

## ***Ecce Homo Novus*: snapshots, the ‘new man’, and iconic montage in the work of Santiago Alvarez**

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This essay explores Santiago Alvarez’s iconic, montage-style filmmaking as it prefigured Modernity’s accelerated crisis as produced by transnational capitalism and theorized years later by poststructuralists and postmodernists. Alvarez, one of the fathers of New Latin American Cinema, stands as an ever more relevant mentor for many contemporary young filmmakers in terms of his lessons about audience cultivation and politicized, immediate, innovative image-making in a context of what he termed ‘accelerated underdevelopment’. His aesthetic of limited resources and limited time and his early emphasis on the tactless camera eye has become a veritable weapon for change for many filmmakers in Latin America’s latest decade, which saw successive economic crises, the failure of neoliberal policies, and a rise in left wing governments.

**Keywords:** underdevelopment; Cuba; neoliberalism; icons; photography; capitalism; colonialism; democracy; new man

Freedom is necessary for all intellectual activity, but the exercise of freedom is in direct relation to the development of a society. Underdevelopment, a byproduct of imperialism, suffocates human freedom. Prejudice, in its turn, is a by-product of underdevelopment. (Santiago Alvarez in Wilkerson, 2003)

### **Introduction**

Cuban revolutionary filmmaker Santiago Alvarez (1919–1998) is often compared with Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov in his radically innovative documentary style. Echoing Vertov’s manifesto on the power of the *kino eye* to capture reality, Alvarez once said: ‘the camera, which is quite tactless, can register this [reality] better than anything. And not just the gesture from the platform: whether they’re sincere, or whether hidden behind these gestures is a demagogic or deliberate attitude’ (cited in Orodea, 1980, p. 15). Alvarez’s style has been described as a pamphlet style of filmmaking meant for fast assembly and immediate consumption. Although compared with Vertov in the way his journalistic approach to filmmaking captures a certain naked reality, Alvarez’s goals are different. His arsenal of artistic strategies includes violating copyright, remixing iconic images, and a unique use of song as argument that both evokes a particularly Cuban history of musical counterpoint and reaches out in a transcontinental way toward what he hoped would become a newly-literate, reinvented, revolutionary public, formed in part by the establishment of the

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ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry). The ICAIC, established by decree just three months after the Cuban revolution, stressed the importance of film as a powerful collective instrument in the development of opinion, the creative spirit and revolutionary principles (Hidalgo, 2001, p. 111).

The Holocaust, slavery, and US imperialism competed as thematic material for Alvarez's declamatory *kino eye* to produce an argument about the fragility of democracies and the racialized violence that often lies just under the surface of 'free' societies. This perspective has taken on a new relevance on the post-crisis Latin American landscape. Alvarez's iconic, trans-historical montage style of filmmaking prefigured the types of accelerated crises in modernity produced by transnational capitalism and theorized years later by poststructuralists and postmodernists. Thus, Alvarez, one of the fathers of New Latin American Cinema, stands as an ever more relevant mentor for many contemporary young filmmakers in terms of his lessons about audience cultivation and politicized, immediate, innovative image-making in a context of what he termed 'accelerated underdevelopment'. His aesthetic of limited resources and limited time as well as his early emphasis on the tactless camera eye has become a veritable weapon for change for many filmmakers in the latest decade in Latin America, a decade which saw economic crisis after economic crisis, the failure of neoliberal policies, and a rise in left wing governments.

Alvarez's innovative use of found film stock and iconic photography in his short collage films contributed to the development of an anti-imperialist, declamatory visual rhetoric that would powerfully impact, both as an artistic model and practical strategy, new Latin American filmmakers unable and unwilling to compete with the Hollywood industrial complex. Alvarez's short collage films – by definition antithetical to the Hollywood model of filmmaking, which stresses formulaic storytelling, organized around predictable crises and resolutions – prefigured the huge market for short films in Latin America that would result when Latin American features could no longer compete with Hollywood for audiences (Fusco, 1994).

### **Urgent cinema then and now**

In an interview for *Film Quarterly*, Argentine filmmaker Fernando Solanas, one of the precursors of New Latin American Cinema along with Alvarez, outlined what he saw as the ongoing struggle an individual raised in capitalist societies must undergo to effect real change and to transform into a *new man*:

One isn't able to change one's form of expression or one's ideology the way he changes his shirt. The fact that a whole people can move from illiteracy to literacy is already a giant step forward. But the transformation of man into a new man is more complex and is going to take longer . . . The problem is that all the subjectivity, all the vital experience of a man who grew up in a capitalist context is alienated. Consequently, his psychology and his language are alienated as well. (Solanas & MacBean, 1970, p. 41)

Solanas believed that all people raised in a capitalist context, Latin American and European intellectuals included, would have grown up with an alienated consciousness and a language that hindered revolutionary expression. He goes on:

Therefore, the author, even if subjectively he is a revolutionary, continues to create works which are objectively bourgeois . . . If a left-wing 'author' criticizes the bourgeoisie, the

bourgeoisie still is able to recognize itself in the author, and it exclaims, 'Oh it's so beautiful! This Italian film is so beautiful!'... While [the filmmaker] turns the ideas around, [he] doesn't change his means of expression, nor his subjectivity, nor his irrationality. He continues to express himself in a style and a worldview that belong to the bourgeois consumer-society. He can easily be co-opted. (Alexander, 1985, p. 3)

Solanas referenced this notion of easy co-optation in his and Octavio Getino's now classic film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (*La hora de los hornos*, 1966–1968) with countless collage sequences referencing consumerism, capitalist products, and porteño youth culture in a rapid-fire manner reminiscent of Alvarez's pioneering style.<sup>1</sup>

Cuban film audiences in the 1950s were no different from other Latin American audiences, save for an even greater appetite for Hollywood and similar types of films from around the world. About 1.5 million people per week went to see films out of a population of just under 7 million (King, 1989). According to Cuban cinematographer Nestor Almendros, Havana was a veritable paradise for film fans, and audiences turned out in vast numbers:

Cuba was a privileged place to see films. First, unlike the Spanish, the Cubans knew nothing about dubbing so all the films were shown in their original versions with subtitles. Second, since this was a free market with almost no state controls, the distributors brought in many different kinds of film. I got to see all the American productions there, even the B movies that had trouble getting to other countries. I also saw Mexican, Spanish, Argentine, French and Italian films. Around 600 films were imported each year. The censors were very tolerant. (Alexander, 1985, p. 140)

Alvarez himself confessed to having grown up in Havana watching Hollywood westerns, and especially liking it 'when the "bad" Indians scalped the blue-eyed blonde good guys' (Wilkerson, 2003).

### New Latin American Cinema

In spite of Alvarez's early critical eye, changing such a large portion of the population's affection for Hollywood cinema was no small feat. According to King (1989), the task would consist of overcoming a poor technological infrastructure, training new directors as new definitions of revolutionary cinema emerged, reaching new audiences and changing the tastes of existing ones. In 1959, Santiago Alvarez was put in charge of the newsreel section of the ICAIC. He joined a nucleus of filmmakers such as Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Alfredo Guevara, Jorge Haydu, Jorge Fraga, and Joris Ivens, who would help shape New Latin American Cinema in the years to come.<sup>2</sup> As Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri suggests, New Latin American Cinema is

the only cinema in the history of cinema that expresses a continent in all the diversity of its cultural-historical connotation but which, at the same time, belongs to an economic infrastructure which perpetuates its so-called underdevelopment, and which places us face to face with common and shared problems of existence. (Birri, 1985, p. 4)

Furthermore, Ana Lopez suggests that New Latin American Cinema is a political cinema committed to praxis and to the sociopolitical investigation and transforma-

tion of the underdevelopment that characterizes Latin America (Martin, 1997). Zuzana M. Pick (1993) argues that in New Latin American Cinema in general the concept of 'people' is depicted as a creative force, or as a popular or vernacular culture that constantly re-invents itself through centuries of conquest, colonialism, immigration and partial modernizations. This constitutes a cinema that threatens to unmask the mystified notion of film production through, as Julianne Burton suggests, disclosing everything about itself, including its economy and means of production (Martin, 1997). Thus, it may be argued that Alvarez's work cannot avoid saying everything about itself as it is literally defined by the limited means of production available in Cuba immediately after the revolution). Julio García Espinosa saw this lack of means as a ripe condition for Cuban cinema to become a 'cinema of quality, one which is culturally meaningful within the revolutionary process' (Martin, 1997, p. 71). In his seminal essay, 'For an Imperfect Cinema', García Espinosa (1997) argues against the type of technical and artistic mastery common in European art cinema and Hollywood studio films. He favored an 'imperfect cinema' in which spectators are empowered to become active participants, co-authors and creators of art. Accordingly, notions of artistic mastery and an elite monopoly on the means of cinematic production were seen as blocking the development of revolutionary cinema. They needed to be abolished. Sounding oddly prophetic of current innovations in web-based digital editing and film technology, García Espinosa imagined a day in which the power of filmmaking would be available to the masses.<sup>3</sup>

Alvarez called his style of work 'accelerated underdevelopment', a term that resonates with the speed with which he made films – *Hasta la Victoria Siempre* (1967) was made in 48 hours for the meeting at which Fidel Castro announced the death of Che Guevara – and the anti-imperialist messages necessitated and created by the material conditions of underdevelopment. Archival photography, anonymous film stock, and collaboration with contacts outside of Cuba contributed to Alvarez's unique aesthetic. For his 1967 film *Hanoi, Martes 13*, he relied on war and riots footage sent from US and Vietnamese sources. *Now!* (1965), a film about the civil rights movement and racism in the US, is similarly made up of archival photographs and home non-professional film footage of KKK bonfires, lynchings, civil rights marches, police violence and protests.<sup>4</sup>

While Alvarez's work presents us with a great diversity of co-existing forms of representation and repeated motifs that sometimes combine and clash in ways that suggest an avant-garde aesthetic, we should be wary of understanding his work under an avant-garde umbrella.<sup>5</sup> The politics of Third Cinema (a politically radical wing of New Latin American Cinema) discourages such an easy grouping. According to Solanas, if First Cinema consists of Hollywood cinema and foreign imitations of it around the world, and Third Cinema consists of cinema that is radically other to First Cinema in its narrative structure, modes of production and distribution, as well as an overall goal to transform spectators into revolutionary actors, avant-garde cinema ends up relegated to the nebulous realm of Second Cinema, or intellectual 'auteur' cinema. In other words, Second Cinema, is considered by Argentine filmmakers Solanas and Getino as a type of cinema that cultivates and courts progressive intellectual elites in its lack of linearity and often abstract beauty, but does not address the politics of change or expose social problems (Martin, 1997). Auteur cinema, thus, is perfectly capable of satisfying the needs and wishes of a

consumer society. While fellow ICAIC founders Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Humberto Solás took influence from Italian neorealism and the landscape of post-war Rome, Alvarez cultivated the class-consciousness necessary for his transformation into a revolutionary filmmaker (at the ripe old age of 40) in the heartland of capitalism and conspicuous consumption.<sup>6</sup>

Alvarez went to the United States to escape poverty in the 1930s and was quickly shocked by the racism and classism he found there. Although his father was an anarchist and had served time in jail for his political beliefs, Alvarez himself was politicized later by his experiences in the US. Some of these experiences included being nearly attacked for offering his seat on a bus to a young black woman holding a baby, and working alongside Italian immigrants and Marxist coal miners in Pennsylvania, many of whom died of ‘black lung’. Of his participation in his first miners’ strike, Alvarez had this to say: ‘You know, I became a Marxist back there, in the States’ (Wilkerson, 2003). Alvarez often discussed the drama of lived experiences as playing a central role in his creative style, or the drama of ‘accumulated encounters’ that form their own language:

For example, *Now!* was not filmed live, but I lived in the US for a while, and I *witnessed* the racial discrimination in the South, and I knew the misery of the blacks and the violence which was wielded against them. When I had the material for *Now!* in my hands, my *mental script dictated* to me the order, the rhythm, the way of using the material. The filmic structure emerged in the editing room around Lena Horne’s song, in front of which I reacted in accord with all those previous experiences. (Wilkerson, 2003, emphasis added).

*Now!* and *LBJ*, two of his better known films, demonstrate the way in which Alvarez drew upon his early years in the US to create visual parallels between histories of oppression.

### *Now!*

Arguably Alvarez’s most famous film, *Now!* places declamatory oral and visual rhetoric at its core, as its iconic photos of civil rights struggles are organized according to the censored lyrics of Horne’s song *Now!* (the song, which uses the melody of the Hebrew song *Hava Nagila*, had been censored by Horne’s recording label for its strong racial message).<sup>7</sup> Although Alvarez used the song and was consequently sued, Horne granted the filmmaker special permission and the lawsuit was dropped. Alvarez is said to have organized the images according to the rhythm and lyrics of the song. Horne and Alvarez’s seemed to share similar goals in terms of encouraging literacy as a form of self defense and identity-formation via the use of popular forms of communication. In Alvarez’s words:

The only way to break the vicious circle of underdevelopment is with a two-pronged effort. Winning the race against time is part of the effective struggle against underdevelopment. In Cuba, in order to win this race, we faced the necessity, parallel to the creation of a film industry – which didn’t exist before the Revolution – of bringing literacy to the entire population. (Wilkerson, 2003)

Alvarez’s hopes for the power of cinema to contribute to social uplift and the development of a new language for a revolutionary new man parallels Dziga Vertov’s

hopes that the camera eye would create a new image-based universal language. In fact *Now!* is comprised entirely of song lyrics and images. There is no dialogue and very little use of actual motion picture footage. Repetition of the word 'Now!' plays a crucial role in the song and underscores the urgency of Horne's anti-racism message. The song's lyrics refer to moments and figures in US history and call upon listeners to revisit history and to know their constitutional rights: 'If those historic gentlemen came back today / Jefferson, Washington and Lincoln / And Walter Cronkite put them on channel two to find out what they were thinking / I'm sure they'd say "thanks for quoting us so much, but we don't want to take a bow. Enough with the quoting, put those words into action, and we mean action now!"'

In Alvarez's film, Horne's vocals accompany moving and still images of police abuses during civil rights protests and marches in the US. The opening of the film features an iconic photo of Martin Luther King in dialogue with Lyndon B. Johnson in the White House, signaling the potentially unstable nature of the images that will follow, and inviting a variety of possible interpretations. Spectators already familiar with the celebratory, rejoicing context in which *Hava Nagila* is traditionally performed will be thrown off guard by Horne's reconstitution of the song into a newer form of declamatory oral rhetoric. They will also be impressed by Alvarez's accompanying use of images of police officers abusing protesters (men, women and children, black and white) and riot squads marching to its beat. The beat of the song slowly speeds up as the images zoom in and out on the guns, batons and dogs used by police officers to curb what is clearly a rising tide of social unrest. In a particularly harrowing sequence, Horne's lyrics concerning racist, paranoid fantasies about black men coincide with a long moving segment in which a witnessing camera tracks several white police officers aggressively restraining an older black woman, whose shoes fly off in the degrading process of being dragged toward a patrol car: 'Everyone should love his brother / Everyone should love each other / Just don't take it literal mister / No one wants to grab your sister'. An artistic parallel is established throughout the film between racial inequalities and violence under the institution of slavery and then later under segregation. Alvarez suggests that US democracy has failed to eradicate its inherent violence and racism in spite of dialogue represented by the iconic images of Martin Luther King and LBJ that appear at the start of the film. This trope of failure takes on a new dimension with the insertion of footage from a neo-Nazi rally. As a neo-Nazi crowd marches in front of swastika and a set of US flags, the following lyrics about constitutional rights and literacy play: 'It's there for you and me for every he and she / Just want to do what's right constitutionally / I went to take a look in my old history book / It's there in black and white for all to see / Now! / Now! / Now, now, now, now'.

The sad histories of slavery, racial inequality and anti-Semitism are brought together at this point. As the film races toward its conclusion, the music speeds up and the images become more violent. Previous images included police harassing non-violent protesters but the neo-Nazi rally ushers in a series of photos of grieving women and children, KKK cross burnings and harrowing photos of white men lynching a black man. The final two shots of the film reinforce Alvarez's ideological message that one cannot do business with oppressors. More radical action is needed to effect revolutionary change. The reference to non-violent dialogue at the beginning of the film, along with the iconic photos of Martin Luther King in discussion with LBJ, is now replaced by a final image of a young black woman



Figure 1. Horne in *Now!*

raising her fist in victory as bullet holes spell the imperative ‘Now!’ across a white background – presumably a movie screen (Figure 1).

### ***LBJ***

While *Now!* brings found film and photo footage of civil rights struggles into the service of Lena Horne’s controversial song lyrics, *LBJ* places an even more explicit emphasis on iconic photography from *Life Magazine*. In the film, Alvarez uses the 19 August 1966 photo-spread of the opulent wedding of Luci Baines, Lyndon B. Johnson’s daughter, to Patrick John Nugent as an allegory of the United States’ democratic value system, which appears to place marriage and family at its core. According to Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, such images:

are moments of visual eloquence that acquire exceptional importance within public life. They are believed to provide definitive representations of political crises and to motivate public action on behalf of democratic values. On the other hand, they are created and kept in circulation by media elites...they are used in conjunction with the grand narratives of official history, and they are nothing if not conventional. (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008, p. 177)

Alvarez claimed that his ‘style is the hatred for imperialism’, and that he used iconic images ‘as powerfully as they were used in the west to sell goods in his own methodology’ (Malcolm, 1999).

In addition to images, music plays a strong role in this film. Alvarez uses an ominous soundtrack featuring the work of Carl Orff to accompany a series of *Life* photos of the cathedral, bridesmaids, wedding ceremony, and cake cutting. These conventional images are intercut with sinister photos of LBJ and naked pinups from

*Playboy* magazine, suggesting the lurid underside of church-sanctioned matrimony. The image of the perfectly layered wedding cake is juxtaposed with a brief borrowed film segment in which a *mafioso* pops out of an artificial cake firing a machine gun, and capped with a sped-up photo montage of Winchester rifles. The violence of the images increases and eventually stops with the advent of a new sequence entitled 'LBJ', which lampoons Johnson as a happy-go-lucky cowboy.

Again, this new segment starts with seemingly innocuous icons of 'American' values – fun-loving cowboys – only to bring such values into horrifying historical relief: the images of the cowboy president are followed by an extended ambush scene, borrowed from a Hollywood western. In contrast to the frenetic speed of the previous segment, the pace of the western footage is slowed down considerably to emphasize the brutality with which an outnumbered group of Native Americans are attacked by cowboys. Michael T. Martin and Bruce Paddington suggest that the reason why Alvarez's work has been so inspirational to Latin American filmmakers is because it 'has challenged the history of cinematic representation and is committed to a social practice that opposes capitalist and foreign domination and affirms national and popular expression' (Martin & Paddington, 2001, p. 2). Alvarez ruptures this critical look at the Western film genre by splicing in a close-up of a photo of a poor black child in an urban US slum. Thus, the histories of Native American genocide and slavery are positioned in tandem. Alvarez seems to suggest that the same history of violence that gave birth to the United States paved the way for the insidious self-destructive nature of its democracy.

Staccato, operatic voices punctuate a series of images that tell the next story in the film which depicts Johnson as a power-hungry knight waiting to overturn the Camelot, Kennedy legacy. Iconic photos of JFK's assassination and funeral procession are followed by ones of LBJ joyfully mounting his horse, as if to take off on a new adventure. LBJ smiles, shovel in hand, as if he had just shoveled dirt into JFK's grave. His face, through superimposition, fades over JFK's replacing it on the official US government seal. A knight in armor appears on horseback, lance in hand. The camera zooms to the headgear and we see LBJ's face (Figure 2). The cowboy from the early part of the film has transformed into a knight poised for battle. The figure of the knight reappears and guides viewers through the remaining two segments about the civil rights movement and the death of the Camelot legacy with Robert Kennedy's assassination. Stokely Carmichael's and Martin Luther King's recorded speeches accompany lyrics from Nina Simone's *Mississippi Goddam!* The lyrics 'This whole country is full of lies / You're all gonna die and die like flies' illustrate the general feeling of despair evoked by the concurrent images of white power rallies and Nazi firing squads in this sequence of the film. Here the editing is as sharp as the blast of a gun and, in fact, the sound of shots being fired underscores some of the images. The only somewhat peaceful break in an otherwise violent play of iconic photographs and film clips comes in the form of a serene montage of African art. But even this nostalgic, idealistic look back is interrupted by a recurrent shot of an owl appearing to witness the truth of the violence evoked by Alvarez's images and photographs in motion. As the music rises in a crescendo indicating the end of the film, sunny photographs of new life from the White House archive replace the reference to the sad legacy of the assassinated Kennedy. LBJ holds a new grandbaby produced by his daughter's union from his new presidential perch. These *Life Magazine* photos suggest full-circle closure, as we are reinserted into the family





Figure 2. LBJ as a knight in armor in Alvarez's *LBJ*.

life of LBJ and, thus, brought back to the start of the film. These halcyonic images are ruptured, however, by a shocking brief moving image of a person on fire as a result of napalm, foreshadowing his escalation of the Vietnam war and the films Alvarez would make shortly thereafter in Vietnam.<sup>8</sup>

Both in *Now!* and *LBJ* Alvarez makes use of what Hariman and Lucaites call the ambiguous potentiality of iconic images from photojournalism. Hariman and Lucaites suggest that even though iconic images are almost always immediately recognizable and understandable, 'their meaning and effects are likely to be established slowly, shift with changes in context and use, and be fully evident only in a history of both official and vernacular appropriations' (Olson et al., 2008, p. 177). Alvarez was candid about the nature of his particular type of vernacular appropriation of images: 'We had the inspiration of creating Cuban cinema that would operate in a different type of society . . . the Americans blockade us and force us to improvise . . . we make collages from American magazines because the Americans prevent us from getting live material' (Wilkerson, 2003). Thus, due to the blockade, Alvarez established a new style of newsreel and began working in documentary, 'turning a scarcity into a "signifier," remodeling second-hand sources such as news photos and television clips, and developing a highly poetic and politically effective film collage' (King, 1989, p. 147). Ironically, the radical documentaries of Alvarez, drawn largely from found footage and archival photography, became the cornerstone of innovation in the newly emerging revolutionary landscape for Cuban cinema.

## Conclusion

To suggest that Santiago Alvarez offered first-time directors who wanted to engage in an anti-Hollywood, anti-imperialist stance a vocabulary and a visual rhetoric in which to do so is an understatement. Alvarez's early acts of film rebellion included:

copyright violation, image remix, hand-held camera work, musical sampling, free interplay of a variety of texts, and an agit-prop aesthetics of denunciation. Today, digital technology allows both first-time and experienced filmmakers to replicate some of Alvarez's rapid-fire filmmaking techniques easily and affordably. Video *escrache*, for example, is a popular indigenous video movement that has sprung up in the wake of economic and political crises in Argentina in the past ten years (*escrache* is an Argentine slang term that signifies the act of public shaming and denunciation). Jessica Stites Mor discusses the 1999 collaboration between a politically and socially committed film collective, *Cine Insurgente* (Insurgent Cinema Group), and HIJOS (the Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence). After releasing a high-profile film about the exploitation of workers by the Ledesma sugar mill in Jujuy (*Diablo, familia y propiedad* [*Devil, family, and property*], 1999), the film's director, Fernando Kirchmar, announced that he would boycott the international film festival in Mar del Plata in protest over the fact that national cinema directors had lost their vision. The HIJOS group then invited Cine Insurgente members to denounce (perform an *escrache*) the mills' owners publically after the film's debut at the Cosmos theater. The film collective, self-styled heirs to the militant cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, then marched with HIJOS members to the home of the Ledesma mill owner, Nélida de Blaquier, where they symbolically 'marked' the home by splattering it with red paint (to remind the public of the Ledesma company's connections to the dictatorship and continuing practices of exploitation). Stites Mor situates Kirchmar's film as part of new era of Argentine political documentaries beginning after 1989 that ushered in new forms of production and dissemination informed by political activism from the 'new left' and designed to confront the ideology of and compete in a new global marketplace (Stites Mor, 2012, p. 132). Thus, in calling these documentary works 'transition films', Stites Mor claims that they form part of the 'reconstruction of a viable and political left' (p. 133). According to Michael Chanan, the emergence of such movements indicates a remediation of 'a genre of militant cinema, in the vein of Santiago Alvarez back in the 1960s, which most of us have assumed is a thing of the past' (Chanan, 2005, p. 3). With respect to filmmaking in the US, Derek Malcolm (1999) rightfully asks, why have we forgotten a filmmaker who has developed in part because of his early experiences in this country, and a filmmaker who has been so concerned with US politics and problems that plague this nation in his works? While the political and ideological embargo might, in part, answer this question, Malcolm's point about the way in which Alvarez expressed a critical Pan-American perspective on social problems that would only grow deeper with the expansion of transnational capitalism (and trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA) is well taken and particularly relevant to the current efforts of emerging Latin American film collectives to compete with the Hollywood 'dream machine' and to collaborate with filmmakers across in the creation of highly politicized films for immediate consumption (on sites such as YouTube and CurrentTV).<sup>9</sup> The resurgence or remediation of an *escrache* aesthetics in contemporary Latin American film and video points not only to the fact that neocolonialism is alive and well in global Hollywood distribution channels in the 21st century, just as it was two generations ago, but to the continued relevance of Alvarez's documentary work as 'a symbol of the link between the Third World struggles, from Latin America to Vietnam' (Mestman, 2002, p. 42). The freshest crop of New Latin American filmmakers seems to understand that, while Vertov's camera

is an eye that observes, Alvarez's is a gun that destroys and reinvents, and it is to be used only in the service of social change.

## Notes

1. Ana M. López suggests that the Cuban role, as the only socialist nation in Latin America at the time of the development of the New Latin American Cinema project, 'has yet to be fully detailed' (Martin, 1997, p. 151). Not only does *The Hour of the Furnaces* share an ideological cinematic approach with the films of Santiago Alvarez, in that both styles reflect the possibility of the film medium functioning as a 'weapon' of change (and, I would argue, as a new form of literacy), it also shares a number of formal qualities such as the use of found or taken footage, photo collages, surrealist imagery, the use of popular music and rhythmic editing strategies.
2. Veteran Dutch socialist filmmaker, Joris Ivens, also played an important role in the development of the ICAIC and the training of some of its filmmakers. Ivens was taken seriously as documentarian by ICAIC's founders because of his experience with newsreels and low budget filmmaking, and because of the fact that he had traveled to Cuba and supported the revolution. Cuban military leaders gave him access to film because he had filmed in Spain during the civil war and in China during its war against Japanese invaders. For a fuller exploration of Ivens' work see Chapter 10 in Chanan (2004); and Panizza (2011). For a documentary about Ivens' life and work, see Hughes (c2009).
3. The current hysteria in the US and Europe over intellectual property rights in the face of digital remixes of film, music and photos, and the general notion that, with internet and digital technologies, anyone can be an artist, offers a capitalist response to García Espinosa's optimistic take on the notion of widespread imperfection in art.
4. While I focus primarily on two Alvarez films dedicated to the topic of racism and inequality in the U.S. in this paper, it is useful to keep in mind that 1965, the year in which *Now* was made, marks the start of the filmmaker's series of films about the people of Southeast Asia. *Solidaridad Cuba y Vietnam*, made in 1965, was followed by many films about US aggression and imperialism in the region, which include: *Escalada del chantaje*, *Hanoi Martes 13*, *La Guerra olvidada*, and *79 Springtimes of Ho Chi Minh*. As Chanan argues, by the 1970s, the ICAIC turned its attention to anti-colonial wars that resulted in two 1976 films on Angola: *Angola, victoria de la esperanza* (*Angola, Victory of Hope*), and *La guerra en Angola* (*The War in Angola*). See Chapters 10 and 11 in Chanan (2004).
5. One finds traces of the surrealist sensibilities of Dada and Buñuel in Alvarez's work, as well as a rejection of high art forms in favor of everyday themes and objects, mixed media collages, and contemporary pop culture icons, elements that are emblematic of the work of Duchamp, Rauschenbergh, Lichtenstein, and others.
6. For more detailed discussions of the influence of Italian neorealism and the CSC (Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia) in Rome on New Latin American filmmakers and ICAIC members, see: Chapters 7 and 8 in Chanan (2004), Chapter 6 in Ruberto and Wilson (2007), and the Introduction in Tompkins (2013).
7. Lena Horne had this to say about the composition of the lyrics used in *Now!*: 'I had committed myself to do a benefit at Carnegie Hall for SNCC... So I asked Jule [Styne] if he could do something special for that concert. He mulled it over and said, "Hey – how about putting some lyrics – just the way you talk and the things you talk about – to the Jewish song called 'Hava Nagilla'. He got Betty Comden and Adolph Green to do the lyrics and the song was called 'Now!' and it became a cause celebre, when the networks refused to allow the recording I made of it to be played" (cited in Waugh, 1995). For a detailed comparative musical analysis of Alvarez's *Now!* and *The 79 Springtimes of Ho Chi Minh*, see John Hess's chapter in Waugh (1995).
8. For *The 79 Springtimes of Ho Chi Minh* (1969) Alvarez was asked to go to Vietnam and film the funeral of Ho Chi Minh. *Hanoi, Tuesday the 13th* (1967), considered his masterpiece, places Alvarez in the role of witness as he saw the first US bombs dropped over Hanoi. This work is described as Alvarez' anger converted into energy.

9. See, for example, the work of the HIJOS collective (Argentina), Cineinsurgente (Argentina), Cine-Mujer (Colombia), Cine-Mujer (Mexico), and Grupo Miércoles (Venezuela), among others.

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