

Docudrama for the Emerging postwar order: Documentary film, internationalism and indigenous subjects in 1950s Mexicoⁱ

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the productive tensions between the competing ideological discourses of postwar internationalism, Mexican postrevolutionary nationalism, and local indigenous representational paradigms in the activities of the film unit of the Unesco-sponsored adult education centre CREFAL in the town of Pátzcuaro, Mexico in the 1950s, which combined village screenings of educational, promotional and informative movies from the world over, with the local production of pedagogical documentary shorts by nonprofessional filmmakers from across Latin America.

Inspired by the work of British documentarian Paul Rotha, whose UN picture *World Without End* (Mexico/Thailand/UK, 1953, codirected with Basil Wright) was partly filmed at CREFAL, these films frequently resorted to a docudrama format that enabled amateur documentary filmmakers to engage with the agendas of their indigenous subjects even as they subordinated them to the UN's call to hygiene, progress and civic values. In doing so, they responded creatively to appeals by theorists such as Kracauer and Grierson for a critical realist cinema. They also acted as a link between the so-called 'classical' pre-war documentary movements in the UK, North America and elsewhere, and the later, socially committed new cinemas.

Keywords:

Documentary film,

Unesco,

CREFAL,

Mexico,
indigenous films,
Paul Rotha

In 1955, the Mexican student Minerva Gil wrote on her recent experiences of using cinema as a teaching aid while working with indigenous peasants in the region of Pátzcuaro, Michoacán state in western Mexico. After waxing lyrical about humanity's inbuilt penchant for communicating via images, about cinema's vitality and its fidelity to the natural world, and therefore about the film medium's unparalleled capacity for influencing the popular masses, Gil ventures that cinema constitutes a 'visual Esperanto'. It is, she says, a 'universal language that all men can interpret'; even those who are 'illiterate or primitive', since it 'requires of its spectators the sole effort of 'looking'' (Gil 1955: 5)ⁱⁱ

unlike the linguistic, cultural and intellectual difficulties of decoding the written word. While this has obvious advantages for the teacher wishing to convey knowledge to such primitive subjects, Gil acknowledges that the moving image is also liable to provoke a critical attitude: it 'elicits attention, interest and sympathy' as opposed to the 'verbalist and inactive' modes of learning encouraged by more traditional methods (14).

Citing the British documentary filmmaker and Unesco film delegate Alexander Shaw, Gil thus invokes the ethical tightrope that those who produce and screen films for such audiences must walk.ⁱⁱⁱ In Shaw's words (writing on the Egyptian context), the filmmaker should 'find out what the government wanted to teach the people, and at the same time, find out what the people wanted to learn' (20). As Shaw discovered, the two agendas did not always coincide; in his case, 'the two interested parties were just beginning to study each other'. Although he claims to have taken up the side of the peasants, his tone is decidedly paternalistic: he describes documentary film as 'the sugared pill of knowledge' (20) that helps bring progress to backward peoples. Gil goes on to cite (apparently approvingly) an officer from the

French colonial Service for Muslim Affairs in Morocco, who speaks of cinema's power to 'influence insufficiently developed peoples who have not yet reached the evolutionary level necessary to use other means of expression' in the office's bid to 'accustom Moroccans to all that [Western] progress entails' (21).

Although Minerva Gil was by no means an original theorist of documentary film, her words can be seen as a vernacular application of several decades of theoretical reflection on the medium. Most sources listed in her bibliography are working papers, pamphlets and manuals produced by Unesco or other institutions on the educational use of audiovisual materials.^{iv} In turn, many of the ideas that she recycles from these publications are derivative of the writings of classical theorists of realist, educational and documentary cinema such as Siegfried Kracauer, Béla Balázs, Vsévolod Pudovkin and John Grierson, whose writings on the film medium's privileged relationship to the real, its extraordinary hold over viewers' attention, and the need to educate mass audiences in film culture as a pathway to critical citizenship were broadly taken on board mid-century by those interested in harnessing cinema's power for educational purposes. The apparently benevolent paternalism of her attitude towards her Mexican indigenous interlocutors is, likewise, an amalgamation of the evolutionary late imperialism and the utopian postwar liberal internationalism that underpinned her film-theoretical sources, together with the integrationist racial politics of postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism. Although something of a hotchpotch of ideas, Gil's graduation thesis is indicative of the ethical and methodological dilemmas faced by the staff and students of the film unit at CREFAL (the Regional Fundamental Education Centre for Latin America) in Pátzcuaro: the Unesco training centre for teachers and civil servants from Latin America and beyond, at which Gil studied.

As this article argues, audiovisual education at CREFAL in the 1950s was a site of tension between differing conceptions of how international institutions, the Mexican federal government and indigenous communities should interact, and of what form the production and exhibition of documentary films in this context should take.^v This act of balancing different, often conflicting interests is a feature of postwar Unesco film more broadly, and its ramifications varied according to distinct local, national or regional contexts (Druick 2011a). The fundamental education project advanced by Unesco following World War II, and under whose aegis CREFAL operated until 1958 when Unesco abandoned the methodology, promoted citizenship and economic and social development through literacy, international cooperation, and the improvement of material living conditions for those deprived of formal schooling (Unesco 1956; Boel 2016). As such, it was constantly marked by a tension between a desire to be shaped by the specific needs of the communities in which they worked, and an institutional imperative to follow top-down directives (Watras 2010).

As well as locating CREFAL's moving-image work of the 1950s within the particular constellation of interests that underpinned the institution and its actors, I explore here the implications of this particular brand of what Acland and Wasson (2011) have called 'useful cinema' for film form and screening practices in Mexican non-theatrical film during this era. Unlike the commercial fiction feature, 'useful cinema' is an 'other cinema, one defined by film's ability to transform unlikely spaces, convey ideas, convince individuals, and produce subjects in the service of public and private aims', and tends to be 'involved more with functionality than with beauty' (2011: 2). Indeed, those who made, screened and consumed cinema at CREFAL approached the medium in a largely utilitarian way, concerned as they were with using the moving image to further, discuss or even question the educational agenda

set by its patrons. But while the institutional context of this cinema is important, I believe that - as some of the authors of *Useful Cinema* acknowledge - its aesthetic dimension should not be overlooked. As I show here, formal approaches to filmmaking at CREFAL varied between energetic modernist aesthetics and a paternalistic aesthetics of simplicity, revealing different sets of attitudes towards distinct viewer constituencies and viewing practices. I thus aim in this article to shed light onto how complex agendas were applied and rendered into film form and screening practices at 1950s CREFAL, and onto how the agents of this cinema viewed their audiences, pupils and actors.

Unesco, CREFAL and Pátzcuaro: Entangled Agendas

Founded in 1951, CREFAL was an organisationally complex site of entangled political, diplomatic, intellectual, and cultural agendas in postrevolutionary and post-World War II Mexico. It was established under the aegis of Unesco, the Mexican government, the Organisation of American States, the World Health Organisation and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, as the first of what was to be a global network of fundamental education centres across the developing world; centres were subsequently founded in Egypt, Thailand and Pakistan. CREFAL was planned as part of a twelve-year project to train a global network of staff who would develop didactic materials and methodologies for teaching literacy, as well as providing sanitary and nutritional education (Sewell 1975: 172; Boel 2016: 157; Sanz and Tejada 2016: 268). It was conceived as a hub to serve the whole of Latin America, with visiting students from across the continent visiting Pátzcuaro for 18-month hands-on courses covering four main areas (health, economics, recreation and basic knowledge), using and developing didactic tools such as puppet theatre, drawing, posters, engraving, and

cinema. The fundamental education project itself was a key constituent of the strategic shift in Unesco's focus during the tenure of Mexican official and intellectual Jaime Torres Bodet as Director General (1949-1952), away from the organ's initial role in the educational and cultural reconstruction of countries devastated by World War Two, and towards the so-called 'insufficiently developed' regions of the world (Abarzúa Cutroni 2016: 90). Following Unesco's guiding logic, so-called 'audio-visual aids' were systematically used on three levels – 'to inform, to motivate and to instruct' –, and were seen as an efficient and cost-effective way of conveying the organisation's teachings to illiterate and newly-literate peoples (Thapar 1958: 7).

Cinema – along with press and radio – formed part of the comprehensive global media strategy developed after Unesco's 1948 conference in Mexico City, at which a new media Production Unit was conceived under the leadership of veteran documentary filmmaker John Grierson. The unit's broad aim was to create global understanding and solidarity with Unesco's aims since, in Grierson's words, 'Unesco can become a truly world movement only when the ordinary people take an active interest and share in its work' (1948). Grierson's auspicious words reflected his optimism about the future of internationalist documentary as a force for good in the emerging postwar order, following his own energetic work during the inter-war and wartime years in contexts bound to national and imperial interests in the UK and Canada. But they are also a measure of the ideological jostling underpinning the entire Unesco project at the time. Official statements and documents explaining the importance of audiovisual aids in the wider fundamental education project were frequently couched in the paternalistic language of Cold War empowerment whereby the 'advanced' nations would aid the 'backward regions of the world' to 'restore their confidence, get them thinking and make them feel that they possess the power and

capacity to transform their lives and realise their dreams', thereby avoiding global inequalities that might 'creat[e] dangerous tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts' (Thapar 1958: 3). Indeed, both fundamental education in general and Unesco's use of cinema in particular were deeply rooted in colonial legacies that favoured western notions of scientific modernisation over autochthonous cultures (Watras 2010; Druick 2011a). Moreover, the notions of literacy and media literacy that Unesco promoted were intimately linked to the idea of the free flow of information and thus democracy and modernisation as bulwarks against communism in the emerging Cold War system. They were thus not neutral terms but 'situated practice[s]' that implied the 'necessity of rapid modernization all across a networked globe that tended to ignore indigenous forms of knowledge' (Druick 90). But at the same time, Grierson's imagined 'world movement' betrays a genuine interest in ordinary people and the everyday that potentially grated against the top-down policy initiatives that determined Unesco's guiding principles. This tension underpinned Unesco's role in laying extensive groundwork for collaborative media projects by linking local actors with global development projects in these early years of the late 1940s and the early 1950s (Longo 2015).

As well as implementing the UN's postwar agenda of democratisation through literacy, CREFAL bolstered Mexico's attempt to consolidate its position as a reliable US ally and key regional actor in the emerging world order. As the Cold War focused its northern neighbour's attentions elsewhere, Mexico strove to strengthen Pan-Americanism in a bid to sustain US cooperation while gaining political capital with other Latin American nations (Lazarín 2014). Meanwhile the Mexican regime under president Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) had fully embarked on a conservative turn following the 1910-1917 revolution. Alemán's government, in line with global

Cold-War tendencies, emphasized anticommunism, import substitution industrialisation, developmentalism and economic modernisation, leaving behind the relatively radical politics of the 1930s that had come to a head with leftwing president Lázaro Cárdenas' (1934-1940) nationalisation of oil in 1938. But at the same time CREFAL embodied an ideological tension within the postrevolutionary regime, which still derived political legitimacy from its revolutionary heritage throughout this period and well beyond (Benjamin 2000).

Unesco Secretary General Torres Bodet had himself been instrumental in Mexico's rural literacy campaigns as the country's Education Secretary (1943-1946); and Unesco's early education guidelines – which underpinned the entire fundamental education project – were closely aligned with 1940s Mexican educational policy that explicitly critiqued *cardenista* socialist education as 'fomenting class war and the division of the Mexican people' (Lazarín 2014: 107). Yet ex-president Cárdenas himself was (and is) very much seen as a founding father of CREFAL: the grandiose villa that serves to this day as the Centre's premises, the Quinta Eréndira on the outskirts of Pátzcuaro, was donated by Cárdenas himself, whose historical power base was in Michoacán. CREFAL's founding director, Lucas Ortiz, was himself a veteran of Mexico's postrevolutionary educational project, having been deeply involved in rural education and the so-called 'cultural missions' across the Mexican countryside that sought to combat illiteracy, foment the industrialisation of the countryside, and ideologically transform the indigenous peasantry into citizens of a modern, progressive nation (Calderón Mólgora 2017). Ortiz's influential work at CREFAL was thus a continuation and expansion of some three decades of debate and praxis in the Mexican educational field about how popular education should situate peasant and indigenous subjects with regard to modernity and the country's revolutionary legacy.

Needless to say, overseas actors such as the documentary filmmakers brought in to run the film unit (initially Hagen Hasselbach from Denmark; subsequently the American Simon Singer), and the young trainees visiting from countries such as Puerto Rico, Haiti, Bolivia, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile and Cuba, all brought their own previous experience, practical concerns and ideological baggage from their particular disciplinary contexts and home nations.

That CREFAL was located in Pátzcuaro is also significant in terms of the Centre's work with the area's Purépecha (or 'Tarascan') indigenous communities. Thanks to the exceptional beauty of the town and the adjoining Lake Pátzcuaro, it was already long established as an icon of the Mexican picturesque in 19th-century art and travel literature: a visual tradition onto which the imaginaries of national and foreign mass tourism were overlain from the 1930s (Jolly 2015). Cinema further consolidated indigenous *patzcuarenses'* place as the objects of an exoticising visual economy which, as Del Moral González (2005: 26-28) has shown, can be traced back to footage of the town shot by artist Miguel Covarrubias in 1926; the feature film *Janitzio* (Navarro, Mexico, 1934), filmed and set on the island of Janitzio on Lake Pátzcuaro; and its remake *Maclovía* (Fernández, 1948). <INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE> Such portrayals often render the Purépecha as fatalistic and primitive figures destined to a tragic existence, emblematic of a monumentalized and timeless indigenous Mexico.

In reality the region's Purépecha inhabitants were themselves at the front line of the ongoing debates about indigenous peoples' relationship to the nation's postrevolutionary politics of land reform. In April 1940 Pátzcuaro hosted the first Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, at which delegates from across the Western hemisphere founded the Inter-American Indian Institute as part of a broad

'rethinking of the idea of the nation and citizenship by revaluing its indigenous components' in the context of wartime Pan-Americanism (Giraudó 2012: 13). This located Pátzcuaro as a key node of an emerging transnational indigenism, with many countries founding national indigenist institutes following the 1940 conference, including Mexico's Instituto Nacional Indigenista in 1948. By the time CREFAL was established in 1951, Pátzcuaro was already the site of an ongoing debate between a progressive, integrationist pluralism committed to the defence of indigenous rights and culture (promoted by leading educational reformer Moisés Sáenz), and a 'scientific' indigenism that sought the transformation and modernisation of supposedly backward indigenous peoples (Giraudó 2012). These conflicting agendas as regards Mexican indigeneity dovetailed with the wider debates about fundamental education and literacy outlined above; and as we will see, were in turn played out through the production and exhibition of documentary film at CREFAL and the surrounding lake region.

World Without End: Pátzcuaro, the Global Village

The most internationally celebrated title to be produced (in part) at CREFAL was the Unesco-sponsored documentary feature *World Without End* (Rotha and Wright, 1953), released in Spanish as *Tiempo de la esperanza*. The picture - a paean to global cooperation and brotherhood - was filmed simultaneously by two veteran British documentary filmmakers of the Griersonian school: Paul Rotha at CREFAL in Pátzcuaro, and Basil Wright in Bangkok and other locations across Thailand, where a new fundamental education centre (the Thailand Unesco Fundamental Education Centre) would open in the northeastern town of Ubol in 1954. Shot with local crews in the respective countries in late 1952,^{vi} *World Without End* intersperses scenes from

the two nations in an attempt to forge a sense of common purpose amongst the peoples of vastly different nations of the developing world. Using a broad narrative structure based on parallel editing, the film gradually builds up a feeling of equivalence, common purpose and, hopefully, solidarity between the rural inhabitants of Mexico and Thailand, drawing out similarities between both nations' problems in terms of hygiene, health, work practices, nutrition, agriculture, education and literacy; and the role of international development - specifically the UN and Unesco - in solving them. The documentary's overarching narrative, with its optimistic message of humanist universalism and the brotherhood of man, is delivered by a single male voice-over narrator who forges links between the Thai and Mexican peasants' everyday lives, generating empathy by centring on the stories of individual villagers and aid workers in both nations.^{vii} [INSERT FIGURES 2-3 HERE]

The documentary's insistence on the interplay between the local and the global, the individual and the universal, is eloquently conveyed through the visual tropes of the sky and the globe [INSERT FIGURES 4-5 HERE] that, in short introductory and concluding sequences, are seen to connect Unesco's work on the ground in the two geographically distant locations. In the initial sequence an animated spinning globe dissolves seamlessly into the first shot of the resplendent clouded sky over Pátzcuaro as the voice-over intones the Roman playwright Terence's maxim: 'Nothing that is Human is Alien to Me'. Likewise, as the film draws to a close a Purépecha peasant pauses from his labour in the Michoacán fields to gaze up at the sky above, and a false eyeline match takes us to a low-angle shot of the United Nations headquarters in New York: the benevolent and (until now) invisible guiding hand that enables the film's protagonists and viewers to imagine their place in a contiguous global space. The ensuing montage sequence conjoins decontextualized

images of people the world over as they work, learn, play or recover from illness; in the film's final shot a close-up of a baby at its mother's breast dissolves flawlessly back to the spinning globe that opened the film. [INSERT FIGURES 6-7 HERE] Here Rotha and Wright skilfully fuse a gendered imaginary linking indigeneity and maternity with the iconography of the spinning globe: a well-worn visual cliché denoting cinema's 'imperial mobility' (Shohat and Stam 1994: 113), but also, by the early 1950s, signalling the Cold War-fuelled advances in space exploration that in turn stimulated globalist thinking.^{viii} *World Without End* thus melds the documentarian's urge for close observation of the everyday with a globalist impulse, offering the spectator a chance to observe local realities even as they viewed the entire earth as if from outer space: something that was fast becoming a photographic reality under NASA's Small Steps programme.^{ix} The visual rhetoric that bookends the documentary - in common with Rotha's previous 'one-world films' *World of Plenty* (Rotha, 1943) and *The World is Rich* (Rotha 1947) - thus deftly interweaves the everyday concerns of ordinary people in far-flung corners of the developing world; the postwar geopolitical agenda of the Western powers; and cinema and other moving-image communications media themselves, which bring these people together through the techniques of montage and animation.^x

Indeed, previous analyses have focused on *World Without End*'s ideological grounding in late-imperial, Cold-War and developmentalist notions of internationalism and the global village, showing how Rotha and Wright grapple with the colonial paternalism that underpins their progressive, ethical discourse. Aitkin (2013) reads the film in terms of the internationalist 'embedded liberalism' that characterized the emerging postwar global order and which Grierson advocated: a Keynesian 'middle way' between laissez-faire economics and socialism. MacDonald

(2013) has similarly critiqued the picture's politics of 'evasive enlightenment' in which the filmmaker acts as a privileged and enlightened bearer of knowledge that, in its limited recognition of its protagonists' cultural difference, fails to challenge its own underlying colonial attitudes. For both authors the documentary ethics underpinning Rotha, Wright and Grierson's commitment to their subjects, and their (limited) efforts to render their traditions and cultural logics, are inseparable from the film's ideological commitment to the emerging liberal internationalism: the production of enlightened viewing subjects who are spurred to imagine a different world-space, relatively undetermined by national boundaries. Such readings implicitly locate *World Without End* as a site of tension between competing temporalities: the overarching, hegemonic one of Rotha, Wright and Unesco's global-village modernity, and the multiple, buried durations of the autochthonous non-Western subjects and realities with whom they engaged.

Unlike Rotha's previous one-world films, which feature multiple narrative voices, *World Without End*'s soundscape is dominated by a single, authoritative, interpretive voice-over narrator; the diegetic soundscape offers no space to the voices of its native actors. In lieu of cultural engagement, Wright and Rotha render the cultural difference of their respective South-Asian and Meso-American subjects via existing picturesque and modernist visual tropes of the landscapes they photographed and their inhabitants. Just as Wright opens the first major Thai sequence by appealing to the 'immutable orient', in the narrator's words, symbolized by the elephant and the iconography of Buddhism, Rotha's initial Pátzcuaro scenes spellbind us with the sumptuous beauty of the lake region. In this absorbing opening Mexican sequence, the omniscient voice-over falls silent to give way to striking images of the lake region's inhabitants' daily toils, mending fishing nets, transporting agricultural

produce by beasts of burden, boat and on foot, as they approach the bustle and festivity of Pátzcuaro's market. The crystalline skies and landscapes, its carefully balanced horizontal and diagonal compositions-in-depth, and its sweeping high-angle pans and low-level tracking long shots of the stunning scenery owe much to the romantic visual economy of Mexican Golden-Age fiction films. Shot by Carlos Carbajal, a cinematographer with extensive experience in the country's feature film industry since the mid-1940s, some of *World Without End's* Mexican sequences stand almost as visual citations of globally successful features such as *Redes/The Wave* (Gómez Muriel and Zinneman, 1934), filmed in Alvarado, Veracruz, and the aforementioned *Janitzio* (1934) and *Maclovia* (1948).

These latter movies themselves drew on a wider visual tradition in 20th-century depictions of Pátzcuaro, in which touristic, picturesque notions of the lake area as an unchanging ideal existed alongside anti-picturesque, modernist portrayals of the ongoing transformations to the region (Jolly 2015). Similarly, *World Without End* repeatedly incites the viewer to stand in awe at the visual appeal of the location and the richness of its inhabitants' cultural traditions, only to quickly disrupt any sense of Pátzcuaro's timeless beauty by reminding us that this is an inhabited space undergoing profound changes that CREFAL, Unesco and the emerging world order must impel in a positive direction. Our attention is repeatedly drawn back to the unhygienic conditions of the Bangkok shanty towns and the ill health brought about by the filthy water of Lake Pátzcuaro; to deforestation in Thailand and the depletion of Michoacán's fish stocks. But just as modernity engenders problems it is also harnessed for good: penicillin is brought in to cure Thailand's Yaws epidemic; modern educational and hygiene techniques prevent disease among the inhabitants of the Lake Pátzcuaro region. [INSERT FIGURES 8-9 HERE] Although the film is careful

to attribute positive values to the cultural and work practices of its Thai and Mexican protagonists (the ancestral wisdom of Thai agricultural methods; the spiritual wellbeing brought about by Tarascan peasants' cultural heritage), the mutual learning process between the modern, urban agents of the United Nations and its rural, indigenous subjects is an uneven one. The synthesis between modern and traditional practices ultimately justifies and redeems the globalist spirit underpinning the movie's entire conceptual framework.

Rotha claimed inspiration from the modernist Mexicanist aesthetic of Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished masterpiece *Que viva México!* (Eisenstein, 1931) shot two decades previously, emphasising, however, that where Eisenstein's cinematographer Eduard Tissé 'delighted in posed static images', his own focus lay on '[a]ction in people and camera' (Rotha & Wright 1953: 16). While Eisenstein and Tissé's visual style was theoretically grounded in an emancipatory avant-garde cinematic praxis, for Rotha and his critics this proved rather a distraction from the practical institutional concerns that the documentary was primarily conceived to convey. As one contemporary critic complained, while Rotha should be commended for having 'taken full advantage of the filmic qualities of Mexico' and 'the classic simplicity of their civilisation with a beauty that is breathtaking', nevertheless '[i]t has proved difficult [...] to keep the vivid Mexican scene in the background and to project the story of the students concerned with the problems of [the island of] Yunuen into first place' (Anon. 1953). The doubts voiced by these and other critics about the function of *World Without End*'s visual style are symptomatic of a fundamental uncertainty underlying the documentary as to the aesthetic and ethical stance that should be adopted towards the non-Western temporalities of its Thai and Mexican protagonists, and about the formal strategies that cinema should thus adopt.

Even so, *World Without End* - which proved quite a success internationally - is important insofar as the global spread and local application of Griersonian documentary practices in the postwar era. Although it did not secure a theatrical release, the documentary premiered at the 1953 Edinburgh Film Festival and was simultaneously transmitted on BBC television; subsequently it was widely broadcast via television networks the world over, reaching some 250 million viewers (Anon. 1954: 40). Indeed, Druick (2011b) goes so far as to suggest that television itself is the film's unspoken subtext. Her claim is consistent with Rotha's conviction that the medium's temporal simultaneity could bolster the progressive aim of international dialogue and understanding: a notion he explored more fully in his Unesco/BBC documentary *The Challenge of Television* (Rotha, 1956), incorporating television footage from Mexico and 12 other nations (Rotha 1956). *World Without End* certainly had some impact on the ground in Pátzcuaro as well. In January 1954, the head of the Unesco film division Ross McLean personally presented a screening of the Spanish-language print on the island of Yunuén, where many of the Mexican sequences were filmed,^{xi} and the documentary formed part of the film unit's catalogue for both local screenings and distribution at a national and international level.

But for all the international fanfare surrounding its release, we would do well to take a fresh, bottom-up look at *World Without End*: one more in tune with the particular modes of engagement at work on the ground between 'modern' and 'primitive', 'indigenous' and 'western' at the film's Mexican and Thai locations.^{xii} As we will see in the following section, Rotha and Wright's film was only the tip of CREFAL's cinematographic iceberg, which centred on the unit's apparently more mundane everyday exhibition and production programme. I will now turn to these activities, which provide a valuable insight into the ways in which the moving image

mediated the diverse ideological and cultural agendas at play with CREFAL and the Unesco film programme.

Screening and Producing Film at CREFAL: Towards an Aesthetics of Simplicity

The activities of CREFAL's film unit had much in common with contemporary nontheatrical practices elsewhere at the time; and the centre's considerable collection of 182 extant reels of (mostly 16mm) film - together with an excellently preserved paper archive - offers a fascinating insight into the exhibition and production practices of substandard gauge educational film at the centre.^{xiii} During CREFAL's first decade (1951-1961) - the centre's most energetic period of documentary film production and exhibition - regular film screenings were organized both at the Pátzcuaro premises and at external locations both on the mainland and in the Purépecha island communities of the lake region.^{xiv} [INSERT FIGURE 10 HERE] The uses of cinema at the centre were manifold: as well as serving as a didactic instrument in the field, screenings at CREFAL's headquarters aimed to raise students' awareness of social issues; to improve their understanding of cinema as an educational tool; and to reinforce their sense of belonging to a progressive international community of educators. Furthermore, film screenings elsewhere in Pátzcuaro, combined with the film unit's contacts with the UN Film Division and other distribution activities, publicized the innovative techniques being developed at CREFAL and helped consolidate its position as an important node in an emerging global network of educational materials, technical and creative personnel, and high-flying bureaucrats.

The Centre had close links with documentary film from its very early days and held some interest for the UN's media programme. Ross McLean visited Pátzcuaro in March 1951, two months before CREFAL's official inauguration, to make an item for

the UN newsreel:^{xv} a trip that doubtless paved the way for the production of *World Without End*. Hagen Hasselbach's film unit rapidly initiated a film production programme (beginning with *Inauguración de CREFAL/Inauguration of CREFAL*, (Hasselbach, 1951), a silent 16mm colour short documenting the inaugural event on 9 May 1951) [INSERT FIGURE 11 HERE]. In July the unit formed a selection committee charged with assembling film programmes suitable for exhibition in the region's indigenous communities, as well as designating students to be trained in camera operation. Donations were requested from the French, British, Belgian, Dutch, Danish, Soviet, Czech and US embassies, as well as from Mexican government departments, the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, and the UN Film Division.^{xvi}

Thanks to the diverse origins of the materials received, CREFAL's staff and students were able to gradually stake out, test and revise their own, variegated conceptions of "useful" educational film that spanned genres, filmmaking modes and national traditions. Screenings for students and teaching staff in CREFAL's first months included films from Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education such as the neo-realist drama *Los peloteros* (Delano, 1951) and the educational short *Una gota de agua/A Drop of Water* (Delano, 1949); assorted newsreels; US wartime animation shorts on health and hygiene including *Infant Care and Feeding* (United States Information Services, 1944) and *Hookworm* (Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, 1945); an informational film on urban regeneration in Canada, *Ottawa: Today and Tomorrow* (National Film Board, 1951); and documentaries on regional dances in Czechoslovakia and physical education in the UK.^{xvii} The films slated for projection in the indigenous villages in the lake region, meanwhile, were generally of a more practical bent, with programmes mainly comprising titles on agricultural topics such as cattle, pests, rural electrification, and health, including the wartime Disney

educational animations *Water, Friend or Enemy* (1943) and *What Is Disease?* (1945).^{xviii} As the film library grew, the contents of CREFAL's film programmes came to include a wide range of nontheatrical, educational and informative shorts including titles from Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, the BBC (including *The Forgotten Indians* [Lobitnière, 1956], part of Rotha's *The World Is Ours* series), and the UN film division; a programme of 'four films on the culture, music and dance of India';^{xix} newsreels from Mexico, Bolivia and other Latin American countries; the prewar US ethnographic title *African Pigmy Thrills* (Castle, c1930); and light-hearted children's animations such as *Molly Moo Cow and the Indians* (Gillett and Palmer, 1935).

Many of these films conveyed a broadly developmentalist ideological stance, in line with the Cold War agenda of anti-communism, liberal democracy and social and economic liberalisation. However, CREFAL's location in a polycentric network meant that as well as receiving and screening materials from the emerging postwar powers of Europe and North America and from the United Nations offices in New York, it also drew on pictures produced behind the iron curtain, and from elsewhere in Latin America and the Third World. Furthermore, documents and manuals held at CREFAL's archive reveal that screening practices allowed for critical interventions by students and audiences, showing that film was seen as very much an open medium. Frequent practices (following Unesco guidelines) included pausing projections mid-film to discuss its relevance for local audiences; staff and students collaborating on 'workshopping' particular titles brought in from elsewhere to adapt them to local needs; and the creation of new, re-written Spanish-language voice-over narrations. These voice-over narrations, sometimes varying from one community to the next, were used in post-screening discussions to debate differences between the images

shown in the film and audience members' daily realities (CREFAL 1953). Indigenous villagers were even, on occasion, themselves trained in the use of film equipment (CREFAL 1954), suggesting that CREFAL was a forerunner of later media transfer projects. CREFAL students and Purépecha spectators alike were clearly conceived as engaged interlocutors - albeit within a hierarchical relationship - rather than passive viewing subjects.

CREFAL's own local production programme was similarly caught between an paternalistic, evolutionary conception of its indigenous viewers/participants and a desire to harness 16mm film to tap their potential as modern thinking subjects. A case in point is *La decisión de José/José's Decision* (Betancourt, 1958), filmed in the village of San Pedro in the Pátzcuaro lake region by the Ecuadorian CREFAL student Enrique Betancourt. Like several of the centre's other productions, *La decisión de José* adopts a rudimentary docudrama format with a (rather wooden) male voice-over providing the basic storyline, which recounts the rise of protagonist José Guadalupe from ignorance and poverty to relative prosperity, good health and local respectability thanks to his decision to benefit from a state poultry farming credit programme and from CREFAL's adult literacy project. In just 12 minutes of screentime, José transforms from backwardness to the ideal subject of the liberal modernisation embraced by the UN and the Mexican state, as he takes personal responsibility for improving his lot while engaging fruitfully in the institutions and mechanisms provided by national and international organs. [INSERT FIGURES 12-13 HERE]

As we might expect, the formal construction of *La decisión de José* is rudimentary, with a wide use of what we may now see as stodgy establishing shots, uninspired centred compositions and its competent but dull use of basic principles of spatial continuity. There is little suggestion that Betancourt wished to replicate any of

the modernist creativity that characterized Rotha and Carbajal's work for *World Without End*. But rather than simply putting this down to the limited artistic horizons and humble aspirations of a budding audiovisual educator, this would appear to come at least partly through design. The Unesco film project in general was preoccupied by the alienating character of much mainstream fiction film, with its 'hypnotic force which forbids one's attention to wander from that screen in the middle of the darkness' (Bloch-Michel 1951: 8). The French journalist Jean Bloch-Michel's words foreshadow later theories of cinematic ideology such as French apparatus theory or revolutionary 1960s Latin American theories of 'third' or 'imperfect cinema', which were concerned by mainstream cinema's potential to discursively overwhelm a passive viewing subject, and which frequently advocated the activation of the spectator through modernist or avant-garde cinematic praxis. By contrast, those working and studying at CREFAL – in tune with the Unesco film project globally – sought to engage indigenous spectators by addressing the perceived lack of efficiency of 'conventional' film language for audiences unaccustomed to the moving image.

CREFAL students were thus keen to emphasize that their primary task was to find a mode of cinematic expression that would enable their interlocutors' 'primitive intelligence' (Gil 1955: 48) to identify with the films they made. This was to be achieved by creating familiar situations enacted by familiar protagonists to generate empathy, and by 'simplifying' mainstream film language. Forms and techniques such as fictional stories conveyed via docudrama, voice-over narration and extra-diegetic sound were thought to 'humanise' the film experience, 'since viewers are [thus] no longer mere spectators of a mechanical process' (Mauna 1954: 65). Citing Unesco's fundamental education manual on filmmaking for African audiences, Minerva Gil noted that 'complex' effects such as slow-motion, dissolves and excessive montage

should be avoided, whilst spatial continuity should be maintained, along with eyeline point-of-view shots so as to trace the movement of the human eye. Long-shots and sequence shots were ideal since 'the primitive intelligence needs more time to “digest” each image, each series of images' (Gil 1955: 48). [INSERT FIGURE 14 HERE]

Nonprofessional educational filmmakers did not necessarily go to such lengths out of disinterested humanism or anthropological curiosity; they were sometimes highly instrumental. As another student proclaimed, films should try to forge 'a bond of friendship, of intimacy and trust between the viewer and the narrator; these feelings can be exploited in order to further the aim in question' (Mauna 1954: 53-54).

Such attitudes intimate how close at least some CREFAL students were to an evolutionary mindset of indigeneity and development, and how far they were from any real conception of their Purépecha subjects as genuinely critical, thinking spectators, with specific cultural narratives and temporalities that might not be entirely expressible through continuity docudrama aesthetics. Indeed, close analysis of a film such as *La decisión de José* (for which there is no space here) may well reveal how far the form of the local CREFAL productions infantilizes indigenous actors, seeing them as primitive viewers who may soon understand the supposedly logical, transparent and universal 'visual Esperanto' of cinema with some training in audiovisual literacy. It would be wrong, though, to reject the project out of hand as one of colonial imposition. Druick (2011a: 97) has argued that, despite their underlying colonial premises, the low-budget, nontheatrical production and distribution mechanisms established by Unesco film projects of this period can be reasonably claimed as a key forerunner to the decolonising Third Cinemas of the 1960s. Indeed, a longer study might ask how CREFAL, along with the long trail of networks of collaborators, filmmaking techniques and screening practices that it left

behind, helped pave the way for later, more radical documentary practices such as those of Fernando Birri in Argentina from the late 1950s, Jorge Sanjinés in Bolivia from the mid-1960s, or the Latin American technology transfer projects of the 1980s.

Moreover, despite these films' undoubted ideological overdetermination as products of postwar liberal internationalism, we might equally see them in the light of Soviet filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin's coterminous progressive internationalism, conceptualized under the banner of the 'Global Film' (Pudovkin 1947). For Pudovkin, the coming of the sound film and the concomitant move towards dialogue and studio production had eroded 'all the vast significance of unimpeded vision and the examination of life which the motion picture camera had given us', since 'spectators were gradually deprived of the wonderful possibility of witnessing real life with their own eyes' (Pudovkin 1947: 328). Sound also meant that films 'almost completely lost their international character', since subtitles, 'idiotically printed on the picture itself', distracted the eye of the spectator, who 'cannot be expected to gain any impression from the pictorial composition of the original film' (329). But the emerging documentary feature film redeemed the medium, with its use of real locations that re-inserted the viewer into contact with actuality and its use of the voice-over narrator, whose 'voice may be translated into any language without disturbing the integrity of impression' (330). This made it, for Pudovkin, the privileged filmmaking mode in order to 'develop new film forms which will answer the universal desire for unity that has arisen among all the peoples of the world' (332).

World Without End and, still less, the educational documentaries produced at CREFAL may have lacked both the poetic and the ideological characteristics that Pudovkin had in mind. But to view them through the lens of Pudovkin's global film is to acknowledge that, in their commitment to unstaged (or roughly staged) reality,

their urge to reconcile indigenous protagonists with an apparently alien modernity, their attempts to craft a flexible film form intelligible to multiple audiences, and their adaptable and linguistically interchangeable voice-of-God narrations, they at least raise the possibility of becoming potential vehicles, however imperfect, for international solidarity. If, taking CREFAL's cue, we pay fuller attention to viewing practices and in-the-field interventions into film materials over and above the documentaries' guiding ideology, we might find in them a source for the 'examination of life [...] with [our] own eyes', albeit without the utopian pretence of 'unimpeded vision'. In this sense, these films are at least a stopping-off point between the 'Global Film' and the new cinemas of the following decade.

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ⁱⁱ All translations from Spanish are my own unless indicated otherwise.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gil's original source is Unesco (1952).

^{iv} Among the sources cited by Gil are: Unesco (1952); Olsen ([1945] 1951) and MacKown and Roberts (1940] 1953), both translations of earlier English-language texts; and Unesco (1949), published in parallel with an English version.

^v The comparison between the various uses of documentary film by CREFAL and by the Mexican government falls beyond the scope of this article, although some parallels may be observed with official nonfiction film practices analysed in other contributions to this special issue.

^{vi} Rotha filmed in Pátzcuaro from 7 November to 21 December 1952, after stopping off in Mexico City to assemble a crew.

^{vii} Originally scripted in English, the documentary was screened in eight language versions in Canada, Denmark, Germany, India, Israel, New Zealand, Sweden, Thailand, and elsewhere; Press Release, 22 February 1954, *World Without End* Press Cuttings File, British Film Institute. My source is the Spanish-language version recorded for Latin America, preserved at the CREFAL archive by Fernando del Moral.

^{viii} Druick (2011b) discusses *World Without End*'s relationship with the emerging idea of the global village in Wyndham Lewis and Marshall MacLuhan.

^{ix} NASA, 'First Pictures of Earth from 100 Miles in Space, 1947'.

https://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_1298.html.

^x Rotha continued along similar lines as commissioner of the BBC television series *The World Is Ours* (1954-1956); see Rotha ([1956] 1958); Aitkin (2013).

^{xi} Lucas Ortiz to Paul Rotha, 29 January 1954. Apoyo técnico series, Box 6, Folder 3. CREFAL Historical Archive.

^{xii} For reasons of thematic coherence and the scope of my research to date, I have been unable to comment extensively on the film's points of reference and impact in Thailand; this is an issue for further study.

^{xiii} The film collection was preserved by Fernando del Moral González in 2005, and is housed at the CREFAL archive in the Quinta Eréndira in Pátzcuaro, which still serves as CREFAL's headquarters. Del Moral restored and digitized 21 of the 182 reels, mostly documentaries and unedited footage produced at CREFAL between 1951 and 1964 (Del Moral González 2005). His book *Cine documental en Pátzcuaro* (Del Moral González 2007) offers a detailed historical account of CREFAL's film department.

^{xiv} Decreased film production from the 1960s was linked to budget cuts, less operational autonomy, an institutional shift from fundamental education to community development, and the departure of Lucas Ortiz in 1964 (Del Moral González 2007).

^{xv} The item appeared in *United Nations Screen Magazine* no. 12 (1951). John Bowers to Lucas Ortiz, 16 February 1951. Apoyo técnico series, Box 1, Folder 6. CREFAL Historical Archive.

^{xvi} Acuerdos tomados por el comité de selección de películas para exhibirse en las comunidades, 11 July 1951. Apoyo técnico series, Box 1, Folder 1; Hagen Hasselbach to United Nations Film Division, 31 August 1951. Apoyo técnico series, Box 1, Folder 2.

^{xvii} Information extracted from various documents, Apoyo técnico series, 1951, Box 1, Folder 2; and Apoyo técnico series, 1952, Box 3, Folder 7.

^{xviii} Proyecto de programas de cine para los poblados que integran la zona de influencia del CREFAL (undated document). Apoyo técnico series, 1951, Box 1, Folder 3.

^{xix} Invitación. Apoyo técnico series, 1955, Box 8, Folder 3.