Such spectators as there were left the theatre looking as if they'd just been to a funeral.'[23] The reaction was, indeed, so hostile that Buñuel had originally been obliged to create a more palatable ending for the film; the alternative conclusion, which was found at the UNAM Film Warehouse

in 2002, has recourse to poetic justice in that Pedro (the protagonist) kills El Jaibo (the villain of the piece), retrieves the money entrusted to him by the director of the Reformatory and returns it to him.[24]

Los olvidados brought about a significant paradigm shift in Latin American film as Buñuel introduced a different mindset – European, Surrealist. At the beginning of the 1950s Mexican cinema was still playing out the last runs of its Golden Age years, in which men were strong, women beautiful and love a word with a romantic aura. This was, perhaps, the main reason for the shock, since the characters in Buñuel's film are anything but stars. In fact it would be difficult to think of a film in which the characters are less star-like; it is, as Octavio Paz pointed out, a 'star-less film'.[25] Both El Jaibo and Ojitos were played by non-actors, after all. But its un-star-like quality went deeper than this. There were simply no redeemable characters in this film, with the possible exception of Julián (Javier Amezcúa), who is consigned to the oblivion of death early on in the film. El Jaibo is instantly recognizable as the archetypal young villain, a Mexican version of Hollywood's Babyface.

Even the characters we expect to be good are corrupt. We expect sympathy to be engineered on behalf of Carmelo (played superbly by Miguel Inclán) when he is cruelly beaten up by the local gang, spearheaded

El Jaibo attacks Julián in Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950).

by El Jaibo, early on in the film. But then, later on, he shows himself to be just as quick to kick others when they are down given half a chance. A latent paedophile, he tries to grope the young girl, Meche (Alma Delia Fuentes) when she sits on his lap, and he jumps at the chance to turn in El Jaibo to the police later on in the film. Pedro's mother, Marta (Estela India) also deviates from contemporary film mores. Carlos Monsiváis notes how women were depicted in films of the Golden Years:

> For a married woman, monogamy is the only guarantee of your existence; for a single woman, your honour is your only justification; for the prostitute, tragedy is your punishment and your only chance for glory; for the daughter, in your hymen I have deposited my honour and your future.[26]

Yet Marta disrupts the codes of melodrama; she is beautiful, sensual and prepared to have a sexual relationship with El Jaibo just, it appears, for the hell of it. In one of the most disturbing scenes of the film, the dream sequence, she offers her son some meat, and if we accept Peter Evans's convincing interpretation that she is offering him her 'torn vagina', then she is offering sex to her son.[27] The moral of the film, furthermore, rather than enacting catharsis or promoting social justice, appears to be simply the working out of the inevitable consequences of evil.

One reading of the film would suggest that it is akin to a sociological study, showing the grittier side of life in the slums of Mexico City. In fact, Buñuel spent a number of months travelling around the shanty towns of Mexico City, watching, listening and thinking about the subject of his film:

> For the next several months, I toured the slums on the outskirts of Mexico City – sometimes with Fitzgerald, my Canadian set designer, sometimes with Luis Alcoriza, but most of the time alone. I wore my most threadbare clothes; I watched, I listened, I asked questions. Eventually, I came to know these people, and much of what I saw went unchanged into the film.[28]

On the face of it, therefore, we might see *Los olvidados* as offering a closely observed picture of the world. But, alongside this notion of sociological

Pedro's mother offers him meat in a dream in *Los olvidados*.

transparency, the use of the motif of blocking and concealment suggests that other factors are at work in Buñuel's film. El Jaibo conceals the rock he will use to kill Julian in a sling. When El Jaibo has to flee from the police, he chooses to hide away in a disused slum by the railways. When Pedro is caught up to by El Jaibo, the latter emerges from his hiding place in the shadows.

Pointing in a similar direction, the dwellings inhabited by the various people in the story – Meche, Carmelo – are always depicted in semi-darkness. This could be an example of verisimilitude (the houses of the lower classes in the 1950s in Mexico City did not enjoy the luxury of electricity) but it is remarkable how consistently Buñuel chooses to depict interiors as dark and threatening, so much so that it becomes a leitmotif of the film. As Deleuze suggests, Buñuel 'injects the power of repetition into the cinematographic image'.[29] Thus the overwhelming nocturnal atmosphere of *Los olvidados* has striking parallels with those films noirs of the late 1940s – precisely the years when Buñuel was in Hollywood prior to going to Mexico – in which the city is a 'place of crime, corruption, and darkness', *The Big Sleep* (1946), *The Killers* (1946) and *Out of the Past* (1947) being classics of the genre.[30] What is so original about Buñuel's rewriting of the film noir trope is that he took its

vocabulary of darkness and violence, but at the same time avoided the urban anomie of the prototype, instead tying his vision specifically to Mexico City, which is recognizable in all the location shots. As Michael Wood suggests, 'Like Godard's Paris, Buñuel's Mexico City is permanently being built.'[31] This darkness is also expressed concretely in Carmelo's physical blindness.

The ambiguity of the use of the blindness motif is suggested in the scene towards the end of the film where Pedro attacks his peers in the reform school and subsequently, out of frustration, two hens. It is at this point that the viewer realizes that the cycle of violence has passed from one generation to the next and, furthermore, that Pedro cannot escape El Jaibo's evil influence. An unusual feature of this scene occurs when the camera lens is suddenly brought into focus and gets splattered by the egg yolk hurled angrily at it by Pedro. Marcel Oms describes this scene in terms of aggression against bourgeois perceptions of reality.[32] It can also legitimately be seen as that juncture when the subaltern attempts to destroy the control that the camera-eye exerts over the characters' lives, breaking down the system whereby art produces scopophilic pleasure, allowing, just for a moment, the violence of the subaltern to be expressed precisely because it fights against disclosure. There is thus a tension operating within *Los olvidados* whereby it mimics the positivistic essentialism of the sociologist who exposes poverty on a superficial scale, while simultaneously hinting that the consciousness of the subaltern will always remain hidden, even when it is being disclosed.[33]

Eisenstein's *¡Que viva México!* and Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* set down the foundation on which later cineastes would build. Despite Hennebelle and Gumucio-Dagrón's suggestion that, for example, 'Mexican cinema was unable to assimilate the cardinal virtues of Buñuel's work', these early filmic experiments were important for the creation of later films.[34] They became the bedrock in which Latin American film directors would thrive.

2

Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano and the 'Time-image' (1951–1975)

The European 'antibody'

After the Second World War, Europe developed new cinematic 'antibodies' which counteracted Hollywood's dominance. European avant-garde film, particularly Italian neo-Realism and the French New Wave, inspired a new type of cinema in Latin America, the so-called Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Cinema). In the new formula of neo-Realism,[1] film directors turned for inspiration to everyday reality, they shot 'on location', used non-professional actors, and their films – Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* ('Open City', 1945), Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema* ('The Earth Trembles', 1945) and Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* ('Bicycle Thieves', 1948) – had an edgy, documentary feel about them. Following hard on the heels of Italian neo-Realism came the French New Wave. André Bazin crystallized the key concept of the movement when he coined, in 1948, the term *caméra-stylo* ('camera-pen') to describe the role of the film director, who was seen more as a creative writer than camera technician. Centred around the influential film review *Cahiers du Cinéma*, founded in 1951, a new concept of the film director was born, christened *la politique des auteurs* ('auteurs' policy'), according to which film was seen as a medium bearing the personal imprint, or signature, of the film director's world view.[2] A landmark year for the movement was 1959: François Truffaut's *Les Quatre cents coups* ('The Four Hundred Blows') and Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, mon amour* ('Hiroshima, my Love') came out, and Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* ('Breathless') was released the following year. Seemingly overnight, a new cinematic style had come into being; relying on location shooting

with hand-held cameras, as well as elliptical editing favouring the long take and composition-in-depth, the French New Wave constituted a radical departure from the action-image then favoured by Hollywood.

The transition from documentary to feature film

A clear line of artistic descent can be traced from Italian neo-Realism to Cuba, as evident in the early careers of two important Cuban filmmakers, Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

Following García Espinosa's lead, Gutiérrez Alea (often known by his nickname, Titón) decided in the early 1950s to travel to Rome to enrol on a course at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia which, at the time, was a hotbed for neo-Realist filmmaking as well as theory. Alea described his experience in a letter to German Puig, dated 22 November 1951: his studies were 'impressive and comprehensive'; he had started his film exercises in earnest and had met Vittorio De Sica.[3] Having access to luminaries of the time such as Vittorio De Sica, whose *Ladri di biciclette*, which had been released only three years before in 1948 and which had established Italian neo-Realism as a thriving new filmic genre, was clearly inspirational for the young Cuban film enthusiast. Together Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa learned how to create cinema in Italy, and they took this new-found knowledge back with them to Cuba.

Julio García Espinosa with fellow filmmaker Titón in Rome in the early 1950s.

Shortly after their return to Cuba, Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa collaborated on a documentary film, *El Mégano*, based on the working lives of charcoal workers in the marshlands of Ciénaga to the south of Havana. The film is intriguing because it mixes observational documentary – for example, the depiction of the removal of the wood from the river, its transport to the charcoal ovens, the burning of the wood, the shacks that the workers live in – with fiction, in the sense that the film dramatizes a conflict between the landowner and the workers who decide to rebel as a result of their exploitation, as expressed by the worker who calls a meeting to say that the situation cannot go on, and who screws up the paper in his hand at the conclusion of the film.[4]

The film was released in 1955 and, though it was a documentary rather than a feature film, it bore the hallmark of neo-Realism in its depiction of everyday reality, of poverty among the disadvantaged classes, and its use of non-professional actors. Soon after being screened at the University of Havana, the film came to the attention of the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar of Batista's government; it was impounded by the military and García Espinosa was held in custody. He was told to hand in the film within 24 hours.[5] He and Titón, concerned that they would lose the film for ever, went to deposit it at the Asociación de Críticos de Radio, Televisión y Cine (ACRTC), thinking it would be safe there. But they were wrong. When García Espinosa went to see Colonel Castaño,

García Espinosa with the cameraman Jorge Haydú (Alfredo Guevara is sitting down) on the set of *El Mégano* (1955).

Workers battling through the swamps in *El Mégano* (1955).

he refused to accept the excuse that the film had been left at the ACRTC, and demanded it be handed over to the military authorities. García Espinosa had no choice and he deposited the film within 24 hours.[6] With the benefit of hindsight it is now clear that *El Mégano* was the blueprint for the politicized formula of filmmaking which would come to fruition in the post-1959 film produced in Cuba with a transparent political ideology.

Cuba was not the only place where these new ideas, inspired by Italian neo-Realism, were taking root. An important new voice in documentary film emerged in Argentina in 1958 with the release of Fernando Birri's *Tire dié*, which is now recognized as one of the classics of Latin American documentary. Along with García Espinosa's *El Mégano* (1955), this work set a mould for Latin American cinema which departed sharply from the Hollywood-inspired films dominating the viewer's imagination in the 1950s, both in the United States and elsewhere. The most important difference is that we are exposed in this film to the have-nots of society, the people normally forgotten by the silver screen, or sometimes domesticated in order to make them palatable for discreet consumption. This is a gritty documentary with a social message, shot

The destitute children in Fernando Birri's *Tire dié* (1958).

with a hand-held camera. It is not entertainment. Following in Brecht's footsteps, *Tire dié* evokes a distancing effect with regard to its viewers, making us think rather than cry. It is reality rather than fiction. Nevertheless, it does use some of the stock-in-trade of the feature film (the use of suspense, for example, since we have to wait until two-thirds of the way through the film before the train finally appears).

The voice-over often takes over a few seconds after we hear the interviewees begin to speak. This is because the original recording was too imperfect for professional use, as Birri has himself acknowledged. This might be seen as a defect of the film, but alternatively it could be seen as an early example of what García Espinosa would later define as Latin America's 'imperfect cinema'; that is, cinema which was not as glossy or as well filmed or as well produced as a standard Hollywood film, but which nevertheless was able to make an important social point despite its material and technical imperfections. Indeed, some would argue that the signifier of the celluloid is making just such a point. Its poverty is a concrete image of Latin America's poverty. A slick image would have defeated the point.

Birri creates contrast and conflict by having the government rhetoric and bird's-eye shot of Santa Fe contrast poignantly with the down-to-earth reality of the inhabitants of the *barriadas* near the railway line. He gives us the names of the people he interviews, refusing to allow them to become statistics. A true documentarist, he allows us to see the material culture that envelops them, how they earn their money, the shacks where they live. He uses suspense effectively, only allowing the train to arrive when the scene has very deliberately been set. He allows the social message to evolve from the events filmed and the words spoken by the protagonists rather than in the clumsy overlay of a narrator. The voice-over is either used ironically (such as during the opening aerial views of the city) or it is there to transcribe what the protagonists say. Birri does not talk; he lets reality speak for itself.

Perhaps most importantly, the documentary has a clear direction; it sets the scene, builds up a contrast, interviews a set of protagonists, stays on message (how the train dominates their lives), moves towards a climax (the entry of the train) and then allows the story to wind down as the train is seen departing. There are some nicely framed mood shots of children running towards the train, running along the bridge structure, and lots of energy in the footage of the children running alongside the train. There are also some impressive ideological montage shots, such as when the children picking through the trash are compared visually with the pigs eating slops, inevitably prompting comparison with the leftovers (the coins) that the children pick off the floor. The main message is that these children and the community to which they belong are the forgotten, undocumented underbelly of Argentine society, a group the government and the middle classes would prefer to ignore. One of the protagonists says: '*mentira el gobierno*' ('government lies'). This is the main message of the film. But it is made obliquely through realities rather than through commentary. Given the fact that there are so many close-ups of the children as they watch the train depart, it gradually dawns on the viewer that we are the ones in the train, the spectators of this poverty; we are the ones who have paid a dime to see this social spectacle, the voyeurs of this pain.

It is arguable that many of these experiments – for experiments they were – would have disappeared without trace were it not for a political event that changed the face of Latin American politics forever. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 provided a new political horizon in

Latin America. Régis Debray has argued, for example, that the Cuban Revolution was, in effect, a 'revolution in the revolution'.[7] As Robert Young has suggested, it brought about

> a fundamental break with the increasingly bankrupt role of bureaucratic communist parties controlled by Moscow and the achievement of a new form of socialism founded on the revolutionary agency of local people, in the first instance the peasantry rather than the urban proletariat . . . The Cuban Revolution showed that a different sort of revolution was possible.[8]

As one of the intellectual leaders of the Cuban Revolution, Che Guevara, suggested, Marxism was now to be seen as a political philosophy based on the human: 'It was love of man, of humanity, the desire to combat the distress of the proletariat, the desire to fight poverty, injustice, suffering, and all the exploitation of the proletariat, that gave rise to Marxism.'[9]

The Cuban Revolution was, indeed, to have a far-reaching effect on the evolution of cinematic language in Latin America. Fidel Castro followed Lenin's line that cinema is 'the most important of the arts' and established the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC, Cuban Film Institute). As a state-funded cultural institution it helped formulate a new image of Latin American reality, one which was specifically not constrained by the ideological baggage of colonialism. The Cuban Film Institute brought together a number of key cultural figures, including Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa and others such as Humberto Solás, Alfredo Guevara and Enrique Colina. Following the Soviet model, it used documentaries to educate the masses, producing what was in effect transculturated agitprop, but it was also involved in promoting the Cuban film industry. Octavio Cortázar remembers how in 1966 in Imías, a small town in the southeast of Cuba, he saw a group of farm labourers, many of them on horseback, watching a Charlie Chaplin film in the 'transportable cinema' (*unidad de cine móvil*) set up there, an event which persuaded him to make his own documentary, *Por primera vez* ('For the First Time').[10]

García Espinosa, for his part, has described what the situation was like in pre-Revolutionary Cuba; the Hollywood film industry called the shots:

The founders of the ICAIC in the 1960s.

> If we wanted one of their hits they would force us to take nine other films of lower quality. The glossy-produced films with big budgets were always put in the best cinemas, so Latin American films screened in the less well-kept theatres. The public therefore assumed their own films were inherently inferior.[11]

After the Revolution, however, García Espinosa and his colleagues informed the Hollywood studios that they would be showing more Latin American and Cuban films than previously: 'The studios said that we were forcing films on the public that they didn't want to see and that cinema attendance would fall. This didn't happen. Attendances stayed the same. We broke the myth.'[12]

The first feature films produced by ICAIC were directed by García Espinosa and Titón, because they were the only two with any concrete experience of filmmaking – *Historias de la Revolución* ('Stories of the Revolution') by Titón, and *Cuba baila* ('Cuba Dances', 1960) by García Espinosa.[13] Both Titón and García Espinosa made these films in order to provide a template for other aspiring filmmakers of the time. There was no time to set up a school formally. The young film directors had to learn on the job in order to record the reality that was unfolding before their eyes. *Cuba baila* was the first feature film produced by ICAIC. Set in Cuba's pre-Revolutionary era, it tells the story of the trials and

García Espinosa on set in Cuba with his wife, Adelaida Raymat.

tribulations suffered by a married couple, Ramón and Flora, who are desperate to keep up with the Joneses by holding a lavish *quinceañera* party for their daughter, Marcia.[14]

Some of the lessons learned through the film-making of García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea and Birri spilled over into the rest of Latin America. In Brazil a group of young film directors and theorists coalesced around a journal, *Metropolitano*, which was modelled on Bazin's *Cahiers*

du Cinéma. Indeed, one of the first signs of the dawn of a truly independent Latin American cinema emerged in Brazil in the early 1960s in the form of its so-called Cinema Novo (New Cinema). Brazilian 'New Cinema' also drew inspiration from Italian neo-Realism and the French New Wave. Low-budget, independent films were shot on location with non-professional actors, in an attempt to encapsulate a new, authentically Brazilian *politique des auteurs* which pointedly flew in the face of the *chanchada*, memorably dismissed by Glauber Rocha as 'Public Enemy No. 1'.[15] Films such as *Ganga dumba* (1963) by Carlos Diegues, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* ('Black God, White Devil', 1964) and *Terra em Transe* ('Land in Anguish', 1967) by Glauber Rocha, *Os fuzis* ('The Guns', 1964) by Ruy Guerra and *Vidas secas* ('Barren Lives', 1963) and *Fome de amor* ('Hunger for Love', 1968) by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, were recognized as independent, autochthonous versions of Latin American reality. Though initially inspired by contemporary European films, Cinema Novo had more of a political edge for, as Diegues scornfully observed: 'We were making political films when the New Wave was still talking about unrequited love.'[16] Perhaps just as importantly, the film directors were keen to theorize about what they were doing; Diegues, Rocha and Pereira dos Santos were, in effect, producing meta-film just as much as film. Rocha's famous phrase, '*uma idéia na cabeça e uma câmera na mão*' ('an idea in your head and a camera in your hand'), became almost a leitmotif of the times.

Deus e o diabo na terra do sol (1964, directed by Glauber Rocha), which won the International Review Prize in Cannes, is a powerful film. Set in the 1940s it tells the story of a ranch hand, Manuel (Geraldo Del Rey), who explodes when his boss tries to cheat him of his earnings; he kills him and escapes with his wife, Rosa (Yoná Magalhães). Now an outlaw, Manuel joins up with a self-proclaimed saint who condones violence; some of the (unadorned) torture scenes which ensue are gut-wrenching. Rosa also turns to killing and, at the conclusion of the film, the pair are seen fleeing from the law. Drawing upon the struggle between the state and the *sertanejos*, which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and which was at the heart of Da Cunha's classic work *Os Sertões* ('The Devil to Pay in the Backlands'), *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* is a meditation on the never-ending struggle between two cultural options, offering a pessimistic vision of whether these two cultural lifestyles can ever be harmonized within state discourse.

The film came out in 1964, the year of the Brazilian coup engineered by Governor José de Magalhães Pinto of Minas Gerais state and Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco, chief of staff of the army. Though the film is cast in the past anterior it also allegorizes the contemporaneous political rift which had been occurring in Brazil since the early 1960s between the military and the 'communist infiltration'. That conflict is best understood in the light of Rocha's theory of 'Uma estetica da Fome' (1967). Rocha argued:

> Cinema Novo teaches that the aesthetics of violence are revolutionary rather than primitive. The moment of violence is the moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the existence of the colonized. Only when he is confronted by violence can the colonizer understand, through horror, the strengths of the culture he exploits.[17]

Manuel in Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964).

In his essay Rocha argues that Latin America's colonized status leads to mutual miscomprehension in the relationship between Brazil and its colonizers, to formalist exoticisms which vulgarize social problems. This leads Brazilian art to be, as he argues, either sterile or hysterical. It is sterile when it attempts to ape the soi-disant universalism of Western art, when it creates official art, monsters created by university discourse. It is hysterical when it expresses social indignation about Brazil's subaltern status; but here it often descends into political sectarianism and pornographic anarchism.

Rocha rejects both sterility and hysteria, advocating the aesthetics of hunger, which forces the colonizing powers to watch people eating earth, killing in order to eat, fleeing in order to eat, miserabilism rather than watching rich bourgeois people eating well in São Paulo. New Cinema is therefore an attack on 'digestive cinema', on cinema as entertainment. This hunger and this ugliness in Cinema Novo is only understood as a tropical surrealism by Europeans, and provokes a sense of shame in Brazilians. The New Brazilian Cinema's aesthetics of violence is revolutionary in that it is only by raising consciousness about its violence that Latin America can make colonizers understand, 'via horror', to use Rocha's words, the strength of the culture they exploit. Rocha's depiction of the *sertão* in *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* proved itself to be a benchmark motif of subsequent Brazilian film.[18]

A film released in the same year as *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, but which had none of its immediate impact, was *Soy Cuba* ('I Am Cuba'), directed by Mikhail Kalatozov (1964; script by Enrique Pineda Barnet), now considered a classic on the Cuban Revolution, especially because of Sergey Urusevsky's cinematography. The plot is straightforward enough, with the first two sections describing oppression in pre-Revolutionary Cuba and the last two portraying the people's rebellion against Batista. Part I tells the story of María who, despite her love for her Cuban fruitseller boyfriend, Rene, has to prostitute herself in a nightclub full of rich Americans. Part II is about a sugar cane farmer, Pedro, who is told that his land has been sold to the United Fruit Company; in desperation he sets fire to the crops and his house. Part III shows the Revolution exploding at the University of Havana while in Part IV the rebellion reaches fever pitch in the Sierra Maestra. The ordinariness of the plot is at odds with the extraordinarily virtuoso camerawork. In one continuous long take

The camera goes underwater in *Soy Cuba* (1964).

early on in the film the hand-held camera records a beauty contest taking place in the Hotel Nacional and then descends slowly down one side of the building until it ends up in the swimming pool and then drops below the surface of the water to film a bathing beauty. In Part III, the camera moves at street level through the funeral procession of a student, Enrique, who was shot by the police, and then ascends to the top of the building and 'floats' between two buildings, moving among some tobacco workers before exiting through a window to witness the scenes of mourning below – the camera appears to be flying. The film uses infrared film provided by the Soviet military,[19] and this provides sharp contrasts between whites and blacks, particularly in the landscape shots. Occasionally this contrast is enhanced by movement. In Part II, when Pedro begins to set fire to the sugar cane the camera begins to swivel round jerkily and a blur of slashing machete knife strokes is thereby created.

But perhaps the most extraordinary feature of *Soy Cuba* is the use of a wide-angle convex lens which makes foreground objects more striking while maintaining focus for distant objects. Combined with some of the crane shots and the infrared photography, the effect created is one of abnormal distance from the phenomenal world, as if it were seen for the

The camera hovers in the air above the funeral cortège in *Soy Cuba.*

The sugar cane worker rebels against social injustice in *Soy Cuba*.

first time, thereby echoing the Formalist technique of 'ostranenie'. Occasionally the frame is tilted. The combination of cinematographic techniques such as these – ranging from the tilted frame to the floating camera – leads to uncertainty about where the ground is and unsettles the viewer. A tour de force, *Soy Cuba* was rejected when released in 1964 by Cubans for its simplistic portrayal of Cuban oppression and by Soviet audiences because of its empathy with pre-Revolutionary Cuba, but was re-launched as a result of the enthusiastic support of directors such as Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola who saw it when it was screened at the 1993 San Francisco Film Festival, and subsequently promoted as a 'forgotten classic'. Perhaps more importantly, *Soy Cuba* should be seen as the missing link of Cuban cinema; it taught the hero of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Sergio Corrieri, how to act, and the film equipment – which included not only cameras but also a crane – brought to Cuba by Mikhail Kalatozov, was left in Cuba after filming was completed and was subsequently put to good use by ICAIC's budding film directors, one of whom was Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.[20]

Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano: theory and praxis

One of the most distinctive features of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano was its theoretical underpinning. For their part, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, in an important manifesto, 'Towards a Third Cinema', advocated a new cinema which threw off the shackles of colonial oppression both in ideological and industrial terms and, in the process, they became important spokesmen for anti-colonialist film directors all around the world:

> The anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World and of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today the axis of the world revolution. *Third cinema* is, in our opinion, the cinema that *recognises in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time*, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonisation of culture.[21]

A more vivid catchword, perhaps, than 'third cinema' was 'imperfect cinema', a term coined by the Cuban film director, Julio García Espinosa in 1969. In a wide-ranging essay, 'For an Imperfect Cinema', García Espinosa contrasted the gritty, more realist cinema emerging from Cuba with the slick, commercially effective but ideologically barren film coming out of Hollywood:

> Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in quality or technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle. Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in predetermined taste, and much less in 'good taste'. It is not quality which it seeks in an artist's work. The only thing it is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the 'cultured' elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?[22]

Just as radical was the theoretical position taken up by the Bolivian film director, Jorge Sanjinés. In a concise and punchy essay, 'Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema', Sanjinés rejected the ideology and content of imperialism and advocated a cinema which is revolutionary, collective and people-centred: 'Revolutionary cinema, as it reaches maturity, can only be collective, just as the revolution itself is collective.'[23] Latin American Film gradually began to play a central role in the evolution of a new concept of Third World Film during the 1960s and 1970s.

In his essay 'Cinema and Underdevelopment', Birri, for example, argued that underdevelopment is an intrinsic part of the fabric of Latin American culture, that it is caused by colonialism and that – up until then, namely, the 1960s – cinema inevitably shared the characteristics of this superstructure ('it presents us with a false image of both society, and our people').[24] Birri therefore called for a new type of documentary which would reverse this representational paradigm: 'It shows matters as they irrefutably are, and not as we would like them to be (or as, in good or bad faith, others would like to make us believe them to be).'[25] The Brazilian film director Glauber Rocha, in his essay 'The Aesthetics of Hunger', which has already been alluded to, argued from a similar

postcolonial viewpoint ('Latin America remains a colony') to propose that Latin America is therefore characterized by 'philosophical undernourishment' and 'impotence'. As Rocha went on to suggest:

> It is for this reason that hunger in Latin America is not simply an alarming symptom; it is the essence of our society. Herein lies the tragic originality of Cinema Novo in relation to world cinema. Our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood.[26]

A number of the essays published by Latin American film directors at the time sang from the same hymn sheet; they rejected the colonization of Latin America, whether by the multinationals or by the film industry, and advocated a radical de-colonization of Latin American reality. Perhaps just as importantly, they refused to examine film in isolation from its political context. Film, for the cineastes of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, is always political.

With hindsight it is now clear that the various film festivals organized in the late 1960s were crucial to the formation of a sense of Latin American cultural identity, beginning with the Viña del Mar, Chile, festival held in 1967, followed by the festival in Mérida, Venezuela, in 1968, and then back again in Viña del Mar in 1969. At the time these were new venues for Latin American film directors to present their work, and they encouraged other budding film directors to try their luck. It soon became clear that Latin American film directors had something new to say, something which was intrinsic to their culture, which was recognized as different by Europeans, and – much more importantly – was understood by Latin Americans as expressing something fundamentally different about the way life was lived in the southern continent of the Americas.

Arguably, the most important film of the New Latin American Cinema was Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* ('Memories of Underdevelopment'). Whereas the majority of the films associated with Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano were revolutionary in terms of their politics but less innovative when it came to their filmic language, Gutiérrez Alea's film embodied revolution in both its use of media and in its politics. After his experience working on *El Mégano*, Gutiérrez Alea had decided that film was where his future lay. The revolution of 1959 allowed that

desire to come to fruition since he was one of the individuals 'commissioned' by ICAIC to create a number of documentaries about the new social reality which the revolution was creating. But it was with *Memorias del subdesarrollo* that his work made an international impact. There were, of course, a number of techniques in this film which could be traced back to Gutiérrez Alea's apprenticeship in neo-Realism, including the use of the street as the set (evident in a number of the scenes in which the protagonist Sergio [Sergio Corrieri] meets and seduces Elena [Daisy Granados]), and the use of a hand-held camera (this is used to most striking effect in the bedroom scene in which Sergio 'hunts' Elena in a sequence leading up to her sexual conquest).

But there were also a number of scenes in the film which demonstrated that Titón was not simply revamping the Italian blueprint but instead reformulating its DNA in order to bring out new aspects which were more relevant and more appropriate for the Cuban national context. Thus Titón began evolving a new type of cinematic discourse in which documentary footage could be integrated into the fictional narrative of a feature film. The aim was to intensify and enhance the sense of the historicism of the narrative; it was a new technique absent from the original neo-Realist formula, but which went in the same historicizing direction. There are a number of these sequences in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, the most significant relating to the narrative of the CIA-supported invasion of the Bay of Pigs, and including the film relating to the trials which occurred afterwards, as well as the documentary footage of the militarization of Havana, which occured as a result of the Missile Crisis of 1962.

Deleuze has identified neo-Realism as the point of crisis for classical cinema, and this crisis was expressed in five new characteristics of the image: 'the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot. It is the crisis of both the action-image and the American Dream.'[27] What now defined neo-Realism was a build-up of 'purely optical situations (and sound ones, although there was no synchronized sound at the start of neo-realism), which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism. It is perhaps as important as the conquering of a purely optical space in painting, with impressionism.'[28] This revolution of the 'optical space' had implications for the role of the protagonist in neo-Realist films:

> The character has become a kind of viewer. He shifts, runs and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or an action. He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action.[29]

This also had implications for the relationship between the character in the neo-Realist film and his surroundings, for 'it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it.'[30] Finally, the neo-Realist film is one where, as Deleuze suggests, 'the character does not act without seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing'.[31]

It is not too far-fetched to argue that Deleuze's description of the typical protagonist of the neo-Realist film, in many respects, is a description of Sergio's dilemma as we witness the unfolding of his vision of the world in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Especially in the opening sequences of the film, Sergio's gaze appears to suggest that he is looking at Havana for the first time. He appears to be distanced, for example, from the experience of bidding his wife farewell, as if he were watching the event through the eyes of somebody else rather than himself. Sergio is a voyant rather than an actor and, as we discover later on, he appears even to be – to quote Deleuze's words – a 'complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing'.

Indeed Sergio is not only disconnected from space; he also appears to be disconnected from time. The title of the film, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, alerts the viewer immediately to the fact that time is an intrinsic component of the experience recounted in the film. The first sequence – after the enigmatic establishing sequence in the nightclub when somebody gets shot, which actually does not establish anything – shows us Sergio at the airport bidding farewell to his wife and then on the bus going home. The idea of memory is instantiated when we suddenly see scenes from that recent past: we assume that Sergio is daydreaming on the bus and recreating in his mind what he has just experienced at Havana airport. This remembering of the past does not occur in a conventional sense –

for example, we perceive the character's eyes looking out of the window, then the frame dissolves, then we see the airport, which would be a paradigmatic way of introducing a memory of this kind. Rather, we are suddenly plunged into a remembered reality, and thus the present of the film (the reality we perceive when Sergio says goodbye at the airport) is suddenly revealed to be the past (Sergio is sitting on the bus remembering what his wife looked like when he said goodbye to her).

Or, is it? Is it the past as recollected via the present, or does the first sequence really happen prior to getting on the bus (in other words, Sergio just remembers a part of that recent experience)? The answer to this question is neither yes nor no; rather it is that the film thrives on this temporal ambiguity and, indeed, attempts to trick the reader into experiencing the present as the past and, by contrast, the past as the present. Indeed, this introduces a level of meta-cinema into the scene, since it foregrounds the present reality along with the act of remembering itself. It is possible to interpret the opening sequence as a set of disjointed flashbacks but, as the film subsequently demonstrates, Gutiérrez Alea's work deconstructs the performativity of the flashback and creates what Deleuze would call a 'time-image'; in other words, an image that simultaneously encapsulates time and reflects upon it. This is most obvious in the third section of the film. Sergio is walking around his Havana apartment overlooking the Malecón, recalling aspects of his relationship with his wife who has now departed for Miami. He goes through her drawers, reviewing her underwear, lipstick and clothes, while listening to her words as he recorded them at an unspecified time in the past. At one point he puts on her eyeglass and we see a frame of him wearing it.

Though the viewer has become accustomed during this third sequence of the film to the presence of Sergio's wife, this has only been through her voice; thus we 'experience' her aurally rather than visually. Suddenly, two seconds after putting on her eyeglass, we see her. As a result of this visual irruption of the past, the chronology of the scene is disturbed. Until this point the dividing line between the present and the past had been enunciated transparently. Sergio is in the present listening to the past as a result of operating a machine that had recorded his wife's voice. But this distinction is perturbed when we suddenly see a frame of the past – his wife adjusts her glasses to look back at him – and it is not clear how this memory of the past has emerged. Clearly, this

is not a flashback in the sense of being a 'conventional extrinsic device', to use Deleuze's words. Were it a flashback the viewer would expect, if presented in conventional terms, an image of the past preceded by a dissolve frame indicating that the past will now emerge into the current narrative of the film. None of this happens. The film does not explain whether this frame is from Sergio's point of view, or POV shot (that is, a remembered POV) or a director's shot. While the viewer's first reaction is likely to be one of confusion, it is clear subsequently that Titón is attempting to allow the past to be experienced within the present of film, that is, inverting the normal protocol of film in which present is turned into past. Indeed, it is just as likely that this frame is an instantiation of the camera remembering its own past, as if the camera had become the protagonist of the film and could remember as if it possessed human agency.

The plot thickens two seconds later. Here the viewer sees a new frame in which we are back with Sergio who looks as if he is reacting to a fleeting glimpse of his wife. It is likely that a viewer without contextual knowledge would see this sequence as an example of the shot-reverse shot technique. The shot-reverse shot is a classic technique used in realist cinema, and characteristic of the action-image style. Typically it will occur in the present of the film when two people react to the signals of each other's face, which include speech as well as facial gesture, normally as part of a dialogue. And here we see Sergio, then his wife, then Sergio.

Time-image in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968).

Time-image in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*.

But the context already provided indicates to the viewer that this is an 'impossible' shot-reverse shot sequence since we saw Sergio's wife leaving for Miami in the first section of the film. This sequence, therefore, can only be a shot-reverse shot sequence in which the reverse shot is a memory of the past. It could not have occurred in one chronological sequence, and instead occurred in the space between present and past, as it were. Furthermore, to complicate things, it is not a recollection image or flashback such as we find, for example, in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. It is a more dynamic, dialectical shuttling between past and present. Time has

therefore entered the frame as a mediator of the shot-reverse shot sequence, and is in effect caught in dialectical suspension. The action image has been re-articulated to create a time-image, one in which time itself has been enunciated before the viewer's startled eyes. Titón has in effect used the time-image to create his own version of an algebra of memory, thereby adding a meta-cinematic patina to the image.

This meta-cinematic patina is evident in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, not only on the level of the image but also on the level of plot and sequencing. Titón's film is, indeed, self-reflexive on a number of levels. In the round-table discussion about underdevelopment, for example, which Sergio attends with Elena, one of the round-table participants is Edmundo Desnoes, the author of the novel (*Inconsolable Memories*) on which the film is based. In effect, the film is playing with the difference between the real and the fictional, allowing one to feed into another in a way which is redolent of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Sergio is totally unconvinced by Desnoes's interventions, which shows a character 'standing up' to the individual who created him. The North American conferencee who stands up during the round-table debate and questions its effectiveness is none other than Jack Gelber, the author of the foreword to the English edition of the novel. Gelber is thus criticizing the book he helped to bring into being in English. This Unamunesque play of creator against the created is further complicated by the scene in which Sergio and Elena watch a series of risqué film clips with a film director at the Cuban Film Institute. The director concerned is none other than Titón himself. His subsequent comment to Sergio that he may well use the scenes in some concocted film later on is supremely ironic, since this is, after all, the film we – as viewers – are actually watching. These different scenes could all be interpreted as 'insider jokes' in which Titón is cocking a private snook at the audience, but they can also be seen as scenes in which Titón is drawing attention to the way in which art can reflect upon its origins, and 'recall' its own genesis.

The documentary *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (1969), directed by Chilean filmmaker Miguel Littín, told the story of Chile's first ever serial killer, José (or Jorge) del Carmen Valenzuela Torres, and it was an enormous success at the Second Festival of Latin American Film held in Viña del Mar in November 1969. A drifter, Valenzuela Torres, or the 'Jackal of

Nahueletoro', as he came to be known, had brutally clubbed to death a defenceless mother and her five children in Chillán in northern Chile in what was apparently a motiveless crime. News coverage of the event and the massive police search for him traumatized Chile at the time. Miguel Littín decided to reconstruct the tragedy using the documentary genre but he introduced some innovative twists. First, he allowed Valenzuela Torres to speak directly to the camera and, second, he used chronology creatively. There are basically four self-contained time worlds in Littín's documentary: (i) his early life as recounted in voice-over in confession mode; (ii) the reconstruction of the events leading up to the murder, along with the murder itself; (iii) his arrest, and abuse by the crowd; (iv) his life in prison after the trial in which he is sentenced to death, culminating in his execution. The film opens with a sequence depicting his arrest, and then tracks back into the events of his early childhood – recounted in voice-over – which are reconstructed up until the point of the murder. It takes up the narrative of the Jackal's life in prison during the period of rehabilitation, and concludes with his execution. During the narrative of his life, the film returns almost obsessively to the scene in which the Jackal is led away by police, signalled each time by the whine of the police siren. It is only at the end of the film when we see the Jackal being interviewed, making a final confession to a news reporter just before his execution, that we realize that the earlier reconstruction of his childhood was elicited at this point. The documentary, rather

Jack Gelber, the U.S. translator of *Inconsolable Memories*, becomes a character in the film *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, which was based on the book he translated.

Sergio discusses film with the director of the actual film he is starring in, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968).

dramatically, takes its point of departure from the Jackal's last confession, a criminal's version of the last will and testament.

Inconsistencies are left in the narrative: at one point the Jackal says that he only used a stick on one of the daughters, but this account is contradicted by someone present who states that he is lying, and that she was strangled. Likewise, when describing the murder of Rosa, the mother, he again claims to have used a stick, but he also states that he was holding a knife at the time. The reporting style simply leaves these details as they are. One of the mysteries of the murder concerns the fact, classic in this kind of sensationalist tragedy, that there was no discernible motive. He mentions that he was drunk on the wine that Rosa had given him, and that she insulted him. No more details are given. And when this scene is reconstructed, we witness Rosa shouting, but the sound is cut, thereby enhancing the horror of the event. The murders are all the more powerful since the Jackal is unable to give any reason for them. The camerawork used to portray the murders in *El chacal de Nahueltoro* is versatile. At times the camera moves around wildly, and we lose focus, thereby echoing the savagery of the events themselves. At other times, we are invited as viewers to step into the mind of the murderer, since the murder scenes are reconstructed via the Jackal's point of view; occasionally the camera looks calmly at the children before they are killed, recalling the filmic perspective of early horror films such as *Dracula* (1931) and *The*

Wolf Man (1941). A chilling moment in the film is when Rosa, just before she is beaten to death, looks directly at the viewer.

Yawar Mallku ('The Blood of the Condor', 1969) is a classic Latin American film by the Bolivian film director Jorge Sanjinés. On the day of its premiere in La Paz (17 July 1969), the theatre where it was about to be shown, the 18 de Julio, was suddenly closed down as a result of the film's inflammatory subject-matter; a public riot ensued and, eventually, the authorities relented and allowed the film to be screened.[32] The film showed the trademark of Sanjinés's interest in politicized cinema. Though Sanjinés began his career with the desire to make 'film for film's sake', he gradually became more interested in creating a 'cinema for society', because art is an 'excellent instrument' with which to create a social consciousness; art plays a fundamental role in the process whereby society achieves a '*toma de conciencia*' ('reality check') of itself, drawing inspiration from Italian neo-Realism.[33] In contradistinction to Hollywood work practices (professional actors in carefully constructed sets), Sanjinés based his film on a real-life event, the covert sterilization of women in the Bolivian village of Kaata. Sanjinés went to the village with his camera crew consisting of himself, Ricardo Rada, Oscar Soria and Antonio Eguino, but he found that it was practically impossible to persuade any of the villagers to act in his film. They were far more concerned with

The execution scene in *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (1969).

Nelson Villagra having a rest on set in Miguel Littín's *El chacal de Nahueltoro*.

reaping the harvest. Finally a coca leaves ceremony was held by the local *yatiri* (soothsayer) who sanctioned the project, and everything then went to schedule.

The three main protagonists of the film – Ignacio, Paulina and Sixto – were not professional actors. In fact *Yawar Mallku* has Ignacio, as communal leader of Kaata, in effect (like Visconti's postman) playing himself. The overall message of the film is that the Peace Corps is a malevolent Western influence in Latin America seeking to colonize under the guise of providing medical and economic assistance. As José Sánchez-H. points out: 'As a result of the denunciation made by *Yawar Mallku*, the Peace Corps was expelled from the country by President General Juan José Torres in 1971 and did not return to Bolivia until 1990.'[34] The final freeze-frame of the film, showing a group of the villagers holding their rifles aloft in a sign of obvious defiance, suggests that armed struggle is the only logical way forward for Bolivia – and indeed for Latin America. The allusion to Che Guevara, who died in Bolivia two years before the film was screened, could not be more transparent. While the film relies on traditional storytelling techniques – it tells the story of the tragedy experienced by a particular community via the

representational narrative of one significant individual, Ignacio – it disrupts narratological linearity by combining cross-cutting with flashback, thereby drawing time into the DNA of the image and creating what Deleuze defines as a 'time-image'.

One significant flashback occurs, for example, when Sixto, faced with his brother, Ignacio, who has been shot and is bleeding to death, asks Paulina what happened. But *Yawar Mallku* does not use the flashback in a conventional fashion – that is, where the flashback is initiated, the film scrolls back to some significant moment in the past and then gradually moves in linear fashion back to the 'present' of the film when it was initiated. Rather, the flashback initiates a tightly choreographed see-saw effect between the present (Sixto wandering around La Paz looking for blood for his dying brother) and the past (a discrete set of events during which Ignacio discovers what is happening in the maternity clinic and rebels against the Western invaders). The film's cross-cuts become more intense as the plot proceeds, echoing the anxiety and suspense underlying Sixto's doomed search for blood, adding a sinister, proleptic mood to the film. Cross-cutting between present and past also allowed Sanjinés to build up connections between apparently unconnected events. When Sixto goes to the centre of La Paz, for example, he witnesses a military procession

Jorge Sanjinés on set in Bolivia 1969.

Ignacio prepares to take revenge on the gringos in *Yawar Mallku* (1969).

going past, and the camera focuses in close-up on a young girl who is also witnessing the procession; as if to underscore the sinister nature of the ceremony, we see she is crying. The camera then slips into the past time of the film, and the viewer now witnesses the commandant who is attempting to persuade the villagers that they should accept the gringos who have just arrived in town. The gringos hand out clothes for the children to wear. This scene – which might be interpreted at face value as an example of kindness towards others – is already overlaid by the scene of the young girl crying which immediately preceded it, and the gift acquires sinister overtones.

It is important to point out, however, that the use of the cross-cut in the context of the flashback was not seen at the time of the film's release as an unmitigated success. Sanjinés has stated in interviews that his aim in *Yawar Mallku* was to address the Aymara population of Bolivia rather than a Western audience. He discovered, soon after the film was released, that many Indians in the audience found the time shifts rather confusing. Here is Sanjinés's own verdict:

> When we filmed *Blood of the Condor* with the peasants of the remote Kaata community, we certainly intended that the film should be a political contribution, denouncing the *gringos* and

> presenting a picture of Bolivian social reality. But our fundamental objective was to explore our own aptitudes . . . the spectators . . . complained later when the film was shown to them.[35]

Sanjinés decided, as a result of this experience, to reformulate his cinematic vision, and thus, in later films such as *El coraje del pueblo* ('The Courage of the People'), he decided against using the flashback. In this later film, he argued, he was able to integrate the vision of the people into the filmic narrative rather than tying some of the community's ideas to his personal vision: 'We, the members of the crew, became instruments of the people's struggle, as they expressed themselves through us!'[36] Some would argue that this was not necessarily a step forward, since few would suggest that *El coraje del pueblo* is a better film, either structurally or aesthetically, than *Yawar Mallku*. While it is legitimate to argue that the rapid cross-cutting between past and present in *Yawar Mallku* led to some confusion, it ultimately allowed the final scenes of the film to acquire their triumphant logic; by returning to his village to fight against the forces of imperialism, Sixto, not just metaphorically but literally, *becomes* Ignacio.

Political documentary, 1970–75

The landmark documentary *La batalla de Chile* ('The Battle of Chile', 1973) directed by Patricio Guzmán focused on the overthrow and assassination of Salvador Allende in Chile on 11 September 1973 by General Augusto Pinochet. Of the footage, 95 per cent was filmed directly by Guzmán and his camera team, the Equipo Tercer Año. The external footage which was incorporated into the documentary consisted of (i) the filming of his own death by Leonardo Henricksen; (ii) the filming of the jets flying over the presidential palace (which came from Pedro Chaskel who filmed them from his Cine Experimental offices); (iii) the bombing of La Moneda palace (which belonged to a German film collective, Hayowsky and Sceunmann Studios); and (iv) some stills derived from Noticiarios de Chile Films.[37] Everything else was filmed by Guzmán himself – this is made clear in the various images where we catch the sound engineer or Guzmán himself on camera. These scenes lend authenticity, providing an excellent example of the strengths of what Bill Nichols

has called the interactive documentary.[38] Guzmán has described how the film developed:

> The 'screenplay' thus took on the form of a map, that we hung on the wall. On one side of the room, we listed the key points of the revolutionary struggle as we saw them. On the other side, we would list what we had already filmed . . . So we had the theoretical outline on the one side and the practical outline of what we had actually filmed on the other.[39]

By emphasizing five aspects of the economic life of the country (Hoarding and the Black Market, Parliamentary Boycott, Student Disturbances, The Trade Unions Go on the Offensive, The Copper Mine Strike), Part I of the documentary draws attention to the worsening relationship between the workers and their bosses, between Allende's government and the United States, and the struggle between the office of President Allende and the opposition-dominated Congress. But its most effective feature is the way that it manages – through the use of apparently unplanned interviews, the rawness of the emotions expressed, the abrupt camera movements – to suggest that a crucially important series of historical events is being recorded for posterity before our very eyes. Part II employs a chronological frame in order to structure its message. The struggle is Allende and the people versus the Christian Democrat Party and the military. It begins with footage of the first attack on La Moneda which occurred on 29 June 1973 and follows the dramatic events of the subsequent summer of discontent, with each new event punctuated by the date of its occurrence, and finally concludes with footage of the bombing of the presidential palace on 11 September. The focus of Part III is a reflection with the benefit of hindsight on the lessons learned during Salvador Allende's political experiment.

The most impressive feature of *La batalla de Chile* is the use of filmed interviews. In an interview with one of Allende's supporters who expresses her support for Alianza Popular, the hand-held camera moves effortlessly from her face to the ice-cream in her hand, providing a sense of unplanned spontaneity. The camera is 'curious' and becomes a roving eye keenly observing everything around it. At a later meeting of Allende sympathizers the camera flits from face to face, creating a fluid,

One of Pinochet's supporters in *La batalla de Chile* (1973).

dynamic sense of reality before our eyes. On another occasion we are led into the home of a Christian Democrat sympathizer; we see her coyly not wishing to answer all the interviewer's questions, and yet her coyness is belied by the wealth surrounding her. As a result of the camera panning around the room it seems almost redundant to ask her why she is in favour of the opposition. Objects speak louder than words.

One of the filmed incidents for which the documentary is justifiably famous is the 30-second sequence in which the cameraman, Leonardo Henricksen, filmed his own death, shot by one of Pinochet's soldiers. There are two versions of the same event. The version which occurs at the conclusion of Part I focuses on a soldier in a truck who notices the camera and begins firing; one of the bullets hits its target, and the camera falls to the ground and blurs over. The second version, which occurs at the beginning of Part II, shows the same soldier firing from the truck at the camera, but now it appears that the fatal bullet is fired not by the soldier but by his military superior. In an interview Guzmán explained why he decided to use both versions. The first, he says, is the unedited footage which was recovered after the event in Henricksen's camera. The second was footage which had been edited and was subsequently broadcast on national TV and on international media, and Guzmán suggested that, though it appears to have been edited, he decided to retain it because it showed that the real guilty party was not the soldier but his superior who had ordered him to open fire.[40] The first version had a 'raw' truth, the second a 'poetic' truth; not for nothing did Chris Marker work on

Jorge Sanjinés working with non-professional actors in Kaata, Bolivia, in 1969.

the editing of the film. One of the strengths of *La batalla de Chile* was, indeed, that it was able to combine the two levels – the 'raw' and the 'poetic' – thereby providing a blueprint for the future of the potential expressiveness of the documentary genre.[41]

3
Nation-image (1976–1999)

The emergence of the protagonist-as-nation genre – what I have called the 'nation-image' paradigm in this chapter – in Latin American film from the mid-1970s until the end of the millennium grew out of what might be called an 'officialist' reading of Latin America's historical reality, which was itself predicated on the 35mm film paradigm. In order to produce films such as *La historia oficial* ('The Official Version', 1984) and *La frontera* ('The Frontier', 1991), as well as justify the significant investment involved – especially in Latin America – it was important for films such as these to be seen as relevant to and, ideally, representative of the nation's citizens. And thus it was that the 35mm paradigm of the 1970s to 1990s tipped Latin American films into a tried and tested genre of the 'national drama'. This filmic stereotype proved to be resilient during this period. Even in the late 1990s the Argentine cultural critic Beatriz Sarlo found that Latin American films were viewed with 'sociological eyes'; a young Argentine film director Sarlo knew had screened his film at a European film festival and 'the critics at the festival told him that this type of film was European territory, and that they expected something more political from a Latin American film'.[1] Barred from artistry and railroaded into the political camp, Latin American film during this period made some important advances – María Luisa Bemberg's *Camila* (1984) was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Film and Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* won precisely this distinction in 1985[2] – but Latin American film was still unable to shake off its role as the echo chamber of what was happening elsewhere, in Hollywood or Europe.

The nation-image film, 1976–89

La última cena ('The Last Supper', 1976), Gutiérrez Alea's first venture into the world of Technicolor, sought to use the historical account of a slave revolt as a metaphor of Cuba in the 1970s. The basis of the historical account by Manuel Moreno Fraginals, is as follows:

> His Excellency the Count de Casa Bayona decided in an act of deep Christian fervour to humble himself before the slaves. One Holy Thursday he washed the feet of twelve negroes, sat them at his table, and served them food in imitation of Christ. But their theology was somewhat shallow and, instead of behaving like the Apostles they took advantage of the prestige they thus acquired in their fellow-slaves' eyes to organise a mutiny and burn down the mill. The Christian performance ended with rancheadores (hunters of escaped slaves) hunting down the fugitives and sticking on twelve pikes the heads of the slaves before whom His Excellency had prostrated himself.[3]

Gutiérrez Alea's film sought to interrogate the very nature of slavery:

> The aim is to question the distorted and prejudiced image of the slave which was created by the culture of the oppressor, as well as revealing in all its complexity the uneven and contradictory traits of the slave's personality, created as a result of his social subjugation: his simultaneously realistic and superstitious spirit, his mix of distrust and credulity.[4]

The film does this mainly through a gradual demystification of the character of the Count. Whereas the establishing scenes of *La última cena*, for example, allow the viewer to take up a sympathetic view of the Count (as opposed to the barbaric slaves, and the brutal Foreman), we gradually realize that his life is based on a facade. While his act of washing his slaves' feet seems to be based on humility, this is later shown to be merely a show when he reveals his merciless side and orders his 'disciples' shot, and their heads put on pikes to commemorate the foundation of a new church. In his *Dialéctica del espectador* ('The Viewer's Dialectic'),

Gutiérrez Alea discusses the two main inspirations for his work: Bertolt Brecht, from whom he derived the notion of the distancing-effect, and Sergei Eisenstein who inspired the idea of montage as conflict.[5] Titón, for example, uses these two techniques in order to force the viewer to reflect upon the contradiction at the centre of the Count's existence. There are two good instances in the film. The first occurs in the long drawn-out scene in which petals are spread on the floor, accompanied by loud rousing music, which comes just before the scene in which the Count washes the slaves' feet, echoing the Last Supper. The audience is drawn into the Count's mind: we see his highly emotional caressing of the flowers; the music drives up in a crescendo; we capture his sense of pain and delight as he contemplates the statue of Christ. We are brought down to earth with a bump, however, because the scene is followed by a long silence, which is then abruptly punctured by the sound of laughter of a slave as his feet are bathed, and tickled in the process. Another similarly bathetic scene occurs again when, during the Maundy Thursday evening meal, the Count tells the story of St Francis, which justifies suffering as the only true religion. Again his account is accompanied by grand, melodramatic music. Since we do not see anyone's face but the Count's, we assume that the slaves share his expression of love for others. The music is followed by an ominous silence. And then the slaves simply burst out laughing because they have been told to 'enjoy' their beatings. Another good example of ironic contrast occurs when the Count's story of the Last Supper is spliced with references to the Carabalí tribe who practise cannibalism. Contrasts between sequences of this kind are good examples of what Eisenstein meant by conflict within the work of art. They force the viewer to reassess his or her views about religion, mysticism and suffering. One is forced to perceive directly the conflict between the two worlds. We therefore experience the work of art dialectically.

Gutiérrez Alea uses the hand-held camera as an additional weapon of his demystificatory armour. His cameraman Mario García Joya was very helpful in this process, as Titón has suggested:

> His camera is very steady. In addition, Mayito uses some devices that he has invented. For instance, he or an assistant places a rod underneath the camera when it must be stationary, and that rod is removed when the camera must begin to move and follow

a character. His inventions work marvelously. You see a tremendous fluidity in these different mises-en-scène. I would go so far as to say that the fluidity is even more perfect than if he had used a Steadicam, because when a Steadicam is used the camera floats a bit.[6]

The film is skilful at presenting the social pyramid within Cuba in colonial times. At the pinnacle of the social pyramid is the Count, closely followed by his cruel foreman, Manuel. The priest and the sugar master act as intermediaries with the subaltern classes; the priest, for example, pleads with the Count to keep to his word about letting the slaves have Easter Day off, but to no avail. Don Gaspar, the educated French sugar master with a scientific mind, mocks the priest's statement to the effect that the slaves have witchcraft while the Church has truth, saying both systems deal in magic. He compares what he is doing (changing sugar beet into white refined sugar) to the Christian theory of redemption of souls (purged by suffering in the fires of hell). He also seems to be mocking, perhaps, the racist basis of the Church and society's views by drawing attention to the fact that he is producing white out of black. He tells the

Workers making sugar in *La última cena* (1976).

priest that the real secret to the refining process is in the little bag that contains 'caca de poule' (humour at the priest's expense). Don Gaspar is a Voltaire-like figure, well aware of the excesses of colonial administration.

The slaves are also individualized, ranging from the old man, Pascual, who is powerless and could not accept freedom even if it were given to him; to the deferential subaltern, Edmundo, who works as the Count's personal servant, and refers to the other slaves as 'negroes'; Antonio, who is desperate to exchange his labours in the sugar cane fields for the easy life in the Big House as a domestic servant; the proud subaltern, Bangoché, from the Congo, a man who is now a slave but was once a king, and therefore has innate dignity; and the dancer who, as his story about the son who sells his father rather than being sold himself aptly illustrates, is the witty rather than rebellious subaltern, namely the slave who works the system rather than challenging its raison d'être. Sebastián reminds us of the personification of Caliban as described in Roberto Fernández Retamar's influential 1971 essay *Calibán*, since he is at once magical and rebellious. His association with magic is confirmed when he takes out a pouch containing powder which, he suggests, will ensure that he will not be caught, and blows it over the Count as if asserting his power over him. His rebelliousness is epitomized when, after being asked by the Count, '¿Quién soy, Sebastián?' ('Who am I, Sebastian?'), there follows a pregnant pause before Sebastián spits in the Count's face. The Count accuses him of being a Judas figure, and this is in a sense confirmed when he murders Manuel during the uprising (in other words, this scene recreates the 'murder' of 'Christ').

But Sebastián is more enigmatic than this. As Titón has pointed out:

> Sebastian, the rebellious negro, assimilates the count's language so as to be able to address the slaves as well: the myth of the body of Truth and the head of Lies is his response, which will cause the demise of the values and reasoning which the count presents as infallible.[7]

The African parable he tells his audience, which is about the struggle between 'Truth' and 'Lie', is a postcolonial version of the struggle between colonized and colonizing peoples which acts as a counter-response to the count's parable of human suffering:

> When Olofi made the world he made it complete with day and night, good and bad. Truth and Lie. Olofi was sorry for Lie, who was ugly, and gave him a machete to defend himself. One day Truth and Lie met and had a fight. Lie cut off Truth's head. Headless, Truth took Lie's head. Now Truth goes around with the body of Truth and the head of Lie.

In order to demonstrate this idea, Sebastián picks up the pig's head, which is on the table, and places it in front of his own. The clear message is that the Christian West has been passing off lies as truth in order to guarantee its ideological superiority over the rest of the world. Sebastián furthermore tells the group of slaves that he has magical powers which allow him to change into an animal or a tree – an idea reinforced by the final, uplifting sequence of the film. In that concluding sequence we see Sebastián running free through the jungle, and his flight is spliced with lush, flowing images of the jungle (a flying bird, a running river, running horses), and accompanied by stirring, triumphalist music. We do not know Sebastián's fate but these final images and sounds of the film suggest freedom and a return to the laws of nature, as if to suggest that Sebastián has finally escaped his political oppressors. *La última cena* has been interpreted by Jerome Branche as 'a metaphor for Cuba's present struggle against contemporary Yankee imperialism',[8] and the promotion of an Afro-Hispanic legacy in Cuba provided the film with a specific contemporaneous relevance.

Pixote: a lei do mais fraco ('Pixote: The Law of the Weakest', 1980), directed by the Brazilian director Héctor Babenco, was a gritty filmic mix of the fictional and the documentary. Babenco first wanted to make a true-to-life documentary about a particular reform school but when the school directors found out what he had in mind they refused to cooperate. Thus it was that Babenco decided to write a fictional treatment, and he based his account on José Louzeiro's documentary novel *Infância dos mortos* (1977).[9] Louzeiro's novel – strictly speaking a work of documentary fiction, the 'romance-reportagem' – was, as Randal Johnson has pointed out, based on a chilling event: dozens of imprisoned minors were taken from Rio de Janeiro prisons and pushed over a cliff near Camanducaia, a town in the state of Minas Gerais.[10] The film that Babenco eventually made was stark; *Pixote* can be described as the Brazilian version of

Buñuel's *Los olvidados*, since it offers a dispiriting vision of the lives of a number of young men who are outcasts in a large Latin American city (this time it is Rio de Janeiro) and whose lives soon lead to crime. The film opens by evoking the language of the documentary. As Marc Lauria points out:

> The film begins [in the version released in the U.S.] as a documentary. Babenco addresses the camera, and states that 50 per cent of the population in Brazil is under 21, and this includes three million homeless children. Brazilian law prevents anyone under the age of 18 to be prosecuted for criminal offences; older criminals prey on these youths. Babenco, standing in front of a slum area, then introduces Fernando Ramos da Silva, who lives there as 'Pixote' in the film proper.[11]

Babenco and Jorge Durán used Louzeiro's *Infância dos mortos* to create a screenplay that differed in some key respects from the original documentary novel. As Johnson points out, 'Pixote ("Pichote" in Louzeiro) is a minor character in Louzeiro's book who dies in the first chapter, gunned down as he and other marginalised children run through a cemetery to avoid being abused by pimps and drug pushers.'[12] A number of the film's episodes, such as the prostitution/hold-up racket, are taken straight from the novel, though it is a character called Dito who is the protagonist. The theme of the corruption of the authorities likewise originated in the book, and Sapato is a prime example of this. While he pretends to be on the boys' side, he does not attempt to punish the perpetrator of the rape committed during the night. The children are 'disappeared' as soon as there is a problem; they become pawns in a larger social power game. When Sapato says to Garatão that he will soon be eighteen, and that he 'doesn't exist', his words may be interpreted on a number of levels. First of all they are meant as encouragement in that Garatão's record will be wiped clean. But they also suggest that in society's eyes the delinquents really do not exist. On a third level, they are a chilling omen of what will happen to Garatão that night – he will be murdered. Sapato knows that this is going to happen and is a willing accomplice in the murder. Following in the footsteps of Italian neo-Realism, the children in *Pixote* were non-professional actors, and were given crash

courses in acting before and during the shoot: 'Babenco trained each child from scratch, thereby avoiding the stereotypical mannerisms that likely would have come from using professional child actors.'[13] The actors were allowed to extemporize and change the script. As Babenco said, 'They gave me the right words, the right sentences.'[14] Sometimes their input even changed the perspective on a given episode; as a result of Fernando's input, for example, Pixote was drafted in as a witness to the sex scene between Chico and Sueli; in the original script he had been in another room.[15] As Marc Lauria puts it, 'Incidents in *Pixote* don't seem to be set up for the cameras; the film seems to follow the characters no matter what they do or say.'[16]

The film is split into two. In the first half we witness Pixote's life in the reformatory, and in the second we see the gang on the outside. Much of what was being worked out in the first part of the film (social culpability, police corruption and so on) is left unresolved. The culpability of the authorities, though underlined, never re-enters the frame, subverting the Hollywood formula in which evil is routinely punished with retribution. As in a picaresque novel where the energy is in the episodic, ever-moving nature of the narrative, Pixote simply moves on to pastures new. It is interesting that Roberto, the singer, should stay behind. He does so for empirical reasons in that he has a broken leg. But his refusal to leave can be interpreted on a symbolic level as well. For him, the world of the imagination – the world of the asylum and the institution palliated by unrealistic dreams – is better than the real world.

The film repeatedly re-enacts the drama of the dysfunctional family, focusing in particular on the absence of any positive female figures. Sexuality is never presented within a normative context. It appears either in the guise of prostitution – there are two prostitutes in the film, Deborah and Sueli, and both offer sordid views of sexuality – or male rape (as when Garatão rapes the young boy in the reformatory), or male–male sex (when Dito and Lila have sex soon after their arrival in São Paulo). Mothers are either absent (as in Pixote's case, since he does not know where his mother is, as his grandfather comments during the prison visit) or they are two-timers (as Dito's mother shows herself to be, when she seduces Sapato), or they are heartless prostitutes (as Sueli reveals herself to be, when she kills her foetus with a knitting needle). The protagonists, Pixote foremost among them, search for their mothers

in different people, but find 'false' maternal figures. Lilica, for example, attempts to 'mother' Garatão and then Dito. Deborah attempts to mother Pixote (she asks him if he wants to come round and play with her son, thereby in effect mothering a motherless boy), and Sueli does the same. But this gesture always leads to failure or death. The relationship between Sueli and Pixote is the most poignant since there are a number of pointers that suggest that the mother–son relationship is central to the film's symbolics. In a visually unpleasant scene – the abortion in the toilet – Sueli says that the aborted child looks a bit like him. This scene is especially important since, as the concluding scene of the film makes clear, she pointedly refuses to be his mother. She sends him out into the world; he is, in a sense, not only a dead man walking (we are reminded of the pertinence of the title of the documentary novel on which the film is based – *Infância dos mortos*), but, as it were, an abortion walking. Sulia has, in fact, expelled Pixote from her home, her womb, and has condemned him to an early death.

As one might expect in such a gritty film, it is the grim harvester who provides the symbolic resonance behind the different scenes. There is, for example, a deliberate parallelism between the needle used by Garatão to torture Fumaça early on in the film and the needle which Sueli uses

Sueli breastfeeds the protagonist in Babenco's *Pixote* (1981).

to kill her unborn child. The torture of Fumaça thereby becomes, in retrospect, a grim omen of what is to follow. This parallelism has a number of implications for our interpretation of the film. Given that Garatão is a rapist, and given the phallic resonance of the needle, it is clear that a web of association is being built up that aligns male sexuality with torture, rape and death. This pessimistic assessment of human sexuality is balanced by the repetition of the motif of the absent mother. The terror of this film does not lie in what we have witnessed so much as in what we imagine will happen next. In the final haunting image we see Pixote walking along a railway track back to Rio de Janeiro, with a gun in his belt. Having murdered three people already, he is a 'hardened' criminal, though still a minor, experienced in violence, extortion, the use of firearms and with a worryingly precocious interest in sex. The fate of the lead actor in the film after its release in 1980 is testimony to its verisimilitude. Fernando Ramos da Silva, who played Pixote, was persistently harassed by the police, arrested on two occasions, tortured and, on 25 August 1987, gunned down by police.[17] The film *Quem matou Pixote?* ('Who Killed Pixote?', 1996), directed by José Joffily, was made about the life of the actor who was gunned down, revealing this to be a story that runs and runs. There is, indeed, no greater testimony to the true-to-life grittiness of Babenco's film.[18]

Camila (1984), directed by the Argentine María Luisa Bemberg, was one of the highlights of the 1980s. The story of the love affair at the core of the film was a contentious one which reflected badly on an important figure of Argentina's republican history (Juan Manuel de Rosas) as well as the Church. For that reason every director since then had been forbidden to tell the story of the love affair between Camila O'Gorman, the daughter of one of Argentina's richest landowners, and a local priest, Uladislao Gutiérrez, which occurred from 1847 to '48.[19] But Bemberg prevailed, and her re-enactment followed the historical account closely. The film shows Camila (Susú Pecoraro) seducing and eloping with the local priest, Ladislao (Imanol Arias), to Goya City where they live happily until discovered by Padre Gannon; they are subsequently captured and shot to death on General Rosas's orders, with the complicity of Camila's father, Adolfo (Héctor Alterio). Though *Camila* cost a mere $370,000 to make,[20] it became one of the biggest box office hits of all time in Argentina, surpassing takings of the recent

The execution of the lovers in *Camila* (1984).

Hollywood blockbuster *E.T.,* released in Argentina at the end of 1982. Bemberg's aim in filming *Camila* was to create an Argentine melodrama:

> [it] was shot in a highly romantic style because I felt that in that way I could really hit the audience, in the heart and in the pit of their stomach. Melodrama is a very tricky genre, because at any minute it can turn into something sentimental, which I detest. So it had all those little tricks, such as the handkerchief, the gold coin, the priest who's sick with love, and the thunder when God gets angry. They're all like winks at the audience.[21]

Camila, indeed, has all the hallmarks of what Warren Buckland has identified as the 'fallen woman melodrama', namely the melodramatic film which focuses on a woman who commits a sexual transgression, is expelled from the domestic space and is eventually punished with death.[22] There is a struggle in the film between Ladislao's more traditional notion of love (evident when he turns back to God) and Camila's more subversive view of love which, for her, is tied to the personal, the erotic. As Ruby Rich has suggested, Bemberg used 'seamless art cinema (lush, transparent, and perfect periodicity) in the service of a new idea'.[23]

Beneath its more obvious melodramatic level as a tragic love story set in mid-nineteenth-century Argentina, *Camila* allegorizes the events of the Guerra Sucia ('Dirty War') of the mid-1970s to early 1980s, in which thousands of political subversives were captured by the authorities and 'disappeared'. Bemberg has pointed to the dual level of the film in interviews: 'It's a very Romantic story in which fear and menaces are also present, something which we've very much lived with in Argentina and it's there, just beneath the surface.'[24] The film led to what has been called a 'collective catharsis'. As John King has pointed out, 'Over two million people wept at the story of Camila O'Gorman, which was their story.'[25] There is a sense, though, in which this film is also Bemberg's own story. Bemberg once declared that she became a film director because she wanted to give women the chance to speak rather than be spoken for: 'My films are an attempt to make women recognise themselves and learn more about themselves through the protagonists' predicament. This is my ethical commitment, helping them to be free.'[26] So the film is itself a blueprint for Bemberg's own rebellion against her family, her society and sexual oppression. In her films, Bemberg had said that she wanted to 'propose images of women that are vertical, autonomous, independent, thoughtful, courageous, spunky', and this is certainly the case with Camila.[27] After all, it is she who is portrayed as initiating the love affair. Traditional versions of the story had an innocent woman seduced by a lecherous priest. 'I think it was a good idea to have the priest seduced by the woman', remarked Bemberg wryly. 'It helped me with the Church.'[28]

Quite consistently throughout the film, Camila takes centre stage and thereby marginalizes Ladislao. When she discovers from the doctor, for example, that she is pregnant, we cut to a shot in which Camila is screaming through her prison bars to Ladislao that they have a child. The camera shows Ladislao's cell; we see him in long shot, hunched over, clearly oblivious to her words. Our sympathy is engineered for Camila during the prison sequences with a standard director's trick – the microphone is placed close to Susú Pecoraro's throat and we hear her nervous breathing and swallowing; the viewer is thereby transported inside the character's bodily space. The denouement of the film implies that the unborn child that Camila is carrying when she is executed allegorizes the fledgling nation of the 'unitarios' mercilessly crushed by Rosas's iron

fist. The very presence of the voice-over – '*A tu lado, Camila*' (At your side, Camila) – which, as suggested above, is an overt allusion to a Romantic notion of post-corporeal love, itself suggests a transcendence of those powers which have crushed Camila's and Ladislao's vulnerable bodies. The film, therefore, has a positive political message. The way in which it actually came into being points not only to its political resonance but also to the sense in which its gestation period accompanied the birth of a new political era. As Lila Stantic recalls:

> It's 2.30 in the morning and I'm with María Luisa . . . Marta goes off and comes back a few minutes later with the papers under her arm. In banner headlines all the papers proclaim: 'Argentina has invaded the Malvinas' . . . We did not know that at this precise moment the right conditions were being created for María Luisa's third film, *Camila*. This is because almost all the critics agreed that in María Luisa's films to date (*Momentos* and *Señora de nadie*), there was no belief in the possibility of love. This machista interpretation of María Luisa's female characters led me, a few days later, to throw down the big challenge: 'Now you have to do a love story. You have to do a love story. You have to tell the story of Camila O'Gorman.'[29]

The filming of *Camila* began – significantly enough – on 11 December 1983, the day after Alfonsín became the first civilian president in almost a decade in Argentina, when the country finally emerged from the nightmares of the Guerra Sucia.[30] This day also happened by pure coincidence to be the anniversary of the time when Camila and Ladislao eloped (it was on the night of 11–12 December 1847). These omens were not fortuitous, perhaps. *Camila* presents a positive ideological statement given the structural significance of its ending. The transcendence of death by virtue of love suggested by the voice-over must logically be seen as an allegory of the transcendence of the dirt of war through the hope inspired by the new democracy ushered in by the demise of the Guerra Sucia. Camila's child – the body of Argentina – dies in her womb but the voice-over of love ('*A tu lado, Camila*') suggests hope for the future, 'another rhythm of breathing and loving'.[31] *Camila* was the Academy nominee

Titón, Birri, Gabo and García Espinosa founding the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in Cuba in 1985.

for Best Foreign Film, and as such put down a marker for Latin American film which proved auspicious.[32]

The following year, 1985, *La historia oficial,* directed by Luis Puenzo, became the first Latin American film to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. It was as if the emperor's clothes that had adorned *Camila* in the previous year had now been stripped from Argentina's body politic – the truth of Argentina's Dirty War could now be told. As a result the Argentine film industry became famous overnight. *La historia oficial* specifically portrays and analyses the social conflict which produced the Guerra Sucia in Argentina from 1975 until 1982; it was a dirty war in which as many as 30,000 people were kidnapped and 'disappeared' (the so-called *desaparecidos*) by the military leaders. But rather than focus on the specifics of warfare between the military and the terrorists, Puenzo's film instead narrates the story of the abduction of the children of subversives who were adopted, once their parents had been 'disappeared', by higher echelons of the military establishment, and it does so by focusing on the drama of one particular child, Gaby. The action of the film centres on the gradual discovery by Alicia (Norma Aleandro), a history teacher in a secondary school, that the child her husband, Roberto (Héctor Alterio) – a high-ranking businessman with links to counter-espionage, the USA, and the military – gave to her some four or five years before the film narrative proper begins, was in fact illegally

abducted from her 'subversive' parents just before they were murdered. The genre invented by Puenzo to tell his story in *La historia oficial* was thriller with a political twist. It was a genre in which Latin American film directors would before long demonstrate great dexterity.

The enunciation of the narrative was engineered through three superb acting performances – by Norma Aleandro (who won the Best Actress award at Cannes), Héctor Alterio and Chunchuna Villafane (who won Best Supporting Actress at the Chicago Film Festival). The last of these plays Ana, who has returned to Buenos Aires after a number of years in exile. The film contains a superb scene in which Ana, through her laughter then her tears, tells Alicia how she was tortured, while Alicia listens to her account in stunned disbelief. The curious thing about the scene is that though the actress Norma Aleandro is stunned by Ana's account of her exile it is, in some ways, the account of Norma's own life: she was forced into exile on 21 June 1976 by a bomb which exploded at 3 o'clock in the morning beneath her apartment, followed by a threat telling her to leave the country within 24 hours and that if she did not do so she and her family were running a grave risk.[33] The superb acting in *La historia oficial* was supported by the use of three cinematic devices which enhance the expression of suspense in the film: blocking, the long shot, and montage-in-depth. The establishing shot of the film, for example, gives a hint of what is to come. We witness the playing of the national anthem in the school playground at which Alicia and Benítez teach, but for those viewers who expect a Hollywood-style

The anagnorisis scene in *La historia oficial* (1985), when Ana tells Alicia why she had to leave Argentina.

Roberto reveals he is a torturer in the final scene of *La historia oficial*.

master shot the results are rather surprising. The film begins with the title ('La historia oficial') being ripped up, at which point the camera focuses on a loudspeaker, and then – in an obsessively deliberate way – on the individuals in the school playground, but our view is consistently blocked by the concrete structure of the roof behind which the camera is placed. This blocking shot – that is, there is something interrupting the vision of the spectator from the main action – is an early indication that we will be seeing a behind-the-scenes version of Argentine reality. This establishing shot, indeed, draws attention to one of the key techniques used in the film, namely, the snares which offer a tantalizing view of an event but do not tell us the whole truth,[34] in order to support the basic message of the film – that the state conceals its actions from its citizens' gaze. It is not coincidental, indeed, that the first time we see Roberto (soon after the establishing scene described above) he is not viewed openly but glimpsed obliquely. Our view of him is blocked by the wall behind which he scurries after entering the house. In pragmatic terms his actions are understandable since he is attempting to hide the doll he has bought for Gaby but, as the film progresses, the prevalence of blocking takes on a more sinister resonance. He is the character, after all, whom we know the least about. As we realize at the conclusion of the film when, quite out of the blue, he attacks his wife, his past may have been very murky indeed.

That Puenzo has deliberately chosen to block the viewer's perception at certain crucial junctures is suggested by what might at first seem innocuous decisions about *mise-en-scène*. Thus, when we see Roberto and Alicia in long shot leave the restaurant and walk along the pavement to their car (we hear their conversation, and can see that Alicia is visibly agitated about being insulted as a result of her infertility), it is striking that the camera tracks them from behind a hedge on the other side of the road; the long shot combined with the fact that we can hear their voices perfectly – as if they were close by – inevitably evokes the atmosphere of secrecy and covert spying, techniques that were part and parcel of the culture animating the Guerra Sucia.

Pointing in a similar direction to the use of blocking and the long shot is the use of montage-in-depth, which underlines the mystery of the state's machinations. The best example occurs when Alicia turns up unexpectedly at Roberto's office and witnesses a showdown between her husband and a business associate called Macchi. Macchi loses his temper and shouts at Roberto that he is not prepared to take the blame for the latter's misdemeanours. Roberto tries unsuccessfully to placate him, and we see Macchi being bundled into a nearby office. The following sequence of shots is seen via Alicia's point of view; the door is opened and then closed, and a final glimpse of what is going on in the room terminates when the lift door shuts. One of the men seems to have his hand around Macchi's neck: is he loosening his collar or strangling him? Because the scene in the office is portrayed as occurring in the most distant segment of cinematic space from the camera-eye – namely further away than the lift door, than the intervening space in the office and than the office door – it is difficult to pick out what precisely is happening. We find a similar exploration of cinematic space in the scene towards the end of the film set in Roberto's home when he is entertaining his American guests and Argentine business associates. The older American is complimenting Gaby; the younger American is on the phone trying to locate his wife who seems to have disappeared; Roberto is boasting about his prowess in the business world; and his two associates are playing pool. This sequence is characterized by deep focus cinematography in which 'a great deal of space is not only visible within a shot but also clearly in focus';[35] in particular three cinematic spaces – foreground, middle ground and background – are combined in such a way that the viewer

used to the Hollywood formula of explicit foregrounding may be confused. Should we be listening to the Argentine men arguing about their pool game or listening to the younger American who is becoming increasingly agitated as his attempts to locate his wife prove unsuccessful? Where is Alicia? To further compound the viewer's disorientation, at one point in the sequence the 180-degree rule is broken, and we see the American behind rather than in front of Roberto. Though not as dramatic as the scene is which Macchi is bundled into a nearby office, this sequence demonstrates Puenzo's deliberate use of montage-in-depth in order to underline the theme of the deliberate blocking of the truth. Like the next-of-kin of the *desaparecidos*, we don't know what to look for or where to look.

Macu, la mujer del policía ('Macu, the Policeman's Wife', 1987), directed by the Swedish-Venezuelan Solveig Hoogesteijn, tells the story of Macu (María Luisa Mosquera), a pretty woman whose husband Ismael (Daniel Alvarado) is accused of murdering her lover Simón (Frank Hernández), along with his two friends. The film opens with the news that the three young men have disappeared; a police investigation begins which is intercut with a reconstruction of Ismael and Macu's courtship. Not only is Ismael an older man, but he first met Macu when she was a young child, the daughter of a woman he had an affair with. He was thus, in effect, 'grooming' Macu for later on. Based on the true story of a policeman, Argenis Rafael Ledezma, the so-called 'Monster of Mamera', who was jailed for murder in 1980 for 30 years, *Macu, la mujer del policía* is a brooding, atmospheric drama about sex, revenge, police corruption and paedophilia which reaches its inevitable climax when Macu testifies against Ismael.[36]

La boca del lobo ('The Lion's Den', 1988), directed by the Peruvian Francisco Lombardi, tells the story of the brutal struggle between the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the army in Peru which lasted throughout the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, and claimed more than 10,000 lives. Lombardi's film is set in a fictional, prototypical town in the Andes, Chuspi, and shows the struggle descending into the seventh circle of hell. A lieutenant, Basulto (Antero Sánchez) captures a Sendero Luminoso suspect, has him questioned and then decides to hand him over; their truck is attacked and Basulto and two of his men are cruelly murdered. A new tougher lieutenant, Iván Roca (Gustavo

Bueno) is sent in, and he begins terrorizing the local population, demanding information from the mayor, killing the cow of a villager he suspects of collusion, Faustino Sulca, and the film describes the descent into violence which leads to the rape of a young girl (Julia) by one of the recruits, followed by the machine-gunning of a number of the villagers next to a remote gulley. The strength of the film lies in its depiction of an absent enemy – the Sendero Luminoso are never seen – which makes of it something of a psychological thriller. The denouement shows the army turning in on itself; it concludes with a duel of Russian roulette between Iván Roca and Vitín Luna (Toño Vega), who beats the lieutenant but then decides to turn his back on the mindless violence perpetrated by the army.[37]

The life-as-journey movies of the 1990s

The 1990s opened with a sharp shock to the system of Latin America's film world. The decade was the 'era of de-nationalisation of the [large] screen', as Erica Segre suggests.[38] In Brazil in 1990, President Collor de Melho stopped all funding of the national Brazilian film industry, and as a result Embrafilme, the national film body, was forced to close its doors.[39] At the same time private investment was encouraged and, indeed, grew apace as the decade progressed. The picture was a similar one in Mexico. At an international film conference held in Cancun in 1993 a new law was promulgated (the so-called Nueva Ley Federal de Cinematografía) whereby the National Film Institute (IMCINE) would 'now only subsidize 60% of the costs of production', with the other 40 per cent to be raised by the director through private funding.[40] The release of *Como agua para chocolate* ('Like Water for Chocolate') in Mexico City in February 1993 was a test case of just how much the cinematic landscape had changed. Following the new law to the letter, Alfonso Arau's film had split public/private funding, which consisted of a state grant from IMCINE, along with private funds from Aviasco, a Mexican airline, the Mexican Ministry of Tourism and the State Government of Coahuila where the film is set.[41] It was an unprecedented success. *Como agua para chocolate* first became a hit with Latin American audiences before being exported abroad; it went on to be a Hollywood blockbuster.

The secret of its success – apart from its heady mixture of exoticism, sex and magical realism – was that, from the outset, it was a film

that had its eyes firmly on its audience. *Como agua para chocolate* owed as much to the financial jolt that the Mexican economy received in the early 1990s as to the determination and perseverance of its director (Alfonso Arau) and author (Laura Esquivel). While a number of critics have pointed out that *Como agua para chocolate* offers up rather stereotypical images of men, women, Mexico and the United States, thereby pandering to some of the easy clichés of Hollywood's filmic idiom, there is no escaping the fact that it allowed Latin American cinema a new lease of life, a passport to being taken seriously as an artistic product on its own merits. That the success of *Como agua para chocolate* was not dependent on the Hollywood machine is suggested by the fact that it was not even nominated for Best Foreign Film. It had transcended the category. There were many, though, particularly those of the old school such as Arturo Ripstein, who disagreed with the new policy – Ripstein famously went to see President Zedillo in 1997 on behalf of IMCINE to complain about the lack of state funding: 'A country without film is a sad country' were his words – but the paradigm shift was leading to irreversible changes in the film industry in Latin America.[42]

Bemberg's *Yo, la peor de todas* ('I, the Worst of All', 1990) provides a twentieth-century reading of the life of a seventeenth-century Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Assumpta Serna), her struggle with the archbishop (Lauturo Murúa) and her burgeoning love for the vicereine (Dominique Sanda). Bemberg used this story in order to create a new reading of feminist culture. In a lecture given in 1992 at the University of Warwick, Bemberg referred to the social conditioning which often holds women back:

> We are limited by psychological conditionings that conspire against women: an absence of inner confidence and the authority to restrict cultural models; an absence of the motivation needed to create art, like a competitive spirit, the urge to differentiate yourself through what you do, and a liking for complex issues. On top of this man has cannibalized womanhood and tries to speak for both.[43]

In her film Bemberg seeks to wrest culture back from its patriarchal mould, and the area in which she questions the official story of Sor Juana

Inés de la Cruz's life relates to her sexuality. There is no historical evidence of a sexual relationship having occurred between Sor Juana and the vicereine, Leonor María Carreto, Marchioness of Mancera, but Sor Juana did write some sonnets in her honour and, as Emilie Bergmann suggests, 'Although Paz insists she could not possibly have had homoerotic desires, her lesbianism is taken for granted by Latino/a and Spanish American lesbian and gay poets who have adopted her as their patron saint.'[44] A lesbian structure of feeling is suggested in two scenes in which we witness a declaration of love. In the first the vicereine looks into Sor Juana's eyes, asks her to loosen her bodice for her and then makes a number of innuendo-laden comments: '*qué bellas eres cuando te apasionas*' (how beautiful you are when you become passionate) and '*no se puede negar la naturaleza*' (you can't deny nature). The second, more forthright scene occurs when the vicereine, after her husband has allowed her to ignore the archbishop's prohibition to stay out of her library, asks her to take off her veil: '*quítate el velo. Es una orden*' (take off your veil. That's an order), after which she plants a delicate kiss on her lips. As Rosa Sarabia suggests, not only the vicereine but the viewer is thereby constructed as a voyeur of Sor Juana's beauty.[45] As Bemberg herself once suggested in an interview, there are so many 'splendid women' portrayed on the big screen that it would not be surprising if 'we all ended up being lesbians'.[46] Given that the vicereine is at one stage provided the fictitious name of María Luisa by the viceroy just as they are about to leave for Madrid, it is perhaps not to stretch the point too much to see the vicereine as a projection of Bemberg herself who wished to 'de-nun' Sor Juana. The gushing words uttered by the vicereine (*'¿Cómo es Juana, con ella misma, cuando está sola, cuando nadie la mira?'*, What is Juana like, with herself, on her own, when nobody sees her?, and – after the veil is removed – '*esta Juana es mía, solamente mía*'; this Juana is mine, mine only) could also be the words of the artist, seeking in Pygmalion fashion to create a new image of womanhood for the modern day. In an interview Bemberg has suggested that she chose Assumpta Serna to play Sor Juana not only because of her beauty and poise but also because she would give the role a contemporary feel, which is what she wanted: 'You forget that the character is a nun because she gave the role a contemporary feel'.[47]

But just as intriguing as these scenes in which innuendo speaks volumes, are those in which the poems for which Sor Juana is famous are

recited in voice-over, and are framed within a new context, thereby transforming them into examples of *littérature à clé*, with the key being the lesbian subtext. Perhaps the best example of this occurs when the sonnet 'Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo . . .', a love poem traditionally seen as a stylistic exercise[48] but now imbued – given the view the camera provides of the vicereine just to the right of the frame – with the sense of being a love poem to the vicereine. This is also the meaning given to the poems by the small committee set up by the archbishop to determine what to do with Sor Juana. Though given a lead by Octavio Paz,[49] Bemberg pursues some imaginative juxtapositions which breathe a new, ambiguous light into what were seen as rhetorical exercises. It does not matter so much whether the interpretation is an historically justifiable one (Paz, for example, sees the love poems more in terms of feudal submission than of eroticism);[50] what is more important is that it allows Sor Juana's transgression to be understood in a more contemporary sense.

The setting of the film is sparse and minimalist, the colours used contrastive. The archbishop often appears surrounded by darkness, while Sor Juana and the convent are often bathed in light, thereby echoing the atmosphere of a baroque painting. As Bemberg said to Félix Monti when they were filming, 'Félix, remember Zurbarán's light.'[51] One critic has noted that, 'Through long, static, shots, confined staging, and minimized tracking, Bemberg creates a visual metaphor for the pervasive repression and claustrophobia of the times, as Sor Juana struggles to defy social convention and pursue an independent life as an intellectual and artist.'[52] The film was not made on location; instead Bemberg used a film set. The blues, greens and greys used to convey the convent give it, indeed, almost an art deco feel.[53]

La frontera ('The Frontier', 1991), directed by the Chilean film director Ricardo Larraín, is based on the actual mechanism whereby an individual who disagreed with Pinochet's regime – instituted in 1973 and continuing up until 1990 – was sent away to a remote part of the country such as the Dawson Islands in the Magellan Straits, becoming in effect a *relegado* (an internal 'exile'). Rather than focusing on physical torture or the murder of the *desaparecidos*, Larraín's film concentrates on a more subtle type of torture, one which concerns the basic problems of the everyday life of a *relegado* living in a remote unnamed village in southern Chile, as presented through the life of Ramiro Orellana (Patricio Contreras), in

order to create a film in the political-absurdist mode. The progressively more absurd rules that the two officials invent in order to make Ramiro's life difficult – forcing him to sign an attendance book at regular intervals to prove that he has not absconded, as well as write out his name in capital letters to confirm the signature, even though there can be no doubt about his identity since, as Ramiro himself points out, there are no other *relegados* anywhere around – have a black humour about them. The camera uses a blue tint to underline the ubiquity of water, and thereby focus on the main image of oppression as experienced by the Chilean people – a slow, painful death by drowning. The blue tint also acts as an omen of the tidal wave which, like the apocalypse, destroys the life of the community. The tidal wave, though it has some Amerindian and biblical resonances, is more appropriately interpreted as a concrete embodiment of the uncontrollable forces of fascism – in Spain in the 1930s and in Chile in the 1970s – that invaded and destroyed people's lives (Maite and her father, Ignacio, are in some senses more desperate victims than Ramiro). A central image in *La frontera* which offers a counterpoint to that of the tidal wave is the statue of the founders of Chile which is rescued at the end and becomes a point of anagnorisis, in that it represents the 'Abrazo de Maipú' – the embrace between José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins after the Battle of Maipú, which secured Chilean independence – symbolizing the bringing together of the two cultures – the Spanish and the Mapuche – rather than the destruction that fascism has brought about. This is in contrast to the official culture represented early on in the film by the absurd posing of the two detectives in front of the national flag for the 'family' snap. The true history of Chile – its authentic roots – has been buried under the tidal wave of fascism.

Perhaps more important than the film's rather obvious symbolism are its quirky, surrealist motifs, such as the diver who is seeking to avert the catastrophe of the tidal wave by finding the hole at the bottom of the ocean. In a world which has been rendered absurd by its political devastation, the diver's logic is as sensible as anyone else's. Since *La frontera* was released when Pinochet still possessed political power (he had stepped down from the presidency in 1990 as the result of a plebiscite but was still head of the armed forces), the director judiciously chose to make his point in a displaced rather than direct manner. Even so, the film ends on a clear message of repudiation. Ramiro is filmed repeating his denunciation

The 'family' snap in *La frontera* (1991).

to the press at the conclusion – the very words that got him into trouble in the first place.

El viaje ('The Voyage', 1992), by the Argentine director Fernando Solanas, is similar to *La frontera* in that it is a political-absurdist film about the desire to discover national identity. We follow Martín (Walter Quiroz), a hybridly ironic mix of Argentina's liberator José de San Martín, and prototypical revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, as he journeys on his bicycle (rather than motorbike) through Argentina (the Straits of Magellan, Patagonia, Buenos Aires), the Andes, Machu Picchu, Cuzco and its Holy Temple, the Amazon, a goldmine in Brazil and finally Mexico. While searching for his father, Martín discovers that Latin America is drowning in debt – which is demonstrated naturalistically (matches are sold to him one at a time in the Peruvian Andes), graphically (Brazil's president as well as his advisors are trussed up) and metaphorically (Argentina is under water, clearly echoing Larraín's *La frontera*). The film begins as a self-discovery fable and gradually turns into a tale of the absurd: the weather forecast predicts the world will 'tilt', and then it appears to do so; because Argentina is under water, people have started selling 'plots of water'; the Argentine president is called Dr Rana (Dr Frog), suggesting that he will swim when others drown – an obvious dig at Carlos Menem; while in Brazil there is an External Debt truck which

arrives in the Andes in order to demand contributions from the peasants through its loudspeakers. Though humorously melodramatic, *El viaje* was not to everyone's taste. There were those who pointed to its 'overt allegorical strategies'.[54] Others did not agree with Solanas's left-wing politics: 'Fernando Solanas's outspoken contempt for Carlos Menem's administration in Argentina nearly cost him his life – an assassination attempt confined him to a wheelchair for most of the post-production on *The Voyage*.'[55] The conclusion of *El viaje* – Martín appears to discover his father in Mexico, driving a truck carrying an enormous image of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent – appears tacked on, and indeed it was since Solanas ran out of funding towards the end of the project and was only able to secure help from the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía on the condition that one of the filmed sequences would take place in Mexico.[56] The main moral of the *El viaje* – as suggested by its conclusion – is that Latin America should seek its cultural destiny not by espousing Western values but rather by delving into its Amerindian past.[57]

Cronos (1993), directed by Guillermo del Toro, is a vampire movie with a difference. The 'cronos', a gold contraption developed by an alchemist in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1536, containing a scarab whose sting brings eternal life, ends up in an antique shop in 1937. The antique owner is Jesús Gris (Federico Luppi) – a grey and therefore 'imperfect' Christ,[58] who suddenly finds that he regains his youthful looks after

Jesús Gris looks closely at the 'cronos' in *Cronos*.

being stung by the contraption. There is, however, a nasty side effect in that he is also overcome by an uncontrollable desire to drink human blood. A local businessman, Dieter de la Guardia (Claudio Brook), suspecting that Jesús Gris now possesses the 'cronos', sends his psychotic nephew, Angel de la Guardia (Ron Perlman), to retrieve it. Casting an American actor as the villain of the film was a 'little wink' from del Toro to the audience since it was a reversal of the stereotypical evil Mexican in many U.S. movies.[59] Though pushed off a cliff in a car by the evil nephew and declared dead, Jesús Gris is resurrected, escaping in hilarious fashion from the morgue just before he is about to be cremated, and eventually kills the evil nephew as well as Dieter de la Guardia. He is cared for by his granddaughter, Aurora Gris (Tamara Shanath), but when Aurora is injured and he sees her blood, the scene is set for the final triumph of evil when he approaches her, echoing the iconic scene from James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) when Frankenstein's monster kills the young girl by the lake. (Guillermo del Toro mentions this scene in an interview as the prototypical scene of the horror film, the thrill of which he had always wanted to re-create in his own films.[60]) However, in a twist of the monster movie prototype, Jesús Gris refuses to kill her, and instead destroys the 'cronos' by smashing it with a rock. *Cronos* thus concludes on a note of redemption, and thereby in effect re-Catholicizes vampirism.[61]

Guillermo del Toro found it very hard to make *Cronos* because of spiralling production costs. When it first went into production it was officially Mexico's most expensive film with a budget of $1,500,000 (although it was soon overtaken by Arau's *Como agua para chocolate*) and it cost an extra $500,000 as a result of the interest payable on the original loan.[62] But the biggest obstacle was the reluctance of the Mexican Film Institute to fund the film. In the 1990s, as del Toro has pointed out, the film industry in Mexico was 'sadly very corrupt' in that there was an older generation of Mexican film directors who, because of government funding, were on their tenth or eleventh film (del Toro does not mention names but he is thinking of directors such as Arturo Ripstein whose eleventh film, *La mujer del puerto*, came out in 1991) while a younger generation (del Toro mentions his contemporaries Alfonso Cuarón and González Iñárritu) had to go through many years of 'internship' working for nothing on a number of films, including those of their friends. He and González Iñárritu often discussed their fear that theirs would be the

'skipped' generation.[63] But Del Toro was so persistent that after four years the Mexican Institute of Film eventually relented and allowed *Cronos* to go into production.

It was a labour of love. The cinematography, the camera angles and the editing all showed an attention to detail that was more in keeping with an art house film than a 'popular culture' movie about a Mexican vampire. The colour coding, for example, is used purposefully in *Cronos* to indicate the identity of different characters as well as the stages of the alchemical process. As del Toro has pointed out, there is an abundance of black in the film, reflecting the importance of black as the symbol of base matter in alchemy, and grey – as well as black and white – is often used to echo the protagonist's name (Jesús Gris) and suggest the drabness of his existence. Jesús Gris's house – and his wife – are colour-coded in warm earth tones while the villains are colour-coded in blues, cold greys, blacks and whites. Red, given its importance in the alchemical cosmology, is only used in connection with Aurora, who often wears very striking red dresses, although it also appears in association with Jesús and his shop at certain crucial junctures.[64] But when the final cut of *Cronos* was pre-screened, one of the heads of the Mexican Film Institute told the team that because the film was a vampire movie it would simply fade into obscurity in Mexico.[65] But *Cronos* went on to win nine out of the eleven Mexican academy awards, as well as the Critics' Week Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.[66]

The individual who dismissed *Cronos* as a vampire movie was wrong in that Guillermo del Toro's clever film could not be simply typecast in this way. *Cronos* mixes genres innovatively, combining the vampire movie formula with black comedy, leading to a blend of genres that del Toro, as he points out in an interview, has always aimed for in his Spanish-language films. This contrasts with his English-language films which, as he discovered to his personal cost when he later made *Mimic*, have to be less experimental because of the pressures of the Hollywood system.[67] The black humour in *Cronos* is death-fixated and intrinsically Mexican. As Guillermo del Toro has pointed out:

> The film is very Mexican in the sense that what is portrayed in it could only happen in Mexico. The undertaker who is chewing chewing gum and eats a banana . . . is so careless that he loses the

> dead body . . . There is also the idea that death can be seen in such a natural way by a young girl. So it's a film of its time and place.[68]

Some details identify *Cronos* as a Mexican historical allegory. The branding iron mark which can be seen on Jesús Gris's hand at the beginning of the film, for instance, is a reference to the practice of the Inquisition in the early colonial days of New Spain (as Mexico was then known) of branding individuals regarded as potential heretics.[69] But *Cronos* is not only about Mexico's past, it is also about the 'horrors' of modern Mexico. The film was released in 1993 and, as del Toro has noted, the vampire motif had a political resonance:

> The insect was vampirizing the victim, the mechanism was vampirizing the insect, in turn the industrialists are vampirizing Mexico. I just wanted to create an ever-growing chain of vampirism in the movie. That's why you can see all the signs on the street and the newspapers in several languages, because this movie was made in a pre-NAFTA Mexico and NAFTA was seen by me as essentially a form of vampirism.[70]

It was meant as an allegory of what was occurring at that time on the political front in terms of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) in which the United States was cast as the vampire-villain feeding off its victim, Mexico. The international acclaim received by *Cronos* in Cannes in 1993 as well as in other international festivals caught the Mexican authorities off balance and, in retrospect, was the first major step in the internationalization of Latin American cinema.

In many ways 1993 can be seen as the year in which Mexican cinema came of age. It was the time it achieved a profound impact on the festival circuit with *Cronos* as well as breaking into the commercial world of film with Arau's *Como agua para chocolate*. While Arau's film was conspicuous by its absence from the list of international awards – though it did win eleven Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures awards – it was the first film, as noted above, to demonstrate that Latin American cinema could punch above its weight in terms of box office success. *Como agua para chocolate* was screened continuously in Mexico City in six cinemas for six months.[71] In the seven months following its February 1993 release

it made $6.1 million in Mexico, which at the time was the most ever made by a Latin American film.[72] It then made $21,665,468 in sales in the United States.[73] The film has a conventional plot based on the trials and tribulations of star-crossed lovers. The authoritarian Mamá Elena (Regina Tomé) offers the young suitor, Pedro (Marco Leonardi), her eldest daughter, Rosaura (Yareli Arizmendi), in marriage rather than her younger daughter, Tita (Lumi Cavazos), whom Pedro really loves. Pedro agrees to marry Rosaura just to be close to Tita. Pedro and Tita's love is finally allowed to blossom after Rosaura's death but their lovemaking leads to Pedro's death during orgasm, and Tita then commits suicide by eating matches.

Como agua para chocolate is, in essence, a feminine counter-version of the Mexican Revolution, offering a kitchen's-eye view of those turbulent years, at odds with the masculinized version that focuses on soldiers and battles. As Esquivel has said in an interview: 'The kitchen, to me, is the most important part of the house. It is a source of knowledge that generates life and pleasure.'[74] The most striking characteristic of the film, as its title suggests, is the use of food as a metaphor for human emotions.[75] There are various examples of this: Tita's tears which drop into the cake as it is prepared for Rosaura and Pedro's wedding meal produce a fit of vomiting in the guests; Tita's blood, mixed with rose petals, when added to the quails, produces an aphrodisiac reaction in those

Tita looks adoringly at her beloved Pedro in *Como agua para chocolate* (1993).

who consume it, an idea that is repeated in the last chapter of the novel when Tita makes *chile en nogada* and unleashes an orgy of the senses. While the link between food and sex is a traditional one, *Como agua* manages to extend this association in unexpected ways. Perhaps the best illustration of this occurs when Tita has to sing to the beans to make them cook. In a house, so popular knowledge suggests, where there have been arguments, the food is 'annoyed' and therefore will not allow itself to be cooked. Most intriguing of all is the way in which the emotions are depicted as emanating from the body like a cloud, influencing everything in their path. Such is the cloud of rose perfume which emanates from Gertrudis's body and attracts Juan, the *villista*, to her, at which point, following a romantic stereotype, they sail off into the sunset on a horse.

Como agua was an undeniably popular film and, as Tomás Pérez Turrent put it, 'The response to the film by the world public was "chocolate" while the response of the critics was "water".'[76] John Kraniauskas argues that the film 'retreats from the masculinized terrain of high politics and the battlefield and concentrates our attention on the so-called private sphere of a household run by woman'.[77] In terms of its success at creating visual solutions to the plot, *Como agua* has a mixed scorecard. The parallelism between sadness and salt, as expressed through the central image of the tear, for example, appears in a set of successful visual solutions. Thus the film opens with a close-up of an onion, and this motif is explored through the tears that the foetal Tita is heard to shed in the womb, the salt in the amniotic fluids that gush over the kitchen table when she is born and the salt used in the meals – a set of associations paralleled in the subsequent scene when Tita's tears drop into the batter from which the wedding cake will be made. To counterbalance this, the visual expression of the parallelism between fire and love, such as when Gertrudis's shower bursts into flames, or when Tita and Pedro finally make love at the conclusion of the film, is less convincing. But the overall significance of *Como agua para chocolate* is clear; it was a stepping stone for Latin American cinema which showed that a Latin American film director could create a commercially successful film which spoke directly to audiences across the subcontinent mainly in the language of magical realism, and thereby plotted a new course between the Charybdis of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano and the Scylla of state funding.[78]

The following year a film was released which, like *Como agua para chocolate*, used food as a metaphorical avenue with which to delve into deeper issues. Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Fresa y chocolate* ('Strawberry and Chocolate', 1994) caused quite a stir when it first came out since it treated a subject hitherto taboo in Cuba: homosexuality. In Cuba the film was so popular that 'impatient crowds broke down a cinema's doors to see it'.[79] It showed continuously in Havana for eight months and 'became the first Cuban film to be nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Film; the year before it won first prize at the Berlin Film Festival'.[80] The film is based on Senel Paz's novel *El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo* ('The Wolf, the Woods, and the New Man', 1991). Gutiérrez Alea read the novel, saw its filmic potential and asked Paz to write him a script.[81] Like *La frontera* and *El viaje*, *Fresa y chocolate* sought to investigate the notion of nationhood through allegory spiced with humour. *Fresa y chocolate* portrays Cuba at a crossroads; it was released at a time when Cuba was beginning to experience the beginning of a deep and lasting crisis, the so-called 'Periodo Especial'. The film portrays the conflict between two opposing lifestyles. On the one hand we have David (Vladimir Cruz), a young idealistic member of the Communist Party, who is a little naive as his lack of knowledge about products such as whisky, and his ignorance of literary figures such as Mario Vargas Llosa and John Donne, suggest. On the other we have Diego (Jorge Perugorría), a tortured artist who is disillusioned with the Communist regime, fascinated with the foreign and the exotic, and – to boot – gay. The plot focuses on how these two contradictory notions of Cubanness are eventually brought together – epitomized by the hug between Diego and David at the end of the film.

Both Diego and David in a sense come nearer to each other politically, though this political rapprochement is represented in terms of physical attraction. Everyone, it seems, is in love with David. Diego, as the older, gay man, has completely fallen for David's innocent ways and his good looks. Nancy (Mirtha Ibarra) is also in love with him, and even prays to the African deities to allow her to keep him for just one year. Vivian (Marilyn Solaya) offers him love, and sex, even though she has recently married. Even his hardline Communist friend Miguel wants to keep him for himself and the Communist Party, and accuses him of being gay when he senses that he has begun to lose him towards the end of the

The famous hug in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Fresa y chocolate* (1993).

film. David in a sense represents Cuba, and all of these different aspects of Cuba – the gay artist, the conventional young woman who plays safe, the ageing prostitute, the Communist youth – are 'in love' with David, and desire him. He seemingly holds the key to Cuba's future.

While it is possible to read *Fresa y chocolate* as a pro-gay film (in the sense that David, by hugging Diego at the conclusion of the film, appears to accept his gayness), a number of pointers in the film belie this reading. Gay sexuality, at a number of key junctures, is replaced by feminine sexuality in the film, thereby ostracizing homosexuality as a phantom presence which is always offstage. As Paul Smith suggests:

> By narrativizing explicitly, if discreetly, the oppression of homosexuals in Cuba, the film states a domesticated mise-en-scene in which the unspeakable horrors of the other scene (out of shot, behind the door) are allowed to emerge into visibility, but only on condition that they do not trouble the heterosexual spectator.[82]

This heterosexual normativization of homosexuality appears to be elicited triumphantly by the final, sexless hug of the film between Diego and David. But there is one discordant note in this apparently seamless heterosexualization of gay sexuality, and this is the scene in the shower

in which Miguel – otherwise presented as the macho, homophobic Communist – in a gesture that seems very much out of character, pats David on the buttocks. Though this is the only point at which a same-sex gesture is hinted at, it is nevertheless significant that it should be initiated by the character whose actions and words up until this point suggest he is ruled by homosexual panic. This surely must be a deliberate wink at the viewer as well as a humorously ironic jibe at homosexual panic.

The viewer, knowing the anti-gay credentials of Fidel Castro, is bound to ask if Gutiérrez Alea was making an anti-Castro statement in this film. This was certainly the view taken by the author of the film preview which appeared in *Variety*: 'Filled with malicious swipes against the Castro regime, *Fresa y chocolate* is a provocative but very humane comedy about sexual opposites and, with proper handling, could attract the *Wedding Banquet* crowd in cinemas worldwide.'[83] Castro, indeed, was asked if he liked the film but he did not comment.[84] On one level, then, the film can be interpreted as an apology for the freedoms of the West. Diego's interest in John Donne and Mario Vargas Llosa, his taste for tea and whisky, are not presented as reprehensible in the film; indeed, it is David's naivety that is more susceptible of criticism. As Stephen Wilkinson suggests, the film 'seems to be making the point that Cuba and Revolution are very much the less for having lost the contribution that figures like Diego could make'.[85] With hindsight though, it is clear that *Fresa y chocolate* went further than this. The letters that have recently been published by Titón's widow, Mirtha Ibarra, suggest that he used the gay narrative as a vehicle to express his dissatisfaction with the government. Gutiérrez Alea, throughout his career, always asked hard questions of the regime, and indeed never shied away from criticizing certain reprehensible aspects of it. But this was always in the sense of constructive criticism rather than outright attack. In a letter Gutiérrez Alea wrote to Alfredo Guevara on 14 September 1977, he referred to the problems he had been facing in ICAIC:

> I do not find in the organisation to which I am linked professionally the necessary stimulus allowing me to develop my capacity to work effectively, and this at a time when furthermore I feel that I am achieving the right level of artistic maturity so I can give the very best of myself.

He also referred to the problems that had plagued him over the years:

> We now have the privilege of hindsight allowing us to look back and see that those errors and clumsy actions have proliferated abundantly during that period in all areas and especially in the cultural field where they have been nothing less than scandalous.[86]

If it is possible to extract the gay ingredient from Diego's dilemma as portrayed in *Fresa y chocolate*, it is not possible to do the same with regard to the artistic ingredient. Most of Diego's conversations with David, indeed, revolve around art. He has an intense relationship with Germán (Joel Angelino), but this is expressed as much through art as through homosexual love. It is Diego's artistic integrity which persuades him to write the letter that leads to the loss of his job. The strategy Diego uses, indeed, to seduce David is via art – namely, recreating a Lezama Lima meal as described in chapter VII of Lezama Lima's novel *Paradiso* (1966). *Fresa y chocolate* is, thus, not a pro-gay film. Alea agreed with Senel Paz, the screenplay writer, that 'the main theme of the film is not so much about homosexuality as about intolerance'.[87] All these pointers, as well as the fact that homosexuality is never visually articulated, suggest that Diego is more artist than gay man.[88]

Some of the difficulties in extrapolating the ideology of Gutiérrez Alea's film were brought home to me in the lively exchange which occurred between Mirtha Ibarra, his widow, and Edmundo Desnoes, the co-scriptwriter of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, in a roundtable I chaired in the Bloomsbury Theatre on 10 November 2009, as part of the London World Film Festival. The disagreement focused on the use of the word 'contradictorio' (contradictory) with regard to Titón's work. Desnoes said the film was contradictory but Ibarra flatly disagreed, saying Titón would never have used such a term to describe his work. In the light of the letters, as well as the portrayal of Diego's artistic dilemma, it is likely that *Fresa y chocolate* is a coded film that expresses Gutiérrez Alea's last testimony about the struggles he had experienced as an artist expressing his vision of the world in Cuba.[89]

Espinosa's *Reina y Rey* (1994), a low-budget film inspired by one of the classics of Italian neo-Realism *Humberto D.* (1952), co-directed by Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini, and dedicated to the latter, manages

to offer an allegory of post-Perestroika Cuba through the simple story of the friendship of an elderly woman, Reina, with her dog, Rey.[90] There is hardly any criticism on this film; as far as I am aware there are only two short reviews, one in the *New York Times* by Sandra Brennan, the other for *Vanity* by Lisa Nesselson.[91] As the first half of the film unfolds it becomes clear that the main dilemma Reina faces is whether she is able to keep her dog. There is so much poverty in Havana that everyone has had to give up their dogs and cats. Reina takes Rey to the *asilo canino* (dog kennels) but, horrified by what she sees – the gas chamber where the dogs are sacrificed – she cannot bring herself to hand him over. In a touch of black humour the chamber cannot be used because the kennels have run out of gas. It soon becomes clear that these apparently accidental or realist details are being used to build up a sense of modern-day Cuba as a concentration camp where people are dying.[92] As one character says to Reina when she is worried that Rey has not returned in the evening: '*los perros son como los seres humanos*' (dogs are like human beings). Underscoring the parallelism between human beings and dogs we note the title in which Rey functions almost as the surrogate husband of Reina. The world of the dogs throws light on human society in a number of ways. Apart from the *asilo canino,* we see stray dogs around Havana's streets or fighting for food on the local rubbish tip. It is important to note that Rey is fed on two occasions by *jineteras* who are walking along the Malecón, as if to suggest that his only source of food is via the illicit earnings of prostitution.

Yet Rey is not simply a synecdoche of the human condition, although he does have this role in the film. Reina would rather starve than give him up. When Rey disappears Reina becomes distraught, so much so that, as a neighbour remarks, she would never even consider leaving Cuba as long as there is the slightest possibility that Rey might come back. It is only once Reina finally accepts that Rey will not be coming back that she is enticed by the offer of her former boss, Carmen, to leave Havana and go and live with them in Miami. But when walking through Havana with Carmen and her husband, just as she has made up her mind, Rey suddenly appears. Reina turns back but does not see him since her view is blocked by some passers-by. Indeed Rey's symbolic function within the plot is underscored at the conclusion of the film. Inexplicably, Reina refuses at the last moment to go with Carmen, who drives off with her

husband in their car to the airport and thence to Miami without her. A young man on a bike asks Reina if she is waiting for Rey, and she says she is. The film concludes with the word '*esperándolo*' (waiting for him), making it clear that Rey is a symbol of Cuba's future utopia. Reina, the film seems to be telling us, is waiting for a better future and in this she becomes paradigmatic of all Cubans. It is important to underscore that this longed-for future does not include the Americanization of Cuba. When Carmen and her husband arrive in Havana they turf Reina out of the bedroom, reclaim their former house and do all the touristy things such as drinking champagne at the Tropicana club. There, Carmen gets extremely drunk while her husband goes off with a black prostitute. To cap the colonialist metaphor they attempt to take Reina back to Miami since they know they will be able to exploit her good habits (hard work with little complaint). This is the point at which the film becomes an allegory for the feared future invasion of Cuba after Castro's death. The thought does not even cross Carmen's mind that Reina might not want to go to Miami. Carmen and Reina fall out when Reina says that her real name is Yolanda – at which point Carmen blows her top. This can be interpreted as the anagnorisis scene in which Reina's true Cuban revolutionary self is revealed. No longer the submissive maid, kowtowing to her rich superiors, Reina becomes Yolanda, the authentically Cuban and revolutionary woman.

Reina y Rey can, as suggested above, be seen as an allegory for the dilemmas faced by modern-day Cuba, or more particularly the Cuba of the 1990s. In a witty use of the language of film to make a semantic point, the first half is filmed in black and white in order to underline the drabness of Cuba with its poverty and endless queues, while the second half, from the point when the 'bosses' arrive from Miami, is filmed in colour. As García Espinosa has pointed out: 'The use of black and white was motivated by the desire to show in an oblique way the drabness of the old woman's life; the colour coincided with the appearance of the couple from Miami and underlies the false colour of their lives.'[93] Indeed, by breaking one of the cardinal rules of Hollywood filmmaking, Espinosa is able to make a clever point about how Cuban reality is schizoid. As one character says, 'All people in Miami do is think about people over here, while all people here do is think about people in Miami. Nobody's happy.' It is of course imperfect cinema, but imperfect cinema with a difference, since

the signifier of the film – the decision to film in unadorned black and white – becomes a new political signifier. What better way of expressing the poverty of communism and the glitz of capitalism than to film in black and white first and then in colour?

But there is of course more to this than meets the eye. The technique was clearly inspired not only by *The Wizard of Oz* but also by the more subtle play between black-and-white and colour in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, which had come out the previous year in 1993, where the only object filmed in colour is the little girl's red coat as she is led off to her premature grave. As often occurs in Espinosa's films, there is a self-reflexive component to this artistic choice. Espinosa essentially deconstructs the positive value we normally associate with colour, for it becomes representative of the exploitative language of American capitalism. Miami, as it were, invades in colour. Thus, in the last scene when Reina decides not to go to Miami with her bosses, the colour of Cuba changes. Filmed with a blue lens, Reina's residence is now somewhere in between the black and white of Part I and the Technicolor of Part II. It is chiaroscuro of Cuba, waiting and hoping; '*esperándolo*'. We may recall that the anagnorisis scene occurs during the *apagón* (blackout). In effect, when the lights go out we are left with black and white. Colours recede from the film's mental screen. It is significant, too, that Reina's moment of defiance occurs when we see her in the shadows; we see her silhouette swaying backwards and forwards in the rocking chair, an image perhaps of 'dialectical' rebellion. The film offers a concrete embodiment of the dialectical tension of Cuba in the mid-1990s, caught between two discourses and two ways of being. Indeed, the chiaroscuro as filmic signifier suddenly turns into a political signifier before our very eyes. While *Reina y Rey* can, at a primary level, be seen as a homage to Italian neo-Realism, on closer inspection it reveals itself to be an artful interrogation of the different codes – black and white realism versus glitzy Americanism – which moves it beyond the dead-end rhetorics of neo-Realism. It is here that the stamp of Espinosa's arresting filmic vision – its dialectical chiaroscuro – may be divined.

Moebius (1996), by the Argentinian director Gustavo Mosquera, tells the story of the enigmatic disappearance of a train on the Buenos Aires underground. An investigator, Daniel Pratt, is called in to solve the mystery and he 'discovers' that a perimeter extension line – which was in the original plans for the underground drawn up by Pratt's topology

professor, Hugo Mistein, but apparently not built – has mysteriously appeared, causing the network to behave like a Möbius strip. Pratt stumbles across a station called Borges, gets on a train and finds that it is the missing train carrying the disappeared people, and driven by his old topology professor. The train then accelerates along the Möbius strip to infinity. Though a little heavy-handed in terms of its allegorical dimension, *Moebius* offers a new sci-fi take on the 'disappeared' of Argentina's Dirty War.[94]

Central do Brasil ('Central Station', 1998), directed by Walter Salles, is the most reflective of the nation-image Latin American films of the 1990s. The search for national identity is articulated in a more layered manner than in *El viaje* and *La frontera* since it has been split between two characters, a middle-aged woman, Dora (Fernanda Montenegro), and a nine-year-old boy, Josué (Vinícius de Oliveira), who are thrown together by circumstance: Josué's mother, Ana (Soia Lira) dies in a car crash, having only just employed Dora as her scribe to pen a letter to her husband living in Estrela do Norte. Dora first of all takes Josué to an 'adoption agency' and is paid 1,000 reis for her efforts, but she is persuaded by her best friend Irene (Marília Pêra) that Josué might be killed and his organs sold. Dora returns to save him from his fate. At this point *Central do Brasil* turns from being a thesis-film about the fate of children in modern Brazil to become a road movie in which Dora and Josué search for their roots, a search that, especially as expressed by Josué, takes on a universal dimension.[95] As Walter Salles pointed out in an interview:

> With *Central Station*, the story was basically about the recuperation of one's identity and also, an investigation into the country's identity. In Portuguese, the words for father (*pai*) and country (*pais*) are almost the same. So the search for a father in *Central Station* is also a search for a country.[96]

As a result of this search, Josué is reunited with his half-brothers, Moisés (Caio Junqueira) and Isaías (Mateus Nachtergaele), Dora eventually comes to terms with her unrequited love for the father who rejected her, and Ana and her husband Jesus are united in letter if not in body (Dora leaves Ana's letter to Jesus on the mantelpiece next to Jesus's letter to Ana under their portrait).

Josué is forlorn in *Central do Brasil* (1998) when he fails to find his father.

The film draws strength from its documentary roots (as Salles has pointed out, he made documentaries for about ten years before he took up making fiction films),[97] as suggested by the two letter-writing sequences in which we see a succession of faces narrating the details of their lives in the manner of a vox pop, and the spontaneous filming of a religious festival:

> So when we were location scouting I saw these religious processions and I really felt that that was so descriptive of what was inherent to that part of Brazil that we needed to plunge it in, so we rewrote the screenplay as we were filming it. I think with road movies, especially, you should leave the door open for things like that to happen. And also, you should be porous to the people that you encounter on the road. You have to be open to let those persons change you and change the fabric of the film.[98]

There are also some strong cinematographic solutions to support the evolution of the plot – the bars which crowd the frame in the early Rio scenes which express entrapment in the big city, Dora's helplessness expressed by the goat which limps with its front paws tied up past her when she is overwhelmed by despair at the bus station, and the shot of Dora crying and clinging to the bars of the bathroom window when she

sees the *evangelista*'s truck drive off, abandoning her to her fate. Colours and focus are also used effectively. As Salles explains:

> What we aimed to do in this film was to lose the focus at the beginning, just focus on the human drama of the faces in the station, so that as the story gets closer and closer to the father, and by extension, the country, you start to see – through the changing depth of focus – that the reality and the country is actually a lot denser than you first thought. At the same time, the colour also changes – I don't know if you realised, but it's very monochromatic. We opted to use very brown colours at the beginning, and it's as if the characters are unable to see more than that. And the closer they get to the heart of the country, the more colours they start to perceive. So the idea of recuperating one's identity is linked to the idea of having a more wide-ranging sensorial palette as well.[99]

Last but not least, this film has a number of strong acting performances, particularly by Marília Pêra and Fernanda Montenegro, who was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role. *Central do Brasil* was the most successful of the nation-image dramas of the 1990s in Latin America even if, in cinematic terms, it was in effect the end of the line for this particular genre.[100]

4
The Slick Grit of Contemporary Latin American Cinema (2000–2014)

This book has argued that Latin American film has experienced a number of paradigm shifts in which, following Gilles Deleuze's theorization, the movement-image that characterized early action-drama film was superseded by the time-image which emerged with the advent of neo-Realism. In *Cinema 2*, for example, Deleuze referred to the way in which neo-Realist cinema had led to a re-drawing of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary:

> As for the distinction between subjective and objective, it also tends to lose its importance, to the extent that the optical situation or visual description replaces the motor action. We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility.[1]

Whereas in the movement-image the imaginary was subservient to the real, the time-image led to a new parity between the real and the imaginary as if they were 'running after each other', to use Deleuze's words. It is important to recall that, despite the paradigm shift identified by Deleuze when realist cinema succumbed to neo-Realism (and the movement-image was superseded by the time-image), both types of film

were analogue in the sense of creating an 'analogue' pre-digital image of reality. The process whereby the optical-sound space of cinema achieved a gradually increasing autonomy from the economy of the real as the century progressed increased in intensity exponentially as a result of the digital revolution. That revolution gave rise to a new motor driving the geometry of optical-sound space: digital technology. Indeed, the ease with which digital editing produced a new sound-look for digitally recorded reality led to a re-juggling of the relationship between the real and the virtual.

The digital-image

Although the first recorded attempt at building a digital camera took place as long ago as 1975,[2] it was only in 1998 that the first digital film was released.[3] The advantages of digital film – the drastically reduced costs of equipment as well as film, the portability of the cameras, the convenience of having the response to light determined automatically by the camera sensor, the ability to see the actual images that are captured immediately on the set, as well as the greater flexibility provided by digital post-production – led to more and more film directors turning away from 35mm to digital, including Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*), Francis Ford Coppola (*Youth without Youth*), George Lucas (*Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*), Guy Ritchie (*Sherlock Holmes*), Michael Moore (*Bowling for Columbine*), Martin Scorsese (*George Harrison: Living in the Material World*), Lars von Trier (*Antichrist*), Robert Rodriguez (*Once Upon a Time in Mexico*) and Steven Soderbergh (*Che*). Indeed digital cinematography's acceptance was canonized in 2009 when *Slumdog Millionaire* became the first movie shot mainly in digital to be awarded the Academy Award for Best Cinematography. The highest-grossing movie in the history of cinema, *Avatar* (2009),[4] was not only shot on digital cameras but most of its box office earnings came no longer by film but by digital projection. Latin America has also been part of this shift towards the digital. In 2010 the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film was won by *El secreto de sus ojos* ('The Secret in Their Eyes'), which had been shot digitally.

What are the implications, we may well ask, of this shift towards the digital in the twenty-first century? Patricia Pisters in *The Neuro-Image:*

A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture (2012) has argued that the digital turn in culture at large is characterized by three trends: networked software cultures, deep remixability and database logic.[5] For his part, William Brown has argued in his important book *Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age: Supercinema* (2013) that the digital turn has had profound implications for the evolution of film in the twenty-first century. First, it has led to a new conception of space:

> Digital technology has brought about a conception of space in cinema that differs from that of the analogue. If limits in the size of film reels and the bulk of the camera have led mainstream narrative and analogue cinema to cut, then digital cinema seems to be predicated upon continuity . . . By showing space and all that fills it as a single continuum, as opposed to a space fragmented by objects, digital technology suggests the inherently connected nature of those objects and their surroundings.[6]

This has profound implications for the ways in which human beings interact with that space of their environment in the world of digital cinema, as Brown has argued:

> If space becomes indistinguishable from all that fills it, then this brings about a fundamental decentring of the figures that fill that space. That is, characters in digital cinema no longer stand out as unique agents against the space that surrounds them, but instead become inseparable from that space. The result of this 'decentring' is a minimizing of anthropocentrism in digital cinema. This logic is not only expressed by the way in which digital cinema increasingly features prominent characters of a nonhuman nature, but also by the way in which environments take on prominent roles in films, including mainstream films.[7]

This in turn has meant that the way time is projected in digital cinema has also been transformed:

> If digital cinema does not need to cut, thereby suggesting a continuity of space, and if analogue film was required to cut,

> then a similar logic applies to time . . . time becomes 'spatialized' in a certain way, such that we can pass from 'real' to 'imagined' or 'remembered' moments without necessarily seeing a marked division between them. In this way, time – both lived, 'real' time and imagined time – also form a continuum.[8]

As we shall see this sense of a new continuum within the projection of space and time in digital film is evident in Latin American film of the twenty-first century. It soon became clear, for example, with the release of *Amores perros* ('Love's a Bitch') by Alejandro González Iñárritu in 2000 that Latin American cinema had embarked on a new course which combined the political grit of its 1960s Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano roots with slick editing and acting performances that converted it into one of the major players of World Cinema in the new millennium. Latin American film has been able to attract new audiences because of a new, dynamic filmic mix; it combines the 'grit' associated with its heyday of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and '70s – typified by directors such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, Jorge Sanjinés and Patricio Guzmán, renowned for their gritty, subaltern-focused view of the world – with the 'slick' camerawork of masters such as César Charlone (the cinematographer of *Cidade de Deus*) and Alejandro González Iñárritu. Films such as these used the innovations of digital editing to bold effect, and combined that wizardry with a fresh new type of acting; thus the actors of *Cidade de Deus* were 'real' gangsters of Rio de Janeiro (rather like the 'real' postman of Italian neo-Realism) who had been taught to act over the course of one year, and Gael García Bernal was a virtually unknown actor when he starred in *Amores perros*. The 'New' New Latin American film was typically located in a generic (often urban) non-national site akin to Deleuze's 'any-space-whatever',[9] thereby making a clean break with films of the 1990s which were located within a recognizably national space.

One additional feature of twenty-first-century films that distinguished them from their predecessors was that they were financed by private capital rather than state funds. Alejandro González Iñárritu sums up the new approach: he and his co-producer Guillermo Arriaga 'loathe the government-financed movie-making that seems to operate by the maxim: 'If nobody understands and nobody goes to see a movie, then

it must mean it's a masterpiece.'[10] These characteristics – exploration of the digital image, the social grit of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, slick digital editing, the use of non-professional actors, location within a non-national space and private financing – were, as we shall see, the essential ingredients of the 'slick grit' of Latin American cinema in the twenty-first century.

Amores perros was a bracing start to the new millennium. It was the culmination of a process of private financing for filmmaking in Mexico which began in the early 1990s – it was jointly financed by two private companies, Altavista (86 per cent) and Zeta Films (14 per cent), the latter González Iñárritu's own production company – coupled with a new vision for the millennium.[11] It traced an abrupt departure from the nation-state and life-as-journey narratives that had peopled Latin American films in the 1990s, as epitomized by *La frontera* (1991), *El viaje* (1991) and *Central do Brasil* (1998), in which the protagonist's journey represented the nation's transition from one status to another. It is noticeable, for example, that there are no visible architectural landmarks in *Amores perros* to indicate that the film is set in Mexico. González Iñárritu clearly wanted to deconstruct the stereotype; as he suggested in an interview:

> I am not a Mexican with a moustache and a sombrero and a bottle of tequila . . . Nor am I a corrupt cop or a drug trafficker. There are millions like me. And this is the world I live in and the one I want to show.[12]

The reality represented as a result is contemporary, generic and urban.[13] The use of virtually unknown or non-professional actors also contributed to the contemporary generic feel of the film.[14]

The facial recognition effect, which comes from seeing a well-known actor, is a comfort zone for the viewer that *Amores perros* sought to break down. The other main difference was that *Amores perros* portrayed youth/teenager culture rather than, say, the middle-age culture evident, broadly speaking, in the three films mentioned above released in the 1990s. Especially in the first segment of *Amores perros*, the reflective consciousness is squarely located within a culture characterized by rebellion, lawlessness and violence, expressed as much by the brutal struggle

The look that launched Gael García Bernal's career in *Amores perros* (2000).

between Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and his brother, Ramiro (Marco Pérez), as by the gruesome and close-up dogfighting. Another feature of the culture depicted, which had direct implications for its future sales and was initially seen by the distributors as a risk, was its lack of inhibitions about using profanities. The dialogue between Octavio, Jorge (Humberto Busto), Ramiro and Jarocho (Gustavo Sánchez) is gritty and colourful. As soon became clear, the film's X-rating, far from denting circulation figures, led to exponential sales as a result of the creation of a new niche within the market (youth culture + action + experimental + X-rating), which was launched as a result of its success at Cannes.

The most striking narratological innovation inaugurated by *Amores perros* in Latin American film was the use of three, interconnected plots, which was a radical departure from a conventional, linear plot (even with flashbacks). In order to solve the problem of having three plots, González Iñárritu and the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga came up with an ingenious filmic solution by creating an intersection – the car accident – at which the three life stories meet (or, indeed, collide), producing greater coherence by having the intersection viewed synoptically from different vantage points. Thus the car accident is first experienced by the viewer from within the truck which Octavio is driving (it concludes the establishing sequence of the film), it is then rerun at the conclusion of the first 'Octavio y Susana' segment, viewed from behind Valeria's car in

the 'Daniel y Valeria' second segment and perceived over El Chivo's shoulder in the third 'El Chivo y Maru' segment of the film. One of the golden rules of conventional filmmaking – that a scene should not be portrayed twice because it may confuse the viewer – is broken in order to provide a solution which leads to greater coherence in the plot. This solution also opened up in one fell swoop new pathways within cinematic space.

Extras – such as the old man who is seen in segment one threatening a rival with a machete if he comes near his dogs, or the middle-aged man whose wallet Ramiro grabs in the bank robbery scene in segment three – double as protagonists; the old man is revealed to be El Chivo (Emilio Echeverría), the hitman, in segment three, and the middle-aged man in the bank is Leonardo, the fixer who organizes the hit for Gustavo Garfias (Rodrigo Murray), the corrupt businessman.[15]

This decision to provide new dimensions to extras – who conventionally simply function as stage-props allowing the action to follow the protagonists – related back to the hypothesis being tested in González Iñárritu's film, namely that reality is simply the end product of a complex combination of events in which individuals meet other individuals by chance. This uncertainty in the plot is suggested by the conclusion of the film. El Chivo places the gun midway between the two half-brothers, Gustavo Garfias and Luis Miranda Solares (Jorge Salinas), and

The 'chance' encounter between Jarocho and El Chivo in *Amores perros*.

lets them fight it out to the death; we do not see what happens next. Whereas in the original screenplay two 'shots' are heard to ring out as Chivito leaves the house,[16] the issue is deliberately left hanging in the air in the final cut version of the film.

Amores perros depicts a gritty reality in which brothers fight each other for women (Octavio and Ramiro fight over Susana (Vanessa Bauche) in segment one), or for power and money (the struggle between the two half-brothers in segment three, called Cain and Abel at one point by El Chivo), and dogs bite the throats out of other dogs, which is as raw as any found in the classics of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in the 1960s. One thinks of the torture scenes in Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) and the vicious murder of children in Miguel Littín's *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (1968). But the difference between *Amores perros* and the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano is that it combined a depiction of a gritty reality with virtuoso cinematography and editing which might appear to undermine the political rawness of that reality. The dynamic, edgy portrayal of the car crash, for example, which has so impressed viewers, was achieved by a new technique pioneered by the director of photography, Rodrigo Prieto, who used skip bleach in post-production in order to enhance the contrast of colour and tone within the frame. As he explained in an interview:

> The contrast in general is enhanced with skip bleach, but so is the contrast of the grain. [The process] desaturates certain lines and colours, such as skin tones, but the reds and blues [are] even enhanced . . . We wanted the film to feel realistic, but with an edge. We were after the power of imperfection [and wanted to] use 'mistakes' to enhance the urgency and impredictability of life in a place like Mexico City.[17]

By making the whites in the frame that much whiter, Prieto was, in effect, producing a quasi-hallucinogenic effect, dazzling the viewer, thereby inducing a more vivid visual sensation in the viewer's mind. Though Prieto used a pre-digital technique in that the photographer smeared bleach on the film reel, this was a compositional strategy more akin to the digital paradigm in which colour transpositions can be engineered with a mouse. *Amores perros* was in effect pushing the boundaries

between 35mm and digital film – bringing into being a new hybrid reality in which the slickness of digital editing was integrated into the universe of 35mm film. This slick grit, combined with the use of non-professional actors, was a winning formula which would prove to be distinctive for Latin American cinema, and it was not surprising that *Amores perros* (2000) went on to win the best film prize at a number of international film festivals (BAFTA, Cannes, Flanders, Chicago, Bogotá, Valdivia, São Paulo, Tokyo).

Nueve reinas ('Nine Queens', 2000), by the Argentine film director Fabián Bielinsky, is a heist thriller which manages to keep you on the edge of your seat. It won a string of awards, although these were, predictably, confined mainly to Latin American film festivals. It won the Silver Condor from the Argentine Film Critics Association (2001), the Audience award at the Bogotá Film Festival (2001) and the Elcine First Prize at the Lima Latin American Film Festival (2001), although it did win the prize of best actor for Ricardo Darín and Gaston Pauls at the Biarritz International Festival of Latin American Cinema (2001). Just as the two main characters, the old trickster, Marcos (Ricardo Darín) and the young trickster, Juan (Gaston Pauls), are trying to work out the other's next move, so the viewer also becomes involved in trying to work out who is double-crossing whom. In many ways, it is the viewer who is finally double-crossed when, as we discover in the final sequence, the younger trickster is the one who held the final trump card. While we are being gradually persuaded that the young man is mad to invest his money in the sale of the set of antique stamps – the *Nine Queens* of the title – and to see his father's words 'You won't survive' as the prediction of what will happen to him, in the final scene he goes back to the warehouse and we see all his accomplices, from the Spanish businessman, Vidal Gandolfo (Ignasi Abadal) to the old man, Sandler (Oscar Núñez), to the aunt who sells the stamps (played by Pochi Ducasse), to the stamp expert (Leo Dyzen), sitting round playing cards, looking like actors relaxing after the 'show'. Then we see – the film's final twist – that he is in fact the lover of Marcos's sister, Valeria (Leticia Brédice). For in a sense it has been a show, mainly for the old trickster, but also for us, the viewers, who have also been taken in by the young trickster's team. So we have been deceived twice, once as film viewers who suspend our disbelief in order to enjoy the filmic spectacle unfolding before our eyes, but also as

'naive' detectives who 'miss' the true, implicit trickster by focusing on the obvious, explicit trickster. And all is revealed in the last minute of the film.

Nueve reinas is part of a new dynamic in Latin American film in that the social metaphor is there – we can read this film as a story about national malaise, the bankruptcy of the Argentine economy after the decade of pegging the peso to the U.S. dollar, along with the moral bankruptcy of the Argentine president who presided over this demise. There are two scenes in particular where this social metaphor appears: in the first we hear Marcos – almost like the voice-over in a documentary film – telling us about the innumerable ways in which everyone is getting ripped off in the streets of Buenos Aires; in the second we see the crowds struggling to get into the national bank, and we realize that the cheque is useless. The social metaphor, therefore, is evident – the film appears to suggest that the politicians who sold the country down the river are as much the criminals of the piece as the petty thieves and heist criminals (including the two protagonists of the film, Marcos and Juan) who populate the streets of Buenos Aires. But notice that these two scenes are not the gravitational centre of the film, as perhaps they would have been had this been a film of the 1990s like *El viaje* which – in an explicit way – draws attention to the problems associated with debt. Here the film is on the *petite histoire* of two tricksters rather than the *grande histoire* of Argentina's bankruptcy. And this is where the paradigm shift enunciated by this film resides. *Nueve reinas* is a clever, fast-moving film and the viewer

Marcos attacks Juan in the grocery shop when his dodgy deal is about to be discovered in Fabian Bielinsky's *Nueve reinas* (2000).

is always being tested as to whether what is seen is spontaneous or staged. And this changes as the film develops so that the viewer is 'taken in' by the first scene in the grocery shop when Marcos 'saves' Juan from being arrested – only to reveal it was a set-up – but is likely to 'get' the scene towards the end of the film when Marcos is attacked by an older man who wants to steal the briefcase and see it as 'staged'. So the viewer begins to 'discover' the first level of duplicity (Marcos's disguise) while remaining oblivious to the second level of duplicity (Juan's disguise), thereby making the final recognition-scene all the more aesthetically effective. *Nueve reinas* is, indeed, as much about the multi-layered nature of art as it is about the story of a younger trickster fooling an older trickster out of love for the older trickster's sister.

It is also an excellent litmus test of the relationship between Latin American (or perhaps Argentine) film and Hollywood film. It is the only Latin American film to be privileged with a remake by the Hollywood studios. *Criminal* (2004), directed by Gregory Jacobs, with John C. Reilly as Richard Gaddis (Marcos), Diego Luna as Rodrigo (Juan) and Maggie Gyllenhaal as Valerie (Valeria), follows the original plot of Bielinski's film closely but, as Carla Meyer points out, the 'inferior American version strips the menace and texture from the original without offering any big stars to compensate'.[18] *Nueve reinas* and *Amores perros* demonstrated in different ways the news of 'New' New Latin American Cinema of the twenty-first century.[19]

In 2001 the Mexican Guillermo del Toro released *El espinazo del diablo* ('The Devil's Backbone'), a gothic horror film set in 1939 during the final stages of the Spanish Civil War. Dr Casares (Federico Luppi) and Carmen (Marisa Paredes) run an orphanage which looks after the children of Republican soldiers who have died in the war. The title of the film provides the most grotesque stage prop, a dead foetus with an enlarged and deformed backbone which is kept in a large jar for scientific purposes. Carlos (Fernando Tielve), who epitomizes the innocence that del Toro always places at the centre of his horror films, arrives at the orphanage and soon discovers that it is haunted by the ghost of one of the orphans, Santi (Junio Valverde) who was murdered by Jacinto, the caretaker (Eduardo Noriega) who incarnates conscience-free evil. The crime was witnessed by the local bully, Jaime (Íñigo Garcés) but he was too afraid to tell anyone. When asked in an interview why he set

his ghost story in the Spanish Civil War, Guillermo del Toro made the following comment:

> The best ghost stories are set against wars, because they leave plenty of ghosts behind. Coming from the outside to the Spanish civil war, it felt very black and white to me. It took place within the family – you could have a fascist father, a fascist son and a republican son and they would argue passionately, and even be capable of taking each other to the firing squad. I tried to make the orphanage in the film a microcosm of the war. I wanted to create a situation where the republican figures in the movie allowed for this fascist creature to grow and nurture, and ultimately take over. The republican government represents the best possible leftist government that has ever taken place on earth – women were emancipated, education was very experimental, culture was booming – and yet it all went to hell.[20]

Carlos's courage, however, emboldens Jaime, and when it appears that all the children will be murdered by Jacinto, they gang up on him, thrusting sharpened stakes into him (in a gesture reminiscent of the vampire motif of del Toro's previous film, *Cronos*), causing him to fall into the very pool in which he drowned Santi. With a touch of poetic justice, he is weighed down by the stolen gold he has stuffed into his clothes. A ghoulish detail is that Santi is waiting for him at the bottom of the pool and 'hugs' him. Though to some degree a traditional horror movie – Santi with his white make-up looks like a younger, Mexican version of Frankenstein's monster – *El espinazo del diablo* has some of del Toro's signature devices, ranging from black humour (Dr Casares offers Carlos a drink from the jar in which the foetus with the deformed backbone is contained; the beautiful Carmen, who has only one leg, is forced into having sex with Jacinto because of her husband's impotence) to absurdity (the bomb which lands in the courtyard without exploding but is somehow 'alive') to the focus on blood and gore as leading to redemption (Dr Casares's ghost gives the final speech of the film, suggesting that Jacinto's evil has been destroyed). In some ways *El espinazo del diablo* could be seen as a dry run for the film del Toro would make five years later, *El laberinto del fauno*, which was also set in the Spanish Civil War.

The ghost, Santi, in Guillermo del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (2001).

Following the trend set by *Amores perros*, *Y tu mamá también* ('And Your Mother Too', 2001), directed by the Mexican film director Alfonso Cuarón and co-written with his brother Carlos, was privately financed, ironically enough by a nutritional supplements corporation.[21] Winning first prize for the film (the Marcello Mastroianni Award), as well as awards for the screenplay and for the two lead male actors at the 2001 Venice Film Festival – though it failed to gain an Academy Award after nomination in the category of Writing (original screenplay) at the 2002 Hollywood ceremony – Cuarón's film appears at first to focus unremittingly on the psychology of men. As Alfonso Cuarón explained in an interview:

> The story wasn't autobiographical, but there are elements from when Carlos and I were growing up. The nanny in the film is played by our nanny in real life, and one of the destinations the trio go through is her town in real life; Carlos and I went to a wedding in the same place where you see the wedding in the film, and the President of the time was present and everyone was more interested in the President than the newlyweds. We also had a car like the one in the film and there is a town the trio visit that is also the name of the street where we grew up. The character of Diego 'Saba' Madero, the friend of Julio and Tenoch, is a character that we know. Of course, we both also had trips to the beach and the incident with the pigs in the tent happened to my cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki.[22]

The threesome in *Y tu mamá también* (2001).

What makes Julio and Tenoch tick, as *Y tu mamá también* suggests, is sex, but also the power over others that having sex with somebody gives the individual. Thus it is no coincidence that Julio tells Tenoch he has been sleeping with the latter's girlfriend in order to get his own back on Tenoch after he sees him sleeping with Luisa, the Spanish wife of Tenoch's cousin. A brinkmanship ensues, until Julio plays his trump card and tells Tenoch that he has also slept with Tenoch's mother. Soon afterwards the final bombshell explodes: the two young men kiss like lovers. The fact that *Y tu mamá también* is not only a road movie but also introduces the sub-theme of male bonding suggests that Cuarón is quoting the work of Wim Wenders (in whose films, particularly *Kings of the Road*, *The American Friend*, *Paris, Texas* and *Wings of Desire*, these two themes are central).[23]

Y tu mamá también is thus not only a film about the sexual mores in operation in modern Mexico, but it also makes some probing comments about the sexual interplay between generations, a practice that culture terms and defines as taboo. The film in a sense re-enacts a journey which pushes the envelope of the taboo gradually further and further from conventional, 'straight' normative sexuality. It begins with pre-marital sex (Julio and Cecilia), evokes the practice of 'swapping' sexual partners (Julio and Ana), probes the taboo involved in stealing another man's woman (Julio steals Luisa), as well as stealing a woman with whom

there is a family connection (Tenoch steals his cousin's wife). If that were not enough, the film then proceeds to break the taboo of two men sharing one sexual partner (Julio and Tenoch share Luisa), before graduating to the devastating revelation that a man will also sleep with his best friend's mother (Julio has slept with Tenoch's mother), before concluding on the final taboo of gay love between two men. The successive stages of this process of gradually breaking down social taboos is carefully choreographed, and demonstrates that this film is as much about the psychology of sex as about the 'liaisons dangereuses' that define human relationships. *Y tu mamá también* is also a specifically Mexican reading of Laclos's insight into the destructiveness of sexual relationships, for it evokes Octavio Paz's sense of the Mexican subject as '*hijo de la chingada*' (son of the whore) expressed in his classic essay *El laberinto de la soledad* ('The Labyrinth of Solitude', 1950). By having two Mexican men sexually exploit a Spanish woman, we might argue that this film attempts to 'reverse' the trauma of Conquest by exchanging the nationalities of the two parties involved in the primal scene.

There are other motifs within the film which suggest that Cuarón is playing with this notion. Chroniclers of Mexican history have often interpreted the growth of Mexican nationhood in terms of the Fall, the idea being that the Eden of the New World was somehow corrupted by the arrival of the Europeans. In *Y tu mamá también* there are a number of coy references to heaven, beginning with the sense of the search for Eden, and the (tongue-in-cheek) name of the beach they are searching for – Boca del Cielo (Heaven's Mouth). It is thus clear that Luisa, Julio and Tenoch are, in their own ways, searching for a sexual heaven. During the journey, we learn that Julio goes through the region once inhabited by his maid before she came to live in Mexico City, and this indicates that the journey may also be construed as a voyage back in time. The journey is thus multi-layered, evoking not only the sense of a personal journey backwards in time for certain individuals but also a tracking backwards into the history of a culture; in this case we are being drawn back to what might be called the 'dawn of Mexican time'.

This dawn also, paradoxically enough, functions as an image of the death to which Luisa is gradually drawing near, though only she knows this. Her husband's nickname, Jano, is a reference to the Latin god, Janus, who could tell the past and the future. The water which appears

obsessively throughout the film is, indeed, symbolic of the death to which all the characters are drawn, especially Luisa. So while Luisa is running away from her husband Jano, she is being drawn towards the god Janus, who sits at the entrance to Hades.

The most distinctive characteristic of Cuarón's film, however, is its exploratory investigation of the language of film. In a presentation given at the Bloomsbury Theatre at University College, London, in November 2009, Cuarón mentioned that he believed that a plot is always a poison, and *Y tu mamá también* in many ways illustrates this notion. The voice-over is used in disarming ways. While used in a conventional manner to provide 'objective' information about the characters – for instance at the beginning of the film it emphasizes what happened in the past – as the film develops it also begins to predict what will happen in the future, an example being what will happen to the pigs that attacked the tent Julio, Tenoch and Luisa stayed in on the beach, right down to the most specific details of how many there were (twenty-three), how many would be sacrificed the following spring (fourteen) and how many would spread a disease (three). This endows the narrative with an eerie sensation of prolepsis. At other times it appears as if the voice-over has a mind of its own, and is interested in events which are not necessarily within the 'camera-mind', as it were. At the conclusion of the wedding party sequence, for example, the voice-over – as if bored with Julio and Tenoch's antics as they attempt to seduce Luisa – provides information about what the president did later that day and, indeed, the next day, when he attended a conference on globalization. The peripatetic nature of the voice-over is echoed by the roving eye of the camera. In the scene in which we hear about the president's actions, the camera – as if it had a mind of its own – leaves Julio and Tenoch behind and follows the waitress carrying the food out to the drivers who are waiting outside the party. The camera-eye is more interested – it appears – in their lives than those of the wedding guests. The innovation of *Y tu mamá también* is that it absorbed the peripatetic nature of the road movie formula and applied it not only to the main action of the film but also to the personae of the voice-over and camera. Cuarón's film thereby tracks this splitting of the filmic personality into different instantiations.

The Argentine film director Lisandro Alonso's *La libertad* ('Freedom', 2001), the most experimental film released that year in Latin America,

was screened in the 'Un Certain Regard' section at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival. It focuses on the everyday life of Misael Saavedra, a woodcutter, grafting documentary into the discourse of a feature film (for some viewers it should have been a short), to produce a film with a strange beauty. The shoot took ten days with a twelve-person crew, and it 'studies its subject with a thoroughness of detail and a lentitude of pace that create the effect of events occurring in real time'.[24] Thus we see Misael chopping down wood, counting it, loading it on his truck, going to the toilet and – in a striking final sequence – eating an armadillo, 'staring directly at us as if daring us to question or challenge the integrity of his way of life'.[25] Since it focuses on the drudgery of manual labour *La libertad* forces the audience to think about the nature of human liberty.[26]

Ônibus 174 ('Bus 174'), a Brazilian documentary film directed by José Padilha and released in 2002, is a beautifully crafted piece of work which weaves live film footage of a bungled hold-up of Bus 174 in Rio de Janeiro by Sandro do Nascimento into an absorbing set of interviews with members of the police force who dealt with the event, along with members of Nascimento's family. It won over 23 awards worldwide and its (extraordinary) 99 per cent rating on the Rotten Tomatoes website, with an audience rating of 89 per cent, showed it to be the critics' choice.[27]

Cidade de Deus ('City of God', 2002), by the Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles, is arguably the most significant Latin American film of the twenty-first century so far. The film is based on the novel of the same name by Paulo Lins (*Cidade de Deus: Romance*, 1997), a true story of the life of a number of gang members living in the City of God, a violent shanty town in western Rio de Janeiro, in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. The characters – who include Busca-Pé, Barbantino, Acerola, Inferninho, Tutuca, Martelo, Carlinho, Pretinho, Pelé, Pará and Manguinha – are, as Lins has pointed out, 'based on real-life people' who 'had already gained public visibility in the Brazilian press by the time the researched facts surfaced'.[28] While the novel is a series of vignettes of the everyday lives of a cross-selection of hoodlums, the film focused on the interlocking lives of a set of people, including the narrator, Buscapé ('Rocket', Alexandre Rodrigues), his older brother, Marreco ('Goose', Renato de Souza), and his two gangster friends, Alicate ('Clipper', Jefechander Suplino) and Cabeleira ('Shaggy', Jonathan Haagensen), Dadinho ('Li'l Dice', Douglas Silva) who, at eighteen, takes on the name

of Zé Pequeno ('Li'l Zé', Leandro Firmino da Hora), his accomplice, Bené ('Benny', Phellipe Haagensen) and his girlfriend, Angélica (Alice Braga), and their enemies, Cenoura ('Carrot', Matheus Nachtergaele) and Mané Galinha ('Knockout Ned', Seu Jorge). The film, like the book, was based on a true story of people in a real place and to keep this documentary feel Meirelles and his co-director, Kátia Lund, decided to use non-professional actors:

> I wanted the audience to look at Li'l Ze and actually see the real Li'l Ze, and not an actor playing a role. The idea was to have these unknown actors in order to eliminate the filter, to let the spectator have a direct relationship with the character. All this, I thought, would bring out the truth I wanted to have in the film. Middle-class actors would not know how to interpret those characters.[29]

Once the casting was done, the actors, many of whom were gangsters from Cidade de Deus, were trained by Fátima Toledo and Kátia Lund for a year.[30] Though this had the effect of launching the acting careers of a number of those who starred in the film, it allowed *Cidade de Deus* to retain a gritty, documentary feel. A documentary realism is also enhanced by the inclusion of a news clip of an interview with the actual man on whom Mané Galinha is based during the concluding credits.

The film also mimicked the *cinéma vérité* mood by using a hand-held digital camera which, with its mobility and jerkiness, had the effect of being a consciousness accompanying the development of the action rather than simply recording the events. The hand-held is, indeed, used for virtuoso effects, such as when in the opening scene it appears to be on the chicken's shoulder as it is making a run for it.[31] Often when the characters are talking to each other the camera pans rapidly between them, and the speed of the pan causes a loss of focus, which adds a documentary-type spontaneity. The cinematography has a mobile feel about it, using a number of camera angles such as a tilt frame when the gangsters jump down in their pursuit of the chicken in the opening sequence, an aerial shot when two of the Tendership Trio are up the tree listening to the policemen discussing what to do next, directly below them, and – most spectacular of all – the swivel, 360-degree shot at the beginning and conclusion of

Buscapé trying to catch the runaway chicken in Fernando Meirelles's *City of God* (2002).

the film which follows Buscapé's head as he surveys the police on one side and Pequeno Zé's gang on the other. This last take is digitally created in that the colours change while the camera swivels, from the blues and greys of the present to the brown and golden tones of the childhood sequence in the City of God.

The film can be seen as a symphony of colours, with the blue-greys of the 1980s contrasting with the earth tones of the 1960s and the pinks and blues of the disco era of the 1970s.[32] The editing in the film explores a variety of effects, including fade and double-exposure in the sequence recounting the history of the Zadia apartment,[33] the use of a passing blue car to create the bridge between the 1960s and '70s as Buscapé walks down the street to school after seeing the body of Cabeleira who has been gunned down by the police, as well as slow motion, fast motion, split screen and shallow focus. In an interview César Charlone explained how he experimented with filming in 35mm and 16mm combined with digital post-production:

> Fernando invited me to film the short, and suggested I do it as a rehearsal for what we would later do in *City of God*. And so, in the four days we filmed *Palace II* (Golden Gate), I tested our 'format'. I tried out 8 types of camera film, 35 and 16 mm, different types of lighting, different types of filming styles, more marked or with more improvisations. Some scenes more planned out and others in sequence. Changes in speed . . . All in all we

> turned *Palace II* (Golden Gate) into a laboratory short. And the last major experiment was technological. To shoot using film, do all the post-production in video and put it back into film, using all the benefits proportioned by electronics (to shoot in other speeds, change them while editing, change the lighting, the continuity and the framing on the telecine, use 35 and 16 indistinctly, etc., etc.) . . . We believed that a small loss of technical quality was unimportant if compared to the advantages that the process furnished us in relation to our 'actors'.[34]

The filming took place on 35mm or 16mm during the day and was then digitized in the evening after the shoot, and Charlone would work on it during the night, and convert it back into 35mm or 16mm film before presenting it to Fernando the following day.[35] This shuttling between film and digital video was innovative at the time, and expanded the visual potential of the frame in an unprecedented way.

The plot in *Cidade de Deus* is kept firmly under control by the voice-over which explains what is going on and which often uses a camera-click effect to signal the beginning of a new narrative, for instance the life of a new protagonist, such as Mané Galinha. The overall structure of the film – though a linear plot can be created – is like a spiralling vortex in that it loops back into the past at certain key junctures. Thus the opening sequence of the film is revealed to be the 'beginning of the end' of the film once we approach the conclusion, and this technique also allows for some events to be perceived from a different point of view later on. When we learn about how Zé Pequeno took over his first drug den our first perspective is that of Blacky and Buscapé as they hear the hammering on the door and our second perspective is an off-the-shoulder point of view of Zé Pequeno's gang as they enter the apartment. This filtering of the plot means that certain events are only revealed to the viewer later on – it is only when we follow Zé Pequeno's narrative that we realize that he not only killed all the people in the motel but also Buscapé's brother, Marreco.

Cidade de Deus attacks not only the drug culture which ruins people's lives in Brazil, but also the way in which the authorities react. The police allow the killing in the City of God to carry on as long as it does not escalate out of control and affect their 'clients', the middle classes. It is,

ironically enough, only as a result of Zé Pequeno's refusal to pay for his guns that the police decide to act – because they have been providing him with the guns in the first place. The media are also shown to be important players within the dynamics of drug culture; as a result of his ability to take photographs – that is, produce images which are appetising to the middle-class press – Rocket escapes his roots in the City of God. It is a world which, as he says at the beginning of the film, if you fight it, you will never survive, and which, if you run from it, 'you'll never escape'; but Buscapé has, in effect, proved that you *can* escape, since he becomes – as the closing sequence of the film makes clear – a professional photographer. No longer Rocket, he is 'Nelson Rodrigues, *fotógrafo*'. *Cidade de Deus* is a masterpiece of a film which managed to combine the grittiness of a documentary-type slice of life created with non-professional actors and slick virtuoso digital editing. It was a dynamic mixture which was destined to have a significant impact on the future evolution of Latin American film. It won 55 awards and had 29 nominations, including an Academy Award nomination for best director (Meirelles), best adapted screenplay (Bráulio Mantovani), best cinematography (César Charlone) and best film editing (Daniel Rezende).

Because of the film's enormous success, a TV spin-off of *Cidade de Deus* was created: *Cidade dos homens* ('City of Men'), with some episodes

City of God: Buscapé is now a photographer.

directed by Kátia Lund and Fernando Meirelles. The TV series went back to the original novel written by Paulo Lins and focused on two teenagers, Luis Claudío, aka Acerola (played by Douglas Silva, who played Dadinho in *Cidade de Deus*), and his friend Uolace, aka Laranjinha (Darlan Cunha). The first season was produced in 2002, airing on Globo TV between 4 and 18 October 2002 and released on DVD in February 2003. The episodes focus on the characters' everyday life, including going to school, surviving in the favela, dealing with the drug culture and its power struggles, going to the beach and trying to seduce young girls. The first episode in the series, *A Coroa do Imperador* ('The Emperor's Crown') pursues an intriguing connection between the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century and the gang warfare in Cidade de Deus in the twenty-first, while drawing some parallels between the life of a playboy and the life of the poor in the favela. *Dois para Brasília* ('Two Tickets to Brasilia') follows Acerola as he goes with his girlfriend to visit her grandfather in prison in Brasilia, sparking up some insight into prison life in Brazil, while *Buraco Quente* ('Hot Spot') follows Laranjina's cousin, Espeto, a drug dealer, who is shot by the police, which leads to a re-evaluation by him as well as by Laranjina and Acerola as to the pros and cons of the life of a drug baron. The TV series, unlike the film, is episodic, and the mood is more light-hearted than *Cidade de Deus* but the filming and editing – particularly the use of the rapidly moving hand-held camera and the voice-over – possesses the recognizable Meirelles-cum-Lund filmic signature.[36]

González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* was the big film of 2003, winning an Academy Award nomination for Benicio del Toro in the category of Actor in a Supporting Role and for Naomi Watts for Actress in a Leading Role. *21 Grams* is similar to González Iñárritu's previous film, *Amores perros*, in that it is a story built around the tragedy caused by a car crash. It is also, like, the previous film, non-linear and shuttles between the past, present and future of the various protagonists in disarming ways. But it is different in that it is filmed in an English-language environment and includes famous actors such as Sean Penn, Naomi Watts and Benicio del Toro. This was a significant paradigm shift for Latin American film in the early 2000s and led to the creation of what might be called a new genre – the English-language Latin American film. This paradigm shift was significant for the evolution of Latin American film in that it was the

Acerola dreaming of making it big in *City of Men* (2007).

The favela youth discuss social power in *City of Men*.

symptom of a linguistic and cultural osmosis. Unlike the osmosis of the first half of the twentieth century, when Latin America was 'invaded' by foreign film directors eager to tell its story, this osmosis was going in the opposite direction. Latin American directors were 'invading' Hollywood.

21 Grams opens with vignettes from the lives of Paul Rivers (Sean Penn), a mathematics professor whose heart is failing, his wife Jane (Charlotte Gainsbourg) who is desperate to have his child, Jack Jordan (Benicio del Toro), a former convict who desperately immerses himself in Christianity in order to mend his ways, and Cristina Peck (Naomi Watts), whose life is destroyed when she hears the news that her husband and two young daughters have been killed in a hit-and-run accident. We never see the accident. (In a powerful piece of cinematography it happens off screen to the left of the camera space occupied by the gardener with whom Jane's husband, accompanied by his two daughters, has just been talking. We see the gardener blowing the leaves as Jack's truck whizzes past. Then we hear a skid and the gardener, realizing what has happened, runs to the scene to the left of the camera field. We are left looking at the abandoned leaf-blower until the sequence concludes.) But it is the unseen lynchpin which binds the lives of the characters together. It is at the point that the heart of Cristina's husband is transferred to Paul that the tragedy – or better the tragedy of the tragedy – begins to unfold. Inhabited by his heart, Paul appears to take on Cristina's husband's character and, abetted by Cristina, seeks revenge for the death of 'his' daughters. The plot at this point echoes the animistic mindset of the sacrificial ceremony of the pre-Columbian Aztecs whereby the life of an individual, contained within his heart, is removed from the body of the sacrificial victim and used to sustain the lives of others.

The disarming shuttling between the lives of the different characters – which is synchronic – combined with the movement back and forth from past to future to present – which is diachronic – is initially confusing for the viewer but it is purposeful in that it underlines the random synchronicity which binds human beings together as well as the human experience of time as a past–present–future continuum in which the three temporal dimensions are experienced simultaneously (in the sense that the future – as its Latin root suggests – is an 'about-to-happen' present while the past only exists in terms of its being experienced in the present). The combination of the synchronic and diachronic shuttling

The truck speeds past the gardener just before the crash in *21 Grams* (2003).

in the film's narrative is predicated on its digital structure of feeling. Digital editing allows for the combination of different filmed sequences as well as the re-coding of the cinematography of a given shot or scene at the touch of a mouse and this digital structure of feeling underlies the expressiveness of *21 Grams*. It would make no sense, after all, to shoot and edit a film which articulates a reflection of the randomness of the events which radically change human lives in a linear way. It would be like writing an essay about the absurdity of human life in balanced prose accompanied by edifying logic. *21 Grams* is thus as much a film about the desire for revenge as it is a reflection on how time and space come together in our lives. Digital cinematography allows for new types of event-association to be assembled. When Cristina goes to the place where the car accident took place the sequence is filmed by a hand-held digital camera which follows her and performs a 360-degree panning shot around her head. This sequence breaks the 180-degree rule but it does not do so gratuitously because the aim of this new hallmark shot of digital cinematography is to capture the character completely. We now know her pain completely.

There are other ways in which digital cinematography can bring new avenues of revelation into the viewer's field of vision. The sequence, for example, in which Paul is told by his doctor that he must check himself into the hospital because his heart transplant is not working, to which he responds 'I'd rather die outside', is followed by the sequence in which Jack is being driven away from prison by his friend and wife,

suggesting that Paul and Jack are joined in some way that is unknown to them, but known to the 'camera-consciousness'. Their destinies are linked even though they appear at this point in time to be heading in different directions. Both have begun a new journey towards the 'outside', and it is a journey in which their destinies will be 'crossed' (by misfortune). As we find out later on, Paul will plan to take revenge on Jack for what he has done but he – rather than Jack – will die in the process. (Paul will lie in wait close to Jack's apartment, see him leave, force him to walk to a secluded spot, and threaten to shoot him; Paul does not shoot him, as we first think, instead shooting at the ground. Jack returns later on, tries to persuade Paul to shoot him, and then – perhaps in order to escape the painful effects of asphyxia caused by his ailing heart – Paul shoots himself.) This synoptic cut, characteristic of digital cinematography but different from traditional cross-cutting which is based on temporal linearity, convergence and cause-and-effect mechanics, allows for new synergies of association between random events to be constructed.

The digital *Weltanschauung* also allows for the strategy of partial disclosure of the filmed space. Thus in the first sequence, when the viewer 'sees' Paul ambushing Jack, taking him off to enact his revenge, we hear and therefore 'see' Paul shooting Jack. González Iñárritu thereby plays with the viewer's expectations: if we see one man leading another off to a secluded place while brandishing a gun, shouting at him, insulting him, ordering him to kneel at his feet, and then when we see the gun pointed at the victim's head and hear the gunshots we 'know' he has been shot and 'believe' that the director simply spared us the sight of the death. These signals – the brandishing of the gun, the anger in the murderer's face, the pointing of the gun at the victim's head – are the grammar of film which we as viewers have learned and which film directors also learn (normally at film school). They are the techniques which are 'in the book', as it were, used by directors in order to build their visual message to the viewer. The digital *Weltanschauung*, however, allows for new ways of seeing reality to emerge. It is not that these did not exist before the advent of digital film, but digital film allowed them to emerge more forcefully, widening the vocabulary of what is cinematographically thinkable. For almost 29 minutes, therefore, the viewer will believe that Paul has shot Jack, but it will transpire that Paul discharged

Jack believes Paul is going to shoot him, and so do we, in *21 Grams*.

Paul points the gun and shoots, in *21 Grams*.

his bullets into the ground and then lied to Cristina, telling her he had killed Jack.

There are other ways in which the digital mindset explores the potentiality of film. For a director working in 35mm, film stock was so expensive that re-filming was associated with bad filming, with not getting it right in the first take. The digital *Weltanschauung*, however, allows the director to explore the once forbidden territory of the re-filmed event. González Iñárritu does this in an inventive way and articulates the unknown aspects of everyday life. We see the abbreviated first and the fuller version 29 minutes later, and the perspective as well as the shooting of the bullets changes. The abbreviated version is filmed with frontal or off-the-shoulder shots while the extended, later version also includes a camera-left shot. By deconstructing the grammar of 35mm film language in this way González Iñárritu adds uncertainty combined with suspense to his drama.

Digital cinematography also allows for other types of event combination to occur. It allows sequences to be interpreted at different junctures of the film as either the past or the future. An example of this occurs towards the beginning of the film where we see Cristina in a bathroom snorting cocaine. Because the scene follows closely on from the scene in which Cristina is in a therapy group explaining the problems she had in the past with her drug addiction, we assume that the bathroom cocaine snorting scene is a recreation of her past habits. But we discover towards the end of the film that it is part of her future. This scene opens the sequence in which Cristina emerges from the motel room to ask Paul if he has shot Jack. It is not that the scene is misconstrued by the viewer as a flashback to Cristina's past, which is then shown 'actually' to be a fast-forward to her future life; it is more the case that González Iñárritu is deliberately playing with the viewer's expectations in order to show how the past can be osmotic with the future. The past and the future are, in a sense, merged when Cristina pushes open the door of the room she is in.

This shuttling between past, present and future allows for a new understanding of time to emerge. In the traditional 35mm universe the present of the film is firmly anchored as a reality which has access to the past via flashbacks (often indicated by a dissolve) but not to the future except in the sense that the development of the plot allows the future gradually to be turned into the present. González Iñárritu's more fluid

understanding of the reversibility of the past, present and future is catalysed by the flexibility offered by the digital format of film. In a sense the digital merging of different time dimensions allows the film to express the notion that Cristina's mindset in the past – when she took drugs and presumably had less control over her emotions – has 'erupted' into the present and persuaded her to seek revenge. Digital film allowed for new mind-event associations to take place, and González Iñárritu has shown himself to be very keen to explore the new connections that digital film offers.

Enrique Colina's *Entre ciclones* ('Hurricanes', 2003, chosen as Latin America's representative for the Cannes Critics Week, tells the story of a young man, Tomás (Mijail Mulkay), a trainee working for a national telecommunications company who loses his home when the roof caves in after a hurricane. But worse than natural hurricanes are the cyclones created by the disasters of everyday life. Tomás finds his job difficult because of his bad-tempered boss, nicknamed 'El Conde' ('The Count', Mario Balmaseda), and his personal life is complicated in that he finds it difficult to choose between three women, a sexy mestiza, Mónica (Indira Valdés), a rich but older Spanish woman, Adriana (Klara Badiola), and a wild young girl, Elisa (Yahima Torres), with a passion for tattoos and stripping naked, and who happens to be his boss's daughter. The arrival

The protagonist gives the finger to the audience at the end of Enrique Colina's *Entre ciclones* (2003).

on the scene of his friend Miguel (Renny Arozarena), who has just come out of prison, eventually leads to Tomás's downfall (literally, in that he is arrested as Miguel's accomplice is ransacking Adriana's apartment, attacked by some rival thugs and thrown off the roof of a ten-storey building). The final scene of the film in which Tomás – now in a wheelchair, with multiple fractures, is advised to take up Zen Buddhism by a friend, at which point he gives the finger to the camera – articulates the black humour at the centre of *Entre ciclones*; Cuba is a place where hurricanes smash your home to pieces, the black market is rife, your boss is psychotic, your lover uses black magic to ensnare you and the only way to survive is to laugh at your bad luck.[37] As Colina suggests, the film 'uses the idea of a fall without any hope of survival as a metaphor [of Cuba's plight]'.[38]

Machuca (2004), directed by Andrés Wood and winner of the Most Popular International Film at the 2004 Vancouver International Film Festival, is Chile's version of *La historia oficial* (1984). An emotionally drenched reaction from a child's perspective to the horrors of civil war, it sold 700,000 tickets and was the 'third most successful Chilean film ever'.[39] Gonzalo Infante (Matías Quer) is a rich, bright and sensitive kid at an exclusive boys' school in Santiago, and the film picks up pace when five boys from the other side of the tracks are introduced as new students. Despite the local bully's attempts to ostracize them, Gonzalo develops a friendship with Pedro Machuca (Ariel Mateluna). They visit each other's homes and Machuca is as impressed by Gonzalo's wealth (his Adidas trainers) as Gonzalo is appalled by Machuca's living conditions (he lives in a shanty town with an open-sewer latrine). Gonzalo has his first kiss with Machuca's cousin, Silvana (Manuela Martelli), who lives in the same shanty town as Machuca, and he and Machuca subsequently share concentrated-milk-fuelled snogging sessions with her. The idyll is broken when cracks begin to emerge in the society: there are food shortages; the dogs are stolen; the pigs are burned; a meeting at the school ends in bitter recriminations between the upper-middle-class and the working-class parents, the latter accused of being Communists; and finally Augusto Pinochet's coup occurs, and the three-year social experiment engineered by Salvador Allende (1970–73) is obliterated. The headmaster of the school, Father McEnroe, is dramatically removed by troops and a new headmaster, a member of the military, is installed.

The devastation of this world is experienced by Gonzalo when he witnesses Silvana being murdered by troops who are attacking the shanty town; the scenes are vividly portrayed with a jerky hand-held camera in shallow focus with desaturated colour tones and a hint of dark sepia. The final separation between the two boys occurs when Gonzalo proves that he does not belong to the shanty town by showing a solider his Adidas trainers. The last sequence of the film, in which we see Gonzalo's family moving into a new luxurious home, suggests that his family has done well out of the coup. The strength of the film lies in its use of the child as a witness to the social events; his innocent perspective underlines the brutality of the coup.

Like *Machuca*, *Días de Santiago* ('Santiago's Days', 2004), directed by the Peruvian Josué Méndez, focuses on the aftermath of war, but in this case it is the civil war between the *terrucos* and the Peruvian military that provides the (never visualized) back-story. A Peruvian re-vamping of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Días de Santiago* tells the story of a 23-year-old man, Santiago (Pietro Sibille), who served in the Peruvian Navy and who now works as a taxi driver. One of his veteran friends has committed suicide, others are planning a bank job, but Santiago desperately wants to find order and purpose in his life. His inability, though, to adjust to the tasks of everyday life – he loses his temper when buying a fridge, he attacks a drug pusher in a local disco, he knocks out his girlfriend when she playfully tries to touch his revolver – leads to the final

Santiago waiting in black and white for his girlfriend in *Días de Santiago* (2004).

desperate scene when he tries to kidnap his sister-in-law who is being bullied by his brother, breaks down a door to find his father raping his sister, and then in a game of Russian roulette attempts suicide; the gun clicks three times and then the screen goes black. Santiago's disorientation is powerfully expressed by a rapidly zigzagging narrative propulsion, a tense, jerky hand-held camera and a (seemingly random) switching from colour to black-and-white during the course of the film. Like a number of other Latin American films of the early 2000s, *Días de Santiago* deconstructs the protagonist-as-national-representative trope common in the previous two decades, and re-focuses national destiny from the perspective provided by youth culture.

Diarios de motocicleta ('The Motorcycle Diaries', 2004), directed by the Brazilian Walter Salles, recreates the story of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's trip from the southern tip of the subcontinent to its northern tip with his friend Alberto Granado in 1952. Salles's film shows us a Che whose eyes are gradually opened to injustice in Latin America, although the politics is presented obliquely rather than frontally (neither Marx nor Marxism are mentioned, and the word 'Communist' is used only once, when the mineworkers they meet on their way through Chile describe themselves thus). *Diarios de motocicleta* can be described as a road movie, as a coming-of-age movie, even as an elegy to the awesome beauty of the Latin American landscape, but its most distinctive feature is its blend of the fiction film with the documentary. It starts as a fiction film – with the lavish, detail-perfect sets of 1950s Buenos Aires providing the establishing scenes when Che Guevara (Gael García Bernal) and Alberto Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna) set off on their journey, along with the parties in Miramar, the first stop on their journey – and gradually turns into a documentary – or perhaps better, a 'featurementary', combining aspects of a feature film with those of a documentary. The conversations with the market vendors in Valdivia, Chile, with the guide in Cuzco, the women in the street in Cuzco who talk about their everyday problems, the man who talks about how he was ejected from his land – these are all micro-narratives, punctuating the flow of the film and providing it with an extemporaneous, real-life quality. This journey towards the documentary-real culminates in the final sequence of the film in which we see the face of an 82-year-old Alberto Granado in Cuba watching a plane take off, echoing the immediately preceding (fictional) sequence

Che Guevara and Alberto Granado arrive in Chile, in Walter Salles's *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004).

in which Granado bids farewell to Che. The sense of the documentary-real is also provided by the dates which are provided on screen to indicate the stages of the two young men's journey. The reality bedrock is additionally suggested through the black-and-white 'moving' stills occurring at various junctures of the film, often to indicate the political injustice of how people live – such as when the people crowded in the boat following the steamer are suddenly seen in black-and-white, or in the final sequence when we see a succession of images of people that Che Guevara has seen on his journey through the subcontinent. These photographs are in the style of the Peruvian ethnographic photographer Martín Chambi, whose most important work dates from the 1930s, and have a subliminal political message of injustice.

Diarios de motocicleta is more a coming-to-consciousness drama than a political film. Politics is reduced to an undercurrent that emerges when Guevara throws a stone at the Anaconda Mining Company truck; when he rejects Granado's proposal to establish an Indo-American society based on Tupac Amaru's rebellion because it would be a bloodless revolution ('*Una revolución sin tiros?*' – 'A revolution without bullets?', he asks Alberto incredulously); in his birthday speech in which he calls for an end to the division between nations in Latin America; and gives a concrete example of ending division between peoples by swimming across the Amazon river to the south side of the leper colony in San Pablo. The film drops a broad hint about the politicization which is

about to occur by having Che say, almost at the conclusion, '*todo ese tiempo que pasamos en la ruta sucedió algo. Algo que tengo que pensar por mucho tiempo. ¡Cuánta injusticia!*' (While we were going on our journey something did happen. Something I have to think about for a long time. So much injustice!) but, interestingly enough, it does not depict that politicization directly. Salles combines the feature-film format with a documentary edge to produce a film about Che Guevara's famous journey from Argentina to Colombia which is partly sentimental and partly political; it won an Academy Award nomination in the category of Best Writing (Adapted Screenplay).

Another road movie was released in 2004: *Familia rodante* ('Rolling Family'), directed by the Argentine Pablo Trapero. It tells the story of a large Argentine family who take a very long trip northwards in their camper van from Buenos Aires to Misiones province in order to attend a wedding. This comedy-drama traces a deliberate departure from the 'nation-image' dramas of the 1990s (such as *El viaje* and *La frontera*) in which the protagonists represent a national consciousness. Here it is the small story that counts: there is no mention of politics or work or ambition, and the film focuses on the everyday narrative of their lives – at home, as it were. We see them eating, drinking, talking, smoking, looking at the countryside, brushing their teeth, going to the toilet, swimming in a river when the camper van breaks down, laughing, gossiping, arguing, fighting, crying, flirting, seducing and falling in love. They make up

Oscar jumps off the van and punches Claudio, his daughter's druggie boyfriend, in *Familia rodante* (2004).

The feet of a mysterious unidentified individual walk past the camera in Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* (2004).

their new narratives as they go along – Yanina (Marianela Pedano) tries to seduce her cousin Gustavo (Raúl Viñoles), Ernesto (Carlos Resta) tries to seduce Marta (Liliana Capurro) and is thrown off the camper van when her husband, the driver, Oscar (Bernardo Forteza) finds out. The documentary feel of the film is underlined not only by the hand-held camera, which imbues the film with the spontaneous-cum-casual look of a home movie, and the non-professional actors who were employed in the film by the director when he arrived in different towns, but by the fact that the star of the film, the grandmother and matriarch of the family, Emilia, is played by Pablo Trapero's actual grandmother, Graciana Chironi. A picaresque film, *Familia rodante* deliberately eschews any broader significance, either of a political or a philosophical nature, focusing on the drama of the everyday.

Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* ('The Dead', 2004), like *Familia rodante*, uses the motif of travel but deconstructs it in order to produce a haunting film about death. The film opens with some lush jungle photography which is upended when the camera comes across two dead bodies, face down on the jungle floor. We then cut to the everyday life of Argentino Vargas, a convict who is coming to the end of his prison sentence for killing his two brothers (whose bodies, we assume, are those we see in the film's opening sequence). He is released, has sex with a prostitute, travels in a boat, kills a goat, visits his sister and he is portrayed throughout in long, reflective takes which – like the protagonist – studiously

avoid depth. We never find out why Vargas killed his brothers; when the boatman asks, he says he has forgotten. At the centre of the film, as Gonzalo Aguilar suggests, is the 'absence of experience as transmissibility and legacy';[40] *Los muertos* is a horror film which combines the horror of murder with the horror of never knowing why.

Lucrecia Martel's *La niña santa* ('The Holy Girl', 2004), as the director suggests,

> isn't strictly autobiographical, but what I put in it is my personal experience in life, my memories. When I was in my teens, I was a very religious person. I thought I had a special relationship with God, or anything that was up there. Now, I don't believe in miracles, but I do believe in the emotion you feel in front of a miracle – the emotion of something unexpected revealed to you.[41]

The film is set in a dilapidated hotel, the Termas, during a medical conference, and it focuses on the burgeoning sensuality-cum-spirituality of the 'holy girl' of the title, Amalia (María Alche). The plot, if it can be described as such, springs from one of the doctors attending the conference, Dr Jano (Carlos Belloso), who rubs himself sexually against Amalia. Far from rebuffing him, Amalia first attempts to grab his hand and then – bizarrely – proceeds to stalk him. The acting and the dialogue are awkward (deliberately so), the cinematography is typically just off-centre (in that we might see a character through a half-open door or their figure is never quite in the middle of the frame), and the transition from sequences is abrupt and occasionally puzzling. Martel's vision is of a world in which people live on top of each other and rub up against each other, with unforeseen consequences. She also shows how aspects of our work, school, home and love lives collide with one another in unexpected ways. As Philip French suggests, *La niña santa* is 'a curiously muffled, dreamy film that simultaneously engages and distances us'.[42] The film seems to be heading towards an explosive denouement when Amalia's best friend, Josefina (Julieta Zylberberg), who has been caught in bed with her cousin, blurts out that Amalia has been molested by one of the doctors but, predictably, the film ends before the denouement occurs. It is as if the camera forgot to complete the script. And the viewer becomes 'the voyeur of the voyeur'.[43]

One film that proved successful at film festivals as well as at the box office (where it made U.S.$12,594,630) was *María, llena eres de gracia* ('Maria Full of Grace', 2004), an HBO co-production directed by Joshua Marston which won the Dramatic Audience Award at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. It tells the larger narrative of drug-running in contemporary Colombia through the eyes of a young girl, María Alvarez, who quits her job in a rose factory in order to become a 'mule', carrying pellets of cocaine in her stomach from Bogotá to New York for $5,000. María is miraculously 'saved' from detection when she is stopped at immigration because she is pregnant with her boyfriend's child and thereby avoids being X-rayed. While María is saved by 'grace', her fellow mule, Lucy (Guilied Lopez), is not so lucky; one of the pellets breaks in her stomach causing her to become drowsy when they are picked up by the gang members in New York. The horror of the film is not so much the drugs as the murder of Lucy by the gang members: in order to retrieve their drugs haul they cut her open and abandon the body, as Don Fernando informs María. The film is shot and edited in a conventional way, as suggested by the continuity editing, the eye-line match and the use of suspense – on the aeroplane when Lucy becomes gradually more and more ill, and especially when Don Fernando (Orlando Tobón) calls Lucy's sister Carla (Patricia Rae), while María is in the kitchen, to tell her that Lucy has been found dead. This cinematographic conventionality is counterbalanced by the use of an unknown actress, Catalina Sandino Moreno, who had no previous professional acting experience. She was referred by the Rubén Di Pietro acting school in Bogotá to a casting audition (attended by 900 competitors) where she won the leading role. The main reason Sandino Moreno won the part was because of her naturalness; she was in effect following in the footsteps of actors such as Gael García Bernal and Alexandre Rodrigues who were 'unknowns' launched by the blockbusters *Amores perros* and *Cidade de Deus*. Sandino Moreno was subsequently named Best Actress at the Berlin Film Festival and nominated as Best Actress in the 77th Academy Awards (the first Colombian actor to be recognized in this way). Latin American film at this time was experimenting with non-professional actors and achieved such impact with this strategy that it came to be known as one of the defining characteristics of the 'new' new Latin American cinema.[44]

María gets the hang of her new job as a mule in *María, llena eres de gracia* (2004).

A Venezuelan film released a year later, *Secuestro express* (2005), directed by Jonathan Jakubowicz, has a number of ingredients in common with *María, llena eres de gracia* – the main similarity being the Latin America–poverty–crime syllogism. Martin (Jean Paul Leroux) and Carla (Mia Maestro) are a young couple enjoying a night out when they are kidnapped in Venezuela by Trece (Carlos Julio Molina), Budu (Pedro Perez) and Niga (Carlos Madera). They are taken off to a penthouse owned by Marcelo, a gay drug dealer, who persuades them to leave Martin with him as part of the drug deal. In an odd twist, Martin happens to be one of Marcelo's acquaintances, as we later discover. Trece, Budu and Niga leave with Carla only to discover that their car has been stolen; they return to the apartment to find Martin and Marcelo having sex, which shocks Carla. Martin later escapes and is unconcerned about leaving Carla behind ('*mátala*', 'kill her', he tells one of the gang). He is later picked up by a taxi driver who happens to know the gang, and delivers him back to them. They kill him in the boot of a car in a game of Russian roulette (one of the strongest scenes of the film). Meanwhile, Carla's father Sergio (Rubén Blades) hands over $25,000 to her kidnappers and they discuss whether they should release her or rape and murder her. Trece pays his share to the others to let her go unharmed, and Carla is released, only to be picked up by another set of kidnappers. The moral of the story clearly is that the underworld is wide and deep and that the best advice is never to trust anyone: 'You can either kill the beast or invite him to dinner', as the voice-over informs us towards the end of the film. Trece returns

to the scene, kills Carla's new kidnappers and sets her free. The conclusion is thus not irredeemably bleak in that there is the suggestion that there are 'good' baddies like Trece who balance out the 'bad' baddies. As Peter Bradshaw says, 'Claims to seriousness on the film's behalf are, certainly, undermined by the way it gloatingly fetishises and sexualises the tokens of poverty in the slums of Caracas: the tattoos, the drugs, and of course the weaponry.'[45] The fast-forward editing along with the use of drug-related slang and popular, earthy speech suggests that this film is essentially a Venezuelan remake of the Brazilian *Cidade de Deus*, explaining its audience impact (it was the hit of the decade in Venezuela with 932,530 viewers[46]) but, apart from the feisty performance by Mia Maestro, the acting rarely convinces.

Madeinusa (2005), directed by Claudia Llosa, tells the story of a young woman living in a small Quechua-speaking town in the Andes, Manayaycuna (meaning 'the town no one can enter' in Quechua) who is determined to get on in life at any cost – as we discover at the film's conclusion. The protagonist Madeinusa (Magaly Solier) and her sister Chale (Yiliana Chong) both desperately want to be chosen as the town's Virgin for the procession of Holy Week which is about to take place. Madeinusa is chosen, much to her sister's disgruntlement, although it becomes clear that this has occurred because she is favoured by her father, Don Cayo (Juan Ubaldo Huamán) who also happens to be the mayor of the town. The town has a peculiar custom during Holy Week. Immediately after the ceremony to mark Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday they put a blindfold on his statue in the local church. Easter Saturday – when Christ is supposedly dead – is known as *tiempo santo* (holy time) and is seen as a time when any sins may be committed because God is unable to see them. The period of *tiempo santo* is measured by an old man in the main square, counting down the seconds until it begins, and then until it ends. Don Cayo has decided that he will take the opportunity of committing incest with Madeinusa during *tiempo santo*. This bizarre state of affairs is further complicated by the fact that just as the ceremony is about to begin a foreigner, Salvador (Carlos de la Torre), arrives in town from Lima, having been brought by a driver called El Murdo. In order to avoid problems with this 'gringo', Don Cayo simply decides to lock Salvador up in his house while *tiempo santo* is going on. Madeinusa is attracted to Salvador because of his light-coloured

Madeinusa is the festival queen in Claudia Llosa's *Madeinusa* (2005).

eyes, and during *tiempo santo* she offers herself to him. Her father later has sex with her but becomes furious that he has been beaten to it by Salvador, and he destroys her earrings, of which she is very fond. Madeinusa persuades Salvador to take her off to Lima with him; when she goes to retrieve her earrings from her father she discovers that he has ripped them to pieces and so she decides to take a terrible vengeance by putting rat poison in his chicken broth. Don Cayo begins to vomit after drinking the broth and soon dies. When Chale returns home she realizes her sister has poisoned her father but chooses instead to blame the 'gringo', screaming out her accusation for all to hear. In a bizarre twist, Madeinusa also decides to blame the gringo, running out into the street and chanting '*El gringo ha envenenado a mi padre!*' (The gringo has poisoned my father!). In the final scene we see Madeinusa in the truck with El Murdo, and it is clear that she has taken Salvador's place, who we presume is now rotting in the town prison. The film is striking in that it follows a well-worn formula, that of using non-professional actors, and it works with the notion of magical realism, such that the dividing line between the real and the magical becomes blurred. There are some experimental shots – two featuring close-ups of some poisoned rats at the beginning of the film, and one a reflection shot of the 'time-machine' used to count down *tiempo santo* – but the cinematography is otherwise conventional and focuses on providing visual solutions to the plot.

Carlos Reygadas's *Batalla en el cielo* ('Battle in Heaven', 2005) was the most innovative film of the year, an experimental piece that pushes

The time machine in *Madeinusa* (2005).

up against the boundaries of human and filmic experience. The human experience of the main characters has gaps which the film never completely explains. We learn that Marcos (Marcos Hernández), a private security guard, and his (unnamed) wife (Bertha Ruiz) have kidnapped a baby which on the morning the film opens has died, but we never find out how the child died nor the couple's motive for the kidnapping. When we see the child's mother, Viki (Rosalinda Ramirez), it becomes apparent that she is hardly well-heeled, so it would be difficult to imagine that she could pay a handsome ransom. Early on in the film Marcos kneels on the floor when he is on the metro and a woman says '*gracias*' when he gets up, but it is difficult to work out exactly what happened and why a woman should be smiling at him from the next carriage later on. We learn that the daughter of Marcos's boss, Ana (Anapola Mushkadiz) works in a sex boutique but we never find out why; since she is rich (as well as beautiful) her motives are enigmatic. We see Marcos stab Ana to death but his motive for doing so is obscure, especially when one considers that he loves her. These gaps in the plot are echoed by the distance of the characters from their emotions. The early establishing scene when Marcos and his wife, as we eventually discover, are standing behind their stall in the metro shows us two, expressionless people in hieratical pose, while an alarm sounds to which they are oblivious: Marcos turns his head slowly from left to right to ask his wife a question. Even when they discuss the death of the child they have kidnapped the couple's faces do not reveal any emotion. In their voluminousness they seem like

Botero models; in their distance from their emotions like characters in a Brechtian play; and their stiff hieratic pose – when they stare at the camera – is reminiscent of Ancient Egyptian sculpture.[47] These three traits flow naturally from the actors who appear, as Philip French suggests, 'from their general discomfort, to be non-professional'.[48] Reygadas clearly thrives on this 'discomfort'. As he noted in an interview:

> What I don't like about the theatre is the fact that the actors are representing roles. I don't understand; I get very bored and I find it a little ridiculous. I even feel sorry for the people acting. Theatre is interesting as a catharsis for actors because it's the only way you can be idiotic and get away with it. I really, really don't like theatre and I feel so far from it.[49]

The title of the film, '*Batalla en el cielo*', echoes the notion of the war in heaven according to the Book of Revelation:

> Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:7–9)

Marcos and his wife stand motionless and emotionless in the metro, in Carlos Reygadas's *Batalla en el cielo* (2005).

The film appears to dramatize its own version of the 'war in heaven' and it does so through the struggle of the main character, Marcos. Though our first glimpse of Marcos in the metro is of a character who is distanced not only from his emotions but also from ethics (in that he seems unconcerned that the child he kidnapped has died), he appears to embark on a path of 'redemption' – as a result of Ana telling him he should give himself in to the police and his wife encouraging him to participate in the pilgrimage to the basilica of Santa María de Guadalupe. So, according to an allegorical reading of the film, Marcos cleanses himself by walking through a shallow pool of water, repents of his sins (as signalled by covering his face with his hands), expresses contrition by approaching the basilica on his knees, covered by a blue hood, and pays for his sins by dying in the basilica itself.

But this allegorical reading is made problematic by a number of factors, such as his (unexplained) murder of Ana just before he begins the pilgrimage and the inclusion of fellatio at the beginning and end of the film, as if to suggest the heaven of sex rather than the heaven described in the Book of Revelation. It is noteworthy, too, that the final scene of the film shows Marcos smiling. This is the only time he is seen smiling – as if to suggest that he and Ana are finally in paradise. Or are they? As Jon Romney points out, 'It's finally hard to know whether Reygadas takes his transcendental, religious theme seriously, or is deriding it outright – or even deriding us for taking it seriously.'[50] The most striking part of the film is its cinematography, not only in terms of its use of awkward though curiously moving shots of the main characters in mute, hieratic poses, but also the travelling, circular panning shot of the ambient buildingscape when Marcos and Ana make love, followed by the tilt-panning horizontal to vertical shot of Marcos and Ana lying next to each other on the bed. Sound is also part of Reygadas's experimental repertoire. There is some curiously insistent emphasis on the simple fact of breathing, and an ironic deflation of the convention of extradiegetic music when one of the characters in the garage asks: '*Qué música es ésta, hijo?*' (What music is that, son?), and the viewer has a double-take as he realises that the music is, in fact, intradiegetic (part of the scene rather than external to it). *Batalla en el cielo* focuses enigmatically on the interplay between sex and religion and its cinematography highlights rather than smooths over the gaps in our understanding of both.

Tilt shot of the vehicle in which Tessa's dead body is found in Meirelles's *The Constant Gardener* (2005).

Alongside this experimentalism, a new direction began to emerge in Latin American film in the mid-2000s. Firstly a number of Latin American film directors, probably taking a leaf out of González Iñárritu's book in *21 Grams*, began to film in English. Fernando Meirelles, for example, released *The Constant Gardener* in 2005. The second characteristic was that Latin American film directors began to use famous actors. The two trends are likely to have been concomitant. So Meirelles had a starry cast in *The Constant Gardener*: Ralph Fiennes (Justin) and Rachel Weisz (Tessa), who received an Academy Award in the category of Actress in a Supporting Role for her performance. Based on John le Carré's novel of the same title, it tells the story of the search by a diplomat for the killer of his wife which leads to his discovery of the corruption of medical companies working in Africa and a treacherous conspiracy which will destroy the lives of millions of innocent people. The story is told in a loop-like way, beginning with Justin's farewell to Tessa as she leaves with Arnold on what will be her last journey, then we cut to soldiers taking a body in a black bag from a vehicle, then to the British High Commission where Justin's superior, Sandy, has to tell Justin that his wife has been murdered, cut to the beginning of their love affair when Tessa interrupts Justin's presentation, and then back to the defining moment of the film – Justin identifies his wife's dead body, along with Sandy, who vomits. And thus the film begins with Justin's reconstruction of what his wife had discovered about a pharmaceutical company, the corruption based on clinical trials in which the British government is embroiled.

Though the dialogue is English, the language of the film is Brazilian. There are the hallmarks of Meirelles's cinematic fingerprints – the edgy use of the hand-held camera, especially when the protagonists are walking among the crowds of Africa, the camera eye which is positioned about 18 inches (45 cm) off the ground and follows the protagonists as if it were a loyal dog, the off-the-back-shoulder shot, the aesthetically striking contrasts in colour between the grey of London (no one has filmed the greyness of London quite like Meirelles – it takes a Brazilian to see it for what it is) and the reds and oranges and yellows of Africa. All these techniques hark back to the cinematography of *Cidade de Deus*, produced expertly between the cameraman, César Charlone again, and the director, Meirelles. The viewer follows Justin's search and, rather like Tessa, he ignores the 'sensible' advice a number of people offer him to return to Britain. And in a sense Justin 'becomes' Tessa because he flies in the face of convention by offering the pilot $800 to fly a young girl away from the danger zone to safety, just as Tessa had attempted to persuade him to drive some patients at the hospital 30 miles (50 km) to get them home. The film ends on a note of magical realism: when returning to the place where Tessa died Justin 'sees' her face, and she comes to him in the form of a swirling wind which hovers near the car. While the film sticks closely to le Carré's novel – thus the denouement is triumphantly expressed when Tessa's cousin, Arthur Hammond, is able to read out the secret letter that Bernard Pellegrin had sent Sandy some months earlier, telling him to silence Tessa and her report – the film is more about a tragic love affair than anything else, and is indeed more powerful as a result of this directorial decision.[51]

2006 was perhaps the 'year of experiment' for Latin American film. Lisandro Alonso's *Fantasma* ('Phantom', 2006) is true to Alonso's tried-and-tested filmic formula in that it explores the links between documentary and fiction and relies on long takes and sparse dialogue. But *Fantasma* adds the new ingredient of self-reflexivity to the mix. So we see – separately – the non-professional 'stars' of Alonso's two previous films, Misael Saavedra from *La libertad* (2001) and Argentino Vargas from *Los muertos* (2004), wandering about in the Teatro San Martín in Buenos Aires looking for the premiere of *Los muertos*. As Jens Andermann suggests, *Fantasma*

> transforms film-watching into a performative act, which becomes uncomfortably conscious of itself as the intradiegetic ambient

> noise (sounds from the street and from other parts of the theatre perforating the showroom) turns indistinguishable from the one entering the (same) showroom during projections.[52]

As the film develops its (plotless) plot, *Fantasma* becomes a commentary on the staged nature of film and – by implication – the theatricality of reality itself. The 'phantom' of the title is the ghost in the machine of life which the viewers – with Alonso's help – are searching for.

In *Children of Men* (2006), which received three Academy Award nominations, in the categories of Cinematography, Film Editing and Writing (Adapted Screenplay), Alfonso Cuarón created a gripping sci-fi movie, based loosely on P. D. James's novel of the same title, which allegorized the problems of the modern world in the face of infertility. Civilization is on the brink of destruction as a result of a seventeen-year dearth of new human births and Britain, the only country with a semblance of government, has become a police state. Despite the grimness of the opening scenes of the film in which refugees are being herded into concentration camps in order to keep law and order, the film eventually emerges as a modern version of the nativity story in that Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) gives birth to a baby girl. The visual design of the film is striking; it combines the chunky visuality of video games during the battle sequences with long takes that provide an extraordinary elegance to the narrative. As J. Hoberman points out:

> Although cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki insisted on shooting the movie's climactic seven-and-a-half minute tracking shot – Clive Owen cradling a newborn born in a mad dash from a nightmare prison camp through an urban free-fire zone – in a single take, other apparent instances of virtuoso choreographed continuous motion were actually series of short shots digitally combined.[53]

Cuarón demonstrated with *Children of Men* that he was pursuing a new language for Latin American film, one which combined the filmic language of sci-fi movies with an auteurist experimentalism.

Babel (2006), directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu and written by Guillermo Arriaga, is a film about the differences that divide people,

countries and cultures, which often produce misunderstandings and sometimes lead to deportation, depression or death. Like *Amores perros* and *21 Grams* before it – which it completes as the third part of a trilogy about death – Babel cross-cuts between different storylines, thereby creating a suspense which is filmic rather than existential. There are three main narratives: Richard Jones (Brad Pitt) and his wife Susan (Cate Blanchett) are an American couple holidaying in Morocco in an attempt to patch up their marriage, when Susan is shot in the neck by a stray bullet from a gun fired by a young Moroccan, Yussef (Boubker Ait El Caid) who is out hunting for jackals with his brother, Ahmed (Said Tarchani). Yussef, Ahmed and their father, Abdullah, are later hunted down by the police and Ahmed is shot and killed. A helicopter is sent and Susan is transported to Casablanca, operated on and survives. The second narrative occurs on the border between the United States and Mexico. Richard and Susan's two children, Mike and Debbie, are being looked after by their nanny, Amelia (Adriana Barraza, who won an Academy Award nomination in the category of Actress in a Supporting Role) in San Diego, when she takes them over the border – with her nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal) – so she can attend her son's wedding in Mexico. On their return to the United States Santiago panics at the border, drives the car off and abandons Amelia and the children in the

Susan (Cate Blanchett) with her husband (Brad Pitt) just after she has been shot in the neck in *Babel* (2006).

Amelia lost in the desert with the two children in *Babel*.

desert. Amelia goes off to find help when it gets light; as a result of her actions – she is accused of kidnapping the children – Amelia is deported with immediate effect to Mexico. The first and the second narratives are connected by a phone call which is heard from Amelia's perspective near the beginning of the film and from Richard's close to the conclusion.

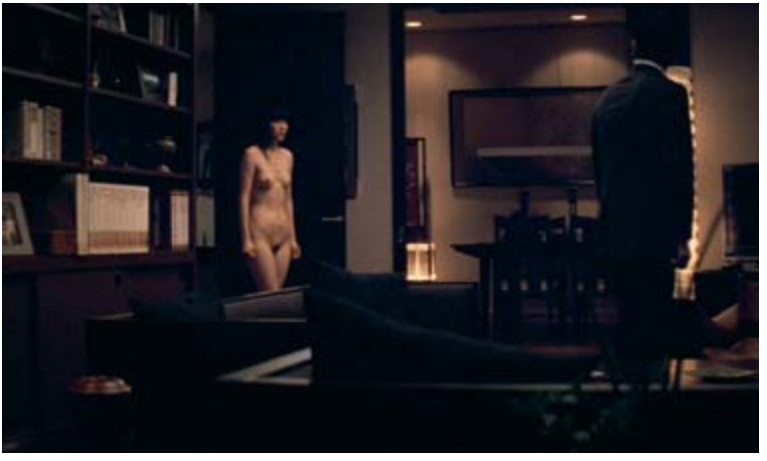
The third narrative has a tenuous connection to the first two, even if it is ultimately more intriguing and thought-provoking. It tells the story of a beautiful, deaf young Japanese girl, Chieko Wataya (Rinko Kikuchi, who also won an Academy Award nomination in the category of Actress in a Supporting Role), who attempts to seduce a teenage boy (by taking off her knickers and flashing him in a café), her dentist (by forcing him to put his hand up her skirt) and a detective, Kenji Mamiya (Satoshi Nikaido) (by taking all her clothes off). The connection with the other two stories is that her father, Yasujiro Wataya (Koji Yakusho) had years earlier in Morocco given his gun to his hunting guide, Hassan Ibrahim, as he later explains to a detective. Hassan had subsequently sold the gun to Abdullah, as seen in the opening sequence of the film. In this way *Babel* echoes a theme explored in *Amores perros*, namely, the irony of how chance occurrences lead to events with life-changing consequences for certain individuals. *Babel* explores the so-called 'butterfly effect', in that it depicts the links between people on far-flung continents rather than in one city (as in *Amores perros*). An example of this type of tenuous connection between different parts of the world is suggested when the story of the shooting of Susan appears on the news in Japan;

Chieko sees it but does not realize its implicit significance for her life. Some reviewers were not impressed by the tenuousness of these connections. Ed Gonzalez, for example, argued:

> Though there is value to *Babel*, the filmmakers are careless about it. Commentaries rise to the surface only to dissipate in a cloud of connect-the-dot-isms. Just when you begin to appreciate the film's political perspectives, the filmmakers allow nuance to evaporate as they thrill in showing us how action in one part of the globe resonates in such a way that it affects someone's life thousands of miles away.[54]

And Peter Bradshaw was also unimpressed. He accused *Babel* of being

> the exasperatingly conceited new film from Alejandro González Iñárritu. It is well acted and handsomely photographed, but still extraordinarily overpraised and overblown, a middlebrow piece of near-nonsense: the kind of self-conscious arthouse cinema that is custom-tailored and machine-tooled for the dinner-party demographic. The script is contrived, shallow, unconvincing and rendered absurd and almost meaningless by a plot naivety that is impossible to ignore once its full magnitude dawns on you.[55]



The enigmatic young Japanese girl, Chieko, in *Babel*.

But – *pace* Gonzalez and Bradshaw – there may well be a good reason why González Iñárritu devises such a globally stretched plot. If one compares the fate which is meted out to the representatives of the different nations portrayed in *Babel*, it is noticeable that some nations pull the short straw whereas others have disaster heaped upon them. Philip French makes an important point in this respect:

> While the movie seems to be sending out an ecumenically bland message about us all being part of mankind, and not sending to ask for whom the bell tolls, it is evident that some men's deaths are more significant than others, and indeed that America is the bell-ringer. The immediate assumption is that the bullet has been fired by a terrorist, and the European tourists panic and flee. A crisis is created, worldwide interest aroused. But whereas, partly by nature, partly by social deference, the authorities are courteous and helpful in their treatment of middle-class citizens, the peasants in Morocco are brutally ill-treated by their own police, and the Mexicans at the U.S. border are viewed with contempt and suspicion.[56]

While Amelia's life is in effect over at the end of the film – she has been deported summarily back to Mexico and will have to build her life again from scratch – and Ahmed's life is literally over, it is striking that the American family emerges relatively unscathed from its 'disaster'. Susan will recover from her operation and her two children have, somewhat miraculously, survived their experience in the desert. This idea is reinforced by the newsreader's comment towards the end of the film: 'The American people finally have a happy ending, after five days of frantic phone calls and hand wringing.' It is as if the film is hinting that Moroccans and Mexicans pay the price whereas Americans survive to live another day, and the Japanese find themselves in a curious limbo region somewhere in between (in the sense that Chieko Wataya is severely depressed and frustrated while her father, Yasujiro Wataya, will not be charged for any role in Susan's shooting).

There are some cinematic signals in *Babel* that indicate González Iñárritu's signature. When we see the tourist bus winding its way along the road, we know it will be shot at, and thus we experience the same

dread we felt when watching the repeated car crash in *Amores perros*. The soundtrack (plaintive guitar interspersed with brooding organ music) and the use of silence – for instance, obliteration of the tourists' speech – gives a sense of distance, as if we as the viewers are helplessly watching people who are about to be struck down by tragedy.

The novelty of the film, though, lies in its exploration of the Babelian motif. The problem with communication underlies a number of episodes, including the slightly odd bilingual conversation Amelia the nanny has with the children (she speaks in Spanish and they reply in English), the argument between Richard and Susan based on their inability or unwillingness to reach out to each other, the awkward attempts by the Japanese youth to communicate with Chieko and her friend, both of whom are deaf; and the diplomatic stand-off between Morocco and the United States which leads to a delay in the arrival of the helicopter. Finally the film focuses on the deliberate non-communication between director and viewer – *Babel*, after all, ends with an enigma buried within the third narrative. Chieko writes a note for the detective and the contents of the letter are deliberately left to remain a mystery to the viewer.

It is ironic, of course, given that *Babel* is about communication problems, that while making the film González Iñárritu and Arriaga fell out. As Jo Tuckman points out:

> But whatever the truth about the end of one of the most successful writer-director teams of recent times, Arriaga was clearly less involved in making *Babel* than he had been in the previous films. This has some critics busy identifying hints as to González Iñárritu's future direction. He has never made a full-length feature without Arriaga, coming late to the industry after a successful career as a radio DJ and a maker of TV commercials. Fernanda Solórzano, critic for the Mexican culture magazine *Letras Libres*, sees evidence of Iñárritu beginning to shake off the shackles of Arriaga's obsession with interweaving, fragmented plot structures and solemn moral messages. As a result, *Babel* is filled with loose ends and a touch of moral ambiguity, she says, but also with a freer exploration of character.[57]

This question was in a sense answered when, four years later, González Iñárritu brought out his next film, *Biutiful*, which has a less complicated plot and is more character-focused.

Despite its initial acclaim, *Babel* did not obtain as many awards as expected (it won the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture and, despite seven Academy Award nominations including two nominations for best supporting actress, it only won an Academy Award for Best Original Score).[58] This is surprising given the expert crafting of the cinematography.[59] The cross-cutting, for example, allowed for some thought-provoking connections between unlinked events. Occasionally González Iñárritu will use visual rhyme, as when Ahmed and Yussef running off after Yussef's bullet has hit the bus leads immediately to the running of a young boy in the next sequence with close to identical framing. Often the switch between the narratives leads to an emotional as well as graphic overlay of one event onto another. The throttling of the hen at the wedding feast in Mexico is followed immediately by the sequence in Morocco where Susan is losing large amounts of blood from the bullet wound. Though Mike is focusing on the blood spurting from the hen's decapitated throat, his horrified look merges emotionally with the horrified look of the tourists on the bus as they see blood pouring from Susan's neck. By fusing the two sequences through adroit editing González Iñárritu allows the second sequence to infiltrate the first – though looking at a hen, Mike is also (metaphorically) watching the tortured body of his blood-covered mother.[60] It should be noted that González Iñárritu's cross-cutting is not traditional in the sense of being the shuttling between two spatially separated actions occurring simultaneously, according to Griffith's time-honoured formula. In *Babel* Mike's horrified gaze at the severed chicken's neck occurs *after* the shooting of his mother since, as we know from the early telephone conversation between Richard and Amelia, she was already in hospital by the time Michael travelled to Mexico. But the emotional overlay between the two scenes is just as effective. Pointing in a similar direction, the tense episode in which Susan is forced to have her neck sewn without anaesthetic and ends with her blood-curdling scream is followed by a seventeen-second silence as we focus on Chieko's face quizzically watching the conversation between the receptionist and one of the patients in the dentist's waiting room. The silence operates as much as

the traumatized after-effect of Susan's pain as an expression of Chieko's puzzled consciousness.

Babel uses the hand-held camera deftly, encouraging it to become another 'real-life breathing' witness to the events, especially during tense action takes, such as when Richard is desperate for Susan to get medical help and he jumps off the bus in order to persuade the driver of a passing truck to take his wife to hospital. When the police arrive to question Ibrahim about the gun, the camera moves fluidly, even nervously, turning from Ibrahim to the officers and back again. One of the most exhilarating hand-held takes in the film is the 'floating camera' sequence in which Chieko and her friends meet some boys who offer them drugs; they play in the water fountain, and then go to a disco. When Chieko sees that no one wants to dance with her, she leaves and her depressed self-absorption is expressed through an adroit use of shallow focus combined with bokeh (out-of-focus light sources) and the obliteration of sound at various points. There is some creative use of the bokeh effect for the lights in the background later on in the film when the detective asks Chieko if she actually saw her mother jump from the balcony. Bokeh is used effectively to signal an element of the plot outside the viewer's field of vision. This version of events is vehemently rejected by Yasujiro Wataya, who tells the detective that his wife shot herself in the head and, furthermore, that Chieko was the first to find her, and that he has explained this many times to the police already. Given that this version of events directly contradicts what Chieko has just told the detective it is not surprising that he looks confused. The detective goes to a restaurant to read the message written for him by Chieko; he takes it out and reads it, and the expression on his face is one of deep sorrow, suggesting that it is a significant statement. Since the viewer will never discover what the letter says the film concludes on an enigmatic note.

El laberinto del fauno ('Pan's Labyrinth', 2006) was the most successful Latin American film of 2006 in terms of awards as well as at the box office. It received Academy Awards for Make-up, Cinematography and Art Direction, and was further nominated for Writing (Original Screenplay), Original Score and Foreign Language Film. The main genre to which *El laberinto del fauno* belongs is fantasy film in the style of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (original novels published 1950–56; latest film version in 2010) with which it shares a number of characteristics,

including the notion of a land of mythical creatures and talking animals to which children (unlike adults) have special access through the imagination. In *El laberinto del fauno* a young girl, Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), stumbles into the faun's labyrinth and is told that she is actually Princess Moanna and that she has three tasks to perform. Whereas Lewis's novel is set in England and access to the fantasy world is found at the back of the wardrobe, del Toro's film is set in Spain in 1944, five years after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War with General Franco in power. *El laberinto del fauno*, unlike the English genotype, thereby takes on a political dimension in that the real world is a world of pain and death, epitomized by Captain Vidal (Sergi López i Ayats), a Franco-like figure who ruthlessly hunts down the Republicans who are hiding in the forested hill above the Nationalist camp. He brutally murders two rabbit-poachers, suspecting them of being Republican spies, and sadistically tortures one of the Republicans – who happens to have a stutter – who is captured after an ambush. The magical world upon which his new step-daughter, Ofelia, stumbles, the faun's labyrinth (the labyrinth here an obvious allusion to Jorge Luis Borges's work) is a world scorned by Captain Vidal. When he finds a mandrake in a bowl of milk under the bed of his wife – the faun's cure for Carmen's (Ariadna Gil) illness – he explodes with anger and blames Carmen for filling Ofelia's head with fairy tales. It is in this sense that Guillermo del Toro builds a specifically Latin American version of the fantasy film in that a clear association is made between totalitarianism and the rejection of imagination and creativity.

The eyeless monster awakes when Ofelia steals a grape in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006).

Carmen becomes, as it were, the mediator between these two polarized attitudes towards life and, at this point in the film, she sides with her husband and tells her daughter that life is cruel and full of pain. And that '*la magia no existe*' (magic doesn't exist). As a result – perhaps not surprisingly, it's a fantasy film after all – Carmen is 'punished' for her words. As soon as she puts the mandrake on the fire it begins to burn and scream (with the aid of some highly impressive animatronics); Carmen loses its protection and promptly dies in childbirth.[61]

Though starting as a fantasy film and gradually morphing into political allegory, *El laberinto del fauno* is transformed into a thriller, especially in its final third when Captain Vidal is determined to take his revenge on any Republican who comes his way, culminating in the dramatic struggle with the maid, Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), who is discovered to be a spy. High tension is created when Captain Vidal gets his instruments ready to torture Mercedes, and the viewer is drawn powerfully into the film when Mercedes attacks the captain, cutting the left side of his mouth open to avenge the torture of the stuttering Republican. Harmony is restored when the Republicans attack the Nationalist stronghold and shoot the captain, although they are too late to save Ofelia, who has been shot by Captain Vidal. The most striking feature about *El laberinto del fauno* is that it demonstrated how seemingly effortlessly a Mexican film director could capture the adoration of the mainstream film market, which for many years had remained the jealous preserve of the English-speaking world. It made over $83 million at the box office and won numerous prizes, including three Academy Awards, and scooped many other awards including three BAFTAs (Costume Design, Make-up and Hair, and Film Not in the English language) and – in Spain – Goyas for Best Cinematography, Editing, Make-up and Hairstyling, New Actress for Ivana Baquero, Original Screenplay, Sound and Special Effects. *El laberinto del fauno* demonstrated that Latin American film was a force to be reckoned with on the world stage.

The outstanding film of 2007 was *Blindness* (2007), directed by the Brazilian Fernando Meirelles. It recreates José Saramago's novel *Ensaio da cegueira* ('Essay on Blindness', 1995), published in English as *Blindness* (1997), and is a powerful film that continues Meirelles's English-language filmmaking trajectory. It extends his interest in exploring a plot- and character-driven formula, in contrast to the digital flamboyance

of the Portuguese-language *Cidade de Deus*. Saramago's story is in some respects a what-if thought experiment drawing on a lineage of disaster narratives ranging from *Lord of the Flies* to *Day of the Triffids*, setting out to answer the question: what would happen if an epidemic of blindness broke out across the world? Saramago's answer is bleak in that he sees democracy as the first casualty, totalitarianism as the government solution – food shortages produce a survival of the fittest mentality, leading to oppression, violence, rape, war and anarchy. Meirelles's filmic version of Saramago's *Weltanschauung* produces imaginative solutions to the dilemma that Peter Bradshaw has identified: 'Cinema is a visual medium, so no film version of *Blindness* could entirely reproduce its buried literary conceit of the "blind" reader having to imagine what the narrator is describing.'[62] The event which inaugurates the plot – involving a Japanese driver (Yusuke Iseya) who suddenly can't drive because he is blind – is presented via a series of directorial shots (the drivers stuck in the traffic jam, sounding their horns and getting agitated) rather than POV shots, so that it takes a while for us to work out what is going on; all we see is car after car whizzing past, interrupted by a shot of traffic lights turning red to green and an aerial establishing shot of a busy traffic junction. Then we hear the driver's exclamation as his car brakes abruptly, leading to the discovery that he is blind. The whiteness of this blindness only envelops the screen as a POV shot just before the Japanese driver describes his symptoms – 'like light shining through a sea of white; it feels like I'm swimming in milk'. From this point onwards the film has a steady forward momentum with plot as the centre of gravity; the driver's blindness infects the doctor he goes to see and the latter infects one of his patients, a call girl who wears dark glasses (Alice Braga), and the eventual result is mass-blindness and the government's decision to quarantine the sufferers in an attempt to curb its spread. The centre of gravity of the plot gradually swerves towards the doctor (Mark Ruffalo) and his wife (Julianne Moore) who become the leaders of this new vulnerable group.

The film, like the novel, is not only an allegory of human exploitation in the abstract; it becomes almost a case study of how scarcity and want lead to the powerful exploiting the vulnerable. The King of Ward 3 (Gael García Bernal) takes control of the food supply and first demands valuables from Wards 1 and 2 and then demands their women. One woman is raped and beaten to death and subsequently the doctor's wife

A Japanese driver realizes he is blind in *Blindness* (2008).

takes her revenge by killing the King of Ward 3, stabbing him in the neck. Mayhem follows, fire breaks out, and the doctor and his wife lead their group out to safety. Despite some of the negative reviews of the film, which have seen it as unremittingly bleak,[63] *Blindness* ends on a positive note in that the Japanese driver regains his sight, leading to the hope that the others too will regain theirs.

One of the main difficulties of the film, as Meirelles suggested in an interview, was the depiction of blindness itself:

> The big difficulty was the fact that the characters were blind. First of all, to establish relationships between characters – well, relationships are really all based on eye contact. When you're flirting or angry with someone, it's all done through eye contact. And in this film, the characters couldn't have any eye contact. Also, because they don't see, it was difficult to work out where to put the camera, because when you're cutting a film, you go to a camera and show what a character's seeing. In this film nobody sees except Julianne Moore, so I couldn't cut the film in the normal way. So we tried to make the image less trustworthy. Sometimes the image is very washed-out and you don't see much, *or* it's out of focus, *or* you look at something and think it's the image, but you realise it's just the reflection. I didn't want you to trust your eyes.[64]

It is clear that Meirelles and César Charlone, the film's cinematographer, thought of various cinematic solutions to this underlying problem. As a result we find in the film some delicately choreographed digital photography to suggest visual disorientation, ranging from the use of white-out shots as described above, when the call girl with sunglasses (Alice Braga) goes blind, when the doctor loses his sight (the profile of foreground and background is oddly merged as if to suggest that the doctor no longer inhabits his wife's space) and when a new group arrives in the hospital. There is innovative use of blurred images combined with the shrill sound of car horns, screeching of tyres and revving engines when the Japanese driver steps out of his car near his apartment, and moral darkness, as, for example, when the screen becomes saturated with black and green tones when the (unnamed) thief who steals the Japanese driver's car is forced to get out of it, and the sequence of the delivery of the women of Ward 1 to satisfy the sexual needs of Ward 3, during which the preponderance of black to near-black tones almost completely obscures visibility. At times it is difficult to trust your eyes because of the use of mirrors. When the thief takes the Japanese driver home the shot of the mirror to the right of the frame disorients the viewer, and in the shot of the call girl and her client on the bed, the mirror which this time is to the left of the frame likewise makes it at first difficult to distinguish image from body. All of these filmic techniques are combined in order to create a sensation in the viewer's mind of 'agnosia', which the doctor defines, in his conversation with his wife early on in the film, as 'an

King of Ward 3 uses the public address system to gain control in a shot which emphasizes his duplicity in *Blindness* (2008).

inability to recognize familiar objects'. *Blindness* is a harrowing film in which strong acting performances from Moore and García Bernal are complemented by a sophisticated, digital cinematography which express the horror of a postmodern world in an arresting way.

Tropa de Elite ('Elite Squad', 2007), directed by the Brazilian José Padilha, is a semi-fictional hard-hitting action film based on the operations of the Special Police Operations Squad of Rio de Janeiro, the Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais (BOPE). While the terrain – drug lords in the favelas and the armed struggle with the police in Rio de Janeiro – is similar to that covered in Meirelles's *Cidade de Deus* released five years earlier, Padilha's film presents the action from the perspective of the police. As Padilha pointed out in an interview:

> *Elite Squad* is like being a cop in an environment as violent as Rio, and what the cop thinks/how he sees the world. I chose a first-person perspective here because it's the right one. Nascimento, like Henry in *Goodfellas*, is full of facts and he tortures people, but you bond with him. It's also why the film became polemic.[65]

This has led some to interpret the film as having a fascist ideology; it was an enormous box-office success (making U.S.$14,660,695) and it won a Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2008.[66]

Luz silenciosa ('Silent Light', 2007), directed by Carlos Reygadas, filmed in Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, in northern Mexico, tells the story of Johan (Cornelio Wall), who struggles to choose between his family – Esther (Miriam Toews) and their five children – and his lover, Marianne (Maria Pankratz). The film is set in a Mennonite community and the dialogue is mainly in Plautdietsch, the language spoken by the low-German Mennonites, though there is some Spanish. As is commonly the case in Reygadas's work, all the actors are non-professional and were chosen from the Mennonite community. Some aspects of the plot of *Luz silenciosa* are based on the film *Ordet* (1955) by Danish filmmaker Carl Theodor Dreyer, in which the main character's wife dies apparently out of grief as a result of her husband's impiety, only then to be resurrected mysteriously, as well as some of the cinematic motifs (clocks ticking, long takes of the landscape, the wheat and wind blowing in the

trees).[67] But Reygadas's work uses Dreyer's film as a prop on which to construct his meditations about film. The deliberate and paused acting of the non-professional actors is used in order to suggest that people are awkward about the roles that have been thrust upon them in their lives, as if they do not understand what will happen next. Johan's first 50-second crying sequence, for example, is tearless and awkwardly natural. When he goes to see his friend Zacarías (Jacobo Klassen) at the garage, the conversation between Zacarías and the other mechanic has overtones of Harold Pinter in that, while they are talking about the machine parts that need to be fixed ('timing belt, crankshaft, and redo the valves'), the second mechanic moves screen-right in order to have Johan framed in a background piggy-in-the-middle shot to contrast his existential pain with their mundaneness. To further underline the ordinariness of the conversation, Zacarías even farts. Anti-staginess (which Reygadas has always sought in his films) is preserved by having the third mechanic enter the frame from screen-right and blurt out his lines too quickly, thereby talking over the second mechanic's lines. We find out what Johan's problem is when Zacarías says, 'I thought you stopped seeing her'. The pain of his experience is illustrated in his remark, 'Just talking about it feels like lead being poured into my guts.' Johan then admits that 'It's true that Marianne is a better woman for me', at which point Zacarías's rejoinder, 'And that may be founded in something sacred, even if we don't understand it', encapsulates the dilemma faced by Johan, and around which the whole film revolves. At this juncture in the film his decision appears to have been made for him by the lyrics of a popular Mexican song, 'No volveré' (I'm Not Coming Back), which are heard in the background and which Johan begins to sing along to. The lyrics express the desire to end a relationship – '*Te lo juro que no volveré / aunque me hagas pedazos la vida / si una vez con locura te amé / y de mi alma estarás depedida*' ('I swear I'm not coming back / even if you smash my life to pieces / If I loved you madly once / You're saying goodbye to my soul'). Johan gets into his truck, ready to drive off, it seems, into his lover's arms. But before he leaves he drives in a circle three times around Zacarías, breaking the expectations of a conventional plot and, in the process, breaking the 180-degree rule since the hand-held camera follows him, and he sings the lyrics of the song before driving off into the distance – a bold cinematic technique.

Immediately afterwards, Johan goes to meet Marianne in the countryside and they kiss. To express the ecstasy of the experience the photographer uses bokeh for the orange and yellow points of light resting on their heads. Produced by a shallow depth of field, Reygadas's use of bokeh is unusual in this scene since the effect is positioned in the foreground of the image rather than the background, which is the convention. The out-of-focus region of the image is thus the space between the camera and the protagonists. Reygadas is suggesting that the love experienced echoes what Zacarías had mentioned earlier – that it is 'sacred' and something we do not understand. He depicts that love as a light coming from a place that is beyond our understanding which, in cinematic terms, is the out-of-focus region of the image. But Reygadas is also drawing the viewer into the concept of love as deriving from an unknown source by situating the space between the camera and the protagonists – which is the space within the filmed frame that viewers are invited to inhabit. Reygadas's playfulness with regard to cinematic conventions also emerges when Johan goes to see his father (Peter Wall) to discuss what he should do. He says that he does not want his mother to know, to which his father replies, 'Don't worry. This is only between us.' Moments later Johan's father winks at the camera, drawing attention to the scene as a filmed reality.

The film comes to its emotional climax during a car journey in which Johan tells his wife that, despite his best efforts, he has seen Marianne again. Esther who, up until this point, had seemed impassive, almost removed from her emotions, is for once overwhelmed and calls Marianne a 'damn whore!' Soon afterwards she asks Johan to stop the car and shelters from the rain under a tree, crying her heart out. Wondering

Johan and Marianne kiss with bokeh effect in the foreground in Carlos Reygadas's *Luz silenciosa* (2007).

what has happened, Johan goes to look for her, comes across her inert body and shouts out in pain. A passing truck driver takes them to the hospital where Johan is told that Esther has died of a massive heart attack. Esther's death, which appears to have been caused by Johan's revelation, and her subsequent resurrection as a result of Marianne's kiss at her wake (we first hear a sharp intake of breath and then we hear her breathing and see her eyes opening) are faithful to Dreyer's script for *Ordet*. However, the use of light as the main structuring technique (in the beginning and final sequences of dawn and dusk, as well as when Marianne visits Esther's body and the room is saturated with white light emanating from the window behind her), is part of Reygadas's filmic signature.

The bokeh orange and yellow points of light, which first appear when Johan and Marianne kiss, reappear after Esther's resurrection. An experimental film with some visually arresting cinematography, particularly in terms of the use of light and the use of bokeh to portray the sacred space of love, *Luz silenciosa* broke new ground in Latin American cinema's search for new ways of portraying the 'unseen'.

La mujer sin cabeza ('The Headless Woman', 2008), directed by the Argentine Lucrecia Martel, is a film about a middle-class dentist, Verónica (María Onetto), the 'headless' woman of the title. Early in the film, Verónica is driving along in her car when suddenly she hits something and comes to a halt; the camera focuses on the right side of Verónica's face (as if positioned in the front passenger seat of the car) and there are no establishing, frontal, aerial or directorial shots to counterbalance this lateral camera shot. In effect the viewer sees less than the protagonist and much of the 'drama' of the film springs from this blind spot. After the crash, in the side mirror the viewer sees a dead dog in the road and our assumption is that Verónica sees the same thing, but we cannot be sure. She is then seen having her head X-rayed to check for injuries and the camera angle is what might be called the 'headless shot', a medium shot showing the torso and legs without the head. This particular shot becomes more insistent as the film develops. The plot is overwhelmed by odd, unexplained events. Verónica goes to a hotel room and has sex with a man who, as we find out later, is married to her cousin. She suddenly becomes carless but it is not explained where her car has gone. She begins to insist that she has run over and killed someone but is persuaded by her family that she has imagined this due to the shock of

running over a dog. This seems reasonable in that the viewer saw a dead dog in the road – that is, until there is a report of the discovery of a young man's body in the canal that runs alongside the road where the accident took place. When Verónica visits her aunt, her aunt refers to some 'ghosts' which live in the house, and we see – in very shallow depth of field – a person leaving the room they are in. This turns out to be the cook's son. Or is it?

The film abounds with mysteries such as these.[68] The film could be read as a story about a woman who ran over a dog but there are too many gaps in the narrative. The cleaners keep asking if they can clean her car; Verónica's friends and family seem anxious – indeed overanxious – to tell her that nothing happened, that it was only a dog. As Joanna Page suggests, Martel's cinema 'intensifies the destabilizing forces that are already at work in the social systems she depicts, heightening the power of becoming that is inherent in the unexplained accidents, popular beliefs, apocryphal texts and forbidden desires of her films'.[69] The disorientation is enhanced by the deliberate use of extremely shallow focus, so that the viewer often cannot make out the background, as well as disorientating camera angles – the main character is very rarely centre-frame and there are a number of headless shots – and apparently inane conversations about hair colour, hairstyles and flower pots. To cap it all, the film ends abruptly. The fact that we never find out whether Verónica did kill a young man or, indeed, see the body, makes this film an allegory of the guilt of the middle classes about the disappeared bodies of the Dirty War (1976–83). The film theatricalizes the middle classes' collusion in the plight of the *desaparecidos*, whose bodies were – for them – deliberately blurred figments of their imagination. This film is an ironic send-up of their imagination.

Lisandro Alonso's *Liverpool* (2008), co-written by Salvador Roselli, tells the story of the journey home by Farrel (Juan Fernández) to Tierra del Fuego. As so often in Alonso's work the landscape – which in *Liverpool* is as much the sea glimpsed from the freighter on which Farrel travels as the remote and stunningly beautiful snow-capped mountains of Tierra del Fuego – takes on a protagonist's role. As Alonso suggested in an interview about the film, 'For me, there is always the place where I want to shoot, before the story and the characters. Once I decide where to shoot, I travel there and I start investigating what happens with the people

who live there.'[70] *Liverpool* contains some of the signature motifs of Alonso's work – the taciturn protagonist, the reflective, long takes and the mixture of documentary and fiction. The title is explained in the last scene when we see Farrel's daughter Analia (Giselle Irrazabal) holding a trinket bearing the name of Liverpool, a gift from her father. Whereas *Los muertos* concluded on a note of mystery – we do not know what happened when Argentino Vargas got home – in *Liverpool* Alonso concludes with a sense of the importance of a gift from father to daughter.

Perro come perro ('Dog Eat Dog', 2008), directed by Carlos Moreno and Colombia's official nomination for the Academy Award, is in one sense a standard Colombian *vicario* revenge-murder-and-gore movie. It tells the story of a powerful businessman, El Orejón (Blas Jaramillo), intent on avenging the murder of his godson, William Medina, and getting his money back from 'El Mellizo' (The Twin). The two *vicarios* sent to retrieve his cash, Víctor Peñaranda (Marlon Moreno) and Eusebio 'El Negro' Benítez (Óscar Borda), accidentally kill one of the twins during their interrogation, but Víctor finds the money and hides it while he plans his escape. Every single character in the film double-crosses someone else (even the laughing doorman takes a pop at Víctor late in the film) and at the conclusion not one of the male characters is left standing. So far, so standard. But the film has two twists. The first is the black magic which the witch, Iris, casts on Eusebio at El Orejón's instigation, leading to his hand rotting away and hellish black water flooding mysteriously out of the shower drain and the toilet. The second twist is that while the *vicarios* are waiting in the hotel an unidentified man keeps on ringing up asking to speak to his girlfriend, Adela. He is told to get lost with some choice Colombian insults. But at the end of the film he suddenly appears and attacks Víctor with a metal bar, asking what he has done with Adela and killing him. The supernatural quality of *Perro come perro* – which sits uneasily with the depiction of raw violence (the worst of which occurs when one of the twins is sawn in half with a chainsaw) and the black humour of Adela's forlorn and persistent boyfriend – is revealed in the final scene when Eusebio dies and is led away, walking past his own dead body, by William Medina's ghost. While certainly not a financial success – it made a grand total of $80 in box-office takings in the United States – *Perro come perro* offers an intriguing take on the Latin American gangster movie genre.[71]

Alamar (2009), directed by the Mexican Pedro González-Rubio, is a film about the relationship between a five-year-old boy, Natan, and his father, Jorge. The film is bookended in Italy – it begins with Natan and his mother speaking Italian in Rome, and the main story emerges using a sequence of fishing trips in the stunningly beautiful Chinchorro reef off the eastern coast of Mexico. Father and son fish together, talk together, the boy learns from his father and also from his grandfather, and the film becomes a beautifully shot elegy in a minor key to the relationship between father and son. The film has something of a documentary feel about it – showing how the fish is caught, how it is de-scaled – redolent in a tangential way of Grierson's documentary *The Drifters*. And yet *Alamar* is clearly a feature film – or, more precisely, a hybrid genre in which the conventions of the documentary film and the feature film merge, a featurementary.

An unnerving film, both thematically and cinematically, *Agua fría del mar* ('Cold Water of the Sea', 2009), directed by the Costa Rican film director Paz Fábrega, expresses the force and power of Nature. This is done in the sense of the unnervingly beautiful pans of the Costa Rican seascape, the snakes writhing in the mud as if in some horribly synchronic dance, but it is also about the power, perhaps sinister, of women, expressed simultaneously in the protagonist as well as the young girl she finds on the beach. In a Q&A session at the Odeon Panton Street cinema in London in November 2009, the director mentioned the connection between them, as if the young girl were the symptom of the older girl's malaise, one of the enigmatic elements of the film. The film is also open-ended in the sense that it does not conclude; it ends with the young girl stepping out of her father's truck and walking down to the beach, without any clear sense of what will happen next. *Agua fría del mar* is an intriguing debut film and also a landmark of contemporary Costa Rican cinema.

La teta asustada ('The Milk of Sorrow', 2009), directed by the Peruvian Claudia Llosa, is a poetic and atmospheric portrayal of the trauma experienced by a daughter, Fausta, on hearing about her mother's rape in a remote Andean village in the 1980s, when the Sendero Luminoso and the military were involved in a vicious and violent war. The film opens with the song of the mother's despair, which turns out to be her last will and testament, in Quechua, describing her pain. It is at this point that the film takes a bizarre turn. It describes Fausta's resistance to having her

mother cremated in the back yard; instead she wants to take the body back home to the Andes, and will not allow the burial to take place until this can happen. Fausta accepts some menial work in the local household of a rich and famous female musician in order to scrape some money together to take her mother 'home'. The musician gradually becomes more and more interested in the young girl's songs of sorrow, and indeed ends up stealing one of them – a story about a mermaid – in order to present it to Lima's elite, to great acclaim. A subsequent visit to the doctor leads to the discovery that Fausta has a potato in her womb, whose presence is a mystery until she explains that it is her way of protecting herself from rape. The magical realism, so evident in Llosa's first film, *Madeinusa*, is also present here in that the potato is actually growing in Fausta's womb and – although we do not see this – she has to cut out the sprouts which are growing within her vagina.

The magical realism is not only unusual, it also has a gendered focus in that it involves a magic formula designed to thwart the violence that men visit on women's bodies. There is also a political, even class-based edge, in that it shows how the aristocracy, as epitomized by the 'criollo' concert pianist, exploits mercilessly the indigenous population. Aída offers Fausta pearls if she will sing – this is enticing for the young girl since she needs the money in order to afford a decent burial for her mother – but then Aída refuses to honour her side of the bargain. But the tables are turned when the young girl has an operation and is able to bury her mother near the sea. The film is cinematographically strong, and has

Mother and daughter in *La teta asustada* (2009).

Aida offers Fausta pearls if she sings for her in *La teta asustada*.

long, intensely emotive shots of Fausta's face, allowing us to 'enter' her pain, which is also expressed in the sad songs she sings. The tragedy is laced with humour, such as the various staged courtship scenes and the episode when a driver is shot because he cannot get his truck carrying a boat through a tunnel in the Andes. This beautifully shot film won its director a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009, and was a nominee for an Academy Award in the best Foreign Language Film category, suggesting that Claudia Llosa is one of Latin America's most important female directors.

One of the most successful Latin American films of 2009 was *El secreto de sus ojos* ('The Secret in their Eyes', 2009), directed by the Argentine director Juan José Campanella, which won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. *El secreto de sus ojos* is a crime thriller based on Sacheri's novel *La pregunta de sus ojos* ('The Question in their Eyes'), which mixes politics and passion. It focuses on the buried romance of a now-retired criminal court investigator, Benjamín Espósito (Ricardo Darín), and Judge Irene Menéndez-Hastings (Soledad Villareal) who had worked together in 1974 on a still-as-yet-unresolved rape case, as silhouetted against the murkily corrupt and violent world of the Guerra Sucia in Argentina (1976–83). Campanella's film is, as Peter Bradshaw states, 'a supremely watchable, well-made and well-acted movie with a dark, sinewy sense of history: a tremendously slick thriller'.[72] Shot and edited digitally, it won the Goya Award for Best Spanish Language Foreign Film and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film

at the 82nd Academy Awards. *El secreto de sus ojos* manages to combine a number of genres. As Geoffrey McNab points out, it 'deliberately blurs genre lines and storytelling styles. This is a murder mystery. It is also a love story, a drama about memory and bad faith and even, in an oblique way, a political allegory about 1970s Argentina.'[73] Unlike films such as *La historia oficial* (1984) or *Garage Olimpo* (1999), which narrates the Dirty War as if it were a story of the present, *El secreto de sus ojos* alludes to it in the past tense and is more concerned with seeing the fin-de-siècle – the film is set in 1999 – as an echo chamber of those events. The preterite feeling is engineered through having the protagonist write a novel about those years, a device which was not to the taste of all reviewers. Tim Robey, for example, was unimpressed: 'Already notorious as the one that beat *A Prophet* and *The White Ribbon* to the Best Foreign Film Academy Award, this flashback-legal-procedural-whodunit from Argentina was in every way the safe choice: handsome, fitfully absorbing, fundamentally trite.'[74] But, *pace* Robey, what allows this film to rise above triteness is its chilling vision of what might be described as 'murderous office politics' as embodied in the rivalry between Espósito and Romano (Mariano Argento). Things begin to turn nasty in the prosecutor's office when Espósito, who in Ricardo Darín's performance, as Jonathan Romney suggests, 'faintly recalls Al Pacino with a quizzical, impish streak',[75] accuses Romano of obtaining by violent coercion two false confessions in the case of the rape and murder of a beautiful 23-year-old girl, Liliana Coloto (Carla Quevedo). The film is structured around a succession of false hypotheses, and the first of these is Romano's solution to the whodunit. This is disproved once Espósito's accusation is upheld and Romano loses his job and is transferred elsewhere. Espósito, with the help of his sidekick, Pablo Sandoval (Guillermo Francella), then goes to visit Liliana's widowed husband, Ricardo Morales (Pablo Rago), who vows to make the murderer pay for his actions. While flicking through some family albums, Espósito notices that in many of the photographs Liliana's cousin, Isidoro Gómez (Javier Godino), appears to be looking at her. This second hypothesis – that Gómez was the rapist – at first leads nowhere since Gómez has in the meantime disappeared without trace. Breaking into Gómez's mother's house allows some letters written by Gómez to be retrieved but these at first provide no clues as to his current whereabouts. Eventually the code of the letters is broken to

reveal that he is a fan of a local football team, Racing Club, and the need to attend a football match provides a perfect alibi for some virtuoso cinematography. It begins with a beautiful aerial shot of Racing Stadium, followed by a sweep over the game; we see a player hit the bar and we fly into the crowd, ending up at Espósito's side; we then follow him and Sandoval as they push through the crowd looking for Gómez until they clap their hands on the shoulder of the wrong man. But the free-floating digital camera really comes into its own when Espósito suddenly recognizes the real Gómez and returns to confront him at the exact moment when a goal is scored. The camera sways and swerves with the crowd's emotion, and Gómez is seen running off into the tunnel. This is followed by a cinematically thrilling chase through the tunnels at the back of the stands in which the camera runs on the shoulder of Espósito and Sandoval like a third participant in the chase. They hurtle down stairs, check the toilets and run after Gómez as he drops over a wall and runs onto the pitch. Here he is punched by one of the players as he is running into the penalty area. This sequence is a virtuoso performance, demonstrating how the digital camera took even further the original promise of the handheld camera, which produces an experience of a living, 'breathing' camera participating actively in the world around it. Gómez is taken off to be questioned and, at this point, the second resolution of the film is provided by Irene Menéndez-Hastings who uses some reverse psychology to make Gómez confess to the rape and murder by insulting his manhood.

At this juncture in the film a number of new unexpected twists emerge. The second resolution is 'undone' when justice is overturned by Espósito's rival, Romano, who gets Isidoro Gómez released so he can assist him in his undercover work fighting against 'subversives', thereby getting his revenge on Espósito. Espósito and Irene go to see Romano who explains that they can do nothing about it. The thriller becomes more thrilling when Espósito and Irene are leaving Romano's offices and, just as the lift door is closing, a hand is seen forcing it open and Gómez steps in. The tension is visible, especially in Irene's face, when Gómez takes out his automatic and readies the cartridge. Sandoval is subsequently found shot dead in Espósito's apartment in what was clearly a case of mistaken identity. Aware that Espósito's life is now in danger, Irene arranges for him to work in a lawyer's office in a remote region in the north, Jujuy. At the station, she says to him, '*no podemos hacer nada*' ('we can't

Gómez checks to see if his gun is working, standing in the lift next to Irene and Espósito in *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009).

do anything'), and this sentence has a personal as well as a political meaning: they cannot fight against the fascists, nor can they embark on a love affair. As Espósito leaves for Jujuy the film appears to reach a new plateau which is, in effect, the third resolution. At this point the film fast-forwards to the present and Espósito and Irene discuss – as a result of reading the latest draft of Espósito's novel – what might have been at that earlier juncture of their lives.

The film has two more twists before its final resolution. Espósito decides to search for Morales, eventually finding him in a remote part of Buenos Aires province, where he asks him to read the novel. Rather unexpectedly, Morales becomes annoyed with Espósito's continued fascination with the murder of his wife 25 years earlier but he softens when Espósito explains his own desire for revenge on Gómez – because he was also responsible for Sandoval's murder. Morales confesses to Espósito that – many years before, in 1975 – he lay in wait for Gómez, kidnapped him and shot him in the boot of his car before disposing of the body, a sequence of events that is reconstructed visually. This is in effect the fourth resolution of the film. It is only when he is driving back and rerunning the different events in his head that it dawns on Espósito that Morales's version of the events does not add up. He decides to walk back in order to spy on the house. At nightfall he sees Morales walking towards an outhouse on his property and, following him, discovers the fifth and final level of truth. Morales had captured Gómez and kept him locked up on his property for 25 years, in what is in effect a reversal of the reversal of justice performed by Romano when he originally released Gómez – people's justice in the face of government injustice created by the Guerra Sucia. After 25 years of imprisonment Gómez

cuts a pathetic figure, saying to Espósito, '*Por favor pídale que aunque sea me hable*' ('Please ask him to just talk to me'). This final act of people power liberates Espósito from the burdens of the past; he leaves flowers at Sandoval's niche and also declares his love to Irene, turning the '*temo*' (I fear) written on a piece of paper at the beginning of the film into '*te amo*' (I love), thereby correcting the typewriter's delinquency (the Olivetti was unable to type out the letter 'a'). The political resolution to the nightmare of the past is echoed by the flowering of love between Espósito and Irene. Rather surprisingly, *El secreto de sus ojos* becomes a thriller with a happy ending.[76]

Biutiful (2010), directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, is redolent of his earlier work in its fascination with death – such that we see life through a thanatocentric lens – and it is different in that it has a linear plot. *Amores perros*, *21 Grams* and *Babel* all sacrificed linearity in favour of a kaleidoscope effect, but in *Biutiful* the only non-linear element is the opening sequence in which, as we realize at the end of the film, Uxmal (Javier Bardem) has just died and is speaking to his father in a snowy dreamscape. In an interview González Iñárritu said that he wanted the plot to be centred around the main character in *Biutiful*: 'The first three films that I did were more plot-driven films and the events were what was moving the story forward. In this case, I wanted it to be a character-driven film.'[77] That central role is played by Javier Bardem in a haunting performance (for which he won an Academy Award nomination for Actor in a Leading Role) of a man who is dying from cancer (he has only a few months to live). He earns his living from shady deals with illegal African and Chinese immigrants, as well as a corrupt local cop, and has a sometimes separated and sometimes traumatic relationship with his wife, Marambra (Maricel Álvarez), a bipolar, drug-taking prostitute who likes to sleep with Uxmal's brother, Tito. Uxmal seems, indeed, to have the Pluto touch in that everything he touches turns to death – he has recently sold his family plot in the local cemetery in order to raise some funds (and in the process meets his grandfather's dead body) and when he attempts to provide extra heat for some Chinese immigrants he buys some heaters which turn out to be faulty and kills all 25 of them. He is also psychic and can see the spirits of the dead after they have recently departed and he moonlights by relaying their final messages to grieving (and perhaps gullible) relatives.

Uxmal meets his dead father in a snowy dreamscape in González Iñárritu's *Biutiful* (2010).

Yet, even though the film seems unremitting in its bleakness – the working conditions of the immigrants are dire, the Barcelona police are either corrupt or brutal or both, Uxmal's flat is unhygienic and cramped, his wife commits incest, his grandfather's tomb is opened up and we see the embalmed body, and the visions Uxmal has of the dead are spooky – a dignity emerges from Uxmal's struggle to survive and his desire to provide for his children after his (physical) death.

Just before his death Uxmal manages to give some onyx stone to each of his children, Ana and Mateo. He arranges for Ige, a Senegalese illegal immigrant whom he has taken care of after her husband's deportation, to look after his children, giving her his life savings. Immediately before his death, he gives his daughter a family heirloom – the ring his mother had given to his father when he escaped to Mexico from Spain.

The pace of the film allows for moments of philosophical reflection – as experienced through Uxmal's eyes when, for example, he learns that his cancer is so far advanced that he has only months to live. As González Iñárritu suggested in an interview, *Biutiful*, unlike his earlier films, 'was more lyrical. I didn't adhere to any clockwork rules for plot. This was more like a fluid current that was taking me to different events and things that this guy was going through.'[78] The cinematography and sound mixing characterizing the sequence after the point at which Uxmal realizes he has killed 25 Chinese immigrants contrive to produce a powerful expression of a mind which through extreme pain and guilt becomes disconnected from its empirical environment. The sight and sound of everyday life becomes blurred, discordant, confusing. The musical score used for the soundtrack, engineered by Gustavo Santaolalla as in González Iñárritu's previous films, is haunting and delicately choreographed,

allowing *Biutiful* – which won an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film – to realize its potential as a melancholic and poetic disquisition on human failure, death and the afterlife.

A sequel to José Padilha's *Tropa de Elite* was released in 2010: *Tropa de Elite 2 – O Inimigo Agora é Outro* ('Elite Squad: The Enemy Within'), with the same protagonist, Roberto Nascimento (Wagner Moura), involved in his personal war against crime, corruption and evil. In the sequel Padilha decided to integrate Nascimento's private life into the drama; Nascimento is divorced from his wife, Rosane, who has married his rival, Fraga, and he therefore loses contact with his son. As Padilha suggested in an interview:

> I decided that, yes, it's going to be a political thriller. My character is going to go through a sort of adventure in this political/police world. But this family is going to be part of this. It's going to affect their son. It's going to have to do with his relationship with his former wife. So I decided to come up with a plot that will be complete, in this way.[79]

Elite Squad 2 was even more successful at the box office than the original, making U.S.$63,024,876.

Preludio (2010), directed by the Mexican Eduardo Lucatero, shot on a roof garden in Mexico City, depicts in an engaging way the gradual growth of a love affair between an (unnamed) aspiring rock star and a chef who has returned from Acapulco to Mexico City. The two individuals start up a conversation before the party which they are both attending; the small talk gradually turns into 'big talk' in that we see a relationship growing between them. The film, as the director explained in a discussion at the Odeon Panton Street in London on 19 November 2010, was prepared over the course of a year and was filmed in one day (the previous day was the rehearsal). There were two takes and the director chose the second (in the first take, a beer bottle had been knocked over, which he thought was a distraction). He was also impressed by the energy and the momentum of the closing stages of the film – something magical occurred that had not happened in previous performances. *Preludio* is an example of one-take, long-take cinema. It is the prelude in the sense that the film appears to indicate the time preceding

the growth of a love affair. It starts small (discussion of food, spying on neighbours), and gradually the frame is opened up to hint that for these two people this may be the most important meeting of their lives.[80]

No films from Latin America were selected for the Palme d'Or competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 but the year certainly had some highlights, including Nicolás Goldbart's *Fase 7*, an Argentine science fiction film, Andrés Wood's *Violeta se fue a los cielos* ('Violeta Went to Heaven'), about the charismatic left-wing folklore singer, Violeta de la Parra, and Everardo Gout's 'brutal Mexican thriller', *Días de gracia* ('Days of Grace'), about the grace period that exists in Mexico when the gangsters and the cops take time off to watch the World Cup.[81]

Pablo Larraín's *No* (2012), chosen for the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, tells the story of the 'No' campaign in Chile in 1988 in the lead-up to the referendum on whether Augusto Pinochet should remain in power for a further eight years. Each side was given a fifteen-minute evening slot on television in the run-up to the election in order to put their case across, and the Resistance Movement, rather than resorting to political ideology, decided to use the language of advertising. The strategy paid off and, against all the odds, the 'No' vote won and Pinochet was obliged to accept a humiliating stand-down; he conceded the referendum and resigned his position as President of Chile (even though he remained as Head of the Armed Forces for another ten years). Larraín's film focuses on the trials and tribulations behind the scenes of the 'No' campaign. Its central character is a skateboarding adman, René Saavedra (Gael García Bernal), who masterminds the campaign. *No* was shot with rebuilt U-matic video cameras, giving the film a smeary 1980s look, making it easier to switch between the fiction of *No* and the documentary sections when excerpts of the 'real' ads from the 1988 campaign are spliced in. As Larraín suggested in an interview, 'You could make really, really a thousand movies, there are so many stories, it's absolutely endless . . . There's a huge mystery about those days.'[82] By avoiding the Left versus Right parameters of the Pinochet story and allowing the narrative to grow obliquely, Larraín manages to explore the mystery of that period in a powerful way.

Post tenebras lux (2012; Latin for 'light after darkness'), directed by Carlos Reygadas, is a highly experimental film loosely based on the director's experience of building his home in Morelos, a city to the south of Mexico City as Reygadas points out:

> For example, this last film, *Post tenebras lux*, I had just finished my previous film; then, I had children and started building my house in the countryside. Of course, a lot of ideas and feelings developed. I tried to put all of those together in a form – that, in this case, certainly seems to be a strange form – but actually it has its own logic.[83]

The film opens with a young girl (Rut, Reygadas's daughter) who is wandering around a waterlogged football pitch at dusk, surrounded by dogs, cows and horses. This opening sequence sets the tone for the rest of the film, which has the appearance of a home movie of a famous film director. But this documentary feel is spliced with a number of other fantastic events. In the second sequence, for example, we see a red devil – with a suspicious similarity to the Pink Panther – snooping around a house, carrying a workman's toolbox and sporting large, dangling genitalia. The film revolves around a family, Juan (Adolfo Jiménez Castro), his wife Natalia (Nathalia Acevedo) and their two children, Rut and her older brother, Eleazar, and since we later hear Natalia talking to Rut about her dream with animals, this suggests that the opening sequence was the dream rather than a depiction of her actions. In an early sequence Juan is depicted hitting one of the dogs savagely (the blows rain down off-screen), an event which appears to be behind a later conversation when Juan tells Natalia that the vet did not believe him (presumably when he explained how the dog got hurt). Juan and Natalia do not appear to fit into the local community and, at a local event, Juan is asked if he is Mexican. One of the members of the community, Siete (Willebaldo Torres) appears to be involved in some shady deals involving tree-logging. Siete introduces Juan to the local people and later on tells him that he has taken drugs and been an alcoholic, a situation not helped when he stumbled in on his father having sex with his fifteen-year-old sister. Siete is later seen having a conversation with Guante in which the latter offers to pay Siete to fell a tree for him, since – he says – he wants revenge on his sister. The film also contains a rather bizarre sequence in a swingers' bath spa in France in which the rooms are named after intellectuals and artists such as Hegel and Duchamp. Juan and Natalia go to the Hegel room and Natalia has sex with a man while she is caressed by another man and a large-breasted woman, and her husband watches.

Rut, Carlos Reygadas's daughter, in a field in *Post tenebras lux* (2012).

The fulcrum of the drama occurs when Juan returns to the house to pick up the buggy that Natalia has forgotten, only to find Siete and an accomplice robbing his home. Juan challenges them but Siete becomes aggressive, draws a gun, follows Juan up the stairs and shoots him. Juan is later discovered by his friend, Jarro.

Juan is subsequently seen, ill and bedridden, and he ignores Natalia's plea to go to the police. Samanta, Siete's wife, tells Siete that someone came looking for him on Juan's behalf, and Siete returns to Juan's house where he finds the children playing on their own. Eleazar tells him that his father has died and this inauspicious event seems confirmed by the devil who enters one of the rooms on his second visit to the house. Siete returns home to find that his wife and children have disappeared and, as a result of his guilt at murdering Juan – after seeing a tree fall to the ground, symbolizing his own demise – Siete commits suicide by pulling his own head off.

This climactic suicide is followed by the final part of a rugby sequence; after going down by one try the losing team forms a scrum, refusing to accept defeat with the words, 'they've got individuals, we've got a team' (which is the concluding leitmotif of the film). In an interview Reygadas states that he ended the film on this note because it was a message of

defiance in the contemporary world, uniting against bankers. *Post tenebras lux* is a highly experimental film built around a series of autobiographical vignettes interspersed with dream sequences which are deliberately enigmatic but have an oblique referentiality to the rest of the film.

The confusion which Reygadas's films often produces in the viewer – *Post tenebras lux* was booed by some viewers at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival – is there for a reason.[84] As he explained in an interview:

> Very often, the way we experience life, we really don't know what's going on in the present tense. And it doesn't always make sense in the future either. If you walk out of your house and you see a corpse in the middle of the countryside, you just see a corpse. You don't know where it comes from, why it's there, who this man was. Then maybe you talk to your neighbors, there's something in the newspapers, and eventually everything makes sense. Or maybe it doesn't. But in cinema and television, we want things to be explained immediately and for everything to make sense. But in reality, I think life is much closer to the way I make films than to what most films are like.[85]

Reygadas uses a blur-edged digital kaleido-cam along with the Academy ratio throughout the film in order to echo this sense of unknowing about the events that occur in our lives. This means that the whole film is made with a very clear central circular zone with objects having blurred edges – as if they have had double exposure – in the area surrounding the central in-focus area. As Reygadas explained:

> I really wanted something that gave great definition in the center, but I didn't want to have something that gave full definition all over the place, because that made me think of this kind of digital image we're looking at now [Skype video call]. These digital images are so defined it's like the curvy aspect of vision has been completely withdrawn, so I wanted something that would be blurred on the sides. When we were mounting the lens on the camera, we found by accident there would be this double image, like a bevel, at the edge. I just realized that it was a reinterpretation of images. If you want to see how things look really, you can

Siete shortly before he commits suicide in *Post tenebras lux*.

> look at them with your own eyes, but if you're ready to see a film or a painting – or to paint something or film something – you might as well reinterpret those images to make them more relative, to make them convey something different than that which we're so used to associating them with. This will always remind us that things aren't necessarily as they seem.[86]

Though not to everyone's taste, Reygadas's *Post tenebras lux* was the major Latin American film of 2012.[87]

The following year, 2013, produced some thoughtful takes on the theme of dispossession in Latin American film. Diego Quemada-Díez's *La jaula de oro* ('The Golden Dream', 2013) tells the story of Juan (Brandon López) and Sara (Karen Martínez) who want to escape from the poverty of Guatemala and ride northwards on the trains. On their way they meet up with a non-Spanish-speaking Indian boy, Chauk (Rodolfo Domínguez). Quemada-Diez worked as a camera assistant with Ken Loach on *Carla's Song* and some of the grittiness of Loach's style has found its way into *La jaula de oro* which combines fiction with documentary. The film, as the director pointed out in a Q&A at the London Film Festival on 15 October 2013, was based on an amalgamation of 600 stories of refugees who sought a better life in the United States.

The documentary feel of the film is enhanced by the quasi-improvised non-professional acting of the three main actors and its appeal to the travelogue genre – the structure is episodic and built around a series of train journeys, with long, beautiful takes of the Latin American countryside. The reality depicted is stark; despite taping her breasts to avoid detection, Sara's gender is discovered by some kidjackers and she is kidnapped, never to be seen again. People who offer to help are simply leading the protagonists to their next dance with death.[88] Chauk is suddenly shot dead by a bullet which comes out of nowhere when he and Juan are walking through some fields, just after they have crossed the border.[89] The final sequence of the film shows Juan now working in a meat-packing factory in the States, the lifeless bodies of the slaughtered animals on the conveyor belt providing a powerful visual symbol of the refugees who died en route, rounded off with Juan looking up at the snow which operates throughout the film as an image of the elusive ideal of the 'golden cage'.[90]

Alejo Moguillansky's *El loro y el cisne* ('The Parrot and the Swan', 2013) is a romance-cum-comedy about a hapless sound recordist, Loro (Rodrigo Sánchez Mariño), who is working on a documentary about classical ballet – called the Grupo Krapp – for an (amusingly gauche)

The bevel effect in *Post tenebras lux*.

American producer. Loro begins to fall for one of the ballet dancers, Luciana (Luciana Acuña), who turns out to be pregnant, though we never discover the identity of the father. When Luciana decides to leave and go home to San Francisco, Córdoba, Loro also abandons the set and goes looking for her. The comical dimensions of the *mise-en-abyme* technique (Loro and his swan, Luciana, are 'acting out' the clichés of the plot of a classical ballet) are exploited to their maximum when Loro begins to record the conversations between Luciana's father and his actor friend in their back garden in San Francisco, Córdoba. The beginning and end of the film exploit to humorous effect the awkwardness of subtitles, covering the filmed scene with words. *El loro y el cisne* reveals its romantic credentials by ending with Loro and Luciana's first kiss.

Perhaps the most distinctive trait of 2013 is that it proved to be the year in which Latin American film directors were lionized by Hollywood, and invited to take on big-budget mainstream action features. Following his success with *Hellboy* (2004), Guillermo del Toro was invited to direct *Pacific Rim* (2013), a science fiction film with a budget of $190 million. It is set in the 2020s when the world is being attacked by monsters, called Kaijus, which have emerged from the floor of the Pacific Ocean. The human race pulls together and constructs gigantic humanoid robots called Jaegers to fight the Kaijus. By 2025 the Kaiju attacks have become more frequent and the world government decides to build some enormous wall fortifications along the coast while the four remaining Jaegers are sent to Hong Kong to defend the unfortified coastline there.

Stacker Pentecost (Idris Elba) asks a retired pilot, Raleigh Becket (Charlie Hunnam), to help him destroy the Kaijus by dropping a nuclear bomb through the Kaiju portal at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Raleigh teams up with Mako Mori (Rinko Kikuchi) in a hi-tech Jaeger, Gipsy Danger, though this nearly ends in disaster when, during a test-run, Mako relives the moment her parents were killed in a Kaiju attack and almost fires weapons while the robot is still in the hangar. A scientist studying the Kaiju, Newton Geiszler (Charlie Day), establishes a link with part of the brain of a Kaiju and learns that the portal on the ocean bed of the Pacific Ocean will only open for a Kaiju. After a series of violent struggles with the beasts of the deep Raleigh and Mako eventually gain entrance to the Kaiju kingdom, and blow it up with a nuclear warhead, thereby saving the human race from extinction. Though a science fiction film –

and therefore tied to some of the stock ingredients of that genre – *Pacific Rim* demonstrates some features which are recognizably part of del Toro's repertoire, including the use of ethics-free monsters (from the wicked nephew in *Cronos* to the evil captain in *El laberinto del fauno*) as well as angelic innocence symbolized by a young girl (Aurora in *Cronos* and Mako as a young girl in *Pacific Rim*). There is also some continuity in terms of the cast in that one of del Toro's favourite actors, Ron Perlman, who was Angel de la Guardia in *Cronos*, takes on the role of Hannibal Chau in *Pacific Rim*, who is involved in the trafficking of Kaiju body organs (and so is a character we love to hate) and, in a rather amusing scene typical of del Toro's black humour, he is swallowed by a recently born Kaiju (during the end credits he cuts his way out with a pocket knife). Del Toro drew inspiration from Francisco Goya's famous painting of *The Colossus* in order to depict the modernized battle of the titans between the Kaijus and the Jaegers in Hong Kong harbour, and the special effects used – especially given that the film is in 3-D – produce a sense of grandeur.

Pacific Rim is also recognizably part of del Toro's trajectory in that it revamps a number of Christian symbolic motifs: the captain, Pentecost, rallies his troops with the words that they will 'cancel out the Apocalypse', and the killing of the Kaijus by the Gipsy Danger wielding a sword is highly reminiscent of stock images of the Archangel Michael triumphing over the Devil. When del Toro was asked about the Catholic elements in an earlier film, *El laberinto del fauno*, he responded, 'once a Catholic,

The attack of the Kaiju in Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim* (2013).

always a Catholic'.[91] The same might be said of *Pacific Rim*. Apart from its extraordinary box office success (over $400 million in worldwide earnings to date), *Pacific Rim* is a ringing endorsement of the cinematic versatility of a Latin American film director who now finds himself lionized by the Hollywood film industry, something which an earlier generation of Latin American film directors could only have dreamed of.

Guillermo del Toro is not the only Latin American film director who has ventured into mainstream Hollywood. Alfonso Cuarón's latest film, a science fiction thriller, *Gravity*, which opened the 70th Venice International Film Festival in August 2013, had no fewer than ten Academy Award nominations, the most for any Latin American film.[92] It went on to win in seven categories – Cinematography, Film Editing, Original Score, Sound Editing, Sound Mixing, Visual Effects and, most importantly, Best Director. *Gravity* tells the story of two astronauts, Dr Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) and Matt Kowalsky (George Clooney), who are on a mission to repair the Hubble Space Telescope, 327 miles above earth. Both characters are surrounded by cosmic emptiness – in space there is no oxygen, no water and no atmosphere – but they are also living with an inner emptiness. As Robbie Collin suggests:

> Stone is a medical engineer who has recently lost her young daughter, and for her, the all-pervasive silence of space comes as a comfort blanket. Kowalsky, the pilot, is also suffering as a result of separation: during an earlier mission, his wife absconded with another man.[93]

The opening scene, in which the two astronauts are repairing the telescope is breathtaking, not only because of the stunning shots of the earth but because of the combination of the hand-held 'floating' camera, the 3-D effects and long takes.

The first long take of the film is more than fifteen minutes long. Disaster strikes when the astronauts are suddenly hit by the shrapnel from a Russian satellite, at which point the special effects suck the viewer into the filmic space. As Alex Ramon says:

> The visuals are beyond praise: cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki creates images that are at once dreamy, nightmarish and

> hyper-real. The use of 3-D is vital and expressive here, sending the protagonists hurtling and twirling, colliding and gliding through space, in a thrilling ballet that puts us right there with them.[94]

Unlike *Avatar*, in which 3-D was used to create a more haptically enhanced film experience, in *Gravity* the 3-D effects are intrinsic to the meaning of the film, which expresses the anguish of modern mankind's dilemma: we are lost in space. There is even a touch of magical realism when Matt Kowalsky – although we know he is already dead – appears to force open the door to the spacecraft, get in and encourage Dr Stone to carry on her mission. The scene seems almost too real to be a dream but, we tell ourselves, it must have been. The coincidence that two of Latin America's most prominent film directors have taken on the 'cosmic' challenge of a sci-fi movie in the same year – del Toro with *Pacific Rim* and Cuarón with *Gravity* – suggests how far Latin American film has travelled since even the early years of the new millennium.

From the early days of images in movement as captured in Guillermo and Manuel Trujillo Durán's *Un célebre especialista sacando muelas en el Gran Hotel Europa* (1897) to the movement-images of the early Mexican gangster silent movie, *El automóvil gris* (1919), the time-image in films such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and the digital-image which subtended the films of the new millennium, such as *Cidade de Deus* (2002) and *Gravity* (2013), Latin American cinema has traced a journey combining tough human stories with extraordinary visual

Matt Kowalsky is floating in space in Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013).

richness. In each of the phases of Latin American film we have witnessed a striking openness to otherness. In the 1950s, film directors such as Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea were open to the otherness of European avant-garde film (Italian neo-Realism, especially) and in the early years of the new millennium to the otherness of the English language; thus a group of films such as *21 Grams* (2003), *The Constant Gardener* (2005) *Children of Men* (2006) and *Blindness* (2007) appeared to create a new genre of the Latin American English-language film. *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Gravity* (2013) suggest that Latin American film has finally taken a new step, into 'outer space'.

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1982), p. 19; Guy Hennebelle and Alfonso Gumucio-Dagrón, *Les cinémas de l'Amérique Latine* (Paris, 1981), p. 94.

3 Hennebelle and Gumucio-Dagrón, *Les cinémas de l'Amérique Latine*, p. 84; Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–1980* (Berkeley, CA, 1982), p. 6.

4 Cynthia Tompkins, *Experimental Latin American Cinema: History and Aesthetics* (Austin, TX, 2013), p. 3.

5 John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (London, 1990), pp. 15–17.

6 Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze*, p. 24.

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58 'Feature Commentary with Director Guillermo del Toro', chapter Five, extra feature on the Special DVD Edition of *Cronos* (StudioCanal, 2006).
59 Ibid., chapter Seven.
60 'Extended Interview with Director Guillermo del Toro', extra feature on the Special DVD edition of *Cronos*.
61 Del Toro mentions in an interview that he always believed that Catholicism, alchemy and vampirism are linked. 'Feature commentary with director Guillermo del Toro', chapter One.
62 'Extended Interview with Director Guillermo del Toro'.
63 'Feature Commentary with Director Guillermo del Toro', chapter Four.
64 Ibid., chapter Four. Pointing in a similar direction the main character goes through the main processes of alchemy – water, fire, earth, air; ibid., chapter Five.
65 Ibid., chapter Six.
66 'Extended Interview with Director Guillermo del Toro'.
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68 'Extended Interview with Director Guillermo del Toro'; my translation.
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71 Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America*, p. 37.
72 Barbara A. Tenenbaum, 'Why Tita Didn't Marry the Doctor, or Mexican History in *Like Water for Chocolate*', in *Based on a True Story*, p. 157.
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77 John Kraniauskas, 'Como agua para chocolate', *Sight and Sound*, II/10 (1993), p. 42.

78 For a discussion of magical realist motifs in *Como agua para chocolate*, see Nathanial Gardner, *Como agua para chocolate, The Novel and Film Version* (London, 2009), pp. 72–80; Sergio Cabrera's *La estrategia del caracol* (1993) is a Colombian film about the antics of a number of people searching for a place to live; it ends up becoming a metaphor of modern man trapped by his environment.

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89 For further discussion of the interplay between politics and art in Gutiérrez Alea's work, see David Wood, 'Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the Art of Revolutionary Cinema', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, xxviii/4 (2009), pp. 512–26.

90 'I have always been very interested in making low-budget films. In the mid-1990s Cuba found itself with very low petrol reserves and so I decided to use the locale where Reina actually lives, which is a house opposite my house. In that way we avoided having to use transport. It is something which is very close to my heart, that is, harmonize aesthetics with modest budgets, and vice-versa. Nevertheless I should point out to you that I do not choose the style, the style chooses me' (email from García Espinosa to author, 15 July 2005; my translation); 'Actually it is an homage to Italian Neo-Realism after a period of thirty years, but there is also a conscious decision to not allow any of the constituent parts (the acting, the photography, the soundtrack, etc.) to become more important than the story itself. You need to bear in mind that the 1990s in Cuba were similar to the immediate post-war years in Italy. To such an extent that, given the number of bicycles which were being used at that time in Havana, I thought that it would be possible to make a Part II of Bicycle Thieves' (email from Espinosa to author, 15 July 2005; my translation).

91 Sandra Brennan's review for the *New York Times* is available at http://movies2.nytimes.com, accessed 15 March 2006. See also Lisa Nesselson, 'Queen and King', *Variety*, CCCLVII/5 (28 November 1994), p. 97. Strangely, neither of these reviews refers to Part II of the movie, focusing exclusively on Part I, perhaps for political reasons. In Part II, Carmen returns from Miami to Havana to 'reclaim' her home back from her servant, Reina.

92 It was not the director's intention, however, to make any reference to the gas chambers of the Second World War. As Espinosa has pointed out: 'In fact you can see it as an allegory of the 1990s but the gas chamber has nothing to do with the Nazis' gas chambers; or at least that was not my aim when I made the film' (email to the author, 15 July 2005; my translation).

93 Email from García Espinosa to the author, 15 July 2005.

94 For further discussion of *Moebius* see Geoffrey Kantaris, 'Buenos Aires 2010: Memory Machines and Cybercities in Two Argentine Science Fiction Films', in *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City*, ed. Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber (New York, 2009), pp. 191–207. Other important films of this period were Arturo Ripstein's *Profundo carmesí* (1996), which is about one woman's obsession with a man leading her to commit blood-curdling crimes, and Tata Amaral's *Um Céu de Estrelas* (1996), in which a young girl's desire to fulfil her dreams ends in violence; for discussion of the latter film see Charlotte Cleghorne, 'The Dystopian City: Gendered Interpretations of the Urban in *Um Céu de Estrelas / A Starry Sky* (Tata Amaral, 1996) and *Vagón fumador / Smokers Only* (Verónica Chen, 2001)', in *New Trends in Argentine and Brazilian Film*, ed. Cecilda Rêgo and Carolina Rocha (Bristol, 2011), pp. 225–42. The following year Enrique Gabriel's *En la puta calle* (1997), as its title suggests, offered a worm's-eye view of the world, while Adolfo Aristarain's *Martín (hache)* (1997) provided a psychological study of the mind of a deluded man. An important documentary of this period was Carlos Marcovich's *Quién diablos es Juliette?* (1997); see Geoffrey Kantaris, 'Dereferencing the Real: Documentary Mediascapes in the Films of Carlos Marcovich (*Quién diablos es Juliette?* and *Cuatro labios*)', in *Visual Synergies in Fiction and Documentary Film from Latin America*, ed. Miriam Haddu and Joanna Page (New York, 2009), pp. 219–36.

95 Ismail Xavier argues that in Brazilian films of the 1990s, 'the child is the only universal left'; 'Brazilian Cinema in the 1990s', in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. Lúcia Nagib (London, 2003), p. 62.

96 Geoff Andrew, 'Walter Salles', *The Guardian* (26 August 2004).

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 1998 was a good year for Latin American film: Fernando Solanas's *La nube*, Alejandro Agresti's *El viento se llevó lo que*, Víctor Gaviria's *La vendedora de rosas*, Sergio Castilla's *Gringuito* and Fernando Spiner's *La sonámbula* all

came out that year; for discussion of the last film, see Joanna Page, 'Retrofuturism and Reflexivity in Argentine Science Fiction Film: The Construction of Cinematic Time', *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, XVI (2012), pp. 227–43. The millennium was rounded off by two powerful Argentine films, Marco Bechis's *Garage Olimpo* (1999), based on a tale of torture from the Dirty War, and Juan José Campanella's *El mismo amor, la misma lluvia* (1999).

4 The Slick Grit of Contemporary Latin American Cinema (2000–2014)

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London, 1989), p. 7.
2 This was by Steven Sassoon, an engineer at Eastman Kodak.
3 *The Idiots*, directed by the Danish director, Lars von Trier, and released in 1998, was filmed on a Sony DCR-VX000, and can therefore be seen as the first movie filmed on digital video.
4 *Avatar* (2009) is no. 1 in the list of highest-grossing films to date, making $2,782,275,172.
5 Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image: Deleuzian Film-philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford, CA, 2012), p. 8.
6 William Brown, *Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age: Supercinema* (New York, 2013), pp. 1–2.
7 Ibid., p. 2.
8 Ibid.
9 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 5.
10 Bernardo Pérez Soler, 'Pup fiction', *Sight and Sound* (May 2001), p. 29.
11 Paul Julian Smith, *Amores perros* (London, 2002), pp. 11–12.
12 John Patterson, 'Aztec Cameras', *The Guardian* (18 May 2000), p. 11.
13 A similar sense of the metropolis at the turn of the twenty-first century is evident in a number of Brazilian films which were set in São Paulo and released in the early years of the new millennium, creating, as Lúcia Sá has argued, 'a shared feeling of nostalgia for a city that no longer exists'; the films discussed are *Urbânia* (2001) by Flávio Frederico, *O Principe* ('The Prince', 2002) by Ugo Giorgetti, and *O Invasor* ('The Trespasser', 2002) by Beto Brant; see 'Flânerie and Invasion in the Monstrous City: São Paulo in Recent Cinema', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, XX/1 (2011), p. 36.
14 Although Gael García Bernal is now one of Latin America's most famous actors, he was virtually unknown when he starred in *Amores perros*; the film launched his career.
15 The role of an extra consists in being an inconspicuous part of the stagecraft of a given film in order not to deflect attention away from the protagonist, something I learned when working as an extra in Hugh Hudson's *Chariots*

of Fire in the Great Court run, which was filmed in Eton College in July 1980.

16 Smith, *Amores perros*, p. 74.

17 Jean Oppenheimer, 'A Dog's Life: Interview with Rodrigo Prieto', *American Cinematographer*, LXXXII/4 (April 2001), p. 23.

18 Carla Meyer, '*Nine Queens* remake misses original's intensity', *San Francisco Chronicle* (10 September 2004).

19 A number of other films released in 2000 showed that Latin America had finally turned the corner. These include Marcelo Piñeyro's *Plata quemada* (2000), based on the novel of the same title by Ricardo Piglia, a film about fraud and double-crossing, and Juan Carlos Tabío's *Lista de espera* (2000), a film about solidarity in Cuba.

20 David Archibald, 'Insects and Violence', *The Guardian* (28 November 2001).

21 Smith, *Amores perros*, pp. 85–6.

22 Jason Wood, *The Faber Book of Mexican Cinema* (London, 2006), p. 98.

23 Warren Buckland, *Film Studies* (London, 1998), pp. 69–70.

24 Michael Guillen, 'At the edge of the World: Lisandro Alonso on *La libertad*', www.twitchfilm.com (26 November 2009); Joanna Page, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (Durham, NC, 2009), p. 63.

25 Ed Gonzalez, 'La Libertad', *Slant*, www.slantmagazine.com (1 October 2001).

26 A number of other significant films released in 2001, such as Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga* (2001) and Juan José Campanella's *El hijo de la novia* (2001) are not discussed here for reasons of space.

27 See *Ônibus 174* on www.rottentomatoes.com, accessed 1 December 2013.

28 Paulo Lins, 'Cities of God and Social Mobilisation', in *City of God in Several Voices: Brazilian Social Cinema as Action*, ed. Else R. P. Vieira (Nottingham, 2005), p. 129.

29 Fernando Meirelles, 'Writing the Script, Finding and Preparing the Actors', in *City of God in Several Voices*, p. 15.

30 Leandro Firmino da Hora who plays Zé Pequeno as a hoodlum – and he is convincing – told me in an interview in November 2010 that he knew a number of gangsters in Cidade de Deu, having grown up with them, but he had followed his mother's advice and studied hard at school, thereby escaping a life of crime.

31 In an interview with César Charlone, the cinematographer of *Cidade de Deus*, in London on 27 November 2004, I asked him how he had engineered that particular shot and he told me he had simply run with the camera behind the chicken at about a foot from the ground.

32 In his presentation given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, on 27 November 2004, César Charlone demonstrated how he used the flexibility of digital editing to produce a colour coding for each of the three decades.

33 There is a good discussion of the apartment sequence in Stephanie Muir, *Studying 'City of God'* (Leighton Buzzard, 2008), pp. 95–7.

34 César Charlone, 'The Writing Studio: The Art of Writing and Making Films', www.writingstudio.co.za, accessed 1 November 2013.
35 In his presentation given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, on 27 November 2004, César Charlone explained how he mixed 16mm and 35mm film with digital post-production.
36 There were other important films released in 2002, including Carlos Carrera's *El crimen del padre Amaro*, Carlos Sorín's delicately done *Historias mínimas*, Carlos Reygadas's *Japón* and Adrián Caetano's *Un oso rojo*; for discussion of the latter film, see James Scorer, 'Once upon a time in Buenos Aires: Vengeance, Community and the Urban Western', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, XIX/2 (2010), pp. 141–59.
37 Dan Fainaru suggests that, despite the irony, there is little in *Entre ciclones* 'to make the Havana authorities squirm in their seats, pull out their scissors or suspect it of dissident tendencies'; 'Hurricanes (Entre ciclones)', *Screen Daily* (9 June 2003); see www.buscacine.com/cinealdia.
38 In an email from Enrique Colina to the author on 5 September 2013. Other significant films released in 2003, which cannot be discussed here for reasons of space, include Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* and Fernando Pérez's *Suite Habana*.
39 Demetrious Matheou, *The Faber Book of New South American Cinema* (London, 2010), pp. 343–4.
40 Gonzalo Aguilar, *New Argentine Film: Other Worlds*, trans. Sarah Ann Wells (New York, 2008), p. 69.
41 S. F. Said, 'Sex and the Saintly', *The Telegraph* (25 January 2005).
42 Philip French, 'La niña santa', *The Observer* (6 February 2005).
43 Isabel Maurer Queipo, ed., *Directory of World Cinema, Latin America* (Bristol, 2013), p. 207.
44 There were a number of other important films released in 2004, including Fernando Solanas's *Memoria del saqueo*, Sebastián Cordero's *Crónicas*, Daniel Burman's *El abrazo partido*, Carlos Sorín's *Bombón: el perro*, Juan José Campanella's *Luna de Avellaneda*, Fernando Eimbcke's *Temporada de patos*, and Nicolás López's *Promedio rojo* which cannot be discussed here for reasons of space.
45 Peter Bradshaw, 'Secuestro Express', *The Guardian* (9 June 2006).
46 Audun Solli, *The Power of Film in Venezuela and Mexico, 1980–2010: Contesting and Supporting State Power* (Oslo, 2014), p. 221.
47 Peter Bradshaw, in 'Battle in Heaven', *The Guardian* (28 October 2005), says of the actors, 'They all have faces like Easter Island statues.' See, for example, also when Marcos and Ana, after greeting a man in a wheelchair with his nurse in the street outside Ana's house, look – without moving and without speaking – at the camera in a choreographically similar shot.
48 Philip French, 'Battle in Heaven', *The Observer* (30 October 2005). As far as Marco Hernández, Bertha Ruiz and Anapola Mushkadiz are concerned, it is the case that they are non-professional actors.

49 Charlotte Higgins, 'I am the Only Normal Director', *The Guardian* (22 August 2005).
50 Jon Romney, 'Review: Battle in Heaven', *Independent on Sunday* (30 October 2005).
51 A number of other significant films were released in 2005, including Fabián Bielinsky's *El aura*, Alex Bowen's *Mi mejor enemigo* and Marcelo Gomes's *Cinema, aspirinas e urubus*. For discussion of the latter film, see Stephanie Dennison, 'The Brazilian Sertão as Post-national Landscape in the Work of Marcelo Gomes', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, xx/1 (2012), pp. 3–15. Amat Escalante's striking feature *Sangre* ('Blood') was selected for Un Certain Regard at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival.
52 Jens Andersmann, *New Argentine Cinema* (London, 2012), p. 91.
53 J. Hoberman, *Film After Film; or, What Became of 21st Century Film?* (London, 2012), p. 21.
54 Ed Gonzalez, 'Babel', *Slant*, www.slantmagazine.com (9 October 2006).
55 Peter Bradshaw, 'Babel', *The Guardian* (19 January 2007).
56 Philip French, 'Babel', *The Observer* (21 January 2007).
57 Jo Tuckman, 'Who really made *Babel*?', *The Guardian* (9 February 2007).
58 *Babel* formed part of the record sixteen nominations for Mexican films in 2007; see Diego Cevallos, 'Film: Oscar Nominations – for Mexicans or Mexican Filmmaking', IPS News (22 February 2007); see www.ipsnews.net.
59 Some critics reacted in a hostile manner to González Iñárritu's experimentalism. Deborah Shaw, for example, argues that *Babel* 'creates an implied world cinema gaze that is central to the construction of a world cinema auteur, and for the marketing of a film'. As she goes on to say: 'Nevertheless, the gaze is flawed, as it can work through a universalist and melodramatic take on "the human condition". Esperanto failed as an international language as it lacked cultural and national roots, and *Babel* cannot provide a model for a new cinematic language for the same reason'; *The Three Amigos: The Transnational Filmmaking of Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Alfonso Cuarón* (Manchester, 2013), p. 154.
60 González Iñárritu is, of course, employing a standard technique used in Film School exercises, the Kuleshov effect, whereby editing two sequences together allows the emotional reaction provoked by the first to spill over into the second.
61 Perhaps the best example, though, of the animatronics in the film is the eyeless monster who chases after Ofelia in her second task and who uses his hands to 'see'.
62 Peter Bradshaw, 'Meirelles Scores with *Blindness*'s Vision of Horror', *The Guardian* (14 May 2008).
63 Roger Ebert, for example, has argued the following: '*Blindness* is one of the most unpleasant, not to say unendurable, films I've ever seen. It is an allegory about a group of people who survive under great stress, but frankly I would rather have seen them perish than sit through the final three-quarters

of the film. Not only is it despairing and sickening, it's ugly. Denatured, sometimes overexposed, sometimes too shadowy to see, it is an experiment to determine how much you can fool with a print before ending up with mud, intercut with brightly lit milk', www.rogerebert.com (2 October 2008).

64 Robert Hull, 'Interview: Blindness', www.screenjabber.com, accessed 15 November 2013.

65 Gary Kramer, 'Interview: José Padilha', *Slant*, www.slantmagazine.com (7 November 2011).

66 A number of striking films were released in 2007, including Ricardo Darín's *La señal*, Rodrigo Plá's *La zona*, Nicolás Prividera's *M*, a documentary, Vivien Lesnik Weisman's *El hombre de las dos Habanas* and Patricia Riggen's *La misma luna*. Manuel Pérez Paredes released a documentary, *Che Guevara donde nunca jamás se lo imaginan* ('Che Guevara as You have Never Seen Him Before'), which contained some new footage of an interview with his father as well as an informative interview with his companion, Alberto Granado, while Luis Ospina released a hilarious send-up of the documentary genre, *Un tigre de papel* ('A Paper Tiger'), about the father of collage in Colombia, Pedro Manrique Figueroa; his life in the arts and in politics is meticulously traced from 1934 until his mysterious disappearance in 1981.

67 For a discussion of the reworking of Dreyer's film in *Luz silenciosa*, see Cynthia Tompkins, *Experimental Latin American Cinema: History and Aesthetics* (Austin, TX, 2013), pp. 180–81.

68 For an excellent discussion of these ghostly presences in the film see Deborah Martin, 'Childhood, Youth, and the In-between: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*', *Hispanic Research Journal*, XIV/2 (2013), pp. 144–58.

69 Joanna Page, 'Folktales and Fabulation in Lucrecia Martel's Films', in *Latin American Popular Culture: Politics, Media, Affect*, ed. Geoffrey Kantaris and Rory O'Bryen (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 85.

70 Violeta Kovacsics and Adam Nayman, 'Interviews / Shore Leave: Lisandro Alonso's Liverpool', *Cinemascope*, http://cinema-scope.com, accessed 1 December 2013.

71 There were a number of other significant films released in 2008, including Andrés Wood's *La buena vida*, José Pedro Ficopovicu's *El círculo*, a documentary, José Mojica Marin's *A encarnacão do demônio*, Christian Poveda's *La vida loca*, Pablo Larraín's *Tony Manero* and Carlos Sorín's *La ventana*, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed here.

72 Peter Bradshaw, 'Film Review: The Secret in their Eyes', *The Guardian* (10 August 2010).

73 Geoffrey MacNab, 'The Secret in their Eyes', *The Independent* (13 August 2010).

74 Tim Robey, 'The Secret in their Eyes, review', *The Telegraph* (10 August 2010).

75 Jonathan Romney, 'The Secret in their Eyes' review, *Uncut* (August 2010).

76 Other significant films of 2009 were Sebastián Silva's *La nana*, Ciro

Guerra's *Los viajes del viento*, Adrián Biniez's *Gigante*, Cary Fukunaga's *Sin nombre* (2009), and Lucía Puenzo's *El niño pez* (2009).

77 Christina Radish, 'Director Alejandro González Iñárritu Interview Biutiful', www.collider.com, accessed 15 December 2013.

78 Ibid.

79 Bill Graham, 'Director José Padilha talks *Elite Squad: The Enemy Within*', www.collider.com, accessed 1 December 2013.

80 A number of significant films were released in 2010 demonstrating Latin America's cinematic maturity, including Pablo Trapero's *Carancho* and Miguel Cohan's *Sin retorno*. Indigenous film gained impact during this decade, including works such as *Eréndira ikikunari* (2006) and *Aukinime* (2010); see Charlotte Cleghorne, 'Revisioning the Colonial Record: *La relación de Michoacán* and Contemporary Mexican Indigenous Film', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, xv/2 (2013), pp. 224–38.

81 Peter Bradshaw, 'Days of Grace – Review', *The Guardian* (25 July 2013).

82 Manohla Dargis, 'Cannes Festival: From Chile, Pablo Larraín's *No*', *New York Times* (22 May 2012).

83 Andrew Alexander, 'Interview with Filmmaker Carlos Reygadas: Mexican Auteur Brings *Post Tenebras Lux* to Atlanta', http://burnaway.org (19 April 2013).

84 Dennis Lim, 'Cannes Film Festival: Loud Boos Don't Faze Carlos Reygadas', *New York Times* (27 May 2012).

85 Alexander, 'Interview with Filmmaker Carlos Reygadas'.

86 Ibid.

87 A landmark Brazilian film of 2012 was *O Som ao Redor* ('Neighbouring Sounds'), directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho, which was Brazil's official Academy Award nomination; Shalini Dore, 'Brazil Sends *Neighboring Sounds* to Oscars', *Variety* (20 September 2013).

88 Peter Bradshaw argues that Quemada-Díez, unlike directors such as Andrea Arnold and Clio Barnard, who have used Loach's work as inspiration to create 'beautifully realized and photographed dramas of naturalism', is 'closer to the gritty, grainy original' of Loach's style; 'Cannes 2013: *The Golden Cage*', *The Guardian* (23 May 2013). Ken Loach, who attended the LFF screening, said he was impressed by the film.

89 The shock of the event was enhanced, no doubt, by the director's clever decision not to tell the actor that his character would be 'shot' until the morning of the take; as Quemada-Díez pointed out in a Q&A at the London Film Festival on 15 October 2013.

90 Other notable films released in 2013 which are not discussed here for reasons of space are Santiago Loza's *La Paz*, an atmospheric film about a young man from the upper classes, Liso (Lisandro Rodríguez), who is unable to reconnect after a spell in a psychiatric hospital, and Amat Escalante's *Heli*, which won the Best Director award at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, and contains a grim and graphic torture scene.

91 As Guillermo del Toro remembered: 'When I showed *Pan's Labyrinth* to my friend Alejandro González Iñárritu, he said: "That's a truly Catholic film." And there was me thinking that it was a truly profane film, a layman's riff on Catholic dogma. It's true what they say: once a Catholic, always a Catholic'; quoted in 'Pan's People', *The Guardian* (17 November 2006).

92 The Academy Award nominations for *Gravity* were in the following categories: Actress in a Leading Role, Cinematography, Directing, Film Editing, Music (Original Score), Best Picture, Production Design, Sound Editing, Sound Mixing and Visual Effects. It won seven Oscars: Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Visual Effects, Best Original Score, Best Sound Mixing, Best Sound Editing and Best Editing – a record for a Latin American film; see Catherine Sheard and Andrew Pulver, 'Oscars 2014: *Gravity* dominates, but *12 Years a Slave* wins Best Film', *The Guardian* (3 March 2014).

93 Robbie Collin, '*Gravity*, Venice Film Festival 2013, Review', *The Telegraph* (28 August 2013).

94 Alex Ramon, TIFF 2013; *Gravity* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón); see www.popmatters.com, accessed 15 January 2014.

SELECT DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Alonso, Lisandro (*b.* 1975), Argentine film director who has directed four features, *La libertad* ('Freedom', 2001), *Los muertos* ('The Dead', 2004), *Fantasma* ('Phantom', 2006) and *Liverpool* (2008). Known for his experimentalism.

Babenco, Héctor (*b.* 1946), Brazilian film director who has directed a number of films, including *Pixote: a lei do mais fraco* ('Pixote: The Survival of the Weakest', 1980) (normally considered his masterpiece), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) and *Carandiru* (2003).

Bemberg, María Luisa (1922–1995), Argentine director known for her portrayal of strong female protagonists, directed films such as *Camila* (1984, nominated for an Academy Award), *Miss Mary* (1986), *Yo, la peor de todas* ('I, the Worst of All', 1990) and *De eso no se habla* ('I Don't Want to Talk About It', 1993).

Birri, Fernando (*b.* 1925), Argentine documentarist who is considered to be the father of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano. His works include *Tire dié* ('Throw us a Dime', 1960) and *Los inundados* ('The Flooded', 1961). He co-founded the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (International School of Film and Television) with Julio García Espinosa, Gabriel García Márquez and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, in 1986, and produced a film based on one of García Márquez's short stories, *Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes* ('A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings', 1988).

Campanella, Juan José (*b.* 1959), Argentine director whose work includes *El mismo mar, la misma lluvia* ('The Same Sea, the Same Rain', 1999), *El hijo de la novia* ('The Girlfriend's Son', 2001), *Luna de Avellaneda* ('Avellaneda's Moon', 2004), *El secreto de sus ojos* ('The Secret in their Eyes', 2009), which won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and *Metegol* (2012).

Colina, Enrique (*b.* 1944), Cuban film-maker and TV personality, who was well-known in Cuba as the host of a television programme about cinema called *24 × Segundo* ('24 Times a Second'). His films include *Estética* ('Aesthetics', 1984), *Vecinos* ('Neighbours', 1985), and *Entre ciclones* ('Hurricanes', 2003), which was invited to the Cannes Film Festival as Latin America's representative for the Critics' Week.

Cuarón, Alfonso (*b.* 1961), Mexican film director who is best known for *A Little Princess* (1995), *Y tu mamá también* ('And Your Mother Too', 2001), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Children of Men* (2006) and *Gravity* (2013). The latter film received seven Academy Awards, including Best Director, the most a Latin American director has ever won. Known as one of the Three Amigos who have transformed Mexican cinema, the other two being Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu.

del Toro, Guillermo (*b.* 1964), Mexican film director. As at home in Hollywood, where he has made films such as *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008) and *Pacific Rim* (2013), as with his Spanish-language Gothic horror films such as *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). The latter – generally seen as his masterpiece – won three Academy Awards, for Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography and Best Makeup.

García Espinosa, Julio (*b.* 1926), Cuban film director who studied with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in Italy in the early 1950s, returning to Cuba in order to make the documentary *El Mégano* (1955). He helped found the Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) soon after the Revolution and went on to be its director for a number of years. He directed a number of feature films, including *Las aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* ('The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin', 1967) and *Reina y Rey* ('Queen and King', 1994). He co-founded the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television in 1986.

González Iñárritu, Alejandro (*b.* 1963), Mexican director of four acclaimed features: *Amores perros* ('Love's a Bitch', 2000), *21 Grams* (2003), *Babel* (2006) and *Biutiful* (2010). *Babel* won the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture and received seven Academy Award nominations, including two nominations for Best Supporting Actress.

Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás (1928–1996), Cuban film director (often known by his nickname, Titón) who studied neo-Realism in Italy in the 1950s and, after the Revolution, helped found the ICAIC and was closely associated with the development of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano. He subsequently made a number of films which launched Cuban cinema, including *Memorias del subdesarrollo* ('Memories of Underdevelopment', 1968), *La última cena* ('The Last Supper', 1977) and *Fresa y chocolate* ('Strawberry and Chocolate', 1993).

Guzmán, Patricio (*b.* 1941), Chilean documentarist who achieved fame with his documentary about the Chilean coup d'état, *La batalla de Chile* ('The Battle of Chile', 1975). His most recent documentary, *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), uses a more 'poetic' approach to express the trauma of Chile's disappeared.

Llosa, Claudia (*b.* 1976), Peruvian director whose films include *Madeinusa* (2006) and *La teta asustada* ('The Milk of Sorrow', 2010), which was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film Category. Her most recent film, a short entitled *Loxoro* (2012), won the award for Best Short Film at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Lombardi, Francisco José (*b.* 1947), Peruvian director of a number of feature films, including *La ciudad y los perros* ('The Time of the Hero', 1985), based on the novel by Mario Vargas Llosa, *La boca del lobo* ('The Lion's Den', 1988), *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* ('Captain Pantoja and the Special Services', 2000), again based on one of Vargas Llosa's novels, *Tinta roja* ('Red Ink', 2000) and *La mariposa negra* ('Black Butterfly', 2006).

Martel, Lucrecia (*b.* 1966), Argentine film director and founder member of the New Argentine Cinema movement. Her main features are *La ciénaga* ('The Swamp', 2001), *La niña santa* ('The Holy Girl', 2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* ('The Headless Woman', 2008).

Meirelles, Fernando (*b.* 1955), Brazilian film director who established his reputation with *Cidade de Deus* ('City of God', 2002), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director, *The Constant Gardener* (2005), for which Rachel Weisz won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress (2006), and *Blindness* (2008), which is based on José Samarago's novel.

Padilha, José (*b.* 1967), Brazilian film director who began his career with the highly successful documentary *Ônibus 174* ('Bus 174', 2002), followed by *Tropa de Elite* ('Elite Squad', 2007) and its sequel *Tropa de Elite 2 – O Inimigo Agora é Outro* ('Elite Squad: The Enemy Within', 2010), both of which were highly successful commercially and received numerous awards.

Reygadas, Carlos (*b.* 1971), Mexican film director whose four features – *Japón* ('Japan', 2002), *Batalla en el cielo* ('Battle in Heaven', 2005), *Luz silenciosa* ('Silent Light', 2007) and *Post tenebras lux* (2012) – are experimental, thought-provoking and occasionally pornographic.

Rocha, Glauber (1939–1981), Brazilian film director closely associated with the Cinema Novo movement. His films include *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* ('Black God, White Devil', 1964), *Terra em transe* ('Land in Trauma', 1967) and *Antonio das Mortes* (1969). He is also famous for his theory of the 'aesthetics of hunger'.

Salles, Walter (*b*. 1956), Brazilian director whose films include *Central do Brasil* ('Central Station', 1998), *Abril Despedaçado* ('Behind the Sun', 2001), *Diarios de motocicleta* ('The Motorcycle Diaries', 2004) – his most successful film, about Che Guevara's travels across the subcontinent on a motorcycle, *Linha de Passe* (2008) and *On the Road* (2012), based on Jack Kerouac's masterpiece.

Sanjinés, Jorge (*b*. 1936), Bolivian director who founded the Grupo Ukamau and established himself as an important voice within the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement in the 1960s. His films include *Ukamau* ('And So It Is', 1966), *Yawar Mallku* ('The Blood of the Condor', 1969), *El coraje del pueblo* ('The People's Courage', 1971), *La nación clandestina* ('The Secret Nation', 1989), *Para recibir el canto de los pájaros* ('To Receive the Bird's Song', 1995) and *Insurgentes* ('Insurgents', 2012).

Trapero, Pablo (*b*. 1971), Argentine director whose most significant feature films are *El Bonaerense* ('The Man from Buenos Aires', 2002), *Familia rodante* ('Rolling Family', 2004), *Carancho* (2010) and *White Elephant* (2012). Typically, the focus of his films is everyday life.

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