THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

A CINEMA OF FREE ASSOCIATION: COUNTER-INSTITUTIONAL FILM CULTURES OF THE HISPANIC CARIBBEAN, 1952 – 1968

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2023

No way. The people who say that believe,
because I worked six years for the Division and fifteen for the Institute of Culture,
that I'm some sort of public property...

- Lorenzo Homar, asked if he made "official art."[1]

[1] Lorenzo Homar, Quoted in Catherine Marsh Kennerley, *Negociaciones culturales: Los intelectuales y el proyecto pedagógico muñocista"* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2009): 75.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank the members of my dissertation committee—Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, Allyson Field, Danielle Roper, and Masha Salazkina—for shepherding this project from an amorphous proposal to its current form. In particular, I want to highlight the contributions of Kara Keeling, who helped give shape to my chapter on Oscar Torres; Jennifer Wild, who first alerted me to the presence of Puerto Rican filmmakers at the first few Flaherty Film Seminars; as well as Dan Morgan and Tom Lamarre, who may have thought they were helping me enter the job market when they were actually my dissertation project's first audience. My gratitude extends to Tom Gunning, Masha Belodubrovskaya, David Rodowick, Dominique Bluher, Marc Downie, Richard Neer, Katherine Buse, Jim Lastra, Takuya Tsunoda, and Nick Baer for contributing to my research in ways subtle, but no less crucial. They've probably forgotten, but I've made sure not to. No list of acknowledgements in this program would be complete without mentioning the Film Studies Center and Cinema and Media Studies staff—namely, Julia Gibbs, Mike Phillips, Ben Ruder, Riss Ballard, Jiayi Chen, Traci Verleyen, Jane Bohnsack, and Shekinah Thornton—for all the levers they pull behind the scenes to assist grad students and for supporting my public programming. As I type the final revisions to this project on a plane to Puerto Rico, I realize that the dissertation would have been impossible to file without the last-minute editing and image-rights feedback from Bridget Madden of the Visual Resources Center and Colleen Mullarkey of the Dissertation Office. From the faculty at CMS, I especially want to note the unique contributions to my scholarly formation by the late Robert Bird, who challenged me to think deeply about Caribbean serigraphy. I did not know what to do with his criticism then, but I hope this project serves as evidence that I am still thinking about that fascinating space between the silk- and silver screens.

At no point before I joined the staff at the Center for Latin American Studies did I feel like a Latin Americanist, nor did I speak with any sort of authority on the field of Caribbean Studies. Whatever knowledge I have today of the field—and whatever confidence has possessed me long enough to write a dissertation on the topic—I owe to the lovely people at CLAS. Natalie Arsenault, for humbling me by hiring me as her second-choice candidate; Diana Schwartz Francisco, for showing me first-hand how to teach Latin American history; and Jamie Gentry and Lindsay Ortega, for keeping things simple once they saw me for the overcommitted grad student that I was. I have always said that CLAS was the 2nd best job I have ever had, right after my summer as a cheese cutter at the Hyde Park Treasure Island.

I would also like to thank everyone who helped Cuba feel like my second (third?) home. From Chicago, I want to thank Hannah Rogers and Laura Zöe Humphreys for facilitating my first trip to Havana, along with Alexandra Halkin's consistent support of my formation as a Cuban media scholar through her organization, the Americas Media Initiative. My regards to Luciano Castillo, Lola Calviño, Daymar Valdés, Rebecca Chávez, and company, all of whom made the Cinemateca de Cuba at Alfredo Guevara's old home feel like a bed and breakfast. I'm glad you all got to taste Puerto Rican coffee. Special thanks to everyone who had a hand in helping me chase down Oscar Torres in the archives: Juan Antonio García Borrero, Orlando Jiménez Leal, Mercedes Cortázar, Ivette Ávila, Elaine del Valle, Ramiro Zardoya, Iris Cano (and her husband Conrado), the team at ICAIC, and everybody who received me at the EICTV. Of course, I want to thank my family in Holguín and elsewhere in Oriente for hosting me. They made me feel as if the Dorestes never left. In Santo Domingo, the filmmaker Victoria Linares Villegas was a vital resource for my research into her distant cousin in more ways than I could mention in this space, along with Tanya Valette and Luis Beiro Álvarez.

In Puerto Rico, no film-historical research is possible without the tireless work of Marisel Flores Patton at the Moving Image Archive in San Juan. The kernel of this project, the very idea of a "global DivEdCo," I owe to Marisel. I would also like to single out the unique contributions of Roberto Ramos Perea, Monchy Almodóvar, Amílcar Tirado Avilés, Hilda Ayala, and Leida Santiago, who together with Marisel and I organized the centenary celebration of filmmaker Amílcar Tirado Santiago in 2023. This event was a personal highlight of my academic career. I would also like to acknowledge the many artists, archivists, and academics who have helped me gain a foothold in the study of Puerto Rican cinema: Naida García Crespo, Carmelo Esterrich, Yomaira Figueroa, José Lacomba, Sharon Riley, Awilda Sterling Duprey, Catherine Marsh Kennerley, Gilberto Blasini, Luis Rosario Albert, Mariam Colón Pizarro, Rose Marie Bernier, Silvia Álvarez Curbelo, Agnes Lugo Ortíz, Julio Quiroz, Pedro Roig, and Arnaldo González who, each in their own way, pointed me in the right direction, or at least away from the wrong one. Special thanks to my friends Jonathan Espinosa, Camila Alonso, Francisco Mella, Andrés Montalvo, and Abdiel Portalatín Pérez who have all been chauffeurs and hosts during too many research trips to count. Thank you for letting me sleep and, occasionally, sleep in.

I send all my love and best vibes to my fellow grad students at the University of Chicago, whose support kept me going even when I felt I was stuck in the mud. In particular—but in no particular order—I want to thank Cinta Peleja for her assurances that I would indeed finish my dissertation; Sean Batton and Ritika Kaushik for showing me the light at the end of the tunnel (and making tea); Gary Kafer and Cooper Long who helped me refine my thinking through numerous workshops; and Katerina Korola, Matt Hubbell, Sophie and Isabelle Lynch, whose parties made the sleepless nights and daily frustrations of academe all worth it. My gratitude extends to Ashley Truehart, Sasha Crawford-Holland, Maggie Sivit, Avery LaFlamme, Tanya Desai, Max Bean, Jenisha Borah, Wolfgang Boehm, Joel Sutherland, Tien Tien Jong Zhang, Amy Skjerseth, Nicole Morse,

James Rosenow, among many other of my contemporaries at the Cinema and Media Studies program.

A special note of thanks to my extended academic community beyond Hyde Park: Alex Denison, Sofía Alfaro, Sol López, Chang-Min Yu, Eli Boonin-Vail, Kyeong-Bok Lee, Hannah Bonner, Tadas Bugnevicius, Hsin-Yuan Peng, Richard Mwakasege-Minaya, Sima Kokotovic, Ben Crais, and Gus Cook. I also appreciate the consistent support I've gotten from professors at each institution I've attended or frequently visited. Of course, none of this would have happened without the prodding of Nandita Batra and Nickolas Haydock at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. Without Nick's invitation to present my term paper at a medievalism conference in De Pere, Wisconsin back in 2013, I don't know where I'd be. At Emory, my research was strengthened through its intellectual contacts with Tanine Allison, Karla Oeler, Daniel Reynolds, Matthew Bernstein, Gary Fessenden, Ryan Cook, Michelle Schreiber, and David Pratt, who I cannot thank without sharing a brief anecdote. David was the fork in my scholarly road, so to speak. I had missed a few meetings of his Genre Studies seminar out of frustration during a particularly challenging semester. David gave me the option to either drop his course or write the best damn paper I had in me. Thankfully, I chose the latter, but not before David conducted an individual and intensive short course on archival research methodologies one afternoon at the Woodruff Library. To this day, I cannot look at a microfilm reader without recalling our little midterm game of chicken at Emory. At the University of Iowa, I knew I could always count on the advice of Paula Amad and Joyce Tsai. Finally, my future colleagues Joshua Yumibe, Kaveh Askari, Julian Chambliss, Salah Hassan, Kristin Mahoney, Ellen McCallum, Justus Nieland, and Kuhu Tanvir at Michigan State University will notice their fingerprints on the first and last chapters.

This project does not get done without the ceaseless support of my partner, Dalina A. Perdomo Álvarez, who will recognize every single thought I've put down in these pages. If my dissertation disappeared off the face of the earth, Dalina could rewrite it from scratch—and likely better. For whenever she reads the final version of this work: I love you, Dangu. My mother, Edna, for befriending librarians, artists, and writers in the island acting as my proxy. My father, José, whose stubborn politics continue to cause arguments and inform my work on Cuban exile media in equal measure. My younger brother, Alexis, for putting up with me while I was dissertating during a pandemic. My older brother, Armando, for being the first in the family to attend grad school and opening this particular door for me to step through. It is because of his obvious talent as a filmmaker that I chose to study them instead of becoming one myself. Our dogs Milo, Ossie, and Congrí for making remote work less lonely both here and on the island. Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to my grandparents—Edna, Noel, Sonia, and Pedro—whose stories of revolutionary Cuba and midcentury Puerto Rico captivated me from a young age. "Pa'lante, pa'trás ni pa' coger impulso," I remember Abuela Sonia repeat to me in her weekly, 30-second phone calls. I'm glad I picked up each time. This is for all of you.

Abstract

"A Cinema of Free Association: Counter-Institutional Film Cultures of the Hispanic Caribbean, 1952-1968," re-routes the global film cultures and currents of the midcentury through Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education (DivEdCo) to retroactively map a Caribbean presence in the emergence of the cinematic new waves of the 1960s. Modeled after other liberal-internationalist state film initiatives, the DivEdCo was a public pedagogy project established shortly before the ratification of Puerto Rico's current colonial relationship to the U.S. in 1952—the Free Associated State—and envisioned as the cultural companion to rapid changes to the island's social life and industry. Contrary to the established history, my project examines how individual artists worked through and at the margins of their institution's demands to make an internationalist, pan-American cinema. Each case study activates archival material and oral histories gathered in the Hispanic Caribbean and New York City to show the hemispheric flows of midcentury Caribbean film, positioning the island of Puerto Rico as a central node. For example, the opening chapter reconstructs the cinema unit's participation in the first few Flaherty Film Seminars beginning in 1955, which I treat as a cinematic contact zone between the documentary conventions of the first world and the third. Another chapter reconnects the parallel film-cooperative movements between the New York avant-garde and members of the Division in the 1960s to examine why the newest Americans were ultimately left out of the New American Cinema. The final chapter retraces the transnational career of Oscar Torres, a queer Dominican filmmaker who was the lone DivEdCo figure to join the Cuban Revolution and, thus, to actively contribute at this early stage to what would soon become a Third Cinema. Ultimately, my thesis proposes that useful cinemas have always been global; the task of the historian is to look beyond the institutions and read against their films' usefulness to their respective colonial projects.

Introduction: The Division in the Discipline

In our office we only earned subsistence salaries, but we didn't worry about the money because we were committed to a project that allowed us-- Where we had enough time to work on our own craft. We had finally solved the artist's eternal problem of financing his art. What more could a young artist, a filmmaker, or a sculptor want?

- Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, *En el mejor de los mundos,* 1991[2]

Figure 0.1. The Division of Community Education (c. 1949), published in *Films with a Purpose* exhibition catalog (New York: ExitArt/Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987): 26.

This project is not about the Division of Community Education. It is about the stuff of film culture—not cameras or screens, but the places through which film discourse circulates in the absence of an ideal film-producing environment. That was the challenge that Division of

[2] Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, *En el mejor de los mundos* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1991): 73.

Community Education artists faced in their myriad attempts to step aside from the institution. In these pages, we explore those selfsame lateral moves which diffuse the historiographic—and geographic—trajectory of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth's signature project of state-sponsored film, if not blatantly contradict it.

"A Cinema of Free Association: Counter-Institutional Film Cultures of the Hispanic Caribbean, 1952-1968," re-routes the global film cultures and currents of the midcentury through Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education (hereafter referred to as the "DivEdCo," Figure 0.1) to retroactively map a Caribbean presence in the emergence of the cinematic new waves of the 1960s. Loosely modeled after other state-sponsored liberal internationalist film groups, the DivEdCo was a public pedagogy project established shortly before the ratification of Puerto Rico's current colonial relationship to the U.S. in 1952—the Free Associated State—and envisioned as the cultural companion to rapid changes to the island's social life and industry. As part of the international spread of liberal democracy, the Division's mission became to cultivate—or rather, to consolidate—a cultural nationalism which sought to reconcile the urgent pedagogy of modernity with attempts to redefine unsettled ideas of what it means to be Puerto Rican. Consisting of archival material and oral histories gathered in Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and New York City, the individual case studies show the hemispheric flows of Caribbean film, taking the island of Puerto Rico as a central node. Contrary to the established history of the DivEdCo, this project shows how individual artists worked through and at the margins of their institution's demands to make an internationalist, pan-American cinema, thus re-attaching this new idea of a wayfaring Puerto Rican cinema of the midcentury to broader discourses in both North Atlantic and Latin American film histories.

The historical context in which the Division of Community Education was formed was a period of significant political, economic, and cultural transformation for Puerto Ricans. In 1948, Luis Muñoz Marín became the first democratically elected Puerto Rican governor in the island's history after half a century of U.S.-appointed and foreign-born governors since the island's invasion and subsequent occupation by the American armed forces in 1898. Under his administration composed largely of the *criollo* bourgeoisie, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) began instituting a series of reforms which shifted the island towards developmentalism while simultaneously allowing the U.S. to gesture toward decolonization on the international stage.[3] The most notorious of these reforms, named "Operation Bootstrap" (*Operación manos a la obra* in Spanish, or "hands at work"), was an initiative between the Muñoz Marín administration and the United States federal government to transform the island's economy from an agrarian system into an industrial one by subsidizing the manufacturing sector and wooing private investment with the promise of cheap labor in the island's urban centers.[4] This new demand for labor prompted a mass exodus from the countryside to the cities or, in equal measure, to urban enclaves along the U.S. East Coast. In accordance with this imposed bootstrap philosophy and in order to rationalize these displacements, the Muñoz Marín administration set their sights on combating underdevelopment through new cultural policies.

This turbulent period of rapid economic change would be further complicated by the inauguration of a new political relationship with the United States in 1952. Muñoz Marín, who had previously supported a pathway to independence, would oversee the legitimization of Puerto Rico's colonial condition when his administration entered a binding agreement with the U.S. that would transform the island's status from non-incorporated territory to Free Associated State (*Estado Libre*

[3] *Criollo* was used to refer to Puerto Ricans of Spanish descent who could trace their immediate ancestry to the Iberian Peninsula and, in many cases, descended from the landed class. Many of the Puerto Rican governing class, both before the Luis Muñoz Marín administration, came from such families, including Muñoz Marín himself.
[4] A.W. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997).

Asociado or "ELA"), primarily known as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in English parlance. The novel political status was intended as a third path between annexation and independence. Ostensibly, its original goal was to allow the island a measure of self-governance under U.S. federal laws. However, while Puerto Ricans have held U.S. citizenship since 1917, they are barred from participating in presidential elections and many have considered the political status as a colonial relationship since its inception, including most of the Puerto Rican artists discussed in this work.[5] This dissertation takes its title from a literal translation (or deliberate mistranslation) of the term in English, "A Cinema of Free Association," which opens the concept to new hermeneutic possibilities At the risk of implying psychoanalytic connotations, Free Association is the framework—for better or worse—which allowed DivEdCo artists to participate in global formations of film culture. As a territory which is often perceived as a halfway point between the cultures of Latin America and the United States, the term Free Association is appropriated here to refer to the artists' ability to leverage their work for the state to further their film education and careers abroad; to collaborate with international avant-gardes in Europe, North America, and Latin America; and to refine their art through the Commonwealth apparatus by day and agitate for Caribbean sovereignties in their free time.

While promises of a U.S.-styled democracy and "bootstrap" policies purported to address the economic and political needs of the populace, Muñoz Marín introduced "Operation Serenity" to alleviate the psychic shock brought upon by these sudden transformations. As Arlene Dávila explains, through the founding of cultural institutions, "Operation Serenity aimed to provide a sense

[5] Recent court rulings have prevented Puerto Rico access to the same bankruptcy measures availably to every state of the union, further undermining the democratic tenets of the Commonwealth's constitution. The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) has further chipped away at the idea of Puerto Rican self-governance. The law imposed a Fiscal Oversight Board tasked with managing the current government-debt crises and instituting severe austerity measures. Typically referred to as *la junta* on the island, the board's rulings supersede those of the Puerto Rican government.

of spiritual balance threatened by rapid social change."[6] Presumably to distract from the contradictory nature of this new political configuration and the deleterious effects of an imposed modernity, Muñoz Marín implemented a multi-pronged project of spiritual reform by appealing to a mythologized Puerto Rican identity. Although the Division predates Operation Serenity—tracing its origins to a 1946 community filmmaking project under the auspices of the Department of Parks and Recreation—its office would become the cultural and educational front of this colossal public works project. It brought in in artists, writers, and general expertise from the mainland to establish a rural education program which, following field surveys from Divisional social scientists and technicians, would respond to the needs of the Puerto Rican poor through art. Filmmakers, painters, and playwrights would be tasked with educating the stragglers of Commonwealth Puerto Rico's dual Operations, or those who did not emigrate and had otherwise failed to be seamlessly interpellated by the imposition of industrial modernity.

The DivEdCo began its operations in 1949. Immediately, it assembled an impressive roster of artists, educators, and staff. University of Chicago-trained sociologist Fred Wale was chosen to lead the agency, a position he would hold until the late 1960s. It was primarily split into three distinct units or sections (the terms will be used interchangeably throughout this project): Editorial, Graphics, and Cinema.[7] Its individual units would be headed by former New Deal artists such as Jack and Irene Delano as well as Edwin and Louise Rosskam as well as established Puerto Rican artists and intellectuals such as the playwright René Marqués—who became Director of Editorial—and the painters Rafael Tufiño and later Lorenzo Homar. All members of the DivEdCo, regardless of their affiliation or preferred medium, played a role in the production of its films. In addition to inaugurating the program, the U.S. experts were expected to train the next generation of artists and

[6] Arlene M. Dávila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1997): 34.
[7] A fourth unit, which collaborated with all three arts-producing wings of the Division, was the Fieldwork Section.

enlist local artists who had previously been affiliated with the island's Nationalist Party, an organization which resisted American occupation and fought for Puerto Rican independence, in an effort to "tame" the political opposition.[8] Thus, the populist Muñoz Marín toed the untenable boundary between being at once a proponent of what many considered American neocolonialism and a perceived defender of the sovereignty of the island's culture and customs. Mariam Colón Pizarro has called this tension the DivEdCo's "poetic pragmatism," or the "successful interplay between modern industrial development and state-sponsored cultural production" as a means of creating an idea of community amidst the turbulence and uncertainty of the belated coming of modernity.[9]

The DivEdCo's rural education program focused on the topics of public health, economic self-sufficiency, the perils of consumerism, participation in liberal democracy, gender equality, among other offerings of at-times paternalistic dictums toward the poor, uneducated, and disenfranchised. Fieldworkers would stay with remote communities in the Puerto Rican countryside and source from them ideas for their educational campaigns. The DivEdCo would then churn out a multimedia program—films, pamphlets, posters—addressing the specific issues troubling rural audiences in order to help peasants help themselves. Initially, the distribution of the materials was rudimentary, but the Division grew to incorporate mobile cinema screenings as well as travelling libraries. The technicians followed the screenings by organizing discussion groups, in which the themes of the film would be discussed in relation to the literary material. To offer a short sampling, some of the lessons plans covered by the DivEdCo would explain relationship between alcoholism and domestic violence, instruct viewers on how to prepare for natural disasters, convince skeptics to

[8] Chapter 3 is a direct response to the assumption of the DivEdCo's effectiveness in sustaining its artists' docility. Jorge A. Arroyo, "Los Rojos de la DIVEDCO, 1949–1951," Self-published essay, 2014.
[9] Mariam Colón-Pizarro, "Poetic Pragmatism: The Puerto Rican Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) and the Politics of Cultural Production, 1949-1968," PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2011, 17.

boil their water before consumption, or even show rural communities how to build necessary infrastructure such as schools or bridges without having to appeal to local government bodies. The program of community formation at times has been accused of celebrating the very symptoms of economic underdevelopment in rural areas of the island as a marker of Puerto Ricanness.[10] As the cultural courier to a larger modernization effort, the DivEdCo invested in spreading a cultural nationalism which rested on the idea of the Puerto Rican peasant as a homogeneous figure, to be seen in the factory just as in the fields, and poverty as an exclusively local issue which demanded exclusively communitarian solutions, absolving both the Puerto Rican and North American states of their respective roles in colonial governance.

The film style of the Division of Community Education can be organized in general terms under the category of "useful cinema," or films characterized more for their utilitarian value and subservience to a governing organization, in this case the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.[11] These types of state-sponsored media initiatives have a long history in Latin America.[12] Like many comparative public and non-theatrical film institutions, the Division's Cinema Unit's aesthetic lineage has been axiomatically traced to Italian neorealism and New Deal social documentary. Granted, the influence of neorealism is palpable in much of the DivEdCo's long-form films. They share similar aspects such as location shooting, natural or non-professional actors, and a similar ethical orientation towards depictions of poverty and oppression. As with many Latin American cinemas that emerged in the 1950s, neorealism underwent a generic metamorphosis from largely

[10] Alyosha Goldstein, "The Attributes of Sovereignty: The Cold War, Colonialism, and Community Education in Puerto Rico," *In Imagining our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame*, eds. Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 323-337.
[11] Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, "Introduction," In *Useful Cinema,* eds. Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 2-3.
[12] Randal Johnson, "In the Belly of the Ogre: Cinema and State in Latin America," In *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: BFI, 1993): 204-213.

fictional features in Italy to social documentary and other semifictional modes in Puerto Rico.[13] While the post-war Italian films typically ended with somber ruminations on suffering and human condition, one major difference was that the Puerto Rican community program's mandate was to provide closure and suggest practical solutions to its rural audiences. As it was primarily an educational organization, the defining narrative ambiguity and open-endedness of neorealism were elements omitted from this particular Caribbean descendant.

At the same time, the Division's films gravitated toward the semifictional mode of the dramatized documentary or, as Siegfried Kracauer has named it, the "found story" which has the quality of being discovered rather than contrived.[14] The docudrama, as it has come to be known, relied on narratives sourced from reality as experienced by Puerto Rican peasant communities. Toward that end, Carmelo Esterrich has recently described the DivEdCo house style as "a little bit of Pare Lorentz, a lot of John Grierson."[15] The DivEdCo borrowed much of its aesthetic concerns from other state-sponsored documentary groups such as the British Documentary Film Board, Canada's National Film Board, and the U.S. Farm Security Administration, from which it imported many of its founding artists, such as the Delanos, the Rosskams, and later Willard Van Dyke. While the influence of these organizations is undeniable, the Division of Community Education changed greatly after the departures of that founding group. The second generation of DivEdCo filmmakers—Amílcar Tirado, Oscar Torres, Luis Maisonet, Ángel F. Rivera, Marcos Betancourt, Jesús Figueroa, etc.—were greatly influenced by film as varied as American direct cinema, Mexican Golden Age comedies, Robert Flaherty's *Nanook*, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, the Canadian

[13] Sarah Sarzynski, "Documenting the Social Reality of Brazil: Roberto Rossellini, the Paraíban Documentary School, and the Cinema Novistas," In *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style,* eds. Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2012): 209-224.
[14] Sigfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960): 246.
[15] Carmelo Esterrich, *Concrete and Countryside: The Urban and Rural in 1950s Puerto Rican Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018): 43.

Candid Eye series, the Satyajit Ray's *Apu* trilogy, Jean Rouch's pre-vérité films, and even the dance films of the New York underground such as Ed Emshwiller's or Maya Deren's. This project is meant to corroborate some of these contacts and influences, but a larger scholarly undertaking is warranted to build a more comprehensive account of a "global DivEdCo," a concept towards which this work can only gesture at this stage. Even in this limited form, establishing the ambiguity of the DivEdCo's film genealogy pushes back against the idea of the agency as a static organism and opens its filmography to new historical revisions, critiques, and possibilities.

It would be instructive at this point to list how the tenets of Puerto Rican institutionalized culture—state paternalism, parochialism, and political docility—have been considered in the past. Appraisals of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism have been plentiful in the 70 years since the ratification of the Commonwealth. In many ways, the cultural policies implemented during the first Luis Muñoz Marín have been credited with consolidating a Puerto Rican identity in the face of an encroaching Anglo-American culture and the state-enforced suppression of Puerto Rican cultural expression, such as the outlawing of the single-starred flag or the institutionalization of English as the official language, among other strategies.[16] In recent years, scholars have taken up the challenge of arguing that the midcentury idea of Puerto Ricanness was not one solely sustained by the state, but instead a complex assemblage of grassroots cultural formations between the island and its diaspora, dismantling the accepted theories of Puerto Rican nation-building from the top down by calling attention to cultural nationalism's racial and gendered blind spots.[17] Building on the counter-

[16] See also: Arlene M. Dávila, *Sponsored Identities;* Catherine Marsh Kennerley, *Negociaciones culturales: Los intelectuales y el proyecto pedagógico muñocista* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2009); Martín Cruz Santos, *Afirmando la nación: Políticas culturales en Puerto Rico (1949-1968)* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2014.

[17] Esterrich, *Concrete and Countryside*; Frances Negrón-Muntañer and Ramón Grosfoguel, Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Hilda Lloréns, *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender during the American Century* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Radost Rangelova, *Gendered Geographies in Puerto Rican Culture: Spaces, Sexualities, Solidarities* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

institutional methodologies of this recent wave of scholarship, this project is somewhat counter-intuitive in adopting the strategy to survey the cultural production of very public servants tasked with advancing the cultural-nationalist line. In other words, "A Cinema of Free Association" writes the history of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism from below by analyzing its institutional cinema from within.

Most of the scholarly accounts of the DivEdCo's oeuvre which approximate the focus and method of this project have been devoted to its Graphics and Editorial Units. This critical myopia is not surprising when one considers the illustrious list of figures who worked there: René Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, José Luis Vivas Maldonado, Rafael Tufiño, Lorenzo Homar, Carlos Raquel Rivera, Antonio Maldonado, and Isabel Bernal are about as dense a line-up of midcentury Puerto Rican artists as one can muster. Historically, the transnational framework has been applied to the Editorial and Graphics sections in such a way that the footprint of the DivEdCo in the literary and visual art world has been thoroughly established. Ángel Falcón Mélendez and many others trace DivEdCo writers' circular migration to and from New York City and establish a direct link between the literary practices of the *Generación de los 50* ("The '50s Generation") and the Nuyorican movement of the 1970s.[18] In a similar vein, Laura Katzman has covered the cosmopolitan sensibilities in the work of Lorenzo Homar, which the author suggests is a symptom of the painter's early recognition of the "transnational aspect of Puerto Rican art."[19] Today, thanks to the ceaseless labor of literary scholars, art historians, and education researchers, the evidence of the DivEdCo's global footprint in those media is overwhelming.[20] To say that its authors organized

[18] Ángel Rafael Falcón-Meléndez, *La emigración puertorriqueña a Nueva York en los cuentos de José Luis González, Pedro Juan Soto y Jose Luis Vivas Maldonado* (New York: Senda Nueva de Ediciones, 1984).
[19] Laura Katzman, "Lorenzo Homar's *Cine Alba*: *An Intimate Portrait of North American Artists in Nineteen-Fifties Puerto Rico*," In *La mirada en construcción: Ensayos sobre cultura visual,* Eds. José Orlando Sued and René Rodríguez Ramírez (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2022): 373-424.
[20] Shifra M. Goldman, "Bajo el emblema de la pava: Arte y populismo puertorriqueño dentro del contexto internacional," *Plástica* 2.9 (September 1988): n.p.

workshops and seminars abroad, that its painters traveled as far as Moscow for international exhibitions, or even that representatives from those two Units held diplomatic visits with their counterparts at Cuba's UNEAC (the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) would not register as exceptional within the standard story of the Graphics and Editorial alumni. In fact, the historiographic imprint devoted to the life and work of some of their individual members has outgrown that of the Division. So why does the work of the Division's filmmakers remain underexplored? Why is their work reduced to propaganda by their interlocultors? [21] How can we recuperate the individual aesthetic aspirations and exchanges within such a calcified canon?

Between 1968 and 1987, the Division of Community Education sharply reduced its artistic output. Most of its artistic catalog sat in disparate archives unscrutinized during these decades while its former artists moved onto other projects, a fate that the work of the Cinema Unit suffered in disproportion to the other sections. Its filmography has largely re-entered scholarly discourse through three major events in recent history. First, the "rediscovery" of a near-complete catalog of DivEdCo film reels in a New York City film lab in 1986. The finding prompted the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) to co-organize with New York University's Luis Rosario Albert, Inés Mongil Echandi, and Jay Leyda what they believed to be the first major exhibition of DivEdco films and graphic materials, which they titled *Films with a Purpose*.[22] The second event was the founding of the Moving Image Archives in 1988, directly catalyzed by the discovery of the DivEdCo films the year prior.[23] The third event, which is ongoing, is the preservation and gradual digitization of the

[21] For critiques of the DivEdCo as state propaganda include, see also: Antonio Lauria-Petricelli, "Images and Contradictions." In *Films with a Purpose* exhibition catalog (New York: ExitArt/Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987); Mary González, "Modernidad, Propaganda y Cine en la Primera Década de DIVEDCO (1949–1959)," MA Thesis, George Mason University, 2017; Rafael L. Cabrera Collazo, "DIVEDCO and the Puerto Rican Cinema in the Fifties," Cuadernos Americanos 20.2 (2006): 71–87.
[22] *Films with a Purpose* exhibition catalog (New York: ExitArt/Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987).
[23] Marién S. Barreto, "Nuestra historia en imágenes móviles: de la invasión norteamericana a *Lo que le pasó a Santiago*," *Punto y coma* 5 (1995): 161–175.

films by the Moving Image Archive beginning in 2012, which granted some form of access to a generation of scholars who have demonstrated to be less inclined to take the Division's cultural-nationalist purpose at face value. The work of digitization remains incomplete due to insufficient funding and inadequate storage facilities at the Puerto Rican General Archives, which houses the film archive. The criteria for the selection of films that are uploaded to YouTube, about a quarter of the DivEdCo's total output, is unclear. Regardless of some persistent archival inefficiencies and fiscal neglect, the work of the Division constitutes the island's closest and most cohesive attempt at establishing a national cinema to date.

In those years where the DivEdCo was being phased out, knowledge of the vast enterprise that was the Division of Community Education cinema program was made possible due to a handful of unpublished master's and doctoral theses written by Puerto Rican scholars both on the island and abroad. These projects have served as an invaluable repository of Puerto Rican cinema relevant in the decades where the films themselves were absent from the screen.[24] It particular, the dissertation project "Poetic Pragmatism" by Mariam Colón Pizarro was the first to identify the offscreen traces of the DivEdCo Cinema Unit's participation in international film cultures by including brief anecdotes on, among other examples, members of the Division at one of the Flaherty Seminars as well as Oscar Torres' time in Cuba.[25] Along those same lines, the tedious archival methodology of this research project is owed to the work of Catherine Marsh Kennerley, whose meticulous institutional history of the Division has been an invaluable insight into the internal politics of its office and the individual convictions of its artists.[26] Narrated through the eyes of Editorial Unit

[24] Waldemar Pérez Quintana, "An Oral History of the Division of Community Education of Puerto Rico from 1949 to the Present: The Perspective of Eight Puerto Rican Educators," PhD Diss, Pennsylvania State University, 1984; Carlos H. Malavé Sánchez, "Discurso Populista en el Cine de Amílcar Tirado: Una Aproximación al Cine de la División de Educación de la Comunidad," MA Thesis, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1986; José Antonio Rivera González, "Género y proceso democrático: Las películas de DIVEDCO, 1950-1970," PhD Diss, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2003.
[25] Mariam Colón-Pizarro, "Poetic Pragmatism."
[26] Marsh Kennerley, 2009.

Director René Marqués, Marsh Kennerley's history of the DivEdCo reimagines the program as a willful negotiation between artists and bureaucrats as opposed to mere propaganda carried out by docile actors. "A Cinema of Free Association" further displaces the accusations of the Division as the product of state paternalism and propaganda by similarly refusing to flatten the individual into the institution.

Beyond studies that explicitly take the DivEdCo as their object, this project sits on a foundation built by many scholars departing from their principal disciplines—or, in many cases, their day jobs—to contribute to our collective knowledge of Puerto Rican Film Studies. Works like Kino García's *Historia del cine puertorriqueño* or Roberto Ramos Perea's *Cinelibre* created an encyclopedic record of an imperiled film history.[27] Silvia Álvarez Curbelo has theorized film infrastructural concerns in ways that approximate the term's usage in these pages, citing the ephemerality of film spectatorship and the dearth of representation as essential aspects of a Puerto Rican film culture ratified primarily through collective memory rather than material culture.[28] Although this project is less interested in considering film through a lens of scarcity, the concept of ephemerality is key to understanding the circuits through which Puerto Rican institutional cinema once travelled. As such, this project is concerned with the places of cinema as much as it is its production.

In the present moment, the field of Puerto Rican film studies is being revitalized by a new generation of Puerto Rican film scholars who have only known the project of Free Association to have been a failure. This project builds on the groundbreaking work of Naida García-Crespo's *Early*

[27] Joaquín "Kino" García, *Historia del cine puertorriqueño: Un siglo de cine en Puerto Rico (1900–1999)* (San Juan: Palibrio, 2014); Roberto Ramos Perea, *Cinelibre: Historia desconocida y manifiesto por un cine puertorriqueño independiente y libre* (San Juan: Editions Le Provincial, 2008).
[28] Álvarez Curbelo, Silvia. "Vidas Prestadas: El cine y la puertorriqueñidad." Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana 45 (1997): 395–410.

Puerto Rican Cinema and Nation Building, which finds the roots of cinematic cosmopolitanism beginning in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. invasion in 1898 and the ensuing international co-production between nascent film industries of the Caribbean.[29] José Orlando Sued' *La noticia paga,* whose brilliant work on the Viguié Newsreel company reveals that the state-sponsored film projects in Commonwealth Puerto Rico were not exclusively public ventures, which may explain why the DivEdCo was not put in the service of more overt propaganda in support of the Popular Democratic Part. As Sued explains, it was not necessary—the Muñoz Marín administration already had the private Viguié Newsreel Company doing their propagandizing for them.[30] The pages ahead have been modeled after the archival fastidiousness of the old generation and the critical skepticism of the new.

Given the stubborn epistemological gaps in Puerto Rican cinema, this project draws extensively from memoirs by artists or associates of the DivEdCo. The decision to organize the structure of this work around such media infrastructures originates from a critical re-reading of Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's 1991 memoir *En el mejor de los mundos* ("In the Best of Worlds")*,* in which he recounts his time as a member of the Editorial Unit of the Division of Community Education. Long hailed as a primary source on the exploits of the Division, to a film scholar the book reads as the Puerto Rican answer to Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon.* The memoir's assortment of rumors, falsehoods, slander, and single-sided recollections based on Díaz Valcárcel's thirteen-year tenure at the DivEdCo, according to the words of a fellow Puerto Rican film scholar, "is simply unforgivable."[31] Nevertheless, despite its dubious historical accuracy and its unreliable narration, this project distills from *En el mejor de los mundos* a methodology for film-historical analysis that has been

[29] Naida García-Crespo, *Early Puerto Rican Cinema and Nation Building: National Sentiments, Transnational Realities, 1897-1940* (Bucknell University Press, 2019)
[30] José Orlando Sued, *La noticia paga: cine, propaganda y política pública en Puerto Rico 1950–1970* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Luscinia C.E., 2019).
[31] Anonymous, personal communication with author, 2022.

largely absent in historical accounts of the DivEdCo and of Puerto Rican cinema broadly. By retelling the story of the major art figures of the midcentury from a personal, interpersonal, and international perspective, Díaz Valcárcel's memoir undoes the institutional mystique of the Division as the incubator of the old masters in Puerto Rican art. Moreover, his insistence on including the minutiae of "extracurricular" events and activities—such as festivals, retreats, seminars, diplomatic visits, etc.—required by his employer help us extricate the study of film from merely that which reaches the screens or stays within the bounds of the national. Whether true or false, select anecdotes from Díaz Valcárcel's flawed work of meta-historical fiction has marshalled each chapter of this dissertation in some way. As such, the reader will notice that each chapter begins with an excerpt from the memoir which, each in their own way, tease out the traces of prose that may inform us on new ways to understand Puerto Rican cinema and propose film history as a sinuous encounter between cultures—regional, diasporic, and hemispheric.

The opening chapter, entitled "An Accented Seminar," reconstructs the DivEdCo's footprint at the first few Flaherty Film Seminars beginning in 1955. The Division and the Flaherty—whose meetings were widely attended by writers, filmmakers, and technicians from the island—were two film organizations which mirrored one another in both their educational and humanist aims, culminating in the 1961 edition held in Barranquitas, Puerto Rico under the auspices of the DivEdCo. Via a comparative study of historical film festivals and state film entities, I propose the early Flaherty Seminars as a cinematic contact zone between non-theatrical filmmakers of the hemispheric North and South, nurturing what Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina have characterized as spaces of "fragile, but peaceful coexistence" between global power and Global South that result in successful cultural, aesthetic, and technical exchanges.[32] By rediscovering the

[32] Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina, "Tashkent '68: A Cinematic Contact Zone," *Slavic Review* 75.2 (Summer 2016): 279-298.

films made on the island by Flaherty participants—namely, Willard Van Dyke's *Mayo florido* (1956) the National Film Board's *Festival in Puerto Rico* (Roman Kroitor/Wolf Koenig, 1961)—I argue that the Division's contacts with filmmakers from around the world facilitated cinematic experimentation on the island, even as the DivEdCo's own artists were constricted by a rigid educational mandate. The decade-long cross-pollination between the two film-pedagogical institutions suggests Puerto Rico provided a studio component to the theoretical debates taking place at the Flaherty for many participants of the annual gathering. Ultimately, this paper reconstructs the DivEdCo's footprint at the Flaherty in these pivotal years, positioning the first decade of the seminar as an unexpected site of North-South aesthetic exchanges, formative political solidarities, and mutual intellectual permeabilities.

Chapter 2, "Non-incorporated Geographies of the New American Cinema: A Film-Cooperative Roadmap," traces the twin film-cooperative movements of 1960's New York City and San Juan through the figures of Shirley Clarke and on-again-off-again DivEdCo filmmaker Amílcar Tirado. The chapter reconciles the anti-establishment nature of the New York Film-makers' Co-op—which mostly distributed film from the New York avant-garde, queer underground, and experimental and independent filmmakers—with the counter-institutional practices of Puerto Rico's Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, Producciones del Viejo San Juan, whose founding preceded its counterpart's by a year. The Puerto Rican Cine-coop is often understood as a failed venture due to the negative reception and mysterious disappearance of its flagship production, *Más allá del capitolio* ("Beyond the Capitol," Amílcar Tirado, 1963). This survey of the Cine-coop's entire oeuvre, however, broadens the film-cooperative activities of the group to include all of its labors, such as the organization of film festivals, workshops, seminars, and other manifestations of offscreen film culture. In the process, it reintegrates Caribbean artists and technicians the broader panorama of avant-garde collectives of the 1960s, drawing the history of film-cooperativism southward from the

North Atlantic. The chapter also explores the attempt to unite the two co-ops as a hemispheric distribution center at the 1966 Inter-American Festival of the Arts, which was partly organized by the Cine-coop. Despite the inconclusive nature of the effort, the proposed collaboration may have helped inform the pan-Latin Americanist turn in the art of the Puerto Rican diaspora, particularly in the work of New York-based avant-garde filmmaker José Rodríguez Soltero. Although one may be tempted to inquire as to why these "other" Americans were ultimately left out of the so-called New American Cinema, more importantly, it affords readers an opportunity to conceive of the New American Cinema partly as an unfulfilled hemispheric project.

The final chapter, "El Gusano de Izquierda" (which roughly translates to "The Leftist Reactionary"), retraces the transnational career of Oscar Torres, a queer Dominican filmmaker who was the lone figure from the DivEdCo to join the Cuban Revolution and, thus, to actively contribute at this early stage to what would soon become a Third Cinema. By examining Torres' pan-Caribbean filmography—his DivEdCo work as well as his Cuban films, *Tierra olvidada* ("Forgotten Land," 1960) and *Realengo 18* ("Commune 18," 1961)—Torres' case becomes an illustration of the long-rumored link between the DivEdCo and the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Arts and Industries (ICAIC). Even if the case may have been overstated by some rumors, the chapter also serves as a critical biography of the artist himself, his activism an area equally deserving of an auteur study. An artist twice exiled from his native Santo Domingo as well as Cuba, Torres' politics remained steadfast as a decades-long agitator against the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. Torres' life and work make him a valuable, if not forgotten figure in tracking the circulation of—as well as the role of the Dominican diaspora in—both avant-garde film cultures and left radicalisms within the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America.

Ultimately, the aims of my project are three-fold. *A Cinema of Free Association* is an attempt to provide a new framework for understanding useful cinemas beyond their service to the nation-state, to reconnect the films and filmmakers associated with the DivEdCo to broader discourses in hemispheric film studies, and to excavate the labors of radical, pro-sovereignty elements within the cultural project of Puerto Rican Free Association, particularly in these times of political, fiscal, and climate disaster in Puerto Rican history.

Chapter 1 An Accented Seminar: Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education at the Flaherty, 1955–1964

This letter dated July 30th, 1957 is meant to authorize your trip to Vermont in an official capacity, on or around August 18th and for a period of approximately two weeks, with the purpose of participating in the "Roberto [sic] *Flaherty Film Festival."*

- Department of Public Instruction, Letter to Amílcar Tirado, 9 August 1957.[33]

Sitting in a clearing in the thick Vermont forest, an audience is treated to a program of Puerto Rican films. The drumming of Puerto Rican *plena* contends against the projector's rotor. The famous *plenero* Gumersindo "Sindo" Mangual is onscreen, humming along to the lyrics for the folk song "Tintorera del mar," which tells the tale of a lawyer who gets eaten by a shark. At the last minute, he decides to ad-lib. The verses have been crafted so that the Spanish word for lawyer, *abogado*, could easily be replaced with another if the situation called for it. Sindo belts out this improvised version in all its vernacular might: "Tintorera del mar, tintorera del mar, tintorera del mar, que se ha comido un *americano*." The crowd—nearly all American, with a few Canadian or European attendees scattered throughout—had seemed to be enjoying the music earlier, but now wore a confused look on their faces. The film ends. The audience is revolting.

"Why is he celebrating that the shark ate an American?"

The four Puerto Ricans, as if in a language no one else present could understand, simply smile at one another other.

This anecdote is taken from Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's memoir *En el mejor de los mundos*, where he recounts many stories of his time working as a screenwriter for the Division of Community

[33] Marco A. Rigau, Letter to Amílcar Tirado, 9 August 1957, Expediente Amílcar Tirado 1, Archivo Inactivo del Departamento de Educación, San Juan, PR.

Education.[34] The film in question is *La plena* (Amílcar Tirado, 1954-1966, Figure 1.1, left), among the first films to represent Afro-Puerto Rican cultural production in the DivEdCo catalog. The plena is a type of folk music that originated within Black communities in the 19th century by blending the percussive rhythms of West African music with the vocal stylings of Hispanic *danzas*. Considered the "sung newspaper" of the working class, plenas were often imbued with political critique, usually improvised during or shortly before the performance. In many cases, the new lyrics overtook the official versions of the songs in popularity, as in the case of "Tintorera del mar" (Figure 1.1, right). It was this latter version that Sindo sung when the film was screened at the 1960 edition of the Flaherty Film Seminar in Dummerston, Vermont to a crowd of filmmakers and educational professionals. It was an audience keen to the subtleties of film art. They had not misunderstood Gumersindo's verse. Sitting at the hearth of film's most accomplished frontiersman, the Flaherty Seminar audience had just been jolted by a rather unexpected folk repudiation of American empire.

Such slippages between the film cultures of the global North and Puerto Rican institutional cinema are at the heart of this chapter. Drawing on archival evidence, I identify the early Flaherty Film Seminars as a cinematic contact zone between non-theatrical filmmakers of the hemispheric North and South. At the height of its production in the mid-1950s, Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education reversed on its mandate of insular community education and rethought its strategy of limiting its exhibition to domestic audiences. Agency leadership resolved to establish ties with U.S.-based film societies, international film festivals, and foreign government film groups, introducing the island's nascent educational film movement to a global film community. The DivEdCo and the Flaherty—whose meetings between 1955 and 1964 were widely attended by writers, filmmakers, and technicians from the island—were two film organizations which mirrored

[34] Díaz Valcárcel, 73-74.

one another in their pedagogical methods and humanist aims. While the role of the Flaherty Seminars in the institutionalization of Film Studies in the Anglo-American academy has been well documented, the contributions of the Division to both the seminars and the field at large during the foundational midcentury period remain wholly unexplored.[35] Moreover, by reexamining the films made on the island by Flaherty participants—namely, Willard Van Dyke's *El de los cabos blancos* (1955) and *Mayo florido* (1956) and the Canadian National Film Board's *Festival in Puerto Rico* (Roman Kroitor/Wolf Koenig, 1961)—I argue that the Division's contacts from around the world facilitated cinematic experimentation on the island by other filmmakers formerly of the useful-cinematic tradition, even as the DivEdCo's own artists were constricted by a rigid educational mandate. This transinstitutional collaboration culminated in the 1961 edition held in Barranquitas, Puerto Rico under the auspices of the Division, an event co-organized through the unsung labors of the Flaherty family and rank-and-file staff in San Juan. Ultimately, this chapter reconstructs the DivEdCo's footprint at the Flaherty in these pivotal years, positioning the first decade of the seminar as an unexpected site of North-South aesthetic exchanges, formative political solidarities, and mutual intellectual permeabilities.

How does one go about reconstructing the events of a seminar, particularly one as reclusive and opaque as the Flaherty? Although previous studies of film festivals and film societies may provide a methodological scaffolding for a historiography of Puerto Rican participation at the seminars, these frameworks are not flush fits. For one, the seminars remain a small, intimate, and invitation-only event. They are not covered by press in the same way a major film festival would be, if at all, nor do classroom recollections make for the most engrossing interview material. As such, this work will be divided into four sections, either taking the shape of genealogies of internal

[35] See: Rotha, *Rotha on the film*; Sadoul, *Histoire du cinéma mondial des origines à nos jours*.

communications within the Flaherty organization or mappings of transnational contacts between seminarians. The timeline is threaded by comments from Flaherty Seminar organizers and participants, made both in the public press and in internal communications, as together they encompass the most extensive archive on the reception of the DivEdCo films in an international context. The middle two sections will branch out—or, to offer another arboreal metaphor fit for the Flaherty venue, splinter—into retellings of institutional crossovers which have been overlooked even in recent reexaminations of the history of the Flaherty Seminar. The first explores Willard Van Dyke's status as a satellite figure who initially remained in the DivEdCo's and the Flaherty's intersecting orbits, before ultimately launching himself fully into both projects, first as an invited filmmaker in Puerto Rico and later as president of the Flaherty Seminars. The second cross-institutional history concerns the result of the seminar encounters between Canada's National Film Board and the DivEdCo, both government film agencies which were being actively reimagined by a younger generation of filmmakers. I offer the case study of French-Canadian filmmaker Michel Brault, who helped unify transnational strains of direct documentary, but not before a quick *vérité* detour in the Caribbean. Lastly, the chapter ends with a reexamination of the 1961 edition of the Flaherty Seminar in Puerto Rico. The seminar, the first ever held abroad, secured the financial viability of the re-formed Flaherty Foundation and steeled the organization for cinema's most turbulent decade. The final section will seek to recuperate the Barranquitas seminar as a signature event in educational film history, now seemingly forgotten by both of its institutional sponsors—and by the discipline broadly. Throughout this series of case studies, this chapter reveals how the Puerto Rican delegation became an integral part of the Flaherty institution, first as curiosity, then as keynote.

A Documentary Genealogy of the DivEdCo and the Early Flaherty Seminars

The Puerto Ricans surely will bring some of their films, always worth seeing, and will give the seminar a great lift, as they always have.

- Letter from David Flaherty to John Adams, dated July 7th of 1960.[36]

In the postwar period, educational film professionals, governments, schools, museums, and many other institutions began to question the role of film in the academic curriculum beyond its obvious aptitude as a vessel for propaganda, prompting a search for new forums for film education. Two schools of thought emerged; those who wished to educate *about* film via existing vocational or four-year college institutions and those who wished to teach *through* film by incorporating film exhibition and the use of audio-visual aids on campus and beyond.[37] The Flaherty Seminars were an attempt to unite both tendencies in film pedagogy. The study of film, both practical and theoretical, was still relatively new to the college curriculum, and still mostly concentrated in major urban centers in the U.S. As the academy slowly caught up, film educators met through informal networks in the form of film societies and cine-clubs, organizations which brought together filmmakers, educators, cinephiles, critics, and students in quasi-institutional settings such as university campuses, public libraries, or independent theaters. The open format of the film society informed the decision to establish the Flaherty Seminar after numerous unsuccessful attempts to start a yearly film festival under the Flaherty name. Throughout the 1950s, many state-sponsored film initiatives—such as the DivEdCo, Canada's National Film Board, and the United States Information Agency—produced a steady output of educational cinema that addressed specific social issues and usually targeted a particular audience. However, this type of filmmaking still suffered from limited means of exposure,

[36] David Flaherty, Letter to John Adams, 7 July 1960, John Adams File, Correspondence Box 70, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New York City, NY. Hereafter shortened to "Columbia."
[37] Charles Acland, "Classrooms, Clubs, and Community Circuits: Cultural Authority and the Film Council Movement," In *Inventing Film Studies,* eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 150.

even as film festivals, the gradual rise of television, and film organizations such as UNESCO offered a baseline for national and international distribution. Film societies emerged as an alternative venue where spectators could come to watch rare films and where independent filmmakers could exhibit their own to new and critically attuned audiences.

The idea for creating a space where, to the extent one exists, a "Flaherty Way" of making film could be investigated in monastic depth belongs to this tradition. As documentary filmmakers carved out new avenues for exhibition, documentary cinema proper had just lost one of its central figures following the death of Robert Flaherty in 1951. A year later, his widow Frances Flaherty and the late filmmaker's closest collaborators and competitors—among them, John Grierson, Basil Wright, Paul Rotha, and others from the U.K.'s Empire Marketing Board—gathered at the 6th Edinburgh Film Festival to devise a permanent way to honor the legacy of one of the medium's reluctant architects. The Flaherty Film Seminar emerged from that pivotal meeting as an informal, open-air gathering for film professionals of all stripes to examine the state of independent, non-theatrical, and documentary film.[38] Catering to a diffuse audience consisting in its majority of filmmakers, scholars, librarians, museum curators, critics, and students, the early seminars were originally held as invitation-only retreats at Frances Flaherty's farm in Dummerston, Vermont. Students, or "participants" as Frances wanted them known, would be expected to lodge at the Flaherty barn for the duration of the seminar, attend thrice-daily screening sessions, and participate in vigorous discussions, typically with veteran filmmakers and friends of the family serving as guests of honor. The Flaherty catalog would encompass much of the program—and often *Nanook* (Robert

[38] The entire origin story is a bit more drawn out and cynical. The Flaherty Foundation shifted its focus toward education to attain nonprofit, tax-exempt status as the sole owners of the Flaherty catalog. By conducting the seminars, the foundation could claim that it was mainly an educational organization, not a memorial, a traveling film festival, or a film distribution company. The Flaherty family would eventually abandon their plans as the foundation reincorporated under another name in the '60s. Scott MacDonald and Patricia Zimmerman. *The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017): 36.

Flaherty, 1922) would be screened more than once, which has since become a running gag in the meetings—yet the programming evolved significantly each year to include educational, instructional, scientific, experimental, and even some narrative fiction films. The seminars sought to further develop the idea of a Flaherty film tradition based on an artisanal and naïve approach toward the subject. They also became the site where Frances attempted a posthumous theorizing of her late husband's work, coining the term "nonpreconception"—an ethical orientation toward filmmaking which privileged discovery and contingency over scriptwriting and formulaic pre-production processes—to imbue the seminars with a structuring philosophy.[39]

Figure 1.1 Silkscreen poster for *La plena* featuring musician Gumersindo Mangual (Rafael Tufiño, 1967, left); a woodcut print of the sheet music for "Tintorera del Mar" (Tufiño, 1954, right).

Frances Flaherty had become aware of the films from the Division of Community Education through their participation in the documentary festival circuit, a field in which Frances

[39] Frances Flaherty, "Introduction," Folder 3: Robert Flaherty seminar, correspondence, brochures, and budget material, 1954 July 1-1964 August 31, Box 10, Shirley Clarke Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI. Hereafter shortened to "WCFTR."

was deeply engaged in this period. At the same 1952 edition of the Edinburgh Film Festival where he had agreed to create a foundation in honor of Robert Flaherty, John Grierson would also award a Merit Diploma to *Una voz en la montaña* ("A Voice in the Mountain," Amílcar Tirado, 1952), which set off the cinema unit's decade-long run of major festival appearances.[4041] In planning the first edition of the seminar, Frances was reminded of a shared a personal connection with the agency responsible for that Puerto Rican community education film she had seen three years prior: Benji Doniger, former Flaherty soundman and now a DivEdCo film director stationed in Puerto Rico.[4243] Since the first seminar had been touted as an exploration of the world of Robert Flaherty, many of his former associates had been invited to the inaugural meeting to lead workshops and deliver lectures on the art of filmmaking, as they learned it from Robert himself. In addition to Doniger, the rest of the *Louisiana Story* (Robert Flaherty, 1949) team including photographer Arnold Eagle, filmmaker Richard Leacock, and editor Helen Van Dongen would serve as the guests of honor. The Flaherty Foundation had also agreed to sponsor another DivEdCo representative to accompany Doniger to the inaugural Flaherty Film Seminar in 1955.[44] The story of the DivEdCo's first day of school, however, is one of truancy. Contemporary accounts of that first seminar note that Doniger

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[40] "Una película nuestra triunfa en Edinburgo," *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, 25 October 1952, Instituto Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "IATR."

[41] Irving Gordon, "International: Edinburgh Int'l Fete, Biggest Arts Junket, Launched with 2,000 Artists," *Variety*, 27 August 1952, 12.

[42] The DivEdCo was founded in 1949. The young Benji Doniger—fresh off the success of *Louisiana Story* (1949) was recruited to form part of the inaugural team, relocating to Puerto Rico. He was the lone American filmmaker from that founding group to remain with the Division through the 1960s, directing for that agency some of its most memorable films of the decade, *Pedacito de tierra* ("A Parcel of Land," 1952) and *Modesta* (1956) among them.

[43] Frances had been reminded of this connection by Morris Mitchell, director of the Putney Graduate School in nearby Brattleboro, Vermont. Dr. Mitchell had been closely following Fred Wale's work as director of the DivEdCo, as both were experts in the field of education in rural minority communities. Mitchell is perhaps best known for establishing the Macedonia Cooperative, an experimental communist society which ran from 1937-1958 in the Appalachian Mountains of North Georgia. Once a member of the Putney School, Mitchell would organize yearly field trips to bring students to Puerto Rico to shadow the workers of the DivEdCo and tour the offices of the Department of Public Instruction. Frances's daughter, Monica Flaherty, was for a time an archaeology professor at the University of Puerto Rico and would have been familiar with the work of the Department of Public Instruction, if not the Division proper. Frances Flaherty, Letter to Fred Wale, 25 June 1955, Benji Doniger File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 71, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia.

[44] Fred G. Wale, Letter to Frances H. Flaherty, 6 July 1955, Benji Doniger File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 71, Columbia.

had attended and lectured at the event, but a last-minute letter postmarked from Miramar, Puerto Rico indicates that Doniger had excused himself about a week prior to the seminar.[45] The debut of the DivEdCo at the Flaherty Seminar would have to wait another year.

Figure 1.2 Frances Flaherty delivers a lecture in Dummerston, Vermont (undated; likely early '60s). This image is taken from the Menominee Range Historical Museums website.

In 1955, the first Robert Flaherty Film Seminar was held in Dummerston, Vermont, home of the Flaherty farmstead, in front of a small group of film professionals and students. In this mostly outdoor and rural setting, participants screened a narrowly focused program composed in its majority of Robert Flaherty's films and discussed the state of filmmaking as an art form now in its seventh decade. Organized as a series of lectures, the meeting eschewed the seminar format for which it has become known in favor of a program of masterclasses taught by Flaherty's former

[45] The confusion stems from Doniger's name being featured prominently in the seminar's program and promotional material which, despite his absence, suggests that Doniger's Puerto Rican oeuvre was to be a major part of the lecture series, alongside the non-Flaherty films by Leacock, Van Dongen, and Eagle. Benji Doniger, Letter to David Flaherty, 17 July 1955, Benji Doniger File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 71, Columbia.

associates or independent filmmakers based on the East Coast."[46] Beyond the Flaherty associates, other independent cineastes whose work roughly fit into the Flaherty tradition were featured. George Stoney screened his 1953 educational film *All My Babies* about Black midwives in the rural south, which inaugurated the long-standing relationship between the seminar and the film's publisher, Columbia University's Center for Mass Communication. Jack Churchill debuted his scientific film *Seifriz on Protoplasm* (1954), a tedious exploration of microcellular organisms which had Frances Flaherty questioning her generosity toward this type of nonfiction film in curating future programs. Sitting awkwardly between the film festival and the film society, the first Flaherty Seminar was met with familiar accusations: that it was opaque, uppity, reactionary, clique-y, combative, and already obsolete. Yet in this intimate, near funerary setting where participants celebrated the life of Robert Flaherty while sitting mere yards from his grave (Figure 1.2), the decision was made to continue holding the seminars in the service of an independent cinema that would go beyond the Flaherty tradition, beyond the documentary mode, and, ultimately, beyond the cinema of the First World.

The second annual Flaherty Film Seminar in 1956 would extend the thematic scope beyond the Flaherty family tree and home in on the more participatory seminar format. The Foundation feared that the lectures and shot-by-shot close analyses of the prior year may grow stale as an encore or, worse, may undermine Frances Flaherty's curatorial commitment to nonpreconception.[47] The list of participants would expand in kind, growing outward from the Flaherty filmography and inner circle to double the attendance of representatives from the scientific, industrial, educational, and experimental film communities. In the run up to the event, Frances and David Flaherty aggressively

[46] MacDonald and Zimmerman, 38.
[47] Gladd Patterson, Draft of Speech 2, undated, 1956 File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Flaherty Seminars Box 77, Columbia.

recruited experts affiliated with independent film institutions, such as the American Federation of Film Societies, the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art, and the independent exhibitor Cinema 16 in New York City. Acting on a tip from Arnold Eagle, guest of honor at the '55 seminar who had just completed a film project on the island, the Flahertys also doubled down on their overtures to DivEdCo Director Fred Wale and the agency's filmmakers, offering scholarships for two Puerto Rican apprentices to attend the seminar.[48] Once again, Benji Doniger was unable to attend. In his place, three filmmakers from San Juan got the opportunity to attend the seminar.[49]

In a true display of nonpreconception, Cinema Unit chief Raúl Muñoz along with two junior directors Luis Maisonet and Ángel F. Rivera showed up unannounced, carrying with them their own prints of recent educational films from the Division. While Doniger's *Pedacito de tierra* and *Modesta* were scheduled to be shown at the event, the films smuggled into the farm by the Puerto Rican interlopers had not been included in the final program.[50] Mercifully, they were given space late in the evening after the opening screening and discussion of Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* on the first day. Many participants had already retreated into their lodgings by then. Those who stayed, however, were treated to an unexpected contribution to the seminar. Of this impromptu screening, Cecile Starr of the *Saturday Review* remarks that the community education films "offered evidence, in their different ways, of a vitality and artistry that are too seldom seen on the American mainland."[51] In a letter to Benji Doniger following the seminar's conclusion, Frances wrote that the Puerto Rican group had been a "revelation" at the seminar. She informs him that they had to add a final session at

[48] Arnold Eagle, Letter to Frances and David Flaherty, 21 February 1956, Arnold Eagle File, Flaherty Foundation General Correspondence, Box 72, Columbia.
[49] Benji Doniger, Letter to Frances Flaherty, 16 August 1956, Benji Doniger File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 71, Columbia.
[50] "Robert Flaherty Foundation Seminar – 1956 Program," Folder B.VIII.12, Hans Richter Collection, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York City, NY. Hereafter shortened to "MoMa."
[51] Cecile Starr, "Film Seminar in Vermont," *Saturday Review,* 13 October 1956, n.p.

the very end of the seminar to allow for a repeat performance of the DivEdCo films.[52] Amidst images of slime molds, live births, and hunts in the African savannah, the scenes of the Puerto Rican countryside seemed to have stolen the show. Had it not been for Doniger's perennial absenteeism, perhaps no films by Puerto Ricans would have ever graced the side of the Flaherty barn.

The overwhelming success of the 1956 edition, in which the DivEdCo delegation had played a major role, encouraged its participants that the tradition should continue. Frances had earlier intimated that the Flaherty Seminars ran the risk of growing too large for her to oversee, but after the '56 session the Foundation had secured the patronage of established filmmakers and cultural institutions. In Puerto Rico, word of the seminar spread quickly through the DivEdCo studio. Filmmakers Amílcar Tirado and Oscar Torres—each of whom will be the focus of chapters two and three, respectively—petitioned the departmental leadership and were granted permission to attend the next edition of the "Roberto [sic] Flaherty Film Festival," according to an inter-office memo in which the legendar documentary filmmaker's name is accidentally Hispanicized.[53] The Dominican Torres screened his debut film for the Division, *Nenén de la ruta mora* ("Boy of the Moorish Road," 1955)—the first DivEdCo film to address the cultural and religious practices of Afro-diasporic Puerto Ricans—along with the short *¿Qué opina la mujer?* ("What Do Women Think?," 1957). Tirado, on the other hand, was finally able to present his own award-winning films, *El puente* ("The Bridge," 1951) and *El santero* ("The Saint-carver," 1956), the latter of which would become a staple of Flaherty program for the next decade.[54] One attendee remarked that the films showed the clearest Flaherty influence of that year's selection.[55] As a result of their chance encounter, Tirado would be

[52] Frances Flaherty, Letter to Benji Doniger, 18 September 1956, Benji Doniger File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 71, Columbia.
[53] Rigau, Letter to Tirado, 1957. Translated in the section's epigraph.
[54] Jack C. Ellis, "On Last Year's Seminar," *AFFS Newsletter,* October 1957, Seminar News 1950s File, Flaherty Papers Box 22, NYU Fales Library Special Collections, New York City, NY. Hereafter shortened to "NYU."
[55] James E. Cronin, "Inside View of a Film Seminar: Documentary Producers Carry on Flaherty Tradition," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* 1 December 1957, 29.

invited to Rome to join director Fred Zinnemann in the shooting of *A Nun's Story* (1958, Figure 1.3, left), a shadowing experience that marked the rest of the young filmmaker's career.[56][57] The seminar would be the beginning of Tirado's long-standing professional relationship with the experimental filmmaker Shirley Clarke, another early supporter of the seminars who in a few years would later co-found the New York Film-Maker's Co-op.

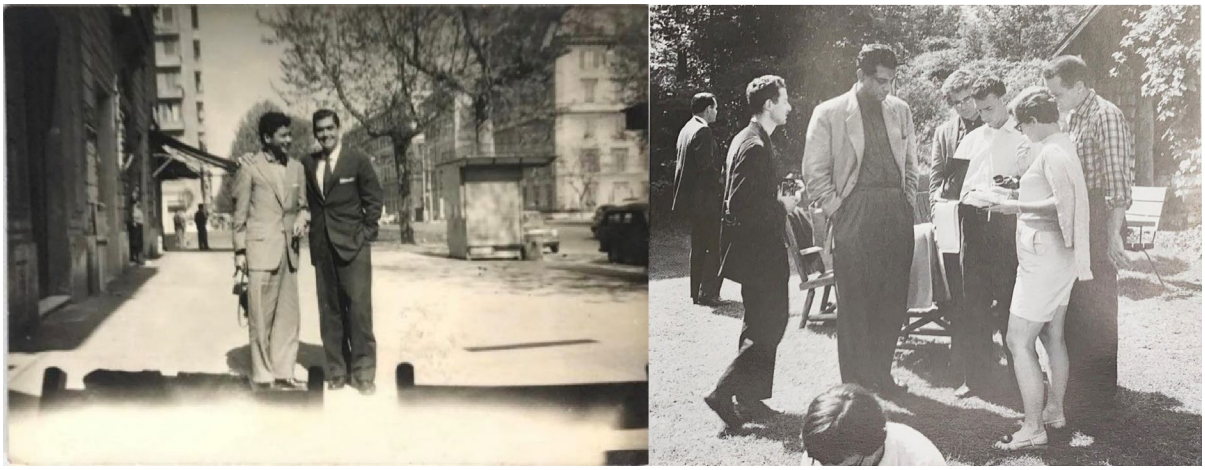

Figure 1.3 Amílcar Tirado and Amaury Veray, director and composer of El puente (1951) respectively, walking the streets of Rome (left, photograph provided by Edgardo Díaz Díaz); Satyajit Ray converses with seminar participants at the fourth Flaherty Seminar (right), taken from Barnouw & Zimmerman, eds., *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema*, special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996): 98.

In addition to its usual ethnographic treatments of the so-called "primitive" societies of the developing world, seminar programmer Andries Deinum made a concerted effort that year to invite filmmakers and show films from regions of the world previously underrepresented in its curation. Most famously, Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) made its U.S. debut on August 26th, 1957 at the

[56] "Puerto Rico Film Study," *The Windsor Star*, 12 May 1958, 17.

[57] In 1958, Tirado was awarded a grant from the Puerto Rican government to accompany Fred Zinnemann on the production of *A Nun's Story* (Zinnemann, 1959), to be filmed at Cinecittá and the Centro Sperimentale studios in Rome. The award was the first in a series of initiatives meant to foment the development of the Puerto Rican film industry, already here conceived as transnational affair in which the DivEdCo would send its filmmakers abroad to shadow or collaborate with acclaimed film artists, such as Zinnemann. In Rome, Tirado moonlit as an unenrolled student at the Centro, taking advantage of his relationship with Puerto Rican enrollee Pablo Cabrera to attend classes and screenings at the filmmaking school. Little is known about Tirado's summer at the Centro—or Cabrera's two years there, for that matter. That said, Tirado's international encounters with film professionals in the U.S. and later Italy stirred such an unease in the young filmmaker that it would result in his most prolific, if not a bit unfocused decade of cinema. Malén Ropas Daporta, "Amílcar Tirado: Director Zinnemann lo Invita a Observar Filmación Película," *El mundo,* 25 March 1958, 4, El Mundo Microfilm Collection, Center for Puerto Ricans Studies, Hunter College, New York City, NY. Hereafter shortened to "Centro."

Flaherty farm in Vermont, a screening which initiated the Bengali filmmaker's long association with the seminar. In fact, Ray's film inspired Frances Flaherty's budding support for emergent young filmmakers of the developing world—of which both Ray, Torres, Tirado, and the rest of the Division's filmmakers were part—in perhaps one of the few moments that Frances openly grappled with or attempted to compensate for the colonialist legacy of her late husband's films.

If 1957 initiated a long overdue colonial reckoning on the part of Flaherty leadership, the 1958 and 1959 editions were fashioned as transnational cinematic contact zones between artists from the Global North and South. A sort of inversion of the anthropological concept of a contact zone, these two Flaherty meetings were sites where film discourse were actively reconfigured to flatten hierarchies, such a film group from a developing nation could briefly share a forum on equal ground with filmmakers from the First World.[58] Education professor Morris Mitchell, who had effectively secured the presence of the Puerto Ricans at the seminar years earlier, now introduced a program of new DivEdCo films as a new standard in educational cinema.[59] The Flaherty Foundation was finally able to bring Satyajit Ray over to the U.S. to serve as a guest of honor at the fourth annual seminar (Figure 1.3, right). As Chandak Sengoopta has argued, the exhibition of *Pather Panchali* within U.S. non-theatrical film societies—the Flaherty foremost among them—greatly influenced how the artist would film the other two films in the trilogy. In fact, the early American reception took Ray's film to be a "dramatized documentary," which partly explains why the Flaherty faithful took the film to be a direct descendant of the Flaherty Way.[60] An early cut of *Aparajito* at the

[58] Djagalov and Salazkina, 280.
[59] The DivEdCo delegation that year comprised of filmmakers Marcos Betancourt, Jesús Figueroa, and Héctor Moll. Morris Mitchell, "The Film in Education: Introducing Films from Puerto Rico," 4th Annual Flaherty Seminar, Tape 9 - Series I: Flaherty Film Seminars, Subseries A: Audio Recordings, Robert Flaherty Film Seminar Archive, NYU Fales Library, New York City, NY. Hereafter shortened to "NYU."
[60] Sengoopta, 278. Sengoopta's is the only other study of the Flaherty's history which makes a forceful case in favor of the accented nature of the early Flaherty Film Seminars and its role in supporting the budding cinemas of the former Third World. Sengoopta argues that the categorization of Ray's film as a dramatized documentary rests on a misreading of its ethnographic intent, given American audiences' unfamiliarity with the Indian context.

1958 meeting effectively became the North American premiere of the film, though the final version would undergo further changes through its director's correspondence with David and Frances Flaherty.

Satyajit Ray's presence at the '58 seminar upended participants' ideas of what the Flaherty space could be, but seminarians would only have to wait a year to see it outdone. In 1959, the seminar headed out west to Santa Barbara under the institutional sponsorship of the University of California. In the process, it became the first edition of the seminar to be held outside the Flaherty farm in the Foundation's young history. The fifth annual seminar had been marketed as an exception because, outside of the Flaherty Foundation leadership, no repeat attendees were allowed to apply so that an air of spontaneity would accompany the new setting in southern California. Despite this, Amílcar Tirado and Oscar Torres would somehow manage to reprise their roles as Flaherty students.[61] The guest of honor that year, the French ethnographer Jean Rouch, addressed for the first time a generation of documentary filmmakers he had inspired in North America. Patricia Zimmerman has previously argued that this seminar became an "incubation center" for direct documentary movements from both sides of the Atlantic, as the triangulation of Rouch and his *cinéma vérité*, Robert Drew and direct cinema, and members of the Canadian National Film Board all met in California that summer.[62] The result would be the consolidation of a global vérité style between its major exponents in the North Atlantic, but even this development shares a unique link to Puerto Rico and the Division of Community Education that will be explored in more detail in an ensuing section.

[61] Malén Rojas Daporta, "Boricua Asistió a Seminario Cinematográfico," *El Mundo,* 26 August 1959, Centro.
[62] Patricia Zimmerman, "Midwives, Hostesses, and Feminist Film," In *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema*, special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996): 203.

Figure 1.4 Scenes from the 6th Flaherty Film Seminar (unknown artist, 1960, Prelinger Archives). Top right: Frances Flaherty converses with participants in the background. Bottom left: Sound technician Héctor Moll and editor Alfonso Borrell, both from the DivEdCo, sit on the grass between sessions.

The 1960 seminar would be the last to be held under the Flaherty Foundation banner and, in many ways, would be the last to emulate the experience of the original. Set once again on the Flaherty farm, its Puerto Rican delegation consisted of editor Alfonso Borrell (Figure 4, bottom left wearing red tie), sound technician Héctor Moll (Figure 1.4, bottom left wearing a grey blazer), painter Antonio Maldonado, and screenwriter Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, who drew from (and likely embellished) this year's proceedings when writing his memoir. The DivEdCo films had a prominent place in the program that year, nestled between screenings of *Louisiana Story* and Jean Renoir's *Picnic on the Grass* (1959) on the opening day.[63] The films were generally well-received by the audience. Professor Henry Breitrose exclaimed that the DivEdCo films separated the film- from the

[63] "Sixth Annual Robert Flaherty Seminar – 1960 Program," 1960 File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 77, Columbia.

toolmaker, offering evidence that "films made for very specialized purposes can hold immense cinematic interest," even if at times those purposes were not always readily identifiable, as evinced by the anecdote which opens this chapter.[6465] Despite the occasional geopolitical tensions and culture clashes, Frances Flaherty remarked that "The process, and the spirit with which these Puerto Rican films are made, has become a model for film-makers in other countries with the same cultural problems."[66]

The seminar's investment in a cinema of surprise or exploration would seem to put the Flaherty Way at odds with the Division of Community Education and the slogan which is so often summoned to describe it—"Films with a Purpose"— but Puerto Rico's connection to the work of Robert Flaherty went deeper than his widow's retroactive attempts to assign it cogency through her theories of nonpreconception. In addition to Benji Doniger's previous collaborations with Robert Flaherty DivEdCo founder and former Farm Security Administration photographer Jack Delano met Robert in his last years and the documentary pioneer is often cited as one of the major influences in the early work of the Division.[67] Willard Van Dyke—a central figure in the story of the Flaherty Seminar, the DivEdCo, and, thus, this chapter—regularly attended Flaherty's Coffee House sessions in the 1940s, where the New York City film crowd would get together to listen to Robert's Irish folk tales and stories of his many expeditions.[68] Despite these shared contacts within the world

[64] Henry Breitrose, "The Nontheatrical Film," *Film Quarterly* 14.3 (Spring 1960): 41.
[65] Other films exemplified the hermeneutic difficulties spectators would run into. For example, the film El Santero ("The Saintcarver," Amílcar Tirado, 1956), documents the craft of Don Zoilo, an artisan based on the west coast of the island who had become famous for his finely detailed wooden statuettes of saints. Among the continental Flaherty participants, the depiction of a santero raised concerns about the separation of church and state and whether the government should allow the topic of religious idolatry onscreen. Díaz Valcárcel, 74.
[66] Arthur Knight, "Draft of Interview with Frances Flaherty," 11 July 1959, Arthur Knight File, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Box 73, Columbia.
[67] "Kino" García, 36.
[68] Willard Van Dyke and Harrison Engle, "Thirty Years of Social Inquiry: An Interview with Willard Van Dyke," *Film Comment* 3.2 (1965): 34.

of documentary film, another similarity between the DivEdCo and Robert Flaherty is that neither considered themselves to be making documentaries in the first place.

Perhaps the strongest tie between the two institutions, however, was not a personal one to the filmmaker, but one felt and shared by the audiences of his films. In the pre-DivEdCo days when the agency was still housed under the Parks and Recreation Administration, field technicians had attempted to integrate film into their rural education programs to attract hesitant villagers. They showed educational films from Canada, some Hollywood fare, and Walt Disney cartoons, but had received only a tepid response from the rural filmgoers and little in the way of the stated goals of community education. DivEdCo filmmaker Amílcar Tirado writes of one screening that changed the calculus for the fieldworkers entirely,

> Showing at 7:00 p.m. Southwestern part of the island, town of Salinas. Film: Nanook. It held them… Nanook was a revelation… He was a lesson for them and for us: Man must fight to conquer life, to subdue nature, otherwise the hostile environment of the rain and the hurricanes, hunger and lack of shelter would swallow him. They transposed him. They put Nanook in with them, to live their lives. They saw Nanook as a peasant, with the same desire to live and to survive as they.[69]

In these early screenings, the artistic nucleus of the agency which would become in 1949 the Division of Community Education had found an imitable form. The unlikely identification between the *salinenses* and Nanook helped DivEdCo leadership settle on the dramatic documentary as a vehicle for film education. Cinema should not instruct its audiences how to solve its problems, but instead represent an empathetic figure who shares in those same problems, show their diegetic resolution, and hope the resulting dynamic could rally spectators to confront the issues present in

[69] The passage continues with an extended description of the film's reception: "First they laughed because the faces of the people look funny to them. The sequence of Nanook fishing was received with a delightful sense of comedy. They even called out names identifying some of the people of their barrio with Nanook, in his effort to catch the fish. Nanook sliding on the snow pulled by the fish was hilarious. There they identified one of their neighbors with the scene. I asked them why, "Oh, because Pancho is so stubborn that he always tries to do this the most impossible way." Living inside the igloo for them was pathetic. We could hear their sounds of pity. The sequence of Nanook and his family had the human touch of family love." Amílcar Tirado-Santiago, "Cinema as a Tool to Implement a Bloodless Social Revolution" (MA thesis), University of California – Los Angeles, 1968, 63.

their own communities. Director Fred Wale summarizes the approach of the first years when he writes, "The 'process' will build the community and if it is successful, the community will build the 'things'."[70] This emphasis on process over results may help address the conceptual incompatibilities between the community education program and the idea of nonpreconception. The Puerto Rican films were not scripted in the same manner as a Hollywood film or even as in the British documentary tradition. In the preparatory stages of a film, the Division's fieldworkers would survey residents in the countryside to gather what they considered to be their most pressing needs and designed their artistic agendas to respond to these issues. Moreover, nonpreconception was a philosophy of negation, nurtured equally by the Flaherty family's conviction that the Griersonian line—the blunt messaging, the booming narration, and the naked appeal to nationalism which had by then become documentary convention—was nothing more than an artistic subservience to politics, or propaganda. The Puerto Rican films, though purposeful, were not always nor necessarily preconceived. The surprise lay in the unpredictability of the needs of the individual communities its films served. While the educational films made by the DivEdCo did lend themselves to a certain utilitarianism, this indirect cinematic address to a highly specific spectator differentiated the Division's cinema from other state film initiatives. It is to these other government filmmakers who saw in the DivEdCo model its own imitable form that we now turn.

Willard Van Dyke: A Bridge between the New Deal and the New Waves

To see the other side of the mountain.

- Willard Van Dyke when asked why he traveled the world to make films, 1965.[71]

[70] Fred G. Wale, "Audio-Visual Aids Centre: Puerto Rico," *Health Education Journal* 13.1 (1955): 97.
[71] Van Dyke and Engle, 34.

The contacts between the Flaherty Foundation and the DivEdCo were facilitated by a few key figures who shared equal stake in the direction of each institution. Although the Division would endear itself to the U.S. documentary community through the early Flahertys, some in those seminar rooms were already intimately familiar with Puerto Rican educational cinema prior to the 1956 session. Willard Van Dyke—famed New Deal photographer, documentary filmmaker, and future president of the organization which would succeed the Flaherty Foundation—volunteered to assist in training the upcoming crop of Puerto Rican film professionals following the departures of Jack Delano, Edwin Rosskam, and other foreign members of the founding group in 1952. More so than other film consultants imported from the U.S., Van Dyke gently steered the suddenly youthful DivEdCo into its second decade.[72] No foreign filmmaker would immerse himself in the civic mission of the Division as comprehensively as Van Dyke, as his extended collaboration with the Puerto Rican Department of Public Instruction saw him provide technical training to aspiring cineastes, cooperate with Fred Wale on the group's administration, host apprentices on field trips to New York City, and even produce two standalone films for the Division between 1953 and 1956. Among films of a more conventional developmentalist bent reminiscent of his pre-Caribbean work, Van Dyke also undertook experimental pursuits under the auspices of the Division unlike any project either the Puerto Ricans or Van Dyke himself had ever produced.

[72] It is important to note that New Deal and U.S. government film figures such as Irving Jacoby, R.J. "Skip" Faust, Henwar Rodakiewicz, and Aram Boyajian would also advise the cinema unit and all played roles in the early years of the Flaherty seminar, though none had such a sustained professional relationship with the Division of Community Education as Van Dyke. For example, the film editor Aram Boyajian was married to *Saturday Review* columnist Cecile Starr, who is now known as one of the first historians to cover the development of the seminars. The couple would also sit on the board of International Film Seminars.

Figure 1.5 *Willard Van Dyke with View Camera* (Peter Stackpole, 1937, Amon Carter Museum of American Art).

Willard Van Dyke is a versatile figure in the history of cinema, moving seamlessly between roles as a filmmaker, photographer, programmer, teacher, arts administrator, curator, and consummate artist-bureaucrat over the course of his 57-year career. That his gradual evolution resulted in a role as an itinerant film consultant in Puerto Rico is a rather logical development in his film trajectory. United by a belief in "straight" or unmanipulated photography, Van Dyke would join photographer Edward Weston and a group including photographers Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham to form the modernist photography collective f.64—a sort of Bay Area Bauhaus named after a lens aperture that allows for a greater depth of field—with many of these artists later becoming part of New Deal public works programs.[73] In 1934, upon seeing Dorothea Lange's photographs for the first time, Van Dyke decided to move away from the celebratory attitude

[73] Therese Thau Heyman, "Modernist Photography and the Group f.64," *In On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950* Ed. Paul J. Karlstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 255.

toward urban sprawl and industry that had until then permeated his practice. He abandoned photography altogether to pursue experiments in what was then called the "film of fact," believing moving images to be a purer mode of representation than still ones.

Against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the New Deal, Van Dyke's former concerns with pictorialism gave way to a more explicitly social realist subject matter, as he began to train his lens on migrant farm laborers and unemployed factory workers. Labor was the subject of his first film for the Works Progress Administration, *Hands* (1934), co-directed by Ralph Steiner, expresses through a montage of close-up shots the manual gestures of hands—teaching, playing, praying—in a celebration of that which unites a people amid economic crises. Thus, with President Roosevelt's fiscal stimulus of the arts and cultural sector providing fertile ground for Van Dyke to indulge in his transition to film, he settled in New York City and immersed himself in the documentary film community in that city. He joined the documentary collective NYKINO, which included among its members other notable documentarists of the 1930s, such as Pare Lorentz, Paul Strand, and Henri Cartier-Bresson.[74] He was the cinematographer on Lorentz' *The River* in 1938 and co-directed the documentary film *The City*—a searing critique of urban modernity's trade-offs—again with Steiner the ensuing year. By the end of the decade, Willard Van Dyke had established himself as a leading documentary filmmaker in the U.S. (Figure 1.5).

Puerto Rico was not Van Dyke's first filmmaking expedition to Latin America. During World War II, Van Dyke was sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association—then in close coordination with the Offices of War Information and the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs—to produce a good will documentary meant to improve the image of the United States in the region.

[74] Van Dyke also joined federally funded film organizations such as Frontier Films and made films on commission from the private industry. Molly Geidel, "Petrodocumentary and the Remaking of New Deal Culture," *American Quarterly* 72.3 (September 2020): 803.

As with the many documentaries charged with delivering the benefits of the U.S.'s "Good Neighbor" policy, the resulting film, *The Bridge* (1944), was meant to bolster hemispheric solidarity between North and South America. These films took the form of counter-propaganda campaigns as the latter region remained susceptible to Nazi influence during the war years.[75] Molly Geidel has argued that the tropes of frontier striving and wretched underdevelopment in *The Bridge* create a "recognizable visual map for community development in the global South" that U.S. documentarists would continue to export and exploit globally.[76] It is under this context of cultural imperialism and extractive capitalism that Van Dyke would forge a relationship with the peoples and places of Latin America, one that would endure through the rest of his career, dulling the idealism of some of his earlier work.[77]

In the 1950s, Willard Van Dyke had become one of the foremost proponents of what Zoë Druick has called the liberal-internationalist strain in documentary cinema, whose history she traces from its origins in the League of Nations through to the activities of present-day UNESCO.[78] These were short, low-budget documentary productions typically concerned with the civic formation of a targeted group of spectators and expressed through didactic modes, nationalist rhetoric, and an underlying subscription to ideologies of universalist humanism and Western conceptions of

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[75] Although the film ostensibly shows how bilateral trade between the two continents would help boost their respective economies, The Bridge is also a thinly veiled publicity piece for the American oil industry. It positions the booming petrochemical and aviation industries as a way to give life and livelihood to the backward and downtrodden peoples living in the most remote corners of Latin America, while adding the nifty side effect of weaning the southern hemisphere off European imports. "Film to Cite Riches of South America: Picture Sponsored by Foreign Policy Association to Seek to Aid Economic Growth/ More U.S. Trade a Goal: Unit under Willard Van Dyke to Make 'The Bridge' with Sloan Foundation Grant," *The New York Times,* 30 December 1941, 6.

[76] In her article, Geidel also connects the "petrodocumentary" tradition between Van Dyke's film and Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story,* both of which became staples in early Flaherty seminar programming. Geidel, 807.

[77] For example, Van Dyke would return to South America in 1958 to assist in the production of Jorge Ruíz's *Y fueron libre* ("And Then They Were Free," Bolivia). Although there is little secondary documentation of his activities in that continent, the University of Arizona's Center for Contemporary Photography lists innumerable archival materials related to unspecified trips to Latin America and correspondence with filmmakers based in that region.

[78] Zoë Druick, "'Reaching the Multimillions:' Liberal Internationalism and the Establishment of Documentary Film," In *Inventing Film Studies,* eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008).

democracy. Van Dyke suffered the effects of increased competition from a resurgent commercial film sector and an attendant downturn in documentary film production following the dissolution of the OWI in 1945.[79] In addition to the lack of work, McCarthyist elements within government film agencies had identified Van Dyke as a potential subversive, denying him film opportunities and funding.[80] Due to the paucity of exhibition options and the delays that insufficient funding created between artists' film projects, many filmmakers were funneled toward film societies such as the Flaherty Seminars in search independent film's galvanized, yet scattered audiences. On the other hand, the governments of countries in the throes of developmentalism flocked to recruit the artists formerly associated with the film campaigns of established Western liberal democracies to help kickstart their own state film initiatives.

[79] Natasha Ritsma, "Projecting Cultural Diplomacy: Cold War Politics, Films on Art, and Willard Van Dyke's The Photographer," In *Art in the Cinema: The Mid-Century Art Documentary*, eds. Steven Jacobs, Birgit Cleppe, and Dimitrios Latsis (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021): 152

[80] Jonas Mekas and Edouard Laurot, "The American Documentary – Limitations and Possibilities," Interview with Willard Van Dyke, *Film Culture* 2.39 (1956): 8.

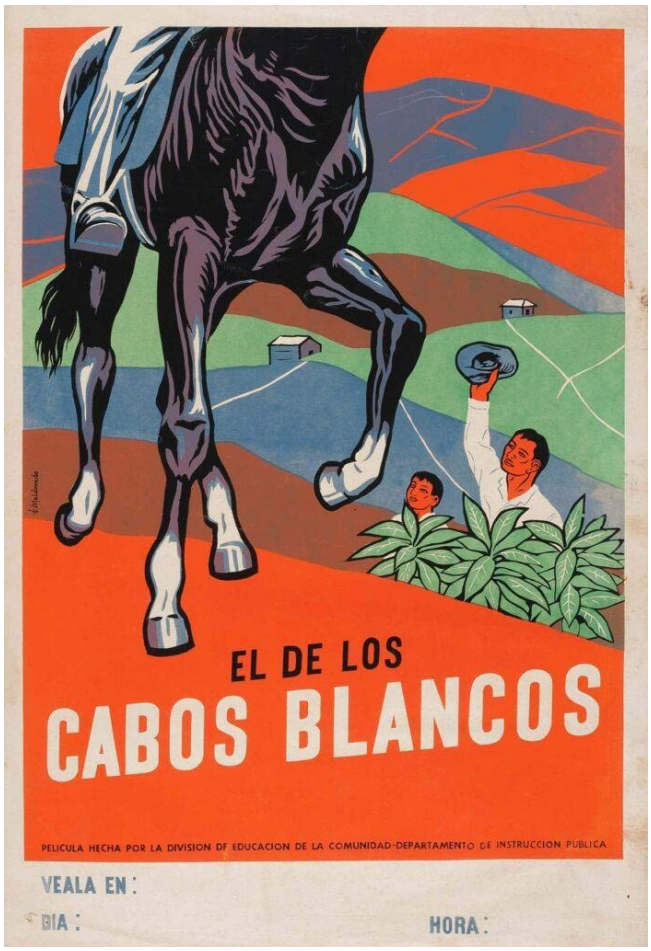

Figure 1.6 Poster for *El de los cabos blancos* (Antonio Maldonado, 1955).

As part of the generation who helped sell the virtues of New Deal policies for the Roosevelt Administration in the 1930s, no candidate would have been more qualified to instruct the Division of Community Education than Van Dyke. At the DivEdCo, the Graphics and Editorial sections had been handed over to Puerto Rican leadership—to painter Antonio Maldonado and playwright René Marqués, respectively—but the cinema unit was still being led by an American interim appointee, Skip Faust. Filmmaker Amílcar Tirado sowed the seeds for Willard Van Dyke's next Latin American excursion when Faust sent him to the offices of Affiliated Film Producers in Manhattan, a firm owned by Van Dyke and fellow Office of War Information film producer Irving Jacoby.[81] On this

[81] Skip writes to Amílcar Tirado, CC'ing Van Dyke, "Dear Miki: I sincerely doubt that it's a good idea to turn you loose in New York City with $1100 but against my better judgment I am sending it on to you. Don't spend it all and come

publicly subsidized field trip, Tirado would be under the tutelage of Van Dyke and Jacoby, who introduced the young Puerto Rican filmmaker to the New York documentary scene and helped him procure film equipment for the Division. In Puerto Rico, a script for Van Dyke's first film had already been penned by screenwriter René Marqués, long before Van Dyke would make his first trip to the island.[82] Once there, Van Dyke would direct two of his most idiosyncratic films, though neither film nor his three years on the island are mentioned in his biography.[83] His dual role as both teacher an artist portends the transition he would make in the middle of the 1960s, where he put his film practice aside to serve in more administrative and educational roles at the International Film Seminars and the MoMA Film Library.[84]

Van Dyke's first film for the Division, *El de los cabos blancos* ("The One with White Shanks," 1955, Figure 1.6), is a thirty-minute docudramatic story of a lone tobacco farmer, Manuel, who resorts to distributing his goods through a local agricultural co-op once he notices that his usual buyer has been lowballing him.[85] Manuel, paralyzed by the possibility of appearing ungrateful, only spurns his usurer when he realizes that his wife is performing domestic labor even more grueling than his own out in the field—and for no wages. The *Cabos blancos* yarn fits into a pattern of pro-cooperative narratives embedded in DivEdCo features toward the middle of the 1950s, when the independent agricultural sector had shrunk to a size that left it vulnerable to predatory lenders. In the context of the DivEdCo, a film like *El de los cabos blancos* would seem a derivative of the

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back here broke… Please give my best to Willard and Irving." R.J. Faust, Letter to Amílcar Tirado, 30 July 1953, Folder Amílcar Tirado 1, Series Administración Caja 2, Departamento de Educación Fund, Archivo de Imágenes en Movimiento, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "AIM."

[82] René Marqués, Memo to the Production Committee, "Argumento cinematográfico: 'El de los cabos blancos'," 16 diciembre 1953, Archivo René Marqués, San Juan, PR.

[83] There is an unpublished autography in the Van Dyke Collection at the Center for Contemporary Photography at the University of Arizona, which is currently being edited for publication by film scholars Tom Gunning and James Rosenow. In the manuscript, Van Dyke does allocate a chapter for discussing his work with the DivEdCo.

[84] James L. Enyeart, *Willard Van Dyke: Changing the World through Photography and Film* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

[85] The film's title, a horse with white shanks, comes from a Puerto Rican expression that refers to a person born with good fortune or high status, in contrast to the workmanlike mule.

Division's many David-versus-Goliath morality tales falling just short of denouncing capitalism proper, such as *El yugo* (Oscar Torres, 1958), a docudramatic take on a fishing community's choice between conducting business with an fishermen's cooperative instead of a predatory middleman. In this narrative film, Van Dyke's reproduction of the folklorically oriented, dramatized documentary style which characterized the Puerto Rican community education films of the '50s is nearly seamless, save for a noted dexterity in filming indoor scenes that were an exception to the theatrical staging and flattened depth of field customary of the Division's interior mise-en-scène.

Van Dyke's second film, the colorized musical short *Mayo florido* ("Flowery May, 1956, Figure 1.7), is a curious evolution of a conventional genre within the DivEdCo catalog. Set to a traditional *bolero*, the famously cantankerous Van Dyke surprises the spectators by stopping to smell the flowers—or at least to film them. Presumably a study of Puerto Rican flora, Van Dyke's increasingly nimble camera scans its subjects from petal to stem, capturing almost by chance the humble peasant lodgings of the Puerto Rican mountainside. The film also uses zoom lenses liberally, inspecting lily pads in minute detail in one shot but glancing skyward at foliage from an impressionistic distance in the next. Its educational purpose unclear, the short never appeared in any of Van Dyke's official filmographies and the DivEdCo never formally assigned *Mayo florido* to be screened in the field. The intertitle stating "Made in Puerto Rico" further suggests that the film was not intended for a domestic audience. Additionally, the film is characterized as an experimental short in the Division's catalog, which would signal the more welcoming stance toward underground and avant-garde cinema that Van Dyke would adopt as film curator in the latter part of his career. Barbara Van Dyke similarly describes the film as an outlier within her husband's extensive filmography, sharing that "Flowery May" had been "the only film Willard made just for fun, on his

own… The flowers were so lovely and he just picked up a camera and played" (Figure 7).[86] *Mayo florido* built upon an existing genre of Puerto Rican musical shorts, but the added stylistic flourishes would inspire later work such as *El contemplado* (Amílcar Tirado, 1958) and many other featurettes of traditional Puerto Rican folk music which remained popular in the Division's catalog even into the austere film production context of the 1970s.

Figure 1.7 Still frames from *Mayo florido* (Willard Van Dyke, 1956).

The 1958 Flaherty Seminar, which would have been Van Dyke's first in attendance, was to also be the debut of the filmmaker as a featured representative of the DivEdCo. The premiere of his Puerto Rican oeuvre and his closing remarks were scheduled to follow the customary program of three or four DivEdCo films, including Oscar Torres' *El yugo* and Amílcar Tirado's *El contemplado,* both of which were paired with Van Dyke's own work. But he was unable to make his scheduled appearance at this seminar.[87] Instead, he would send New York filmmaker and *Skyscraper* (Van Dyke, Clarke, Irving Jacoby, 1959) co-director Shirley Clarke to present the films, securing for the Puerto Rican group another steadfast ally in independent cinema, which the ensuing chapter on film-

[86] She continues, "It was a film that pleased him. I had always wished he would find time to do that more often. He never did." Barbara Van Dyke, Letter to Robert Haller, 6 February 1990, Willard Van Dyke File, Film-makers' Co-op Archives, New York City, NY.
[87] David Flaherty, Letter to Cecile Starr, 19 September 1958, Cecile Starr File, Box 70 – General Correspondence, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia.

cooperative movements between San Juan and New York City will detail. After missing this first opportunity, Van Dyke became a staple of Flaherty Seminars throughout the '60s and '70s. He became involved with the organization in an escalating capacity, first as part of the board of trustees and eventually as its president from 1968 to 1971. During his presidency, a palpable antagonism developed between the mysticism and poetic realism which characterized Frances Flaherty's ambitions for the seminar and Van Dyke's sharp pivot to experimental genres and socially engaged cinema.[88] However, this shift toward more cutting-edge, practice-based programming was merely an actualization of the work he had done at the DivEdCo a decade earlier, showing the portability of his approach to film pedagogy.

Van Dyke's consulting tenure for the DivEdCo is a small part of his broader career, but his presence and advocacy were a fairly large influence on the Puerto Rican film group. While ostensibly he was there to impart practical lessons on the art of filmmaking, Van Dyke's muted cinematic experimentalism was built on the bedrock of the DivEdCo's already established styles, ideas, and forms. His generic migrations were prompted by a mutual admiration for the Puerto Rican program.[89] The contacts between the Division's artists and Willard Van Dyke inaugurated a sort of circular educational opportunity, at once exhibiting Puerto Rico to the world and bringing in foreign talent to instruct apprentices. This exchange also created new opportunities for foreign filmmakers like Van Dyke to collaborate with local artists both in the service of but also beyond the DivEdCo's immediate ideological purview, as *Mayo florido* shows. In this manner, Puerto Rican filmmakers associated with the Division would inaugurate a type of unofficial filmmaker's residency on the island, facilitated by the close friendships and intellectual exchanges happening at the annual film

[88] MacDonald and Zimmerman, 98.
[89] "Reminiscences of Willard Van Dyke" (1980) Columbia Center for Oral History Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia.

seminars. During this period, the DivEdCo, Puerto Rican culture, and the Caribbean landscape were offered up as the studio component to the theoretical debates taking place at the Flaherty gatherings.

Lastly, it may be worthwhile to speculate as to how the upstart Puerto Rican film community was able to assist Willard Van Dyke, an artist who had ostensibly moved on from government and corporate film ventures and who would in a matter of a few years defend the New York underground against accusations of obscenity. James Rosenow has stated that Willard Van Dyke's early career as a New Deal filmmaker was defined by his commitment to generic experimentation, trying his hand at a variety of emerging forms at the boundaries of the documentary mode even under inflexible work conditions.[90] If Rosenow argues that these filmmakers' stateside work may serve as evidence of a certain current of experimentalism in the early American documentary, then Van Dyke's genre-bending for an agency with as rigid a formal and ideological mandate as the Division of Community Education's also raises the concomitant claim that U.S. artists were being afforded a creative freedom there consistently denied to the native group of artists. Van Dyke, however, shared all production credits with his crew on the films he worked on, though in his administrative capacity, this tendency to share or efface his own work makes it difficult to accurately sketch the full extent of his involvement in the Division, leaving little archival trace of his labors in Puerto Rico beyond the two films. Within the agency, however, no ambiguity about his contributions existed. When asked to list American filmmakers who have worked for the Division, Fred Wale makes sure to distinguish Van Dyke's efforts from other foreign consultants: "Willard, as you know, has been a consultant *and* a fellow worker for us on many occasions."[91] The homegrown filmmakers and the veteran documentarist were able to develop a mutually beneficial relationship in

[90] James Rosenow, "Forming an American Modernism: The Rise of the Experimental Filmmaker 1927-1939" (PhD Diss), University of Chicago, 2018, 157.
[91] Fred Wale, Letter to Richard Griffith, 27 September 1957, Department of Film Exhibition File 72, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York City, NY. Emphasis my own.

which the latter would be awarded a rare instance of state subvention for film experimentation—a practice that had been nearly extinguished on the mainland by McCarthyism and its association of the avant-garde with communist ideologies—while the former group gained a boisterous and well-connected advocate for their art in the international independent film community.[92] If the Flaherty is when he ultimately assumed the role of a seasoned administrator, then the Division of Community Education is where Van Dyke first fashioned himself into a teacher.

The Other Chronicle of a Summer: Caribbean Layovers of Transnational Vérité

> *Until recently, there was little chance to keep up with all this [documentary] activity, to see the work of Jean Rouch for the Musée de l'Homme, of the new young directors at the Canadian National Film Board, or of the young Puerto Rican group. But, increasingly, the Flaherty Seminar has been filling this gap.*
>
> - Colin Young and A. Martin Zweiback, *Film Quarterly,* 1959.[93]

There was one state film institution to beat the DivEdCo to the Flaherty. Canada's National Film Board—or the ONF (*Office National du Film du Canada*) in French—first sent a representative to the inaugural seminar in 1955 and remained an active participant at every Flaherty Seminar during its first two decades.[94] It should come as no surprise that the NFB was involved in the Flaherty Seminar from its inception, given that both institutions share a common progenitor: Scottish documentarist John Grierson. In 1938, Grierson was brought over from the U.K. to Canada to conduct a study on the feasibility of creating a public film industry in the country. Grierson's initial visit to the country would result in the founding of the National Film Commission (later changed to the "National Film

[92] Jonas Mekas and Edouard Laurot, 8.
[93] Colin Young and A. Martin Zweiback, "Going Out to the Subject," *Film Quarterly* 13.2 (Winter 1959): 40.
[94] Many NFB filmmakers attended the Flaherty Seminar in its first few years, among them NFB director Tom Daly—who succeeded Grierson and Ross McLean, its second director—as well as filmmaker Guy Coté, who in the ensuing decade would attempt to position the NFB as the Flaherty Seminar's institutional sponsor, to no avail. In addition to Daly and Coté, many of the major filmmakers associated with the famed Unit B at the NFB passed through the Flaherty seminar in the '50s and '60s, including Michel Brault, Colin Low, Claude Jutra, Pierre Perrault, Gilles Groulx, and others. "A Directory of All Personnel Engaged in the Robert Flaherty International Film Seminar (1955-1964)," IFS Misc 1955-1966 File, Box 22, Robert Flaherty Film Seminar Archive, NYU.

Board") the ensuing year, a government film agency he would lead through the 1940s. Following the conclusion of the war, NFB production turned toward civic education, a mission which united it with its sister institution in the Caribbean.[95] Thus, in its quest to "show Canada to Canadians," the Board followed a tried-and-true recipe of filming subject documentaries about agrarian labor practices, folk morality tales, profiles of different Canadian ethnic groups, and other liberal, developmentalist, and nationalist themes.[96] Toward the end of the 1950s, the NFB's cultural-nationalist project lay on an increasingly unstable political foundation given the internal conflicts between Canada's English- and French-speaking provinces, its settler-colonial relationship to its indigenous territories, and its own status as a current Dominion and former colony of Great Britain. Now more than fifteen years removed from its founding, the NFB sent to the Flaherty a new crop of Canadian filmmakers who questioned the politics of their predecessors and positioned their work in relation to global new waves in addition to other government film programs. To this end, Frances Flaherty made the decision to hold the seminars at the Vermont farm precisely because they served as a halfway point between New York City film societies and the recently relocated National Film Board, which was then in the process of moving its headquarters to Montréal in order to restore the balance between its Anglo- and Francophone staff.

Of the many government film groups at the Flaherty, none developed a closer relationship with the Division of Community Education than Canada's National Film Board. Much like the DivEdCo had adopted the strategy of the Farm Security Administration in designing a public arts program to uphold the Commonwealth status, Canada's program borrowed the strategy and

[95] Having been established during wartime, the NFB had initially trained its propaganda on the Canadian Armed Forces' entry into WWII, producing newsreels under the titles *Canada Carries On* (1940-59) and *World in Action* (1942-45). Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007): 16-17.
[96] Zoë Druick, "Grierson in Canada," In *The Grierson Effect: tracing Documentary's International Movement,* eds. Zoë Druick and Deane Williams (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 105-120.

modality of the United Kingdom's Empire Marketing Board under Grierson, a model which had also built in a bias toward representing the themes and concerns of anglophone Canada over those of the French province or indigenous territories. By the mid-1950s, French-Canadian filmmakers who had typically served as apprentices under an established Ontario-based leadership were now ascending to prominent positions within the Board's individual production units, yet many were being tasked with furthering an integrationist policy to which few of them personally subscribed. These rising filmmakers responded to these contradictions by developing novel techniques and addressing hyperlocal themes in their films, even at times blatantly disregarding the institutional leadership in pursuit of their own creative visions.[97] It was with this younger generation of Canadian—and particularly French-Canadian—filmmaker that the Puerto Ricans would come to share a common cause. The Flaherty Seminars provided a forum for the expression of shared creative aspirations at the margins of their respective institutional agendas, even as some political incompatibilities between Puerto Rican and French-Canadian cultural nationalisms would emerge from this exchange.

[97] Beginning in the 1970s, the Board would also offer programming covering the First Nations and, belatedly, would feature indigenous filmmakers in its catalog.

Figure 1.8 Michel Brault (far left) and Frances Flaherty (far right) posing with two unknown participants at the Flaherty Seminar in Santa Barbara, published in Michel Brault, *Conversation sur le visible* (Montréal: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec/Library and Archives Canada, 2016): 90.

Throughout the decade, the NFB had allowed some of its filmmakers to experiment with new forms and play with established genres, an experimentalism particularly evident in the work of animator Norman McLaren and the films produced by the famed Unit B. The French-Canadians, however, had to work a little harder to earn that creative privilege. Many got their start in NFB-produced, English-language documentary television series, such as the flagship *Candid Eye*, a term that would become synonymous with the Canadian variant of direct documentary. Running from 1958 to 1961, its fourteen half-hour documentaries were mainly directed by observational cinema innovators Terence Macartney-Filgate, Stanley Jackson, Wolf Koenig, and Roman Kroitor.[98] Candid

[98] Mccartney-Filgate would join Drew Associates for the shooting of *Primary* (1960) and remain with them throughout the decade. Unsatisfied with the immersive potentialities of lightweight cameras and synced sound, the inventive Kroitor

Eye seized the youthful effervescence of NFB filmmakers to assemble a new image of a plurinational Canadian identity. Along with the formal innovations of the Candid Eye films, the Unit B developed film technology that would facilitate the practical demands of this new style of filmmaking, oriented toward extremely lightweight, shoulder-operated cameras and portable recorders that could capture direct sound (to be synchronized at the studio later). Working as apprentices under the old, Ontario-based guard was a new set of French-Canadian filmmakers as cinematographers that included Michel Brault, Gilles Groulx, Claude Jutra, Pierre Perrault, Georges Dufaux, among others. Brault and many of his Quebecois colleagues played a crucial role in the Candid Eye and its offshoot programs during the late '50s and early '60s.

Although Unit B is often credited as the vanguard of the Canadian direct documentary tradition, the delegate chosen to represent the Canadians at the inaugural '55 seminar was Montréal-based filmmaker Michel Brault, who presented the film *Corral* (1954) in director Colin Low's stead. Brault had yet to direct his first film—in fact, he was still only a part-time staff member of the Canadian film group—yet through his Candid Eye work with Koenig and Kroitor and his participation at the seminars he would pick up techniques now commonly associated with direct documentary. In 1958, Brault was contacted by the Flaherty Foundation newsletter to provide an update on his film activities in the three years since his visit to the inaugural meeting. Brault's response is understated, given that he had already begun work on his breakout film,

> Michel Brault (Seminar '55) writes from Canada: "I am extremely busy with my work at the National Film Board, from 35mm documentary to half-hour dramatic films for TV. It is wonderful to work in a medium so dear to us all. I regret only one thing: *not to have enough choice in the subjects I have to work on* – though I still consider myself in a period of apprenticeship."[99]

would be involved in developing the film-technological that resulted in IMAX and 3D stereoscopic animation. The NFB's Unit B, more so than any other regional verité cluster, were equal parts tinkerers and artists.

[99] *Flaherty Seminar Newsletter* 1.1, March 1958, 5, "Robert Flaherty seminar, correspondence, brochures, and budget material, 1954 July 1-1964 August 31," Box 10 Folder 3, Shirley Clarke Papers, WCFTR. Emphasis mine.

Despite bemoaning his lack of creative control over the subject of the films, Brault would begin to break the rules in 1958. He received his first directorial assignment: a three-minute documentary on professional snowshoe-makers convening outside Montréal. Working alongside editor Gilles Groulx, the initial rushes of the film were rejected by the NFB leadership, yet both Quebecois filmmakers chose to complete their thirty-minute version of the film clandestinely. André Loiselle writes that the resulting film, *Les Raquetteurs* ("The Snowshoers," Groulx and Brault, 1958), acquired a great symbolic significance since it was "a film about a typically French-Canadian pastime [made] in defiance of anglophone authority."[100] Although armed with a 35mm camera, Brault debuted the handheld, forward-moving "walking shots" that would come to define his signature contribution to the direct documentary filmmaking conversation (Figure 1.9, right), while also placing his Nagra sound recorder in the fray to capture candid and direct sound, even though they would have to tediously resynchronize it in post-production. More than an ethnographic film, the film became symbolic of a budding French-Canadian identitarian movement, coalescing in direct opposition to English-Canadian hegemony. The films of the Québec contingent—*Le Raquetteurs* and later *La Lutte* ("The Wrestling Match," Claude Jutra, et. al., 1961) in particular—became compulsory programming at the Flaherty as early examples of an observational documentary mode, but it was this initial act of film rebellion that would connect Brault and the Flaherty to the consolidation of *cinéma-vérité* (Figure 1.8).

Between Europe and North America, a new type of documentary style was emerging, one which sought to collapse the distance between the documentarian and their subject. In France, this style would later be popularized by Jean Rouch under the moniker of cinema vérité—a "film truth." At the risk of oversimplification, vérité and its direct documentary (which is the least inaccurate term

[100] André Loiselle, *Cinema as History: Michel Brault and Modern Québec* (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 2007): 38.

when attempting to refer to each variant at once) influences and derivatives were premised on an observational approach to the subject, communicated through the use of hand-held cinematography, the capture of direct sound (where possible), a lack of voiceover narration, minimal interaction with the subject (or maximal, in the French case), and the assumption of the camera as a naïve or objective actor, though none of these descriptors are without their qualifications.[101] The style had been nurtured by regional direct documentary predecessors in the North Atlantic, such as free cinema in the United Kingdom, direct cinema in North America, and the aforementioned Candid Eye house style in Canada. Free cinema, in particular the short *Momma Don't Allow* (Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, 1956), is widely credited as the inspiration for ensuing transatlantic adaptations of the style. With its frenzied, often intrusive takes of the London nightlife, the film provided a model for North American direct documentarists to follow and innovate upon. Direct cinema, as seen in Ricky Leacock's *Primary* (1960), the work of Drew Associates, or the early work of the Maysles brothers, eschewed voiceover narration, direct intervention into the subject's actions, and committed more concretely to the use of hand-held cinematography, a stylistic differentiation made possible by the increasing portability of modern cameras. On the other hand, practitioners of cinéma vérité such as Rouch's subscribed to a more involved approach, often relying on interviews and having their subjects respond directly to their prompts, while also employing more static cinematography, close focal points, and the use of wide-angle lenses, at least prior to their encounter with French-Canadian cinematographers. Brian Winston helpfully illustrates the difference between the two direct documentary tendencies, characterizing the approaches used by American direct filmmakers as "flies

[101] For example, the candid eye and direct cinema variants were committed to an observational style of filmmaking in which the presence of the camera or its operators was rarely acknowledged, but direct cinema tended to have a latent narrative behind its deliberate ambiguities. In France, vérité had a more interventionist, reflexive approach to the direct documentary, often prompting subjects through interviews and other instigations. Rouch almost always inserted himself into his films, as well as his crew.

on the wall" versus cinéma-vérité's "flies in the soup."[102] Ironically, the ambulatory, skittish, and erratic camera movements of the direct documentary style brewing in Québec can be understood as the most flylike of all, eluding apprehension by either of Winston's entomologic metaphors.

Figure 1.9 Michel Brault, with Rouch and Morin trailing, showing off his walking camera technique. Photograph appears in Brault, 88.

It has become the stuff of Flaherty legend to state that the development of a global cinéma vérité—as well as the use of the term as an umbrella concept for films in the direct documentary tradition—began in earnest at the seminars. In 1958, a chance meeting between Terence Macartney-Filgate, Robert Drew, D.A. Pennebaker, and Ricky Leacock at the seminar in Vermont resulted in their co-authored debut film, the landmark documentary *Primary*, uniting the North American direct documentary variants under one banner.[103] The 1959 edition, the first held outside Vermont, seemed to be a culmination of Frances Flaherty's desire for the Seminar to serve not as a coronation of the "Flaherty Way" or her ideal of nonpreconception, but to lay the groundwork for their inheritors to emerge.

[102] Charlie Michael, "Claiming a Style: The 'Living Cinema' of Pierre Perrault's *Pour La Suite Du Monde*," *The Velvet Light Trap* 54 (2004), 46.
[103] MacDonald and Zimmerman, 63.

Direct or observational documentary had become the silent theme of the '59 seminar. Frances had personally asked to include Michel Brault's *Les Raquetteurs* in the final program after a visit to the NFB headquarters. Aside from the Flaherty Foundation leadership, the DivEdCo participants, and some specially invited guests, the guest list was comprised exclusively of first-time seminarians. Moreover, the Foundation would attract the most star-studded roster of its young history. Jean Rouch, the guest of honor, would address for the first time a generation of ethnographic filmmakers he had inspired in North America. Brault was a late addition to the proceedings. Film historian Jack C. Ellis traces the accepted genealogy of cinéma-vérité as having originated after Jean Rouch's encounter with Michel Brault's *Les Raquetteurs* in Santa Barbara.[104] Rouch, Brault, and Flaherty historian Patricia Zimmerman have elsewhere claimed the meeting as cinéma vérité's incubation center and origin story.[105][106]

Following the seminar, Rouch extended an open invitation to Brault to collaborate on an ethnographic project on the other side of the Atlantic. In summer of 1960, the offer materialized when Brault became the cinematographer for *Cronique d'un eté* ("Chronicle of a Summer," Rouch, Edgar Morin, 1961). Rouch had been particularly impressed by Brault's sporadic and rudimentary use of direct sound, still a relative rarity in documentary film. The absolute necessity of recording dialogue in Rouch's unfinished film had forced them to shoot scenes around a sound recorder, usually in fixed shots that did not faithfully capture the affects of the impassioned arguments or the intimate confessions occurring onscreen. Departing from the Candid Eye, Brault took the mobile

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[104] Jack C. Ellis, *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989): 221-22.
[105] Zimmerman, "Midwives…," 203.
[106] Rouch writes, "For me, the Flaherty Seminar in Santa Barbara was the open door to a new way of making film. It was there in 1957 [sic], when the synchronous sound image was waiting to be born, that I met Michel Brault—who brought new filming techniques like the lavaliere mike, wide-angle lens and the walk with the camera. And that's how *Chronicle of Summer* [sic] was born… thanks to Frances Flaherty." Jean Rouch, "Recollections: Jean Rouch," In *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema,* special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996): 62.

camera to its logical extremes in *Les Raquetteurs*, forgoing telephoto lenses, conventional framing, and even the aid of the viewfinder in favor of close-up, liquid cinematography often shot from the hip (Figure 9).[107] In the *Palace de la Concorde* scene in which the protagonist Marceline walks toward the camera as she delivers a monologue to her deceased father, Brault famously rigged the camera to a car's rear bumper. As Marceline drifts into her traumatic recollections of the Holocaust, the camera similarly rolls away from medium to extreme long shot in the span of a minute. Two years after the film's release, Rouch said in an interview, "It was Brault who brought us new shooting techniques which we didn't know and which we have been copying ever since… We have to admit that everything we have done in French cinéma-vérité derives from the NFB."[108]

Figure 1.10 Report of production of *Festival in Puerto Rico* (left), photograph by Michel Brault featured in Guy Fournier, "Au festival de Porto Rico," *Perspectif* (October 1960): 16. Brault holding a microphone next to Pablo Casals (right).

The transatlantic history of cinéma vérité is often told through its aesthetic negotiation at the Flaherty Seminar and its consequent onscreen manifestation in *Chronique d'un eté*. Missing in this apocryphal tale of the Flaherty Seminar is vérité's brief detour in the Caribbean. Amidst this encounter between documentarists of the old world and the new, Brault had already been tasked with chronicling the summer of '60, only that the streets and apartments of the *arrondisements* would be replaced by the stone walls and concert halls of San Juan. Following an invitation from the Puerto Ricans, Brault traveled to San Juan in June of 1960 to film the classical music performances

[107] Loiselle, 37.
[108] Erich Rohmer and Louis Marcorelles, "Entretien avec Jean Rouch," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 24.144 (June 1963): 17.

of the 4th Casals Festival (Figure 1.10, left), a month before he would join Rouch in France. [109] Alongside Wolf Koenig, Roman Kroitor, and Tom Daly, the project was show of inter-institutional diplomacy between the NFB and the Department of Public Instruction, the umbrella agency within which the Division of Community Education was housed. [110] As the series finale, *Festival in Puerto Rico* (Koenig, Kroitor, 1961) would be the last film of Brault's apprenticeship for the Candid Eye. The film follows the famous Canadian contralto Maureen Forrester as she performs at the festival, but Brault's camera only loosely interprets what constitutes the performance itself. The film is a highly distractible reportage of the festival happenings told through shots of bored audience members at the rehearsals, intimate family scenes on vacation in the Caribbean, a few ethnographically oriented detours in the Puerto Rican countryside, as well as a reception in which governor Luis Muñoz Marín himself makes a brief appearance. Part-tourist and part-educational film, *Festival in Puerto Rico* is one of the first examples of the direct documentary style to be filmed in Latin America, and the clearest example of the DivEdCo's artists pursuing experimental filmmaking vicariously through the work of its partner institutions.[111]

Festival in Puerto Rico stands apart from the rest of the episodes in the series because Michel Brault seems to workshop some of the techniques he would employ in Paris later that summer, debuted here to little fanfare.[112] Among the very first shots, there is already an example of Brault's signature "walking camera" as he films the orchestra members tuning their instruments in preparation for the event (Figure 1.11, top-middle). The camera makes its way through the orchestra

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[109] Dusty Vineberg, "Activity Stirs on Channel 10," *The Montreal Star,* 4 February 1961, 68.
[110] David Flaherty, Letter to Cecile Starr, 19 September 1958. Flaherty Foundation Papers, Cecile Starr File, Columbia.
[111] The DivEdCo's participation in Canadian experimental documentary may not have been vicarious at all. In the 1961 curriculum vitaes of director Luis Maisonet, producer Otoniel Vila, and cinematographer José Jolguera, each of them credit themselves with having participated in the filming of "Casals," "Don Pedo Casals," and "Don Pablo Casals" for the NFB. Amílcar Tirado, Letter to Gaspar Roca, 3 May 1961, File Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas de San Juan, Colección Fomento, Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "FLLM."
[112] Previously, Brault had shared cinematography credits in *Police* (Terence Macartney-Filgate, 1958) and *The Days before Christmas* (Macartney-Filgate, et al., 1960). Some shots in *Festival in Puerto Rico* appear to have been taken by either Koenig, Kroitor, or one of the DivEdCo technicians assisting in the production.

pit, avoiding any stray bows and protruding elbows from members of the string section. The stroll ends on a medium shot of Maureen Forrester reading from her vocal score. There are a few more similar shots where the camera navigates through space, some as it follows its subject, much like the famous scene in *Chronique d'un eté* where Marceline walks through the Palace de la Concorde following a car-mounted camera. Moreover, it is easy to tell which shots are taken by Brault given that he is seen somewhat disappointedly holding a boom mic a few feet away from Casals as he makes his entrance to the backstage area (Figure 1.10, right). Although the scene features direct sound, it is shot in a long focal length at a remove from the subject to avoid the clicking of the camera's motor, a signature compromise that suggests Koenig would have been behind the camera in those instances. In his study of the use of lightweight cameras and synchronous sound equipment at the National Film Board, Vincent Bouchard notes that developments in film technology were not linear and were not used across all the Board's units uniformly. Although much has been made of the technical innovations of the NFB, it is best to understand these as improvised "micro-inventions" that often went unreported and primarily occurred at the meeting point between the film equipment and the profilmic space.[113] Given the use of direct sound in scenes shot in close-up and the unrestrained movement of Brault's walking camera in others, it becomes clear that cinéma vérité's French breakthrough did not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it was precipitated by a series of smaller inventions that moved direct documentary closer to its desired verisimilitude.

The perceived political affinities between the French-Canadian and Puerto Rican groups also merits closer examination. An informed spectator may be tempted to draw a parallel between Puerto Rico's so-called "bloodless" revolution and Québec's incipient Quiet Revolution, but the image of the island represented in the Candid Eye episode is a false reflection, relying on a crucial cultural and

[113] Vincent Bouchard, "Les traces des dispositifs cinématographiques légers et synchrones dans les archives techniques de l'ONF," *1895* 51 (2007): 68-91.

political misrecognition. The NFB team had fallen for the cultural-nationalist project of the Muñoz Marín administration, almost explicitly. This is represented in the conversation between Forrester and Muñoz Marín in the Fortaleza gardens, when the Puerto Rican governor reinforces the cultural ties to Latin America—he includes himself within a tradition of Latin American heads of state who were also poets—while leaving question of governance unaddressed (Figure 1.11, top right). Why does the poet-statesman insist on talking only about poetry at the expense of the state? Where exactly is this philosopher-king's republic? By 1960, the Candid Eye series had harnessed an emergent Québecoise nationalism as a way to facilitate understanding between its English-speaking provinces and its own. The incipient cultural nationalism of the French group may have identified its cognate in the unorthodox political arrangement of the Puerto Ricans with the U.S., but the showrunners mistook the conditional autonomy of the Commonwealth for actual sovereignty. This despite the fact that the colonial relationship between the U.S. and its non-incorporated territories more closely approximated the relationship between Canada and its First Nations and indigenous groups, an ongoing colonial project taking place within Canadian borders and previously rendered faithfully by Robert Flaherty's exoticizing gaze at the Inuit peoples of northern Québec.

Figure 1.11 Assorted screencaptures from *Festival in Puerto Rico.*

Although Koenig's and Kroitor's film seems content with implying similarities between Puerto Rico and French Canada, the subject of colonialism is entirely absent from the conversation. As Nicole Beth Wallenbrook writes of *Chronique d'un été*'s faint acknowledgements of the Algerian War of Independence, Rouch's and Morin's film is characterized by a guided ambivalence toward colonialism generally, a discursive restraint employed to evade French censors.[114] As a conflict analogous to the contemporary Nationalist project of independence in Puerto Rico—to which the filmmakers must have been privy due to their contacts with card-carrying Puerto Rican Nationalists—Brault's camera is decidedly apolitical on this account, even as its candid approach allows for some of these markers of Puerto Rican coloniality to edge into the frame. For example, during the very scene where Muñoz Marín touts his writerly bonafides, Brault's camera makes little effort to hide its boredom. It lowers its gaze, scanning the white linen table to its left in search of hors d'oeuvres. Then, the camera veers right, glancing at a tray of champagne glasses still fizzing on their way to the guests. Meanwhile, Governor Muñoz Marín, First Lady Doña Inés, and Maureen Forrester continue to exchange pleasantries in the deep background, out of focus and out of earshot. Canadian film historian Bruce Elder has attributed this non-interventionist approach as the legacy of the NFB's aesthetic debt to Henri Cartier-Bresson and his obsessive aesthetic search for the "decisive moment," often to the detriment of a moral decisiveness.[115]

Political shortcomings aside, *Festival in Puerto Rico* remains a little-known steppingstone in the transatlantic consolidation of direct documentary cinema, a collaboration facilitated by the aesthetic effervescence of the Flaherty Seminars of the late 1950's. The NFB's and the DivEdCo's shared, albeit misguided subscription to liberal internationalism had made Luis Muñoz Marín's Puerto Rico

[114] Nicole Beth Wallenbrock, "A Prism of Censorship and Ambivalence: *Chronique d'un été* and *Algérie, année zero*," *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 62.1 (2022): 133-156.
[115] Bruce Elder, "On The Candid-Eye Movement," in *Canadian Film Reader*, eds. Seth Feldman, Joyce Nelson (Toronto: P. Martin Associates, 1977): 90.

ripe for the direct documentary treatment. Regardless, there is an unintentionally subversive quality in filming a man whose power had been derived from a carefully curated media image as the voice of reason in the tumultuous Caribbean of the midcentury. Here in the palace gardens, removed from the podium, the desk, or the float, Muñoz Marín is made to look uncharacteristically small as hunches over into the frame and mutters into the portable microphone. Although the French and Canadian delegates to the Flaherty have been credited with bringing liberation struggles to the fore, perhaps a naïve realism was not apt to treat a Puerto Rican ruling class that had allowed the island to become the forgotten project amidst a wave of global decolonization.[116] The Convent Hotel, the recital hall, the Casals Festival, the filmmakers' innocent eyes are fed a luxe image of Puerto Rican modernity, yet, deployed in the Caribbean colony, the Quebecoise camera is anything but a gun.

Colonial Keynotes: The 1961 Flaherty Film Seminar in Barranquitas

> *I am becoming aware of the fact about all of you that, while you are pleased at the international honors being heaped on your films, you do after all have a job to do, and that probably the least important part of that job is participating in film festivals, galas, premieres…*
>
> - MoMa Film Library Director Richard Griffith, Letter to Fred Wale, 1957.[117]

In early 1960, the Flaherty Foundation coffers were running dry. Much of the foundation's resources were tied up in producing the *Louisiana Story* study film, a print of Robert's film that would feature outtakes and repeat sequences providing insight to students on the filmmaker's process. The foundation's other projects—the re-issue of *Nanook* and the continued cataloguing of the Flaherty estate—were put on hold. On the financial side, David and Frances Flaherty had conceded defeat in their decade-long effort to attain tax-exempt status for the foundation, as they had failed to convince

[116] Thomas Waugh, "The Films They Never Showed: The Flaherty Seminar and the Cold War," In *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema,* special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996): 218.
[117] Richard Griffith, Letter to Fred Wale, 6 November 1957, Department of Film Exhibition Richard Griffith Folder 73, MoMa.

the IRS that its goals were educational and not to commemorate the life and career of Robert Flaherty. The decision was made that the foundation was to be absorbed by a new organization, the International Film Seminars (IFS), by the end of the year. Erik Barnouw, Media Studies Faculty at the Center for Mass Communication (CMC) at Columbia University, would become the IFS's first president and pivot the programming in a direction that reflected the organization's stated global ambitions. The IFS advisory board was assembled with a view toward that goal, with invitations going out to the likes of international filmmakers such as Thorold Dickinson in Great Britain, Jean Rouch in France, Henri Storck in Belgium, Guy Coté in Quebec, and Satyajit Ray in India, among many other leading figures on the international nonfiction circuit. Fred Wale joined the advisory board as well, though his name was curiously exempt from this list of international board members.[118] The restructuring had fulfilled Frances Flaherty's wishes following the second seminar to have the organization find a more stable institutional home and cycle through only the most qualified of stewards, though much of the seminar's artisanal appeal was lost in the handover from the Flaherty family to the CMC. The 1960 Flaherty Film Seminar would be the last family-run gathering at the Dummerston farm.

Although the 1959 partnership with the University of California would be short-lived, the professionalization of the seminars as an educational organization had opened up new possibilities for collaboration as the Flaherty deepened its ties to the budding field of Film Studies in colleges and universities across the U.S.[119] However, the decision to hold the Flaherty Seminar in Santa Barbara under the sponsorship of the university—coupled with a raise in enrollment fees and a

[118] MacDonald and Zimmerman, 58. In most of these letters, the Puerto Rican contingent was not considered foreign and, thus, Fred Wale was not mentioned alongside other foreign members. In a letter addressed to Ray, however, the presence of the Puerto Rican film unit—a rare instance of representative filmmakers from the Global South—was used to entice the Indian cineaste to join the founding IFS cohort. As with most matters related to the Puerto Rican Commonwealth status, the island remained foreign in a domestic sense.
[119] MacDonald and Zimmerman, 44.

zealous pursuit of external grants and donations—intimated to some observers that the foundation had initiated measures of financial austerity. Behind the scenes, the old guard of seminarians began to grow restless as the Foundation relied primarily on tuition revenue to fund the events, meaning that the larger cohorts had diminished the customary intimacy of the seminars. Moreover, the growing profiles of the guests of honor had some seminar faithfuls lamenting that the gatherings were beginning to feel more like a festival. To scale the seminar up, keep its founding members happy, and stave off a dissolution, the seminar sought a new institutional partner.

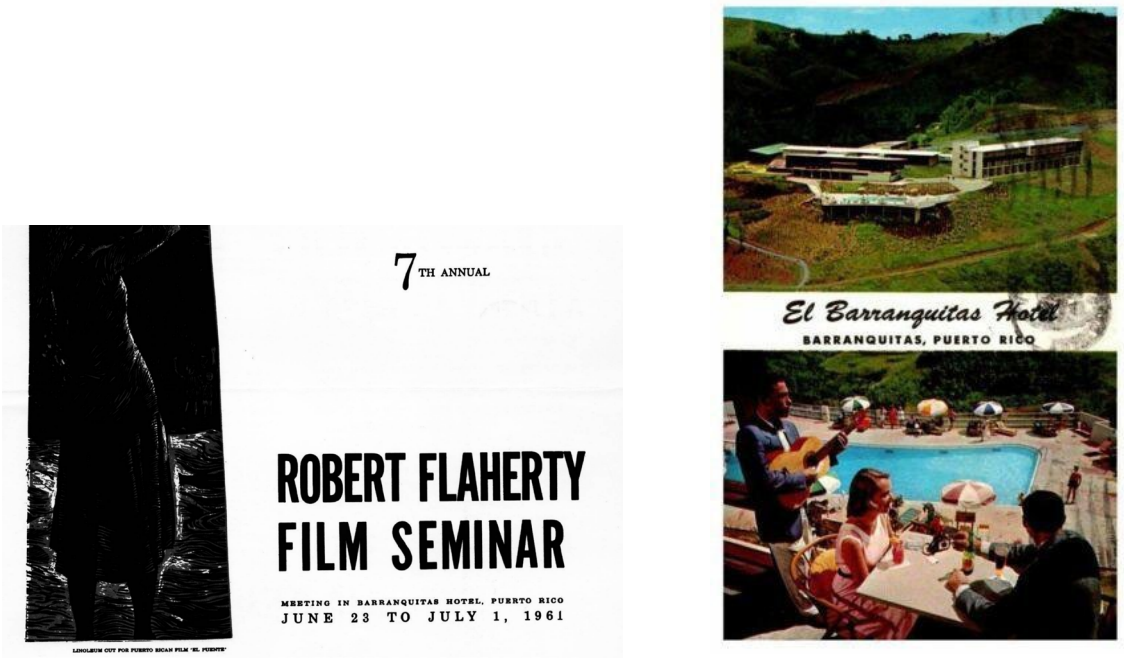

Figure 1.12 Souvenirs from the 1961 Flaherty Seminar in Puerto Rico: Robert Flaherty Film Seminar 1961 Program (left, Hans Richter Collection, MoMA) and a hotel postcard (right, personal collection).

As early as December 1959, internal correspondence within the board of the Flaherty Foundation repeatedly allude to a "Marqués idea" or "Puerto Rico idea," ostensibly to refer to a letter addressed to the Foundation from the Puerto Rican playwright and director of the Editorial unit of the Division of Community Education.[120] The letter itself was not available at any of the

[120] David Flaherty, Letter to Jack Churchill, 14 December 1959, Jack Churchill File, Correspondence Box 71, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia.

archives consulted, but the responses it elicited from the Flaherty leadership and previous appeals from Marqués to other U.S. based cultural institutions allow us to piece together the gist of its content.[121] Marqués, it seems, had been floating the idea of having the DivEdCo host an upcoming edition of the Flaherty Seminar in Puerto Rico, though it had yet to gain traction in Vermont. René Marqués' tenure at the helm of the editorial unit had been characterized by his insistence on exporting the work of the DivEdCo to cultural institutions abroad.[122] As a firm believer in the value of the agency as a hub for Puerto Rican artistic expression, he often took up the role of ambassador for the work of the DivEdCo.[123] For example, at the inauguration of a Puerto Rican film festival at the Brooklyn Museum in 1957, Marqués delivered an opening speech titled "A Few Words to New Yorkers" that dismantled the idea of a "Puerto Rican problem," then a euphemism for Puerto Rican migration to New York City in the 1950s.[124] Although Marqués had not attended a seminar before writing his letter, his proposal to have the island host the next Flaherty fell within this tendency toward cultural rapprochement between Puerto Ricans and Americans sympathetic to the island's political plight—foremost as compatriots, but also as artists.

The Flaherty board initially did not entertain the Marqués idea, but the exigencies of its looming incorporation into the International Film Seminars hastened their search for a new institutional sponsor. Faced with the prospect of another enrollment fee hike and a downsizing of the 1960 seminar, board member and scientific filmmaker Jack Churchill proposed, "The only

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[121] The letter likely sits at the inactive Archive of the Department of Education in San Juan, shuttered since 2007. Mimeographed copies of all the documentation of Marqués tenure at the DivEdCo had also been collected in the Archivo René Marqués in Río Piedas by his partner, José Lacomba. Throughout the years, however, this archive has been the target of recent robberies and much of its contents—including unpublished screenplays and original artwork from the period—have gone missing.

[122] Catherine R. Marsh, "La negociación de la cultura en una nación sin estado: La producción cultural de la División de Educación de la Comunidad del Estado Libre Asodado de Puerto Rico (1948-1968)" (PhD Diss), University of California Berkeley, 2001, 134.

[123] In 1952, Marqués helped organize an exhibition of Puerto Rican serigraphy at the Brooklyn Museum. Years later, he teamed up with Richard Griffith to present a series of "Puerto Rican Evenings" at the MoMA featuring DivEdCo films.

[124] René Marqués, "A Few Words to New Yorkers," 27 October 1957, Department of Film Exhibition File 72, MoMA.

answer I see for the economics question (...) is outright subsidy by film-making groups. Hence Puerto Rico idea, and NFB. Good old-fashioned socialism."[125] With the endorsement of the board, the planning of the 1961 edition of the Flaherty Film Seminar in Puerto Rico began in earnest in August of 1960 when Frances Flaherty presented to the trustees a formal invitation from the island government.[126] A priority item that year for the International Film Seminars, so it would seem, would be to actually hold a film seminar internationally (Figure 1.12).

There were some misgivings from the board and long-time Flaherty Foundation members in the run-up to the 1961 seminar. While expressing some enthusiasm for the change of scenery, the older Flaherty participants found it difficult to attend an offshore seminar and feared that the meeting would be poorly attended.[127] Others expressed gratitude that they had been relieved of the responsibility of planning what figured to be the most logistically challenging event in the seminar's short history. Sensing a rapidly spreading reluctance to travel to the Caribbean for the meeting, the French-Canadian film editor and founder of the Festival International du Film de Montréal, Guy Coté, even submitted a late bid to host the event at the Montréal headquarters of the National Film Board. However, Frances Flaherty believed that holding a seminar in Puerto Rico could be the most important act in the institution's young history. She was, as many were, concerned about the financial viability of the new organization, but as the date grew nearer, she sensed a historical shift happening in the Caribbean region, which had just witnessed the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and the successful assassination of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. In 1961, Frances writes, "I think we can be ambassadors of good will at this critical time in the Caribbean."[128] A

[125] Jack Churchill, Letter to Frances Flaherty, 18 February 1960, Jack Churchill File, Correspondence Box 71, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia.
[126] IFS Trustees "Minutes," 13 August 1960, Minute Book 1960-1967 File, Flaherty Papers Box 22, NYU.
[127] John Adams, Letter to Frances Flaherty, 10 September 1960, John Adams File, Correspondence Box 70, Flaherty Foundation Papers, Columbia.
[128] Frances Flaherty, Letter to Teves, 26 January 1961, FH Flaherty 1961 File, General Correspondence Box 11, Flaherty Papers, Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New York City, NY.

conference on film education now seemed to veer into the diplomatic.[129] The Division of Community Education, after long negotiations between Fred Wale and David Flaherty, agreed to host the 1961 Flaherty Seminar, finally uniting the two institutions in the mountain town of Barranquitas (Figure 1.13).

EL MUNDO, SAN JUAN, P. R. — SABADO, 1ro. DE JULIO DE 1961.

Participantes y anfitriones del Seminario de Cine Flaherty que se lleva a cabo actualmente en el hotel Barranquitas, disfrutan de una velada con don Sindo, el último de lo sauténticos pleneros de Puerto Rico, quien aparece a la extrema derecha de esta tirilla, acompañado de su grupo. En la foto a la izquierda aparecen, de izquierda a derecha: Guy Coté, del "National Film Board of Canada", Reginaldo Rivera y Amilcar Tirado, de la unidad de cinema de la División de Educación de la Comunidad. En la foto al centro, aparecen, de izquierda a derecha: Rafael Tufiño, director de la unidad de Artes Gráficas; el escritor Emilio Díaz Valcárcel; Alfonso Borrel y Reginaldo Rivera, de la unidad de cinema local; la señorita Mary Dickinson, artista de Boston; John Korty, director de Nueva York; Luis A. Maisonet, director en la unidad de cine local; y el señor Robert Steele, profesor de Artes de Comunicación en la Universidad de Boston.

(Fotos EL MUNDO y Depto. de Instrucción)

En Hotel Barranquitas

Asistentes a Seminario de Cine Flaherty Gozan de un Concierto de Plenas Ponceñas

Por Sandra L. Rodríguez ... va a cabo en el hotel Barranqui... dad de cinema de la referida ... fesional. La experiencia ... oportunidad de ... hacer películas a tragalas al Se...

Figure 1.13. Participants enjoy the 1961 Flaherty Film Seminar reception in Hotel Barranquitas. In Sandra L. Rodríguez, "Asistentes a Seminario de Cine Flaherty Gozan de un Concierto de Plenas Ponceñas," *El mundo*, 1 July 1961, 4.

The DivEdCo spared no expense. Flaherty seminarians were received by folk dance numbers, sampling of traditional Puerto Rican cookery, and live plena music by Gumersindo Mangual, whose lyrics had been the target of outrage at the prior year's seminar. Jean Rouch, after praising *Santero* as the best educational film he had seen in the '58 edition, was named guest of honor for the 1961 session and would present *Cronique d'un eté*, although it is unclear if he was able to attend.[130] Peter Brook showed rushes of *Lord of the Flies* (1961), which he had been filming on the island. *Festival in Puerto Rico* celebrated its island premiere. Widely referred to as a highlight of the

[129] It would not be the last time the Flaherty Film Seminar would fashion itself as a diplomatic envoy. The 1991 edition was held in Riga, Latvia to commemorate the end of the Cold War. 45 filmmakers from the West and the former Soviet Union were invited to participate.
[130] Young and Zweiback, 46.

proceedings, the participants were asked to join the DivEdCo on field surveys and mobile cinema screenings. Tinged by a measure of exoticism, the seminar programmer, Dorothy Oshlag (Figure 1.14), describes the experience as follows,

> The seminar in Puerto Rico took on a life of its own. Among other things, we went out to remote hillside barrios with mobile film units from the Department of Education, sat on the ground with the local inhabitants and saw with their eyes. I understood how the Inuit must have felt when Flaherty put up a sheet and screened footage of Nanook and the Walrus.[131]

The Flaherty and the DivEdCo had come full circle. Just as Amílcar had been awed by the reception of Nanook in the Puerto Rican countryside, Dorothy Oshlag marveled at the manner in which the DivEdCo films captivated its intended audiences. However, if Dorothy may have felt that the seminar "took on a life of its own," it is likely because the IFS leadership was barely involved in its operation. The Department of Education's (formerly the Department of Public Instruction) sponsorship had come at a crucial time in the seminar's history, yet it had also come equally restrictive conditions. For one, the Puerto Rican government would take on all aspects of the seminar organization outside of the specific selections of films to program, down to a visit from functionaries from the highest levels of government. Second, by involving the Division's fieldwork in the curriculum, film had taken backseat to the projection of a Puerto Rican modernity whose cracks were beginning to show. The seminar was taken out of the hands of the Division's artists and cultural workers and treated by the Muñoz Marín administration as an all-expenses paid visit for film diplomats to tour regions of the island most likely to register as "backwards" in the eyes of a foreigner, in order to better contrast with the luxurious Hotel Barranquitas and the prosperous city of San Juan. While it would seem appropriate to celebrate the 1961 edition of the Flaherty Film

[131] She continues, "The truly spellbinding evening of that seminar was the showing of Frances's own print of *Pather Panchali,* in 35mm, without subtitles. Our screening was in the dining-room of a small hotel we had been given high in up in the mountains in the center of Puerto Rico. At night, the sliding glass doors could be opened: the jungle sound track of tree frogs and night animals wove itself into the film. It was magical. At the end, the entire group was completely silent. Tears were seen. Dorothy Oshlag Olson, "Dorothy O. Olson," In *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema,* special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996): 50.

Seminar in Puerto Rico as a consummation of the shared pedagogical aims of each institution, the event was illustrative of the main tension between the state and its artists in Puerto Rico, namely, an established pattern of public institutions instrumentalizing any organic artisanal and intellectual activity pursued under its umbrella. Despite the PPD's obvious co-option of the proceedings, the success of the seminar was proof of the viability of the subsidy model which the International Film Seminars continue to follow to this day. The Flaherty Seminar in Puerto Rico marked a turning point in its development, which allowed the legendary gathering to eventually become the longest-running film society in the Americas.

Figure 1.14 Dorothy Oshlag relaxing after a long seminar week, published in Barnouw & Zimmerman, 93.

In Fall 1961, Guy Coté, presumably seething after being spurned by the Flaherty, resolved to hold a three-day, seminar-like event to open the 2nd Annual Montreal International Film Festival.[132] The occasion would attempt to marry two ethnographic tendencies developing between France and

[132] "Filmmakers' Seminar a Montreal Click Though More Secretive Than Kremlin," *Variety,* 16 August 1961, 7.

Latin America: the French New Wave and the nascent national cinemas of Latin America. Francois Truffaut and Jean Rouch were be invited to represent the New Wave, the latter skipping the Puerto Rican Flaherty in order to attend this competing event. Representing Latin America was DivEdCo filmmaker Amílcar Tirado. Displaying his signature critical generosity, Amílcar offered an optimistic vision about the socially committed cinema of the Division. He argued, as he always did, that cinema was a tool for a liberatory, humanist education. The French—unclear if said by Jean Rouch, Francois Truffaut, or Alexei Alexeieff specifically—dismissed his concerns as symptomatic of a cinematic underdevelopment, a condition already eradicated in the cinemas of the First World.[133] If Puerto Rican cinema was a tool, they reasoned, then the French cinema is a toy. Following the conclusion of the festival, the French-Canadian trade press took up the toy-tool debate in the Québecoise film journal Objectif,

> Talking about our sex lives for three days would have been more stimulating than talking about the so-called social conscience of the filmmaker, of which he has no more of than the common streetsweeper. Basically, everyone, doing his job, has a social conscience, a moral or political responsibility, equal to all men. You are not obliged because you are a filmmaker to make absolutely propaganda films, or absolutely educational films, or films that will change the face of the world. I make a film because I feel like it.[134]

[133] Luis M. Escribano, "Seminario Canadá Destaca Ponencia de un Boricua," *El mundo,* 5 September 1961, 7, 11.
[134] Pierre Patry, "Mais je n'ai vu aucun monstre!," *Objectif* 1.9-10 (October 1961): 17-20.

Figure 1.15 Amílcar Tirado, Dorothy Oshlag, David Flaherty, and other kneeling around a sitting Frances, presumably at 1961 seminar (left). Amílcar Tirado, Luis Maisonet, Héctor Moll, and David Flaherty consult the seminar program (right). Images provided by digital exhibition *Peripecias creativas: 100 de Amilcar Tirado, 1922-2022* (Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2023).

Why revisit the seminar now? Why should it matter that Puerto Rican government film, made in part to uphold the island's colonial status, was featured in Flaherty programming? What can we take away from the DivEdCo's decision to go back to school (Figure 1.15)? I can only answer the first question with a provocation, first posed by Chon Noriega after his own programming of the 1993 Flaherty Film Seminar, in response to an escalating antagonism between the aging New American cineastes and a diverse coalition of young Latinx media artists in the 1980s,

> I had come to see myself as entangled in a Catch-22. One the one hand, I felt that there remained an urgent need to do these exhibitions, because we are still trying to understand Chicano/Latino media production as a culturally—and politically—constituted body of work; and, in some instances, as one that has had significant interactions with (or within) the other alternative cinemas and movements in this hemisphere… But, on the other hand, if Latino cinema represents a valid specialization, it is not likely to be seen as a valid vantage point from which to theorize broader issues within the field. It should be, but postmodern correctness or lip service aside, the center and its margins do not add up to a whole in most intellectual and institutional circles. The center speaks for the whole, while the margin supplements a "new" specific content… According to the minority critique—which is often stated, rarely heard—"Whites get to theorize, while people of color present their wares." Thus, while there is a need to examine Latino cinema, the "politics of exhibition" is such that these programs help establish inclusion according to the same old center-margin relations.[135]

[135] Chon A. Noriega, "On Curating," In *The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema,* special issue of *Wide Angle* 17.1-4 (1996), 399.

Noriega's was not merely a call for an accented avant-garde to rebalance a seminar programming in which a stale old guard had been historically overrepresented. His curatorial agenda included the centering of culture-specific film practice, the recuperation of minority filmmakers within "American" film movements from which their participation has been effaced, and a broad resistance to the national as an operative category of film discourse. These goals find their antecedents in the modest agitations of the Division of Community Education at the Flaherty Seminars between 1956 and 1961, a period after which they were displaced—ironically enough—from center to margin by an energetic avant-garde grown dissatisfied with formal convention and didacticism in independent film. During this period, however, the DivEdCo exposed new audiences to Puerto Rican cultural expression by way of its own documentaries or strategic film collaborations, served as a bridge between regional ripples in film practice which became global new waves, and underwrote the Flaherty Seminars' initial international turn.

More often than it has indicated the future of independent filmmaking, the gathering has served as a mirror of the times. In recent years, several film scholars and seminar regulars have remarked that the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, despite donning the name of a filmmaker now commonly associated with an orientalist and extractive gaze toward his indigenous subjects, has made space for minoritized communities to lead conversations about the state of the art.[136] As Noriega's account shows, the transformation of the seminars as an unexpected site of colonial reckonings and reconciliations did not happen overnight.[137] But neither did it only begin in the

[136] See: Segoopta; Scott MacDonald, "Desegregating Film History: Avant-Garde Film and Race at the Robert Flaherty Seminar, and Beyond," In *Adventures of Perception: Cinema as Exploration* Ed. Scott MacDonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 10-80.

[137] In this transcript of a Flaherty discussion from 1993, the seminar boiled over when its very obsolescence to the centrality of class, race, and gender in the event programming. Ruth Bradley, "Old Model, New World (1994)," in "The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema," eds. Erik Barnouw and Patricia Zimmermann, *Wide Angle* 17.1-4, Special Issue (1995): 405–7.

1980s.[138] The Puerto Rican contribution is only a small part of this history, now covered by a well-diversified registry of faculty, students, and films which have given the Flaherty Seminars an international face. But for those ten days every August, the artists of the Division of Community Education shared their films with the global film community in a rare forum where they could be discussed as educational tools, as art objects for their own sake, and as fodder for film theory. One must revisit the seminar now because that story has been told without its accent.

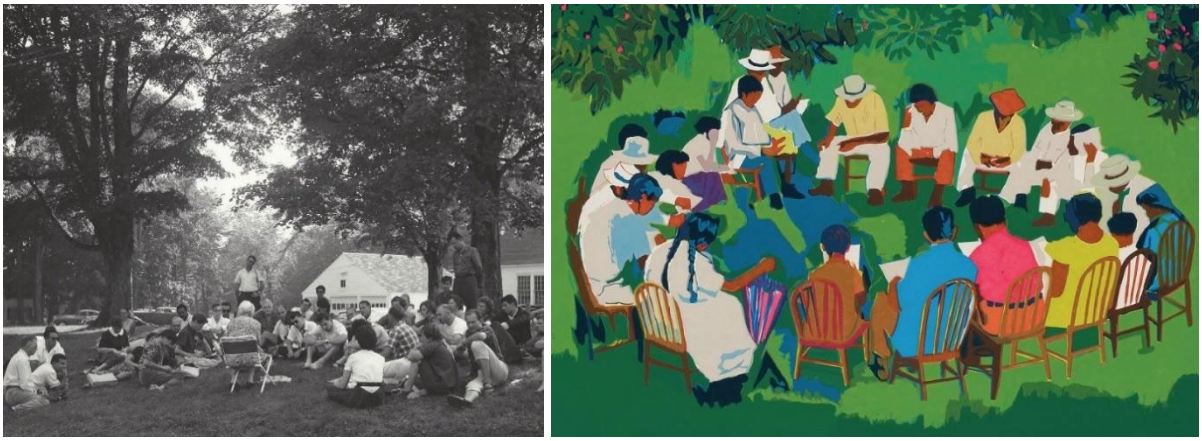

Figure 1.16 Participants gathered around Frances Flaherty at the 1960 seminar in Vermont (left, image from International Film Seminars). Rafael Tufiño's poster for the 25th Anniversary of the DivEdCo, featuring a rural reading group (right).

To answer the last question, it is best to understand the early Flaherty Film Seminars and the Division of Community Education as two parallel approaches to institutional film pedagogy developed in tandem with one another (Figure 1.16). In their time, both were mirrored institutional experiments in building an independent infrastructure for an independent cinema. If the DivEdCo was an attempt to foster community through film, then these early Flaherty seminars sought to further the study of film through community. As Zöe Druick has previously argued, organizations such as the Flaherty, the DivEdCo, and the National Film Board "helped to push issues about education and film into an institutional setting where, for better or worse, they gained the credibility

[138] Zimmerman writes that during the early '80s as feminist, Marxist, structuralist, and post-colonial studies entered the college curriculum, the seminar programming began to account for works produced by people of color or origins in nations whose cinemas were considered minor. MacDonald and Zimmerman, 148.

required to emerge as a fully-fledged area of study."[139] Ultimately, this transinstitutional collaboration was an attempt to set a foundation for the study of film in Puerto Rico, an initiative which initially received the full-throated support from the highest levels of the territorial government, but was ultimately rescinded as policy became increasingly indifferent to the concerns of the community film program and Puerto Rican cultural production at large.[140] Moreover, the dynamic of having Puerto Rican film professionals receive their technical and theoretical formation within U.S.-based institutions has remained virtually unchanged and unchallenged in the decades since. Film Studies, as a field, does not exist as an formal discipline or academic program in Puerto Rican education.[141] As with so many of the goods, services, and resources rendered artificially scarce by the island's colonial status, film education is yet another sector that is, under the current conditions, attained only through outsourcing. For those who wish to pursue a vocation in film as an art or an object of study, the act of obtaining an education is a process that necessarily produces diasporic subjects. Prospective film students may choose whether to enroll in U.S.-based degree programs—often at great personal cost and with limited pathways toward an eventual return—or, alternatively, they may choose to either become autodidacts or abandon course altogether. Alongside other minoritized ethnic and racial groups enrolled in university programs, film study by Puerto Ricans in the U.S. has become today an accented cultural practice marked by a formative dislocation, despite the consistent presence and material effects of Puerto Rican artists in the seminar rooms and projection halls where the study of film first inched toward its institutionalization.

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[139] Druick (2008), 87.
[140] Lauria-Petricelli, "Images…" For a more extensive account of the Puerto Rican government's sponsorship of and ultimate disinvestment from cultural institutions such as the DivEdCo, see also: Dávila, *Sponsored Identities.*
[141] Traditional course offerings in film theory or history is usually housed within language, literature, and communications department, but no individual degree-granting program exists. In addition, the island's lone four-year film production program at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón is geared toward the advertising industry.

As Hamid Naficy describes in *An Accented Cinema*—the influential postcolonial critique of exile and diasporic filmmaking to which this chapter's title alludes—the films of displaced artists are characterized by linguistic and cultural slippages, multisensory homages to the homeland, and gestures of defiance toward the dominant culture. [142] All of these qualities are present in the anecdote which opens the chapter; the adverse reaction of the Flaherty crowd, the tactility and percussive rhythms of the plena drum, the vernacular struggle against American empire, and a resistance to discipline—academic, colonial, or both. The liminal subjectivities of Puerto Rican filmmakers and interstitial locations of Puerto Rican film were expressed through acts of spectatorship and discussion at the Flaherty Seminars, uttered not just onscreen but through the choice words and the thick accents of its presenters.

[142] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Seminar: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 10.

Chapter 2 Non-incorporated Geographies of the New American Cinema: A Film-Cooperative Roadmap

Our fundamental purpose is to form a national (sic) Puerto Rican cinema.
We will attempt to use the medium to present Puerto Rico with dignity and respect.

- Amílcar Tirado, *Variety*, 29 March 1961[1]

Not long after their films began to be featured at festivals and seminars abroad, a rift had opened between cinema and literature in the Division of Community Education. Emilio Díaz Varcárcel recalls the frustration in the writers' room toward the Cinema Unit for their perceived lack of curiosity in their medium. "Those cinema guys did not keep up with international film," they would often be heard commenting while waiting in vain for their own opportunity to direct films. In response, members of the Cinema Unit often reminded a room full of jilted screenwriters that they were close to literature but too far from cinema. Cinema Unit Director Amílcar Tirado was at the front of the cinephiles' offensive. He believed that reacting to contemporary trends in world cinema—and, in fact, the involvement of too many literary minds—would act as "contaminants" to their own. "Look," Tirado reasoned, "with basically nothing but a little camera, a simple story, beautiful and uncomplicated, you can work wonders."

The writers, including Editorial Director René Marqués, sensed an implicit labor issue in the proposed expulsion of novelists, poets, and playwrights from the filmmaking process. After all, film was a collective art, no? That much should have been clear to anyone in the ten-year-old agency. Tirado, long Marqués' main antagonist, believed in the collaborative nature of film, but he had a knack for getting his way.

[1] Al Dinhofer, "20 Puerto Rican Technicians Form a 'Film Cooperative'," *Variety,* 29 March 1961, 15.

René expressed his frustration by shouting what everyone at the Division's offices already knew: "I'm sick and tired that in this goddamned office anything that Miki Tirado says goes!"

René had a point. Emilio Díaz Valcárcel explains that, as the prodigal son of *muñocismo,* the Division of Community Education leadership saw in Amílcar Tirado's career living proof of a Puerto Rican modernity. Tirado was, according to the author, "a talented *mulatitto* from the countryside who embodied the hopes of the working class, who identify with his films even as they watch them from below." It is not just the DivEdCo who was invested in his films, it was the weight of the entire Commonwealth apparatus which buttressed Amílcar's camera.[2]

Or, at least, that is one, oft-cited account of the institutional mythology of the DivEdCo's most accomplished filmmaker, Amílcar Tirado, an artist who remained on good terms with all of the Commonwealth's cultural institutions even as he sought to break free from them. This chapter examines one of Tirado's more infamous exploits toward this end. The study traces the activities of the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, Producciones del Viejo San Juan (the "Cine-coop," as its members translated it, or simply "the Co-op" for brevity) in Puerto Rico and beyond. Founded in 1961 by Amílcar Tirado and other members of the Division of Community Education, the Cine-coop was one of the first attempts in the Americas to establish an independent, national cinema through organized cooperative means. This chapter documents the archival trace of the Puerto Rican Cine-coop beyond the movies it made, uncovering its part in establishing film festivals, publications, cine-clubs, and other critical media infrastructure in coordination with a broader film-cooperative movement blossoming in North America. In particular, the Puerto Ricans opted for the commercial model that filmmaker Shirley Clarke had envisioned for the cotemporaneous and better-known New York Film-maker's Co-op ("New York Co-op" or "Film-maker's Co-op"). If it is

[2] Díaz Valcárcel, 183-184.

recalled at all, the Cine-coop today is widely considered a failed venture due to circumstances surrounding its first feature film, *Más allá del capitolio* ("Beyond the Capitol," Amílcar Tirado, 1963), which was pulled from theatres despite the momentum of media coverage during its production and premiere. The second part of the chapter distills impressions from *Más allá del capitolio*'s production history to recreate the film as the site of new historical potentialities, positioning it as a point of bifurcation in the development of an independent, trans-institutional, and anti-establishment cinema on the island. Through an accounting of the Cine-coop's broader, film-adjacent ventures and a revision of its place within the global film-cooperative movements of the mid-1960s, this chapter recuperates the true yield of the Puerto Rican film cooperative labor.

More often than not, those efforts materialized offscreen. In 1966, the Co-op reappears as the chief organizer of the First Annual Inter-American Festival of the Arts, an event backed by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture meant to showcase the arts of the member countries of the Pan American Union. While the Cine-coop had been mostly dormant following its abortive screen debut, there was a coordinated attempt to unite the film-cooperative infrastructure between New York City and San Juan at the 1966 Inter-American Festival of the Arts held in Puerto Rico, proposing the latter city as a central node in the production and distribution of independent film from the transhemispheric Americas. I argue that the proposed Inter-American Co-op constituted an attempt by Puerto Rican filmmakers, sensing the government's imminent divestment from the DivEdCo, to assure the continued contribution of the Division's artists to film culture both within the island and internationally, but also as a way to integrate themselves into the New American Cinema and other hemispheric new waves, movements they sensed had been well underway without them. Ultimately, although the film-cooperative movements between San Juan and New York could not enact a formal partnership, one unintended effect of the Inter-American Festival of the Arts was to introduce to a wider audience the work of queer, Nuyorican underground filmmaker José

Rodríguez Soltero. By juxtaposing the critical rejection of Puerto Rican cultural *and cooperative* production between the island and its diaspora in New York, I explore the limits of the Cine-coop's quest for a national cinema while proposing Rodríguez Soltero's work as an alternative cooperative model, one that finds its roots in the work of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Together, this chapter attempts to reconcile the anti-establishment nature of North American film-cooperative movements—mostly represented in the New York avant-garde—with the counter-institutional practices of the Cine-coop.

Film scholar Juan Suárez has argued that the widely accepted interchangeability between the terms "New American Cinema" and "underground film" is ahistorical, noting that were actually two distinct, albeit simultaneous and often overlapping avant-garde film movements in the New York City of the midcentury.[3] The latter proved to be a more capacious umbrella term for the proliferation of independently produced, cooperatively distributed, low-budget, and artisanal films in New York, to the point where Jonas Mekas—author of the First Statement of the New American Cinema Group—came to adopt the term himself. Suárez's revision restricts the underground cinema to the span between the popularization of midnight screenings of experimental cinema in 1961 and 1966, which marked a broader turn toward structuralism in the avant-garde. It is this window which we will explore in this chapter, a time where both U.S. and Puerto Rican cinema seemed to be breaking free of its industrial and institutional models, respectively. The study is pushed forward by inquiry: where was the New American Cinema?

[3] Juan Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 55.

A Tale of Two Co-ops: La Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, Producciones del Viejo San Juan

> *What have we found in the Co-op that departs from what came before? The dream of all the great artists and directors to have money to make the films they wish to make, free from the control of the large monopolies. This is the opportunity we have today. We can say that we have been liberated from the hangman.*
>
> - Amílcar Tirado, *El mundo,* 21 September 1962[4]

Filmmaking and film exhibition have been a cooperative undertaking since the earliest years of the medium. Pudovkin viewed "collective film-work" as the defining characteristic of filmmaking.[5] Labor and cooperative movements across Europe adopted film screenings into their programs as early as 1897.[6] In fact, ideologies of individualism, bound up with the rise of the studio system and reinforced later by the cult of the auteur, were relatively late developments in the history of cinema.[7] In times of crisis, however, film has tended to revert to the collectivist forms of its early days. In 1961, the machinery of industrial cinema was failing. New York-based filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Shirley Clarke, and others—emboldened by the recent success of local independent cinema—banded together to form the New American Cinema Group. Written in Mekas' unmistakably flamboyant prose, their famous manifesto in opposition to the industrial mode of film production ends, "We don't want rosy films—we want them the color of blood."[8] The New York Film-makers' Cooperative was founded shortly thereafter on February 18, 1962 with the goal of circulating independent films in a "non-exclusive, nondiscriminatory" manner, where no artist's submission would be subject to any qualitative judgment and the filmmakers themselves would set

[4] Luis M. Escribano, "Dice Moca se Ha Convertido en Personaje Principal en Film 'Más Allá del Capitolio'," *El mundo,* 21 September 1962, 14.
[5] He writes, "The technical manager can achieve nothing without foremen or workmen, and their collective effort will lead to no good result if every collaborator limit himself only to a mechanical performance of his narrow function." V.I. Pudovkin, Film Technique and Film Acting (London: Vision Press, 1968): 136.
[6] Alan Burton, *The People's Cinema: Film and the Co-operative Movement* (London: BFI, 1994): n.p.
[7] Janet Staiger, "Individualism Versus Collectivism: The Shift to Independent Production in the US Film Industry," *Screen* 24.4-5 (July – October 1983): 79.
[8] "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," *Film Culture* 22-23 (1961): n.p.

the prices to loan their work.[9] The Film-Makers' Co-op has since become the longest-running film-cooperative organization in the world, supplying non-theatrical spaces with a vast catalog of experimental, avant-garde, and—above all—independent films. Undoubtably, the New York cooperative movement was the progenitor of many similar efforts elsewhere—in London, Paris, the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Toronto, and beyond—and grandfathered many other film collectives of its kind.

Obscured within that longevity is the fact that the Film-makers' Co-op had a an older sibling. Established in February 1961, La Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, Producciones del Viejo San Juan (Figure 2.1) preceded the founding of the more famous Film-makers' Co-op by a year, both roused by a wave of anti-Hollywood fervor and a turn to alternative models for small-scale film production and exhibition. At the time, it was billed as the first of its kind in the Americas.[10] Comprised of current and ex-members of the Puerto Rican Division of Community Education, this state-adjacent film co-op shared with its counterpart in New York City the goals of constructing an alternative film infrastructure via film productions, the publication of trade journals, regulars programs at independent film theaters, experimental and avant-garde film festivals, and the institutionalization of film studies through seminars and workshops, among many other activities. The Cine-coop and the Film-makers' Co-op—albeit belonging to two different avant-gardes, one explicitly nationalist and the other more counter-cultural—shared scattered, yet key points of contact during this time. This section aims to reintegrate the Caribbean artists and technicians involved in the Puerto Rican Cine-coop into the broader panorama of the film-cooperative

[9] David E. James, "Introduction," In *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground,*" ed. David E. James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 10.
[10] Daily periodicals on the island frequently made the claim that La Cooperativa is the first such organization in the world, but the Puerto Rican film-cooperative movement is preceded by previous cooperative film groups in the U.S., U.K., and France. Duncan Petrie, "Bryanston Films: An Experiment in Cooperative Independent Film Production and Distribution," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 38.1 (March 2018): 95–115.

movements of the 1960s, drawing that history southward from the North Atlantic. Thus, one can begin to conceive of the New American Cinema partly as an unfulfilled hemispheric project.[11]

The idea to form a film co-op in San Juan emerged out of necessity. During the height of the DivEdCo in the late 1950s, a growing rift had developed between the Editorial and Cinema sections of the Division of Community Education. The former apprentices—Amílcar Tirado, Oscar Torres, Luis Maisonet, Ángel F. Rivera, Marcos Betancourt, etc.—now found themselves as the seniormost filmmakers in the studio. On the Editorial side, established writers from the *Generación de los Cincuenta* ("The '50s Generation"), such as section director René Marqués and Pedro Juan Soto felt they had outgrown their previous roles and argued for greater creative control over film production beyond writing the screenplays, as the excerpt from Díaz Valcárcel's memoir which opens the chapter recounts. In the Cinema Unit, Amílcar Tirado leveraged his own directorial vision against the educational framework demanded by Divisional Director Fred Wale, which led to further discontent in the writers' room.[12] All of these creative negotiations are captured in a particularly fiery exchange early in Marqués' tenure, where Tirado pushed back against the Editorial Unit's lack of film expertise, claimed that the agency's educational style had become "passé" among the international film community, and proposed that the DivEdCo invest resources into more experimental pursuits in equal measure to its educational projects.[13] Toward the end of the decade, it had become clear to

[11] In recent years, many scholars have begun to establish that the New American Cinema *was* a hemispheric project from the start. For Jonas Mekas, the plan for the Co-op was to expand to the European market, but he frequented film festivals in Latin America. For example, the phrase "New American Cinema"—as opposed to "the American New Wave"—was popularized abroad among attendees at the 1962 meeting of the Mar del Plata Festival in Argentina. Further, Thomas Winfield Hafer has found that members of the older generation of the queer underground in New York—whose epicenter was in Manhattan's Lower East Side, a Puerto Rican enclave—frequently traveled to Mexico and the Caribbean to make films. Older film artists such as Henri Charles Ford, Willard Maas, Charles Boultenhouse, Gregory Markopoulos, among many other were drawn to Puerto Rico for its open gay culture in San Juan. This is to say, that there remains much to be explored in the New American Cinema Group's connections to Latin America. See: Thomas Winfield Hafer, "'The Last of the Great Bohemians': Film Poetry, Myth, and Sexuality in Greenwich Village and the Atlantic, 1930-1975," PhD diss, City University of New York, 2014.
[12] Marsh Kennerley, 109.
[13] Marsh Kennerley, 107.

artists in either medium that their current arrangement at the Division was a mere marriage of convenience. DivEdCo filmmakers began to look beyond the institution to develop their artistic careers, either through other public arts and cultural agencies or the growing independent television and entertainment industry on the island.

Of the DivEdCo, no one would go further in either direction than filmmaker Amílcar Tirado.[14] Amílcar Tirado had been one of the few Puerto Rican founding members of the Division. Hired as an unskilled laborer, Tirado had become the DivEdCo's most accomplished filmmakers by the end of the '50s. As his rivals in the Editorial Unit had surmised, he was also generally favored by the Luis Muñoz Marín administration and its arts and cultural organs.[15] By the early 60s, Tirado had been regularly serving as the preferred liaison between the Cinema Unit, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), and the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) for several collaborative film projects. For example, ICP Director Ricardo Alegría—a renowned Puerto Rican archaeologist—often entrusted Tirado to film theirs and Division's more ethnographically oriented work. Tirado directed *La plena*'s treatment of Afrodiasporic musical forms and *El santero*'s profile of a master woodcarver of religious icons, among many other works in this vein. Despite obtaining regular work from other film-producing government agencies, Tirado still required permission from Fred Wale to pursue projects or to use the facilities for outside work, which significantly delayed most of these inter-office co-productions.

Amílcar Tirado had also begun to explore opportunities in the private sector. The Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO, but more commonly shortened to *Fomento* in

[14] Segundo Quetell Velázquez's thesis traces Tirado's film career outside of the DivEdCo through an auteur studies lens. Néstor Segundo Quetell Velázquez, "Más allá de la DIVEDCO: Historiografía y Cine de Amílcar Tirado" (MA thesis), Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 2012.
[15] Carlos H. Malavé Sánchez, "Discurso populista en el cine de Amílcar Tirado: Una aproximación al cine de la División de Educación de la Comunidad" (MA tesis), University of Puerto Rico – Río Piedras, 1986.

Spanish) had begun to court foreign film studios and independent productions.[16] In 1959, a new tax exemption was strategically amended by the Luis Muñoz Marín administration to attract Spanish-language film industry talent and capital fleeing from the effects of the Cuban Revolution.[17] Jerónimo Mitchell Meléndez, an independent filmmaker who had mostly produced films in Europe, was lured back to the island by the these tax incentives. His company, Mitchell Productions, hired Amílcar Tirado to direct its one and only feature, *Ayer amargo* (1959), a well-cast, albeit generic melodrama which was successful in both the Puerto Rican and New York box offices. The film was among the first to take advantage of the new tax law. Its success signaled to local producers an immense growth potential in the domestic market, but perhaps more importantly, *Ayer amargo* gave to Amílcar Tirado the idea that a new model for a national film industry was possible.[18]

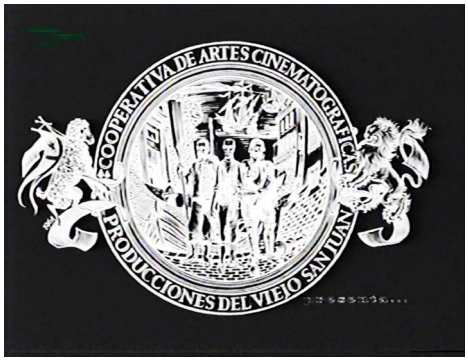

Figure 2.1 The logo of the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, taken from opening credits of *Más allá del capitolio* (Amílcar Tirado, 1963).

In response to the restrictive environment of government film and yearning for more directorial control over his films, Amílcar Tirado and company had begun to think seriously about a collective film venture made up of DivEdCo talent. However, the idea to incorporate as a

[16] PRIDCO or Fomento ("Compañía de Fomento Industrial") was a government agency founded in 1942 by U.S.-appointed governor Rexford Tugwell which was meant to bolster the construction of factories and industrial parks in pre-Commonwealth Puerto Rico, but had since been modified to function as a seed fund for outside investment. It worked in tandem with its sister agency, the Banco de Fomento ("Government Development Bank"), which was the financial body which either directly funded or administered loans to the projects chosen by the PRIDCO. Since the bank could not operate without the approval of Fomento, I will use this latter term interchangeably to refer to both.
[17] Nathaniel Soltero, "Enmienda a Ley Permite Exención Industria Fílmica," *El mundo,* 2 julio 1959, FLLM.
[18] María Saavedra Martínez, "Numeroso Público Asiste al Estreno de Cinta Puertorriqueña '*Ayer Amargo*'," *El mundo,* undated, 1960, IATR.

cooperative emerged from their extensive contacts with the international film community through their participation at the Flaherty Seminars, film festivals, and shadowing opportunities with successful film industry professionals abroad. Tirado's formation as a feature filmmaker is especially indebted to his participation in the 1957 and 1959 editions of the Flaherty Film Seminar. In the former event, Tirado befriended New York-based experimental filmmaker Shirley Clarke who, along with DivEdCo consultant Willard Van Dyke, would soon create the artists' collective Filmmakers Incorporated in 1958, a sort of spiritual predecessor of the Film-makers Co-op.[19] As Lauren Rabinovitz has noted, before New York-based film professionals built a vast infrastructure for independent cinema in the 1960s, Filmmakers' Inc. was a short-lived film-cooperative experiment which served as the headquarters for many of the artists who would later encompass the New American Cinema Group.[20] Following the Flaherty Seminar's conclusion, Tirado was invited to visit the set of a John Ford production, during which the veteran director advised the striving young filmmaker to look for opportunities outside of Hollywood. Tirado recounts Ford's warning as follows,

> Hollywood is a giant monster, strangling itself with its own size. Go home. Go home to Puerto Rico. There you can work in simplicity and create things which are original, unshackled by the complexities you would find here.[21]

Putting the paternalism of Ford's advice aside, Tirado would adopt an anti-Hollywood outlook and refocus his attention on establishing a national cinema in Puerto Rico following this meeting.

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[19] Established by filmmakers Shirley Clarke and Willard Van Dyke—two filmmakers with direct professional links to the DivEdCo film group and the eventual founders of the Puerto Rican Co-op—Filmmakers' Inc. also counted among its founding group direct cinema luminaries such as Ricky Leacock, D.A. Pennebakker, and Albert Maysles. Although not officially registered as a cooperative entity, Fimmakers Inc. functioned as a space where talent, expertise, and equipment flowed freely and free of charge, to the extent that Clarke has described it as a spiritual predecessor to the Filmmakers' Co-op.

[20] Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-1971* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 110.

[21] Kal Wagenheim, "Form Moviemaking Co-operative," *The Island Times,* 24 March 1961, n.p., *Más allá del capitolio* Dossier. Instituto Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, San Juan, PR. Any newspaper or journal article cited with missing page numbers was taken from IATR.

However, if Ford persuaded him to abandon breaking into Hollywood as his career aspiration, it was Shirley Clarke's breakthrough film with Filmmakers Inc., *Skyscraper* (Clarke, Van Dyke, Irving Jacoby, 1959) that provided Tirado with a viable model for a commercial alternative to Hollywood cinema. *Skyscraper* had been filmed by members of the Filmmakers Inc. under the sponsorship of construction, manufacturing, and appliance companies and had just won the top award at the Venice Film Festival in 1959. As the success of Clarke's and Van Dyke's film showed, a co-op would not need to rely on the leisurely bureaucracy of government filmmaking nor the irregular work that island-based studio productions could provide, but could instead leverage sponsored film and publicity contracts to fund their own projects.[22] In late 1960, Amílcar Tirado and a few DivEdCo co-conspirators resolved to form their own cooperative group, one which could continue to take on public contracts to use as seed funding for their vision of an independent, Puerto Rican film sector.

Figure 2.2. Amílcar Tirado (c. 1958) on one of his many field trips, this one to Rome. Photograph taken from by Audrey Hepburn, featured in Dodo, "El director," *Cine-guía* 1, no. 6 (April 1963): 18.

La Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas Producciones del Viejo San Juan was officially recognized as a cooperative entity on February 24, 1961, with Amílcar Tirado serving as its president

[22] As a semi-private, self-governing agency, Fomento sometimes funded private ventures if they deemed the projects beneficial to the state. José Orlando Sued, "Industrialización, educación, prensa y relaciones públicas: la Compañía de Fomento Industrial promueve a Puerto Rico, 1948 – 1956," In *La mirada en construcción: Ensayos sobre cultura visual,* eds. José Orlando Sued & René Rodríguez Ramírez (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2022): 205-247.

(Figure 2). As stated in its official filing, the Cine-coop's mission statement was to "introduce to the global market an art cinema that successfully competes with highly perfected foreign film."[23] The group had come up with an ingenious business model. Their choice to organize as a nonprofit capitalized on a favorable attitude toward cooperativism by the late Luis Muñoz Marín administration, which had instituted a policy that compelled municipal agencies to provide material support to registered co-ops free of charge, as long as it did not interfere with their regular operations. As a co-op registered in Old San Juan, this meant that the members of the Cine-coop would be allowed to use the Division of Community Education's film facilities outside of work hours.[24] The San Juan Co-op also benefitted from a close relationship with the office of Fomento, which granted the group coveted tax-exempt status and access to public loans and other avenues for funding.[25] Tirado managed to maintain his previous working relationship with the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the University of Puerto Rico, whose future co-productions would be administered through the co-op. The hope was that the contract work would provide a self-sustaining model for domestic film production which would pair independent film ventures with government contracts and public subventions, not unlike Shirley Clarke's own recent work. Despite this public-private maneuvering and the Cine-coop's adjacency to government agencies, Tirado repeated the claim in the local press that the collaborations would come with no strings attached.[26]

Cine-coop had gathered some of the most famous names in the popular arts of the island. In a letter addressed to PRIDCO President Gaspar Roca, Amílcar Tirado writes that the Co-op is comprised of film professionals who had undertaken twelve years of training in filmmaking, alluding

[23] Tirado, Letter to Gaspar Roca, FLLM.
[24] La Cooperativa's unregulated use of public resources would later some eyebrows among the few holdouts in the DivEdCo's Cinema Unit, some of which had been attempting to organize a separate collective under the title Cinebor (a portmanteau of "Cine Boricua").
[25] Luis Escribano, "Grupo se Dedicará a Hacer Películas Puertorriqueñas," *El Mundo,* 15 March 1961, 30.
[26] Wagenheim, "Form Moviemaking Co-operative."

to the fact that the majority of its members had been previously or were currently employed by the DivEdCo.[27] The group was led by long-time DivEdCo artists such as film directors Luis A. Maisonet and Amílcar Tirado, director of photography Gabriel Tirado (no relation to Amílcar), sound engineer Héctor Moll, and the graphic artists Antonio Maldonado and Rafael Tufiño, who by 1961 had become among the most well-known Puerto Rican artists in the international art world. They were joined by junior members of the Division such as editor Alfonso Borrell, producer Otoniel Vila, camera operator José "Pepe" Jolguera, soundman Victor Alonso, and lighting engineer Leslie Colombani, all of whom would become household names in the Puerto Rican entertainment industry beginning in the '60s rather than their DivEdCo tenure. Local journalists, television producers, and even former political appointees rounded out the group, which suggests that this initiative had the broad support of media professionals as well as government. In total, there were 24 members in the founding group of the Cine-coop. Of their roster, Tirado proclaimed, "Film needs from the carpenter, the chauffeur, and the cinematographer to be truly realized. This is also the projection of the cooperative movement."[28] The broad representation of Divisional staff reflected—beyond a growing dissatisfaction with the direction of the DivEdCo in those years—the Cinema Unit's understanding of film as a collective endeavor, though this show of egalitarianism stopped well short of actively including any women among the Co-op's founding members, at least for the time being.

[27] Tirado, Letter to Gaspar Roca, 3 May 1961.
[28] Luis M. Escribano, "Harán Cine Genuino Tipo Puertorriqueño," *El mundo – Suplemento Sabatino,* 1 April 1961, 11.

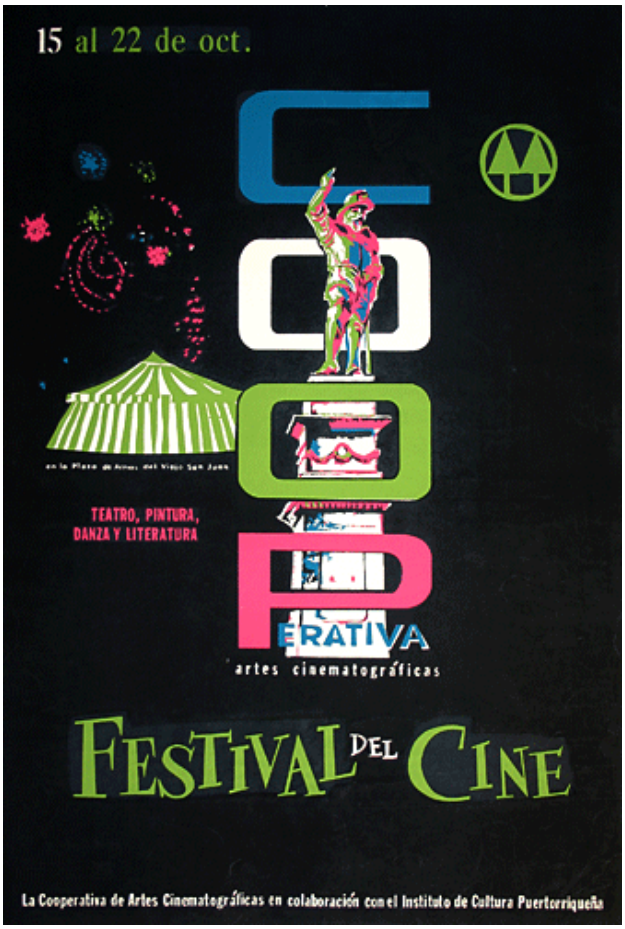

Figure 2.3. Poster for the Co-op's Film Festival (Rafael Tufiño, 1961).

As the Co-op accumulated the necessary capital to begin working on their first feature, they began laying the groundwork for a homegrown film culture beyond the screen.[29] They fundraised through several different means. The Cine-coop organized screenings, held workshops, and even lent their talent and equipment to foreign co-productions on the island. They had been filming their first short for a public agency, *Arquitectura colonial* (Tirado, 1962), which would be a documentary on the ICP's restoration of colonial-era architecture in Old San Juan. Toward the end of their inaugural year, Cine-coop celebrated its incorporation by organizing the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's

[29] Prior to *Arquitectura colonial,* their first project for the ICP which ended up taking five years to finish, the Cine-coop had one proposal for a short film rejected. The treatment of this untitled film project followed the escapades of a scrap collector in the island of Vieques, then an island municipality of Puerto Rico which was under occupation by the U.S. Navy. The protagonist finds a large cylinder and begins lugging it back to his house on a pushcart. On the way home, onlookers realize that he is carrying an unexploded ordnance which must have strayed from the nearby base, setting up a humorous and disproportionate response from the military.

yearly Cooperative Week, featuring a film festival as its main event (Figure 2.3). Held in Old San Juan in honor of the comedian Diplo—star of the DivEdCo's first feature-length film, *Los peloteros* ("The Ballplayers," Jack Delano, 1951)—the films would be accompanied by a ballet, a performance by the symphony orchestra, an exhibition of painting and engravings, a play, and other celebrations.[30] The film program consisted of exemplary independent shorts from around the world, which Amílcar Tirado was able to borrow from the Museum of Modern Art in New York by donating two prints from the DivEdCo catalog to their film library.[31] Led by the ever-resourceful Tirado, the film festival constituted material progress towards an alternative film infrastructure, a key tenet for any anti-industrial model of film distribution.

In 1962, the Cine-coop began to publish a monthly periodical, *Cine y Cultura* (Figure 2.4, left). Edited by newcomers Sandra Rodríguez and Miguel Soler Vega, *Cine y Cultura* counted among its contributors the most prominent figures in the contemporary arts. It featured original engravings by Rafael Tufiño, graphic design by Lorenzo Homar (Figure 2.4, right), a column on the intricacies of screenwriting by René Marqués, and a "State of the Institute of Culture" address from Ricardo Alegría.[32] They covered the production of *Arquitectura colonial* extensively. In its opening, collectively authored editorial, the magazine announces its intent to refine the Puerto Rican taste in cinema through criticism, but also to bring international film cultures into the island. They write, "For us the cinema is too important—making it, meditating on it, and growing with it—[to exclude] commentary and reports on the current state of this art internationally, its development, and its

[30] El Barón de Cardi, "Cooperativa de Arte Cinematográfico Rinde Homenaje a Memoria de Diplo," *El mundo,* 14 October 1961, 32.
[31] The Co-op seems to have relied on its close relationship with Museum of Modern Art Film Library Director Richard Griffith to source its program. In letters between Alfonso Borrell and MoMa staff between September and November 1961, the museum expresses its displeasure that the prints were overdue. Their last correspondence with Borrell ends, "Do you want to give them hell, or should I? And nevermore films for free to P.R." Margareta Akermark, Memo to Richard Griffith, Folder 72, Department of Film Exhibition, MoMA.
[32] "Revista Cine y Cultura," *El mundo,* 14 April 1962, 20.

importance to different communities of the world."[33] In its review column, the Cine-coop makes its most direct reference to the New American Cinema on record,

> [*The Connection,*] a film adapted from theatre by the young filmmaker Shirley Clarke, is a low-budget production representative of a new independent film movement in the United States. This movement, which we will talk about in ensuing issues of this journal, represents the efforts of a group of young artists struggling against the large American film monopolies. They clamor for the right to artistic expression and to create a New American Cinema that responds to their new mentality.[34]

Meant as a challenge to the Puerto Rican spectator-cum-reader, the piece ends by asking, "In the meantime, what will happen to our theaters in San Juan?"[35] The Cine-coop positioned itself as the Puerto Rican answer to the U.S. new wave. To a savvy reader, this provocative editorial style with a strange blend of hyperlocal and international film discourse has an obvious intertext in the New York periodical *Film Culture*—not to mention that the title of the Cine-coop's official journal borrows from its northern periodical. Founded by Jonas Mekas in 1955, the influential film journal was partly responsible for helping consolidate the study of art cinema in the United States through prolific guest features from prominent filmmakers, scholars, and intellectuals. Although best remembered today for serving as the unofficial press organ of the New American Cinema, *Film Culture* was key in bringing together the avant-garde filmmakers and critics of the immediate postwar period with the underground filmmakers of the 1960s.[36] In fact, Jonas Mekas personally invited Amílcar Tirado to contribute an article to *Film Culture* in 1959.[37][38] In this way, the publication served

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[33] "Editorial," *Cine y Cultura* 1.1 (February 1962): 3. Colección Puertorriqueña, University of Puerto Rico – Río Piedras, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "CPR."
[34] "Cine," *Cine y Cultura,* 5.
[35] "Cine," *Cine y Cultura*, 5.
[36] The journal also translated the leading critical voices of the avant-garde internationally, including pieces from Ibero-American critic-practitioners such as Luis Buñuel, Néstor Almendros, and Emilio García Riera. Haden Guest, "Experimentation and Innovation in Three American Film Journals of the 1950s," In *Inventing Film Studies,* eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 252.
[37] Malén Rojas Daporta, "Boricua Asistió a Seminario Cinematográfico," *El mundo,* 26 August 1959, 12.
[38] The article was never published, but it has become the object of a transnational search, of sorts. The filmmakers' sons—both currently undertaking years-long projects to catalogue their late fathers' personal archives—will flag any documents that establish contacts between Mekas and the Division of Community Education. Amílcar Tirado Avilés and Sebastian Mekas, personal communication with author, October-November, 2022.

as a place of mutual understanding and critique between intergenerational and international vanguards. A similar dynamic was playing out in the editorial room of *Cine y Cultura,* where the publication was being used to involve the older, more established DivEdCo authors who had initially resented the cinephiles' cooperative side project. The endorsement of the head of the "old guard" in René Marqués meant that the Cine-coop had effectively poached the entire DivEdCo artistic staff by that point. Ultimately, the gravity of the Cine-coop's and the Film-makers' Co-op's intermedia operation allowed artists from either generation to work in their preferred medium and towards the shared goal of creating the conditions for independent cinema to thrive. More importantly, the praise given by the Puerto Ricans to the New American Cinema—and to Shirley Clarke in particular—suggests that its members considered the mission of the Caribbean co-op as tied to the one in New York.

Figure 2.4. Cover of first volume of *Cine y Cultura* (left); sample of graphic work, possibly by Lorenzo Homar (right).

It is important to note that, although the Cine-coop drew inspiration from the film-cooperative movement in New York, their business models were quite different from one another. The New York Film-makers' Co-op was, first and foremost, a distributor of films. Although it would become a creative hub for filmmakers based in the city and sometimes directly financed some

films in their catalog, production was not one its chief concerns. On the contrary, the main motivating factor for its founders was a wealth of independent film production in New York City going unseen due to limited means of exhibition, causing a bottleneck effect at the few film societies and independent cinemas which either distributed or screened experimental and avant-garde film.[39] Further, some members of the Co-op who had previously worked in for-profit film collectives now generally went about their productions quietly, for fear of tipping off film craft unions to their unregulated shoots. Many filmmakers, including Shirley Clarke, perceived the involvement of New York-area locals as responsible for inflating the production costs for their independent projects, limiting the ability of crewmembers to perform in multiple roles, and generally serving as a restriction upon their work.[40] These limitations were central factors to Clarke's decision to start a film cooperative in 1961 after the dissolution of her Film-makers' Inc. Her cautionary tale likely informed the Puerto Ricans' decision to rely on unremunerated and uncredited work for its initial productions.

On the other hand, there were also notable similarities between the two film cooperatives. They were both known to share equipment and crew freely to film shoots involving any of their members. As a primarily film producing group, the Cine-coop in Puerto Rico leveraged their small army of operators, grips, gaffers, among other crewmembers from the DivEdCo roster to either co-produce B-movies with foreign studios, collaborate with public agencies on documentary projects, or work on public-private ventures for local publicity companies, all while benefitting from the backing of the Fomento office. Like their New York counterpart, members of the Cine-coop were willing to defer their wages and be paid retroactively contingent on the films making a profit. The

[39] Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002): 18.
[40] Shirley Clarke, James Degangi, Jonas Mekas, Lew Stoumen, and Willard Van Dyke, "Film Unions & the Low-Budget Independent," *Film Culture* 22-23 (1961): 134-150.

plan was for U.S. studios to be seduced by the promise of free labor, relying on the marginal advantage that working with Cine-coop members provided them, such as sidestepping union requirements and cutting costs to a fraction of a typical shoot. In this way, both co-ops also shared a somewhat dismissive attitude towards organized labor through their overreliance on in-kind donations in time, talent, expertise, and other below-the-line expenses. On that account at least, Tirado could not be accused of being dishonest. He emphasized, "The fact is that nobody—absolutely nobody—will get rich from the Co-op."[41]

Lastly, it is only logical to concede that the approaches to filmmaking of La Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas and the Film-makers' Co-op find their roots in very different cinematic traditions. In the latter case, the New York Co-op put into circulation any and all films that came into their possession. Accordingly, the works of New American Cinema distributed under its umbrella can be best described as a loose assortment of visual artists working across a constellation of genres and media, imperfectly united by an aesthetic predisposition against convention and officialdom. Ironically, the bait-and-switch of associating these artists with a nationality—a group so thoroughly composed and inspired by immigrants from Europe and Latin America—gets at the elemental mischief and playfulness that retroactively gives the New American Cinema some coherence. In the Puerto Rican case, a coherence in vision, if not vocation would have to come first, which its appeal to nationalism could furnish. In his account of the development of art cinema in 1960's Europe, Peter Wollen identifies two strands of the French avant-garde that map fittingly onto the relationship between the New York and San Juan cooperative groups. He describes the institutional frameworks of the two poles as follows,

> The basis of the Co-op movement… lies in artisanal production, with film-makers who do as much as possible themselves at every stage of the filmmaking process. If there are

[41] Sandra L. Rodríguez, "Grupo del Viejo San Juan Prepara la Primera Película Comercial Para la Pantalla Ancha," 15 May 1961, 25.

> performers involved they are usually few, generally friends of the film-makers, often other film-makers. The other avant-garde has its roots much more in the commercial system… [The difference] is much more in the frame of reference, the places from which they come and the culture to which they relate.[42]

The type of cinema the Cine-coop wanted to create falls into the latter group, but it borrowed aspects from the film-cooperative movements of the North Atlantic. For example, they would make films that cast stars in leading roles and travel in commercial circuits, though also relying on institutional synergies and the voluntary labor of its members. In the Puerto Rican case, the Cine-coop did not have an "official" cinema of its own to antagonize; it could only attempt to differentiate itself from foreign film imports as a vehicle toward the creation of a national cinema. Thus, the newness of the national outweighed considerations of pursuing a novel form. The dynamic is best captured in the epigraph which opens this chapter. A *Variety* reporter asks Tirado about his vision for the Cine-coop and he delivers an answer, in his typical humanist rhetoric, that his and his peers' aspirations are to create a national cinema deserving of the Puerto Rican people. In print, the reporter issues a correction to Tirado's use of the word "national," himself mistaking the map for the territory. In identifying and responding to category errors such as these, La Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas positioned itself at the vanguard of another new, American cinema.

Screening the Bloodless Revolution: *Más Allá del Capitolio* (1963)

> *We don't want to come into town and have people see us as film executives only there to make money… We mean the opposite of Hollywood.*
> - Amílcar Tirado, *Variety*, 29 March 1961[43]

In 1962, the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas focused its resources into the production of its first feature-length film. The following year the Co-op released what was

[42] Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," In *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (New York/London: Verso Books/NLB, 1982): 103.
[43] Sandra L. Rodríguez, "Grupo del Viejo San Juan…"

considered at the time to be its crowning achievement, *Más allá del capitolio* ("Beyond the Capitol," Amílcar Tirado, 1963), a satire on small-town politics based on a novel by Indian author R.K. Narayan. In just one daily newspaper, there were no fewer than fifty articles on the activities of the Cine-coop and its feature published between 1961 and 1963, an unprecedented number for a domestic film project. This section reassembles a production and exhibition history of *Más allá del capitolio*, based on the ample press coverage of the film as well as newly available archival material from the Fomento collection. Widely believed to have been pulled from Puerto Rican screens for its inflammatory commentary on the state of democracy in the Commonwealth, *Más allá del capitolio*'s denouncement of U.S. imperialism—an attack deliberately launched from the political center to widen its appeal among Puerto Rican and foreign audiences—is more obtuse than contemporary accounts of the film would admit. Ultimately, the film does not propose a radically liberatory vision for decolonization in the Caribbean, but instead reinforces the myth of the Commonwealth's "bloodless revolution" by reducing the island's struggle to petty partisan squabbles.[44] By unsettling the claims of *Más allá del capitolio*'s counter-institutionality, this section opens the Cine-coops' national-cinematic project to a form of self-critique, one that may have eluded a group of artists pulled by the allure of nationalism in its own time.

Unambiguously set in an unnamed, newly independent island of the Caribbean "two valleys removed from the Capitol," *Más allá del capitolio* is a satirical comedy that sends up the fickleness of local politicians as well as the gullibility of those who vote for them. Narrated by what the townspeople presume to be the recently deposed dictator of the island—Don Rodrigo—the plot centers on the actions of a small-town mayor (José de San Antón) who is dead set on clinging to power, regardless of the ideological leanings of the new central government. In the aftermath of a

[44] The term "bloodless revolution" is used to refer to the U.S.-styled liberal democracy deployed in Commonwealth Puerto Rico through vehicles such as Operation Bootstrap, Operation Serenity, and its attendant economic miracles.

successful revolution, he tries to endear himself to the revolutionaries by tearing down any local vestiges of the previous regime. He stirs revolutionary fervor among the townspeople by having the streets re-named, announcing new holidays, and, in a fit of inspiration, deciding to topple the statue of Don Rodrigo overlooking the valley. An enterprising journalist (Axel Anderson) covers every step of the town's upheaval, storing the statue of the loathsome tyrant in his own home while he writes a report about the events. However, in the frenzy of revolution, the villagers have overlooked that the statue portrays not the bloodthirsty despot Don Rodrigo, but his homonymous father, the beloved patriot, hero, and founder of the diegetic town. Spirited by this discovery, the townspeople converge on the journalist's home to retrieve the statue and erect it on the town square, but the journalist has since become obsessed with the monument and refuses to relinquish it. The film satirizes the electoral politics of the day, with competing parties willing to cynically weaponize history and sway with the political winds. On the other hand, it is also an indictment of the common citizen who believes the pronouncements of their journalists and politicians uncritically. The obvious joke undergirding the film is that its events are set against a revolution that quickly becomes background fodder to the patriotic posturing and political grandstanding between the mayor, the journalist, and the citizenry.

Before unpacking the film's odd ideological analysis of Puerto Rico under Free Association, it is instructive to retrace the vertiginous route that *Más allá del capitolio* took to reach Puerto Rican screens. The Cine-coop had spent the better part of '61 pitching film scripts to Fomento, most of which were routinely rejected.[45] Meanwhile, the Co-op's members continued its world-cinematic publicity tour, debuting the new organization at the 7th Flaherty Film Seminar in Barranquitas and the 2nd Montréal International Film Festival. Although in the previous chapter, Tirado's brush with

[45] In many early reports, Tirado and other Co-op members mention a film adaptation of Manuel Zeno Gandía's *La Charca* ("The Pond") would be the first feature-length project, but that project ultimately went unfilmed.

the representatives of the French New Wave in Montréal went awry, his presentation was received much more favorably by members of the Indian delegation. Following the screening of an extended program of DivEdCo films, Tirado was approached by Indian author R.K. Narayan and offered the film rights to his breakthrough novel *The Lawley Road.* The novel narrated a story of corruption in a small village in post-Independence India, which served as the basis for *Más allá del capitolio.*[4647] Shirley Clarke, who had attended the festival on behalf of the New American Cinema Group to screen her debut feature *The Connection* (1961), had also been approached by Narayan. However, given the novel's folk sensibility and rural setting, Clarke reasoned that the subject more closely aligned with Tirado's directorial métier. Clarke agreed to assist Tirado in finding an industry professional to adapt the novel for the screen and secure financing.[48] Deeply affected by the showings of Tirado's *El puente* and *El santero,* Narayan's guidance to the Puerto Rican was blunt: "make the film in the style of the DivEdCo."[49]

[46] Luis M. Escribano, "Semianrio Canadá Destaca Ponencia de un Boricua," *El mundo,* 5 September 1961, 11.
[47] Accounts differ on the details of this encounter. Articles in *El mundo* have alternatively claimed that Narayan offered the film rights to his novel to Tirado at the festival or that Tirado visited with Narayan in New York, where the agreement was made to adapt the novel into a film. It bears mentioning that the film's producer, Frank Marrero, has also claimed that he was at the FIFM in 1961 and that Narayan offered *him* the rights to the film adaptation, but this version of events is not reinforced by the available evidence.
[48] Marcela Bertholds, "Cooperativa Cinematográfica Filmará Cuento de Autor Hindú," *El mundo,* 5 May 1962, 31.
[49] Luis M. Escribano, "Llega Productor Filmará Cinta Para Cooperativa," *El Mundo,* 4 April 1962, 15.

Figure 2.5. Frank Marrero (left) and Amílcar Tirado (right), featured in *El imparcial,* 2 July 1962, n.p., IATR.

Shirley Clarke recommended a familiar name to fill the role of producer for the Puerto Rican Co-op's first film. Frank Marrero (Figure 2.5), a Puerto Rican filmmaker who had just graduated from the film program at UCLA and had already accumulated ample production experience across several studios in Los Angeles. Marrero recounts that what convinced him to pause his promising Hollywood career to join the DIY film project that had been in preparation in San Juan was the opportunity to "direct and produce" what he considered to be the first feature film subsidized in its majority by the Puerto Rican government.[50] In addition to his credited role as executive producer on the set of *Más allá del capitolio,* Marrero's business savvy was summoned to attract international co-productions to the Cine-coop's studios. Marrero was successful in this regard, securing contracts to co-produce at least two pictures with 20th Century Fox to be filmed on the island, with costs partially offset by Fomento.[51] Although Marrero provided immediate returns by rapidly raising capital for the Cine-coop and establishing a working relationship with the office of Fomento, his at-times

[50] Frank Marrero, "Frank Marrero, filmmaker, director, media pioneer," Interview by Soldanela Rivera, *80grados.net*, 8 December 2017.
[51] These were *Harbor Lights* (Maury Dexter, 1963) and *Thunder Island* (Jack Leewood, 1963). Héctor J. Mejías, "Ambiciona Mostrar PR Tiene Tanto Recurso Natural Como Talento Para Industria Cine," *El mundo,* 25 March 1963, 9.

overzealous involvement in matters concerning directing and his affinity for low-budget, lightning-quick B-movie shoots already hinted at some philosophical differences between the Co-op's founding members and its executive import from Hollywood.

Matching Marrero's contribution—though not necessarily his vision—the Cine-coop appealed to other public agencies for support while Fomento considered its formal proposal for financing. Recently accessioned archival collections of the former Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company reveal that Amílcar Tirado's solicitations reached the highest levels of public office. Throughout the early part of 1962, the chief of Fomento supplied a weekly report to Governor Luis Muñoz Marín covering the activities of the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas in fine detail, which suggests that the governor followed the idiosyncratic co-op with great interest relative to other media entities, including the DivEdCo.[52] Beyond the tacit endorsement already granted by his administration's pro-cooperative platform, Muñoz Marín himself had an interest in improving the perception of Puerto Ricans around the world, particularly after the representation of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City in the 1961 film adaptation of *West Side Story* (Robert Wise/Jerome Robbins).[53] Amílcar Tirado pressed on these diplomatic sore spots in his many proposals to government agencies, playing up his film as an idealized sample of a national cinema to come. In a letter to Ricardo Alegría requesting the use of ICP resources, Tirado shares his plans for the provisionally titled "*La Estatua Avergonzada*" ("The Embarrassed Statue"),

[52] Héctor Zayas Chardón, Weekly Report 36 to Governor Luis Muñoz Marín, 2 September 1963, File Gobierno de Puerto Rico 1963, Colección Fomento Corporativo, Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "Fomento."

[53] According to Maldonado, a prominent member of Luis Muñoz Marín's cabinet, Teodoro Moscoso, had found the depiction of Puerto Rico as economically backward and overpopulated—as well as Puerto Rican New York's disproportionate criminality—personally insulting. Moscoso was acting chief of PRIDCO and had become known as the architect of Muñoz Marín's signature policy, Operation Bootstrap. In response to the musical play's New York City debut, Moscoso instructed his office to get the offending lyrics for *West Side Story* either changed or eliminated, a request the producers ultimately ignored. See: A.W. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997): 106.

> The film in its totality, adapted to the Puerto Rican environment and sense of humor, will be shot in some small village in the island's interior. The film offers a wide spectrum of the constitutive elements of our cultural roots, which will allow it an opportunity to deliver to Puerto Ricans in a proud and dignified manner an honest vision of their character and to the foreign spectator a broader and accurate image of Puerto Rico.[54]

Whether appealing to patriotism or just plain business sense, Tirado and Marrero proved to be a formidable fundraising duo. Financing for the film was approved by Fomento in May 1962, just a month after Marrero joined the project. They had secured an initial $55,000 loan from the Cooperative Development Administration toward the production and tax exemption for the duration of the shoot.[55] The film was announced during a press conference and subsequent gala held at the lavish, colonial-era psychiatric hospital which were now occupied by the headquarters of the Institute of Culture. Primary shooting for the film would begin immediately in the western town of Moca. The pre-production phase of *Más allá del capitolio* garnered an unmatched popular response, its press coverage now accounting for the vast majority of the Cine-coop's archival footprint, particularly in the thirty-year absence of the film itself.[56] Every minor behind-the-scenes note received a half-page treatment from the local dailies, revealing just how wide support for the project had grown. Film critic Lilliam Skerrett characterized the Cine-coop's mobilization of local actors, painters, sculptors, writers, costumers, set designers, and even electricians in fine detail. Dispatching journalistic brevity, she mentions the thirty-plus Puerto Rican actors cast in the film, among them leading film and television stars such as José de San Antón, Axel Anderson, Braulio Castillo, Helena Montalbán, Chavito Marrero, Efraín López Neris, Walter Mercado, and many others. Many

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[54] Amílcar Tirado, Letter to Ricardo Alegría, 30 November 1961, File Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas, Box 3C, Series Dirección Ejecutiva I, Fondo Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan, PR. Hereafter shortened to "AGPR."

[55] They would later be extended an additional $20,000 line of credit, presumably once Fomento realized the popularity of the project in this early stage. Bertholds, 5 May 1962, 31; "Oficina de Exención Contributiva Industrial Caso Num N-1621," *El imparcial,* 23 July 1962, n.p., IATR; "Extiende Préstamo a Cinta Filman Aquí," *El mundo,* 24 September 1962, 13.

[56] The film had been considered lost until it was found by archivist Marisel Flores-Patton in 1991, who was in the process of cataloguing a cache of DivEdCo print found in a film lab in New York City.

DivEdCo and ICP artists unaffiliated with the cooperative also joined in. Skerrett writes, "It seems as if a highly contagious outbreak of enthusiasm has spread amongst various painters who have spontaneously offered their collaboration."[57] Rafael Tufiño designed the costumes and set, Ed Vera and Antonio Maldonado handled the film poster and intertitles, and Lorenzo Homar prepared the sketches for the eponymous statue, which a team of local ICP artists would ultimately build. The entire process of sculpting the statue of Don Rodrigo was reported from beginning to end. Over the course of several weeks in the summer of 1962, *El mundo* published a series detailing the mounting of the statue's wooden skeleton, the plaster molding, the application of a bronze patina, and then the final towing of the 16-foot, 20-ton prop—escorted by a caravan of some 3,000 with the pomp and circumstance of a parade—from the capital to the mountain town of Moca (Figure 2.6).[58]

[57] Lilliam Skerrett de Torres, "Cooperativa de Cine Filma Primera Película en Moca," *El mundo – Suplemento Sabatino,* June 23 1962, 46.
[58] "Más de 3,000 Personas Dan Bienvenida En Moca a la Estatua de Don Rodrigo," *El mundo,* 21 July 1962, 9; "The Horizontal Actor," *San Juan Star,* 18 July 1962, 19.

Figure 2.6. Sketches and photographs detailing the making of the statue of Don Rodrigo, all images provided by the Instituto Alejandro Tapia y Rivera.

But how did a film meant to oppose the Hollywood mode of production come to earn the nickname the "Puerto Rican *Ben-Hur*?"[59] In short, never in the history of filmmaking on the island had the line between maker and spectator become so fuzzy, prompting Amílcar Tirado to scale his film up. In addition to all of the star power from the Puerto Rican art and entertainment world who lent their labor to the film's production, other celebrities and politicians converged on the mountain village in their capacity as socialites. Visiting from India, author R.K. Narayan was on the set of *Más allá del capitolio* and acted as a technical consultant.[60] Mocanos mingled with the influx of famous

[59] Al Dinhofer, "Making Movies in Moca," *San Juan Star,* 27 August 1962, n.p.
[60] Marcela Bertholds, "Inician en Moca Filmación de Película de Largo Metraje," *El mundo,* 28 June 1962, 20.

guests, granted unprecedented access to a *beau monde* they previously thought to be endemic to the screen. The Cine-coop even organized a race—*El Maratón de Don Rodrigo*—as a community-building event following the arrival of the statue.[61] The enthusiasm on the part of the crew was only matched by the locals' own. Onlookers from all over the island were deputized as production assistants or cast as extras in unpaid roles. Local mocanos provided meals and general assistance to the visiting filmmakers. In some cases, they even ceded their own homes for the actors to lodge in or to serve as the film set for the fallen Don Rodrigo's storehouse. The crew thanked the village with a final celebration, replete with music, fireworks, and libations, all of which made it into the final cut of the film. At a local assembly one villager remarked, "The filmmakers will never forget (…) the patience of [the small town's] residents, who tolerated an invasion of cables, cameras, lights, ropes, road closures, and strangers asking them to keep quiet."[62] On the other hand, the townspeople also would not soon forget the few weeks when Moca became the Mecca of Puerto Rican film production (Figure 2.7).

[61] "Julio César Hernández Vence Carrera Maratón Don Rodrigo," *El mundo,* 7 August 1962, 19.
[62] Lillian Skerrett de Torres, "Moca se Convierte en Centro Fílmico," *El mundo,* 7 July 1962, 32.

Figure 2.7. Set photography showing the parade-like atmosphere of the film shoot in Moca (all production photography courtesy of IATR).

Más allá del capitolio premiered on August 28th, 1963 at the Teatro Puerto Rico and was screened continuously in commercial theatres until at least early November (Figure 2.8).[63] Despite the glowing coverage of the film's production and great anticipation among its domestic audience, critics universally panned *Más allá del capitolio* upon its release, believing it to be derivative of the Mexican comedic productions that had overtaken most movie screens in the 1960s. Al Dinhofer of the *San Juan Star* surveyed 23 moviegoers following the film's premiere and found them feeling "intimidated, hurt, insulted, cheated, bothered, and more than slightly bewildered."[64] The film was torn apart. Tirado was criticized for lacking directorial control and being unable to maintain

[63] "Calendario de Actividades," *El mundo,* 28 August 1963, 10.
[64] Al Dinhofer, "Good Idea Gone Astray," San Juan Star, 4 September 1963, 25.

narrative cohesion; the acting was compared to that of a television *novela*; the symbolism of the statue failed to land in the absence of a clearly articulated political message; the editing could barely establish continuity; and what was supposed to be a boon for realism in the choice to shoot on location was rendered uncanny when entire sequences showed the town's plaza and streets completely deserted. The absence of the participation of any writer from the DivEdCo's Editorial Unit resulted in an uneven script and labored dialogue, exacerbated by the noticeable accents of the film's Argentinian and Cuban leads. The iconoclastic promise of the Don Rodrigo conceit was rendered toothless through the film's choice to project competing, yet amorphous and undefined, ideologies onto the monument. In this vacuum, only the publication *Bohemia Libre*—a weekly magazine founded by Cuban exiles in Puerto Rico—was able to offer a positive review of the film, interpreting the Cuban Revolutionary government to be the intended target of its barbs, thus explaining their departure from the critical consensus.[65] Ultimately, the overwhelming critical sentiment is best captured in the following appraisal of the Cine-coop's flagship failure: "If a single artistic project is deemed superlative by virtue of its being a local product then all arts in Puerto Rico are doomed."[66]

The makers of *Más allá del capitolio* found it was tougher for Puerto Rican audiences to digest poking fun at ideas of revolution, independence, and sovereignty while being actively deprived of all three, unlike the Indian source material which Narayan had written while the country was undergoing a process of decolonization. Although the title of the film promised a pointed critique of government, its director Amílcar Tirado hedged on its reception by training the film's sights on forms of governance on the left and the right equally, while cynically representing self-governance as a gag in the buffoonish figure of the mayor. Producer Frank Marrero indicated as much when he

[65] Vergara, "Revolú Farandulero," *Bohemia Libre,* 9 September 1962, n.p., IATR.
[66] Dinhofer, "Good Idea."

said of the film, "We wanted to make a 'what if' movie. What would happen in Puerto Rico if the Americans were to leave?"[67] Although it may have worked as a tagline, this provocation fails to account for what political action it might take *to prompt* the U.S. to end its occupation. By assuming empire's voluntary and benevolent withdrawal, *Más allá del capitolio* imagines decolonization as something to be witnessed, not something that could be compelled through militancy. In this way, if the DivEdCo's body of work was meant to present the image of the "bloodless revolution" that brought about a conditional Puerto Rican modernity in the 1950s, *Más allá del capitolio* is its inverse. It does not utilize the process of reform to implement a territorial status and nurture a developing economy. Instead, the film invokes the trope of bloodless revolution to transpose the Commonwealth's economic miracle for a miracle of another sort—the virgin birth of a Puerto Rican republic. In other words, though *Más allá del capitolio* was billed as a comedy, the film's resulting incoherence insists it be taken as fantasy.

[67] Frank Marrero, 2017.

Figure 2.8. Newspaper ad for *Más allá del capitolio* (left, taken from October 1963 editions of *El mundo*); title screen for the film by Antonio Maldonado (right).

The most likely explanation for the film's failure, if not the Co-op's, is likely a tale much more typical to small and start-up national film industries. For one, the film was not able to attain a distribution deal, which forced the Co-op to self-release the film domestically despite Frank Marrero's previous success with 20th Century Fox, a prolific distributor of Spanish-language films internationally.[68] In the long run, Marrero's business model of offering the members of the Co-op to work in incoming productions from foreign studios had failed to generate revenue for the organization—and thereby wages—which led to a loss of membership. These types of "overly-ambitious, fast-buck operations" which relocated to Puerto Rico to exploit state subventions and tax

[68] Although press reports at the time allege Frank Marrero had a distribution deal with Columbia Pictures—and that *Más allá del capitolio* was scheduled to screen at the Museum of Modern Art, Carnegie Hall, the University of Southern California, and several European countries in August 1963—there is no evidence that the film was ever picked up for theatrical distribution in the U.S. Héctor J. Mejías, "Primera Película de Cooperativa de Cine se Exhibirá en Estados Unidos y Europa," *El Mundo,* 18 August 1963, 5.

exemptions came under scrutiny in a 1963 exposé by Vincent Canby for *Variety.*[69] The incompetence extended to minor, collaborative projects with government agencies, the type of steady work the Co-op had assumed would always be available.

In 1963, the Cine-coop signed a contract with the Tourism Department titled "En mi viejo San Juan," which would be distributed by Columbia Pictures. Marrero was brought in as a consultant, but he had since become employed by the publicity company Delta Films, a private entity that would not be eligible for the tax incentives afforded to cooperative organizations. The film was ultimately abandoned, and the Tourism Department accused the Co-op of breaching its contract. In the litigation process, the Co-op's legal team disavowed any professional association with Marrero and clarified that Marrero was not authorized to act on their behalf given that he was a private contractor.[70] The failure of these public-private co-productions as one of the Cine-coop's sideline ventures prompted Frank Marrero's estrangement from the group, as he was the most vocal proponent of that particular revenue stream. Contact between Marrero's new production company and the Co-op after *Más allá del capitolio* became sporadic and bitter, with the Co-op's founding members blaming the hire of the Hollywood film producer for the Co-op's turn away from its original plans to make art films.

In addition to the falling out with the film's executive producer, the Cine-coop had been forced to defend itself from accusations of misappropriating public funds since its incorporation. Strangely enough, the allegations originated from another film-cooperative group comprised of members from the Division of Community Education. Cinebor, a portmanteau of "Cine Boricua," was founded by DivEdCo film director Marcos Betancourt contemporaneously with Tirado's Co-op

[69] Vincent Canby, "McKeehan Details 'Felicia' Production and Puerto Rican Film Blowhards," *Variety,* 30 January 1963, 20.
[70] Carlos E. Otero, Letter to José M. Menéndez Monroig, 16 June 1965, File Delta Films, Fomento.

in September of 1961.[71] Incorporated as a private, profit-sharing entity with many of the same goals as its competitor, Cinebor nevertheless accused the Cine-coop of hiding a commercial operation in the guise of a cooperative entity, which implied that it had been making unlawful use of public facilities during the production of *Más allá del capitolio* on the Division's premises and was thus guilty of embezzling the Commonwealth's money.[72] In making the accusation, Cinebor was trying to compel Fomento to either cut off funding for the Co-op or offer the same support for non-cooperatively organized entities such as theirs, but its claims were ultimately thrown out.[73] Regardless, with both avenues of public and private filmmaking opportunities waning, the Cine-coop entered a stage of dormancy in the ensuing years as it restructured its operations in order to pay off its debts.

Today, *Más allá del capitolio* holds a curious position in the history of Puerto Rican cinema. It is overwhelmingly considered a failure and held responsible for the dissolution of the Co-op or, worse still, the end of Amílcar Tirado as a director of feature and fiction films.[74] Others have claimed that the film was mysteriously pulled from theatres after a week-long theatrical run, with the implication that the "political" nature became unpalatable to the many public agencies which supported the film.[75] The idea that Tirado's film threatened a still-fragile electoral democracy on the island and, thus, could be taken as politically subversive would be more believable if it were not for the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that *Más allá del capitolio* was pulled from commercial theatres early or at all. The film celebrated a highly anticipated premiere and near-three-month

[71] Elín Ortíz Reyes, "Nuevo Intento de Hacer Cine en P.R.," *El mundo – Suplemento Sabatino,* 25 August 1962, 47.
[72] Luis M. Escribano, "Oliveras Ordena Estudio de Operaciones Cooperativa de Cine," *El mundo,* 13 March 1963, 4.
[73] "CINEBOR Alega que Usan el Equipo del Estado Libre Asociado para Fines Lucrativos," *El mundo,* 21 March 2063, 11.
[74] Luis Rafael Trelles, "Película perdida, sentimientos encontrados," *luis trelles,* 20 October 2012. <https://lrtdotcom.wordpress.com/2012/10/20/pelicula-perdida-sentimientos-encontrados/>
[75] Joaquín 'Kino' García, *Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño* (San Juan: Palibrio, 2014): 50.; Ramón Barco, "Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño," *Boletín del Archivo Nacional de Teatro y Cine* 2 (July-December 2004): 153.; Roberto Ramos Perea and Marisel Flores-Patton, conversation with author, 22 April 2023.

theatrical run, as shown in Figure 2.8 (left). If the Co-op had intended for the film to remain in theaters even longer, it would be more reasonable to assign blame to its financial issues, the ongoing litigation with Delta and Cinebor, and its not having been picked up for distribution for its disappearance from Puerto Rican screens, rather than state censorship. Further, the suggestion that the failure of *Más allá del capitolio* marked the end of the either the Co-op's or Tirado's film ventures is swiftly disproved by the contents of the ensuing sections, which establishes that the Cine-coop attempted to expand in 1966, not dissolve. *Más allá del capitolio* proposed a model for a Puerto Rican national cinema that nearly approximated viability, though the film itself offered no clear ideological interventions or proposals for resolving the island's political status in the process. Despite the sober assessment of its many flaws and setbacks, the story of the Cine-coop's first attempt at a feature film presented here ultimately contends that the effort was successful in some regard. Namely, it ended the group's adherence to a compulsory cultural nationalist line, allowing the Cine-coop to view itself as part of a broader tapestry of emergent film practices in the Americas.

Where Was the New American Cinema?: The Inter-American Festival of the Arts (1966)

> *If the Inter American Festival's organizers wanted to expose the film-makers and the public to what's new and exciting in the film world, they committed a mistake by including (…) 10-year-old films from Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education.*
>
> - Shirley Clarke, *San Juan Review*, June 1966[76]

Between 1964 and 1966, the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas had entered a period of decline and had undergone drastic changes to its organizational structure and operations. The failure of *Más allá del capitolio*, the Co-op's unpaid debts, and the fallout from the misappropriations investigation meant the end of the Cine-coop as a commercial or feature-filmmaking organization.

[76] Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, "The New Film-Making," *San Juan Review* 3.4 (June 1966): 33.

The Cine-coop's New York City counterpart was also struggling, despite its expansion into new markets and a growing film catalog. By 1966 it had become clear to Shirley Clarke that Jonas Mekas' model of appealing exclusively to non-theatrical outlets—libraries, universities, film societies, festivals, etc.—needed to be updated. Clarke's Film-makers' Distribution Center—her feature film offshoot of the Co-op—entertained a formal association with the Cooperativa de Artes Cinematográficas and other Latin American film collectives. This section briefly recounts the events of the Inter-American Festival of the Arts in San Juan and examines a brief window in which the two film-cooperatives intersected and nearly merged, affording readers an opportunity to conceive of the New American Cinema, following Amílcar Tirado, as an unfulfilled hemispheric project.

Of the original two dozen founding members of the Cine-Coop, only Amílcar Tirado and Héctor Moll had remained in their original roles, though they were comparably less involved than they had been in the group's early years. Alfonso Borrell had been replaced as secretary by newcomer Maggie Bobb, a Chicago-born, University of Puerto Rico-trained journalist who aspired to become a filmmaker and had previously enrolled in film workshops held by Amílcar Tirado at the UPR's flagship campus. The Cine-coop had finally, five years after its founding, integrated a woman member into their group. Filmmaker and historian Frances Negrón-Muntañer has previously written of the *machista* culture of this period, in particular the boys' club that the DivEdCo had become following the departures of Irene Delano and Louise Rosskam in the early 1950's,

> Despite the fact that Puerto Rico's film history has been greatly fragmented and interrupted, the so called "golden age" of Puerto Rican cinema associated with the División de Educación de la Comunidad. This organization trained a whole generation of Puerto Rican filmmakers but did not train a single woman and had no Puerto Rican woman in major creative positions. Thus, the División produced a handful of films (from over a hundred) on women's rights, without the full participation of women as directors, writers, editors or producers.[77]

[77] Frances Negrón-Muntañer, "Puerto Rican Women Directors: Of Lonesome Stars and Broken Hearts," *Jump Cut* 38, (June 1993).

In this entirely fair characterization of the Division of Community Education and utter lack of women artists in prominent roles, Negrón-Muntañer adds that the only woman filmmaker on the island during that decade—also the first in Puerto Rico's history—was Maggie Bobb, the newest member of the Cine-coop. In addition to some student films, Bobb produced a short experimental filmed titled *Laguna soltera* ("Bachelor Lagoon," 1967) before settling into a career as a film journalist in Puerto Rico.[78] Bobb was likely one of the first *experimental* women filmmakers on the island, but even beyond that distinction, she seemed to reinvigorate the moribund Co-op through other means than making films.

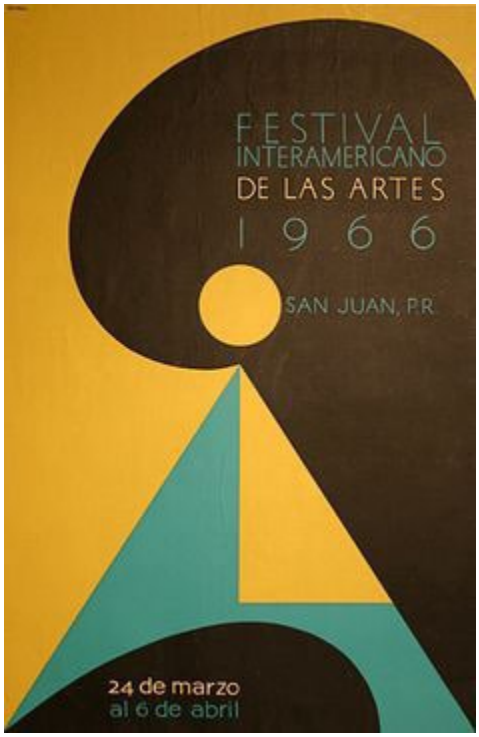

Figure 2.9. Poster for *Festival Interamericano de las Artes* (Lorenzo Homar, 1966).

[78] Film historian Ramón Barco, writing in 1971, offers a description of *Laguna soltera* which is the exact plot of José Rodríguez Soltero's *Lupe* (1967), filmed that same year. *Lupe* is a faux biography of the Mexican starlet *Lupe Vélez,* whose death by overdose is recounted in sordid detail by Kenneth Anger in his book *Hollywood Babylon.* Negrón-Muntañer, n.p.: 67-78; Ramón Barco, "Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño," In *Boletín del Archivo Nacional de Teatro y Cine del Ateneo Puertorriqueño* 2 (July-December 2004): 154.

In early 1966, San Juan had been chosen as the location for the 4th Inter-American Festival of the Arts (Figure 9), which was a travelling festival sponsored by the Pan American Union and North American non-governmental organizations. The event was meant to celebrate cultures across the American continents. In practice, however, the festival seemed to prioritize cultures from countries whose governments had friendly diplomatic relations with the United States.[79] It would be the first time the event was held in Puerto Rico. Sensing an opportunity, Maggie Bobb and Amílcar Tirado petitioned to the Institute of Culture to co-organize a Documentary Film Festival within the broader Inter-American Festival. The Cine-coop members would serve in the festival's organizing and selection committee. Invitations were extended to the Cine-coop's usual contacts in North America; Fred Zinnemann and Frances Flaherty from the Vermont seminars, Shirley Clarke from the Film-makers' Co-op, and Guy Coté and Norman McLaren from the National Film Board. They also invited Manuel Barbachano Ponce and Luis Buñuel to represent Mexico; the Argentinians Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson and his wife Beatriz Guido, who were on the island fleeing the anticipated coup in their home country; documentarist Gabriela Samper from Colombia, also head of the Colombian Cinematheque; and other filmmakers representing Latin America.[80] Despite the line-up of rather conventional film directors, the event would be organized around the themes of "New Cinemas, New Media and the American Expression" (Figure 2.10).[81]

[79] Lillian Skerrett, "Varias Personalidades Artísticas Vendrán PR," *El mundo,* 26 January 1966, 14.
[80] Torre-Nilsson and Guido had chosen Puerto Rico for the shoot of their first English-language film, *Monday's Girl* (1966), upon hearing rumblings of a possible coup in Buenos Aires. The film producer Manuel Barbachano Ponce screened his films *Raíces* ("Roots," 1955) and *Yanco* (1961). Of the bigger names invited, only Gabriela Samper could have been called a documentarist. The festival is also notable for having invited the Dominican experimental filmmaker Franklin Domínguez, whose breakthrough film *La Silla* ("The Chair," 1963) was an open denunciation of the Trujillo regime's worst atrocities. These were hardly representatives of a new cinema.
[81] Luis M. Rodríguez Morales, Letter to Shirley Clarke, 2 February 1966, Box 9 Folder 4, Shirley Clarke Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

Figure 2.10. *Festival de Cine Documental* (Antonio Maldonado, 1966).

According to the publicity material, the goal of the festival was to gather the vanguard of pan-American filmmaking under the banner of documentary cinema, promising to show "the most artistically interesting productions of the Americas, stressing particularly the work of young filmmakers."[82] As one can surmise from that list of names, the meaning of the word "documentary" was deliberately elastic, referring at once to films belonging to a nonfictional film tradition but also welcoming films which offered, according to Bobb, "truth to life, rather than mere social realism."[83] The film festival was structured in such a way that it imitated the style of the Flaherty Seminar, though in a setting considerably ritzier than the Vermont backwoods. Each screening would be followed by a black-tie "cine-foro" where the attending filmmakers would form a roundtable conversation. Coverage of the Inter-American Festival of the Arts was quickly superseded by its film

[82] Maggie Bobb, "What is the Festival de Cine?," *Festival de Cine Documental* program (Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1966).
[83] Maggie Bobb, "What is the Festival de Cine?," Festival de Cine Documental Program, March 1966, Box 9 Folder 4, Shirley Clarke Papers, WCFTR.

outpost. Critic Robert Friedman wrote, "Something strange happened recently in San Juan. Within a period of ten days, moviegoers here were actually able to see several good films."[84]

Not everyone agreed. In an interview with *San Juan Review* film critic Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, Shirley Clarke spoke about the current state of the New American Cinema and the state of the film-cooperative movement between San Juan and New York City, where she provided the indictment of the festival in the epigraph which opens this section. She reluctantly criticized Tirado and the rest of the festival organizers for wasting an opportunity, in her estimation, to open new lines of exchange between filmmakers of the North and South, inviting too many established commercial filmmaking and rallying behind an impenetrable definition of the documentary genre.[85] Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata agreed, "Most of the works seem to have been chosen in an erratic, purposeless fashion," with no programming to make good on the promise of new cinemas and American expressions.[86] In trying to reconcile the disparate new waves, the selection committee seemed to have failed to account for their differences. In fact, Tirado's conception of a "Nuevo Cine Americano" tacked much closer to the movement headed by guest of honor Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson in the Southern Cone than Brakhage's cosmological epics or Leacock's uncontrolled camera.[87] Tirado responded to these criticisms in a private letter to Clarke, "We don't necessarily have to go along with Gierson's [sic] definition of the documentary, do we?"[88] The Documentary Film Festival's critics agreed that its organizers had best learn how to identify a film's genre before trying their hand at identifying its new waves.

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[84] Robert Friedman, "Film Festival: A Strange Thing Happened…," *San Juan Star,* 1 April 1966, 11.
[85] Ruíz de la Mata, "The New Film-making."
[86] Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, "Think Along with Dwight," *San Juan Review* (April 1966): 37-38.
[87] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Of Periodizations and Paradigms: The Fifties in Comparative Perspective," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 11, 12-22 (January-December 1998): 31-44.
[88] Amílcar Tirado, Letter to Shirley Clarke, 18 May 1966, Shirley Clarke Papers, Box 9 Folder 4: Puerto Rico Film Festival (1966)…, WCFTR.

Earlier in '66, the New York Film-makers' Co-op had been in the process of opening new chapters internationally, most notably the London Filmmakers' Co-op.[89] Shirley Clarke had recently established the Filmmakers' Distribution Center, a branch of the Filmmakers' Co-op that would specialize in the theatrical distribution of the group's struggling feature filmmakers.[90] In the first four years of the Filmmakers' Co-op, film directors operating in traditional narrative forms and conventional genres—or experimental filmmakers who simply wanted to make longer films—had been underserved by the existing distribution model, which favored the hastily produced, low-budget films of the avant-garde and underground.[91] Lauren Rabinovitz describes the center founded by Clarke as one which "perpetuated the [Film-makers'] Coop's artist-centered philosophies and democratic policy of accepting all submitted films… but the FDC assumed authority for determining rates and for withholding a larger percentage of the profits than did the Coop."[92] The distribution center, as opposed to the more eccentric and decidedly non-profitable distribution of underground films, operated on a more traditional business model which relied on one "tentpole" film to succeed in order to turn a profit. Clarke attended the festival in Puerto Rico in her capacity as president of the FDC. Her firm had yet to find its tentpole.[93]

During a forum dedicated to the difficulties of independent filmmaking in Latin America, the topic of Shirley Clarke's Filmmakers' Distribution Center caught the attention of her fellow panelists. After the festival, the participants decided to collectively author a letter addressed to Ricardo Alegría to propose that a similar initiative be implemented in Puerto Rico, whose independent film industry had been showing steady growth, if not necessarily a consistent quality.

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[89] David Curtis, "A Tale of Two Co-ops," In *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground,* ed. David James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 255.
[90] Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *The Village Voice,* 31 March 1966, 31.
[91] P. Adams Sitney, "The New American Cinema," In *Film Culture Reader,* ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1970): 71-72.
[92] Rabinovitz, 1991.
[93] Amílcar Tirado, Letter to Ricardo Alegría, 30 September 1966, File Amílcar Tirado, Box 88D, AGPR.

The subject line read, "Ways to maintain and further intercommunication between the countries of the Americas through cinema," The letter continues,

> The experiences and ideas of this Festival should be used to create in Puerto Rico a true interamerican center of cultural cinema, a meeting place of Latin America and North America. There are three major areas in which filmmakers of the Americas need to cooperate, and in which no effective central organization exists at present in Latin America. These three areas are communication, distribution, and production.
>
> We propose that Puerto Rico, through the sponsorship of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, become the center of Interamerican film, by establishing an organization to be called the Interamerican Cinema Center (Centro Interamericano del Cine), which would coordinate activities in these three areas.[94]

The Center's scope was comprehensive. The plan called for the headquarters of the Interamerican Cinema Center to be in San Juan, where it would be directed by members of the Puerto Rican Cine-coop. Domestically, it would function as a circulating film library and cine-club, lending films to small exhibitors and educational institutions (Figure 2.11). It also intended to hold conference series, seminars, film workshops, screenings, and festivals. Its international program was decidedly more ambitious. The Center established a consortium of film archives and cinematheques composed of member institutions largely from Latin America and the Caribbean, a plan which had received an early endorsement from representatives of Venezuela's and Colombia's film archives present at the festival. The strategic location of the "International Film Co-op," as it was called in the press, was intended to make the United States film market available to amateur and independent filmmakers in the rest of the Americas, offering the Center as a non-commercial distribution channel into the largest film-consuming market in the world.[95] Lastly, taking a page out of the Cine-coop's own model, the Center would have an filmmakers exchange program that would facilitate international co-productions and provide film training the host countries. The letter was signed by participants

[94] Filmmakers attending the First Interamerican Festival of the Arts, Proposal to Ricardo Alegría, undated, File Cine, Box Archivo del Director 1 1966, Fondo Dirección Ejecutiva, AGPR.
[95] Lillian Skerrett, "Isla Sería Sede de Productores Independientes de Documentales," *El mundo,* 1 April 1966, 13.

from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, the United States, and Canada.[96]

In many ways, the initiative resembled the *Unión de Cinematecas de América Latina* (Union of Latin American Cinematheques) which had recently emerged out of the 1965 Mar del Plata Film Festival. The UCAL was a pan-Latin American collective which struggled to obtain FIAF membership and relied on Cuba's ICAIC to sustain operations during its first decade, aligning the organization as a steward of the New Latin American Cinema through the 1970s. This type of subvention was unavailable to the proposed Interamerican Cinematheque given that it was to be located in a United States territory and through the Pan American Union, the predecessor to the Organization of American States.[97] A private entity such as Shirley Clarke's FDC would have been an ideal business partner to bridge the chasm between independent filmmakers of the Americas. However, perhaps the most important guest of honor, Shirley Clarke, was not among the signatories. Given the brief success that Clarke's FDC would have later that year with the release of Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966), Clarke's lack of support was especially damning for the intercontinental film cooperative. By the end of 1966, Amílcar Tirado was enrolled as a master's student at the UCLA program and had refocused his attention on becoming a film educator. Clarke would make the same career choice—becoming an instructor of film production in the Northeast and later at UCLA—shortly after the FDC failed the ensuing year as a result of Warhol's withdrawal of *Chelsea Girls* from the FDC catalog.[98] Despite claims to the contrary, Tirado did not always get what he wanted.

[96] Filmmakers…, AGPR.
[97] Janet Ceja Alcalá, "Imperfect Archives and the Principle of Social Praxis in the History of Film Preservation in Latin America," *The Moving Image* 13.1 (Spring 2013): 71.
[98] Rabinovitz, 139.

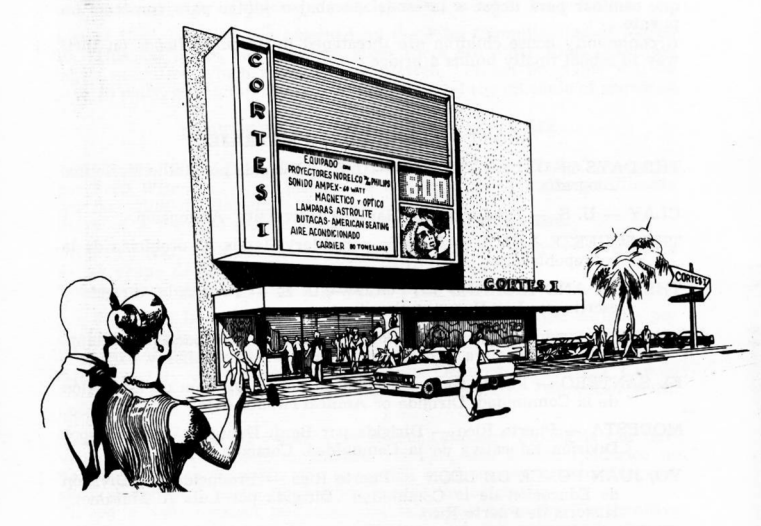

Figure 2.11. The Cinema Cortés, where the Documentary Film Festival was held (illustration featured in official IAFA program, courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico).

Although Tirado's misguided attempt to establish an inter-American film cooperative by merging two failing co-ops, Maggie Bobb's involvement in the festival proved more fruitful. From the beginning, she had tried to steer the selection committee toward films more representative of the emergent film movements taking place in North America. Prior to the festival, she had traveled to New York to immerse herself in the culture of the underground.[99] Bobb returned to Puerto Rico with a curated selection of avant-garde, experimental, and amateur films for the festival, most of which did not make it into the official programming. Instead, Bobb was given a special program at the Ponce Museum of Art as a sort of satellite venue of the Inter-American Festival which would host events in the southern city of Ponce concurrently with the San Juan itinerary. It became a clandestine event funded by and running parallel to the broader, state-sanctioned festival. Ponce hosted a special 16mm program showed Ed Emshwiller's experimental dance films, Hillary Harris' time-lapse films, and other selections from the underground scene. Upon learning that Shirley Clarke and one of the films from the satellite screening shared a distributor—the New York

[99] Maggie Bobb, Report to Ricardo Alegría, Winter 1966, File Festival Interamericano de las Artes, Box 82D, AGPR.

Filmmakers' Co-op—Ruíz de la Mata felt compelled to inquire about its Puerto Rican creator, "Off-the-record: What do you think about [José Rodríguez Soltero's] work?"[100]

Degrees and Separations: The Diasporic Avant-Garde and the UPR Film Seminar

> *The only plausible reason for calling [José] Rodriguez Soltero's films 'underground' is that there's where they should literally be kept.*
>
> - Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, *San Juan Review,* August 1966[101]

Parallel to his wayward attempts to reinvigorate the stalled Cine-coop by associating it with film collectives across the Americas, Amílcar Tirado had already begun to transition into his role as film educator. Tirado and the remaining members of the Cine-coop—now whittled down to a handful—led a collaboration between the Division of Community Education and the University of Puerto Rico to hold film workshops on campus. Between 1964 and 1969, the intensive, summer-long workshops produced several famous alumni. Most notable among his students was the lone Puerto Rican member of the Film-makers' Co-op in New York City, José Rodríguez Soltero. As a prominent figure of the queer underground of the late 1960s and later a community filmmaker with the Young Lords Organization, Rodríguez Soltero's brief career best embodies the subversive, pan-American cinema to which Tirado's Co-op once aspired. Although the Cine-coop's filmography has been generally forgotten or considered low in quality, the organization was successful in creating the necessary infrastructure—such as festivals and workshops—to beget cinematic genealogies such as this one. Through Maggie Bobb's experimental film program and Amílcar Tirado's film seminars, José Rodríguez Soltero became the missing link between the San Juan and New York co-ops. Only through his artistic exploits and political activism does the Puerto Rican film-cooperative movement

[100] Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, Letter to Shirley Clarke, 19 June 1966, Shirley Clarke Papers, Box 9 Folder 4: Puerto Rico Film Festival (1966)…, WCFTR.
[101] Beatriz Ruíz de la Mata, "Avant Garde," *San Juan Review* 3.7 (August 1966), 36.

come closest to establishing the hemispheric film collaboration for, though in this case it was a film culture ratified mostly offscreen.

Figure 2.12. Amílcar Tirado in the DivEdCo screening rooms (left, taken from Dodo, 16); Maggie Bobb's "Death of the Hired Man" (right, taken from "Seminario Cine UPR…," 55).

In 1961, the University of Puerto Rico had begun holding a workshop in audiovisual studies through the University's College of Education. The workshop was a pilot program meant to inform the registrar on whether the newly opened Center for Audiovisual Education should be converted into a full-fledged academic program. The first two editions were mainly focused on educational television. In 1963, Amílcar Tirado was hired to expand its scope into filmmaking.[102] Over the past decade, Tirado had already established a working relationship with the UPR due to its collaboration with the DivEdCo in the production of *El santero,* among other shared projects. By 1964, the workshop had become a week-long, advanced-level seminar which had shifted its focus away from television, instead devoting day-long units to aspects of cinematography, directing, editing, sound engineering, and lab work in the Division's studios (Figure 12).[103] Before their co-organizing the film festival and the Inter-American Festival of the Arts in 1966, Maggie Bobb had been among the seminar's standout students in 1964, adapting Robert Frost's "Death of the Hired Man."[104] Tirado

[102] "Ofrecen en la UPR Tercer Seminario de TV Educativa," *El mundo,* 10 July 1963, 26.
[103] "Darán Seminario de Cine en UPR," *El mundo,* 9 April 1964, 4.
[104] "Seminario Cine en la U.P.R.: Cubre Todas las Fases Rodaje de Películas," *El mundo – Suplemento Sabatino,* 18 July 1964, 55.

also supervised the student films of Ramón Barco, a Cuban-born filmmaker who later became one of the first historians of Puerto Rican film and television. Although Tirado's workshop would be short-lived, it served as a precursor to the current film program still active in the University of Puerto Rico's flagship campus.

The most accomplished alumnus of these workshops, however, may have been José Rodríguez Soltero, a Puerto Rican performer and experimental filmmaker who would later become associated with the queer underground artistic communities of New York's Lower East Side. Between 1964 and 1968, Rodríguez Soltero directed at least five films, among them *El pecado original* ("The Original Sin," 1964-65), *Jerovi* (1965), *Lupe* (1966), and *Diálogo con el Che* ("Dialogues with Che," 1968), although he made countless other films either as a student, in performed happenings in avant-garde theatre, or as part of Nuyorican activist groups of the 1970s and '80s.[105] His works were characterized by their political irreverence and unapologetic camp aesthetics, often featuring queer and Latinx performers such as fellow Puerto Rican drag queen Mario Montez and Venezuelan conceptual artist Rolando Peña. Toward the end of the '60s, Rodríguez Soltero's métier grew more militantly anti-imperialist. He became increasingly involvement with activist groups such as the Young Lords and the Nuyorican documentary movement of the 1970s, before dropping out of filmmaking altogether sometime during that decade, unable to reconcile the macro-politics of left Latin American chauvinism—in both senses of the word—with the personal politics of his own homosexuality (Figure 2.13).[106]

[105] His first film, *El pecado original* ("The Original Sin," 1964), along with a dual-projected, superimposed film happening titled *Riñón* ("Kidney," 1966) are both considered lost.
[106] Juan A. Suárez, "The Puerto Rican Lower East Side and the Queer Underground," *Grey Room* 32 (Summer 2008): 31.

Figure 2.13. José Rodríguez Soltero's final experimental film, *Diálogos con el Che* (*Dialogues with Che,* 1967)

José Rodríguez Soltero's first film, *El pecado original* ("The Original Sin," 1964), was shot independently while the director was still a teenager enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico. Intended as a tribute to Luis Buñuel, Rodríguez Soltero himself described the film as a "surrealistic short… exposing the author's attitude toward virginity, sex, love, marriage, religion, and the status-quo of his native country." [107] The film personifies the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico in the two main characters—casting the former as a Caucasian boy and the latter as a Black girl, who engage in an asymmetrical romance within the film dreamscape. Here, Rodríguez Soltero enters the debate on Puerto Rican identity from unpredictable angles. By presenting the island as a gendered and racialized actor who ultimately becomes a victim of sexual assault, his film reveals the underlying inequities in the relationship between the Commonwealth and Washington, conceived as crude and irreverently as only a film student could. As Juan Suárez has argued, in figuring the island as a Black woman, the filmmaker positions his work in direct contradiction with the mythologies of Puerto Ricanness peddled by the institutional organs of Operation Serenity—namely, the DivEdCo and the ICP.[108] Although the film has since been lost, *El pecado original*'s heavy-handed critique of the colonial status is evidence of the young filmmaker's preoccupations with

[107] Suárez (2008), 10.
[108] Suárez (2008), 10.

translocalist concerns from his position as diasporic subject. In 1966, his film is included in the Inter-American Festival of the Arts, reintroducing him to Puerto Rican spectators. In an appeal to Ricardo Alegría, hoping to convince him to include Rodríguez Soltero's *El pecado original* in the festival programming, Maggie Bobb writes, "First experimental film made in Puerto Rico by Jose Rodrigues-Soltero [sic], formerly student at UPR. 10 min. Boy dreams he rapes his fiancé, not really sexy but psychologically interesting."[109]

In New York, Rodríguez Soltero had made a name for himself through his collaborations—and, often, cohabitation—with other underground film collectives as Andy Warhol's Factory, the New York Film-maker's Co-op, the Bridge Theatre, etc. He also participated in experimental theater productions as part of the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, whose casting of local, camped-up Latinx talent became a hallmark of its ensemble. Trafficking in a rare combination of aesthetic and political currents—a decidedly First World avant-garde sensibility undergirded by anti-imperialist, pan-Latin Americanist intensity—Rodríguez Soltero's focus on queer and accented performance stood in stark contrast to the fetishized representations of Latinx performers in the films of the white queer underground, such as in Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966) or Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963). His choice to hypersexualize and objectify the queer, Brown subjects of his camera came from a place of personal investment—he was the rare artist in the queer underground who embraced his agency as both fetish and fantasist, comfortable as both the object of desire but also expressive of his own. In his work, José Rodríguez Soltero triangulated his positionality as the lustful interlocutor of the audience, the performers, and his white and male contemporaries and patrons. Rodríguez Soltero's profile rose rapidly within the U.S. underground.

[109] Bobb, Report to Alegría, AGPR.

The young artist's most recent performance had thrusted him into the national spotlight. On April 8th, 1966—just a few days after his film's premiere in Ponce—Rodríguez Soltero staged a midnight happening by the title of *LBJ* at East Village's The Bridge Theater. In the available promotional material, José Rodríguez Soltero described the piece as a "Live-Multi-Screen – Scrambled – Love – Hate – Paradox USA." A cross between the two currents of underground performance at the time, ridiculous theater, and destruction art, *LBJ* was a protest against the eponymous president's decision to deploy ground troops in Vietnam a year earlier.[110] Juan Suárez summarizes the performance as follows,

> *LBJ* was to be part of a ten-artist presentation, with Montez and [Charles] Ludlam also in the program, but apparently the evening fell apart after Rodríguez Soltero's act. José and his collaborators walked on stage carrying a live chicken, which they hung from a beam by the legs, they ordered the audience out of their seats and then stormed the orchestra. The stage lights went out, a strobe light came on, and the troupe proceeded to advance from the back of the room to the stage jumping over the seats to the sound of the top pop hit of the year, "The Ballad of the Green Berets..." When José reached the stage, he attached a disused forty-eight-star U.S. flag to an asbestos screen with the letters *LBJ* and set it on fire.[111]

In a two-page report on the event, Fred McDarrah of the Village Voice, who also took the infamous photograph of Rodríguez Soltero kneeling in front of the American flag (Figure 2.14), describes the desecration in detail. The flag took several matches to catch fire. By the time it had turned to ashes, the audience has grown restless. Amid an unlikely mix of boos and applause, several members of the audience demanded that the Puerto Rican artist be thrown out. His "extraordinary anti-American theatre piece" was met with predictable abuse: "pinko," "fag," and other invectives were directed toward the stage, according to McDarrah.[112] Aghast, Nancy Weber of the New York Post wrote that

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[110] Destructivism emerges from a 1962 manifesto by Nuyorican visual artist Raphael Montañez Ortíz, one of the Rodríguez Solteros New York City contemporary. The movement, to the extent one can be discerned, was characterized by visceral, pre-rational acts of destruction in response to intensifying global crises and displacement. See: Raphael Montañez Ortíz, "Destructivism: A Manifesto," 1962; Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," *Discourse* 14, no. 2 (1992): 74–102.

[111] Juan Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 26-27.

[112] Fred MacDarrah, "American Flag Burned in Theatre Spectacle," *Village Voice,* 14 April 1966: n.p.

she felt "physically, spiritually, morally, and aesthetically oppressed" and exited the show early.[113] The column reassembles the far-reaching fallout of a clumsy and disorganized effort, which was taken to be an anti-war demonstration by the national press and became a flashpoint for debates on protest art and good taste.

Figure 2.14. José Rodríguez Soltero burning an American flag during the *LBJ* happening (image featured in MacDarrah, "American Flag Burned in Theatre Spectacle," Village Voice, 14 April 1966: n.p.).

Rodríguez Soltero's iconoclastic act of defiance is also a condemnation of the more oblique forms of U.S. imperialism, a subject with which the artist was uniquely familiar as a Puerto Rican émigré. His dramatized constellation of cultural and political signifiers includes depictions of Caribbean *santería*, the performance of guerilla warfare as camp, and discursively uniting remote

[113] MacDarrah, n.p.

struggles against American empire. *LBJ* stood between two imperial movements in modern U.S. history, the recent incorporations of Alaska and Hawaii into the Union in 1959 and the first referendum on Puerto Rico's political status in 1967, the first in which independence and annexation would be listed as options. Read in this context, Rodríguez Soltero's choice to ignite a 48-star U.S. flag alludes to the ongoing expansion of what historian Daniel Immerwahr has called the United States' "pointillist empire," whose hegemony in global affairs is enabled by these small, geographically dispersed claims to foreign land.[114] As such, Rodríguez Soltero's critique of American empire mimics the transtemporality of its object, at once eulogizing lost sovereignties and pointing towards the insatiability of empire in the case of as-yet-unincorporated territories such as Puerto Rico.

After *LBJ,* The Bridge Theatre was forced to shut down temporarily due to the public response to the performance. José Rodríguez Soltero returned to Puerto Rico for a time while the controversy subsided. In Puerto Rico, Rodríguez Soltero's work in both film and performance were virtually unknown off campus before his inclusion in the film festival. Intrigued by the presence of a Puerto Rican experimental filmmaker, film critic Ruíz de la Mata organized, with the ICP's help, a midnight screening of José Rodríguez Soltero's *El pecado original, Jerovi,* and *Riñón* at the Galería Colibrí, San Juan's foremost contemporary art gallery. *The San Juan Review*'s two columns on this summer trip constituted a sort of homecoming for the diasporic filmmaker, whose traffic within avant-garde and Latinx circuits would finally come full circle, culminating in the De la Mata quote cited at the beginning of this section. Critical rejection notwithstanding, Rodríguez Soltero's return to the island saw him establish an experimental film group in his alma mater.[115] Upon his return to

[114] Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019): 213.
[115] Doris N. Souffront, "Universitario Dirige Películas," Puerto Rico Ilustrado, 10 June 1967, 17.

New York City, he joined new film-cooperative organizations which catered to minority groups in the city, such as the Young Filmmakers Foundation started by Chilean-Puerto Rican documentarist Jaime Barrios.[116] In a roundabout way, José Rodríguez Soltero had already accomplished the goals set out by Shirley Clarke's and Amílcar Tirado's half-decade long coordination between film co-ops in their respective cities.

While today Rodríguez Soltero has become a pioneer in Nuyorican cinema and a paragon of the Latinx contribution to the queer underground, he remained a minor figure next to its more exuberant figures such as Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, Charles Henri Ford, Gregory Markopoulos, and many others. It was only after his death in 2008 that his films were accounted for, restored, and put into circulation. Since then, Rodríguez Soltero's films have been the object of renewed attention, becoming central to the Latinx and Nuyorican canons often ignored by national-cinematic criteria. This recent recuperation notwithstanding, the artist and his surviving films are virtually unknown on the island. If, as Juan A. Suárez has argued, "the history of the avant-garde and the history of the Caribbeans who lived side by side with them in [the Lower East Side] have usually been told as two separate histories," then this section can be considered an attempt to rewrite the diasporic avant-garde into Caribbean film history. Rodríguez Soltero as a missing link between the film-cooperative movements of New York City and San Juan, but his work is a bridge between the state-sponsored community film project of the island and the grassroots community media groups of the diaspora.

As for Tirado's career in film education, in 1969, the first New Progressivist Party governor—Luis A. Ferré, architect of the modern Puerto Rican statehood movement—instituted a series of public austerity measures and a targeted divestment of the arts. To justify defunding

[116] Jessica Gordon-Burroughs, "Looking Back and Away: Jaime Barrios's Film Club (1968)," *Discourse* 42.3 (Fall 2020): 281-304.

cultural agencies, the Ferré administration argued that they had become a public forum for pro-independence propaganda and, borrowing a page from Barry Goldwater's playbook, that the island's culture "should not be directed through governmental mandates that could destroy liberty."[117] In practice, weaning arts and culture from state benefaction looked a lot like self-sabotage. In 1969, Luis Maisonet—having been recently promoted to Cinema Unit chief after Ferré's reshuffling of Divisional leadership—accused his long-time colleague and fellow filmmaker Amílcar Tirado of time theft and other improprieties related to his UPR seminar.[118] In truth, Tirado and his students had been working on a film titled *No puede ser* ("It Can't Be"), which profiled several residents of the Juana Matos slum on the outskirts of San Juan. It was one of the few shantytowns left in the metropolitan area, but at the time its residents fiercely resisted relocation to public housing, figuring that living in Juana Matos for free was preferable to paying a subsidized rent in an unfamiliar community. Divisional leadership felt it was an unflattering portrayal of the new government. As a result, the DivEdCo recalled Tirado and suspended all future collaboration between its artists and the university.[119] As if that had not been enough, the Division also kept the negatives of the student films, which had been left in their labs when the collaboration ended, and denied Tirado the opportunity to process the films.[120] Of the first of many clashes between the cultural sector and the PNP party, *El mundo* columnist Miguel A. Santín quipped that the lessons learned are that "social ills must be swept under the rug and whoever brings attention to them is simply an enemy of Governor Ferré's Administration."[121]

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[117] Luis A. Ferré, Quoted in Arlene Dávila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1997): 41.
[118] Luis Maisonet, Letter to Epifanio Nangó, 1 August 1969, Folder Amílcar Tirado 1, Series Administración Caja 2, Departamento de Educación Fund, Archivo de Imágenes en Movimiento, AGPR.
[119] Maggie Bobb, "División Educación Suspende Colaboración a estudiantes del Seminario de Cine UPR," *El mundo,* 14 August, 1969, 16.
[120] "Niegan Permiso Evaluar Películas Producidas en Departamento UPR," *El mundo,* 10 October 1969, 43.
[121] Miguel A. Santín, "Trasfondo," *El mundo,* 15 August 1969, 7.

Another of Tirado's students, Ramón Barco, would become a successful filmmaker and enjoy a long career as a film critic. In this excerpt from his 1970s retrospective account of Puerto Rican cinema which was originally published in a local newspaper, Ramón Barco touches on many of the nodes of 1960s avant-garde film culture which serve as the objects of this chapter, albeit in a diffuse and informal manner. Barco writes,

> *Más allá del capitolio* wasn't poorly received, but what is certain is that the film was mysteriously withdrawn from theaters and, to this day, it has not been exhibited anywhere else. One day I asked Amílcar and he blamed the defunct Cooperativa de Artes y Ciencias [sic] Cinematográficas. Immediately, he assured me that he would begin the task of re-editing the film, polishing it as best he could to bring it back to theaters, but that was the last I heard of it. Amílcar was my professor at the University of Puerto Rico in 1965… In those days, the *sanjuanero* José Rodríguez Soltero was filming *El pecado original*, his surrealist short of Buñuel-esque influence, in the Río Piedras church. Another group had created an experimental film workshop under the direction of Jonas Mekas and the New York Film-makers' Co-op. Maggie Bobb filmed *Laguna Soltero,* a biography of Lupe Vélez starring the drag queen Mario Montes. I filmed in 16mm the film *Angela,* which screened at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in Czechoslovakia, but then I left it at the Film-maker's [Co-op] and it was forgotten…[122]

The assemblage of collaborations Barco references in his work is reorganized here through the multivarious infrastructures that filmmakers in Puerto Rico and its diaspora built to support an independent, transnational film culture. To offer some sort of closure to this admittedly convoluted roadmap, Amílcar Tirado and Shirley Clarke founded film cooperatives because of the perceived stagnation of the hegemonic commercial cinema, both qualitative and quantitatively. The work of Clarke and Tirado met similar fates toward the end of the decade, with both opting to join the teaching profession after running into conflicts with their overzealous partners and their respective co-ops—their films not so much lost as they were caught in a tangle of unfulfilled contracts, accrued debt, uncertain distribution rights, and obsolete formats. Their last-ditch effort to reimagine their respective cooperative group as an inter-American network, albeit inconclusive, was able to bring together a younger, grassroots avant-garde who leaned toward new expressions of film art such as in

[122] Barco, 153.

the work of Rodríguez Soltero. This excerpt from Barco's annotated filmography demonstrates how these seemingly disparate cooperative and avant-garde movements where never more than one degree of separation from one another and signals the need to reincorporate the Puerto Rican cooperative and avant-garde movements into a broader history of film cooperativism and experimentalism across the hemisphere.

Chapter 3 "El Gusano de Izquierda": Reform and Revolution in the Cinema of Oscar Torres

Suffering from our reality, for our cinema, with quick reflexes, all of us—the mob of cineclub-goers, poets, novelists, painters, theater artists, musicians, sociologists—without means of fortune landed where this cinema could be learned; at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografía in Rome.

Almost immediately, the Cubans Julio García-Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea [arrived], and then the rest of the tribe, Oscar Torres from a small point on the Caribbean map (Santo Domingo?)… And others and others…

- Fernando Birrí, 2002[1]

It is December of '62. One balmy afternoon in the middle of a work week, a small group of artists belonging to the Puerto Rican Division of Community Education—filmmakers, painters, poets, bureaucrats, *manganzones*, *bohemios y bochincheros*[2]—meets in the interior patio of *Bar Seda* in Old San Juan. A few drinks in, the lone filmmaker in the group dares to ask, "Did you hear? Oscar Torres won an international award for his film *Realengo*." Another artist, the painter and presumably the capital "N" nationalist of the bunch, is not interested in talking about a Cuban film made by a Dominican filmmaker, but he is reminded that Oscar was also Puerto Rican at heart.

"All Oscar needed was a chance," the filmmaker continued, "In Cuba he finally got it at the ICAIC and now he's making a name for himself in the cinema of the Third World."

A third artist interjects, "Why doesn't he go back to Santo Domingo? Maybe he can do something for his own country."

The filmmaker corrects him. Oscar had tried to make film there. He pauses and entertains changing the subject before unfurling the rest of the Dominican filmmaker's achievements: Oscar was the only director from the Division who kept up with the cinema being made in the rest of the

[1] Fernando Birrí, "Cesare Zavattini, una vida en muestra." *Cine Cubano* 155 (2002): 35-49. All translations my own.
[2] Roughly translated: Manchildren, Bohemians, and gossips.

world, a fighter against Trujillo, a journalist, an agitator. "It does Puerto Rico good to have people like him."[3]

The exchange reproduced here is taken from Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's memoir*, En el mejor de los mundos* ("In the Best of Worlds," 1991), which features a collection of vignettes about the author's tenure at the DivEdCo. As the scattered geographies and nativist quips of the prior passage suggest, the filmmaker in question, Oscar Torres, had become the subject of curiosity in Puerto Rican art circles. A few years earlier he had made a decision distinguished at the time for its ambition. Torres, in choosing to relocate from Puerto Rico to Cuba in 1959, became the lone figure to make the leap from the educational filmmaking of the DivEdCo to helping conduct the initial experiments of Cuba's Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry (ICAIC). In doing so, Oscar Torres took part in the formative years of an institution and contributed to the internal debates that would ultimately change the landscape of cinema in Latin America and beyond.

Oscar Torres de Soto was a queer Dominican filmmaker, critic, and radical whose life brought him to every island of the Hispanic Caribbean and whose career makes him a valuable figure in tracking the transnational circulation of film culture in this crucial period in Latin American cinema. In 1951, Torres left Santo Domingo to study filmmaking at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, parlaying his education to secure a tenured directorial position in Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education upon his return to the Americas. Shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Torres joined the nascent ICAIC, making him among the first of a wave of Latin American artists who joined that Institute throughout the decade.[4] Despite the obvious transnational valences of his life and work, Torres' films are today most frequently associated with

[3] Díaz Valcárcel, 189.
[4] Despite claims to Cuban- and Puerto Ricanness by birthright and through his close association with those islands, Torres most frequently self-described as Dominican, where he spent most of his life.

the national cinematic histories of each of the islands that harbored him—in some of those histories he was a minor figure, but, to others, crucial. Less scholarly attention has been placed on the causes of the artistic and political restlessness which prompted his pan-Caribbean transience. Having fled the Dominican Republic sometime in 1951, Torres' self-imposed exile was a direct result of his avowed support of and leadership within revolutionary organizations opposed to the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship in that island. In Puerto Rico, Torres' dissatisfaction with making cinema in support of the territory's new colonial arrangement with the United States led to his temporary exit and made tenuous the permanence of an eventual return. Torres would ultimately resettle in Havana in September 1959, but he abruptly departed Cuba under mysterious circumstances shortly before completing his second film, *Realengo 18,* in 1961. Of all his abrupt departures, however, the least understood may be Torres' premature death in 1968 at the age of 37.

Today, Oscar Torres remains an obscure figure in the history of Caribbean film as well as in broader histories of Latin American cinemas, as part of either the new waves or the continental social documentary movements that preceded them. In Latin American film studies, Oscar Torres' name typically appears—if it appears at all—in passages relating to the presence of Latin American filmmakers at the Centro Sperimentale in the 1950s.[5] In studies of revolutionary Cuban cinema Torres' contributions are anecdotal, often factually inaccurate, and serve more as an acknowledgement of the ICAIC's early internationalism than to position Torres as an agent in the construction of a new Cuban cinema.[6] In Puerto Rico, Torres is proof positive of the theory that the social-democratic Luis Muñoz Marín administration used the DivEdCo as a means of "taming" the

[5] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996): Tensión y reconciliación," *Encuentro* (Summer 1996): 79. For a full list of Latin American filmmakers at the Centro, see Flavia Laviosa, "International Students at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome: 1935–2020: A History to Be Written," *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* 9.2 (March 2021): 175-209.
[6] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Intrusos en el paraíso: Los cineastas extranjeros en el cine cubano de los sesenta* (Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016), 153; Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2004): 130-131.

political opposition from the left, where keeping potentially subversive artists employed was functionally the same as having them under surveillance.[7] In the Dominican Republic, the tendency to position Torres, a man unmoved by neither paternalism nor nationalism, as the father of Dominican national cinema limits comparative studies of his work.[8] Perhaps the discourse in which Torres' absence is most conspicuous is that of exiled Cuban filmmakers, yet Torres' failure to default to the reactionary politics associated with this group prevents his identification with the anti-communist bent of the cinema of Greater Cuba.[9] These discrete premises and absences in the available historiography render the figure of Torres static: an ahistorical, apolitical actor in the highly combustible historical and political era in which he lived and labored. This very ambivalence

[7] A claim repeated in recent publications on the Puerto Rican cultural production of the period, such as Arlene Dávila's *Sponsored Identities* (1997), Catherine Marsh Kennerley's field-defining *Negociaciones culturales* (2009), Carmelo Esterrich's *Concrete and Countryside* (2018), and also Jorge A. Arroyo's self-published *Los Rojos de la DIVEDCO* (2014). Luis Muñóz Marín's strategy for containing dissident artists is often told through his handling of DivEdCo founders, Jack Delano and Edwin Rosskam, as well as their respective wives, Irene Delano and Louise Rosskam. Jack and Irene Delano were founding members of the DivEdCo in the mid-1940s, working in the Cinema and Graphics Units respectively. Edwin Rosskam and his wife Louise led the early iterations of the Literature and Photography departments, respectively. As immigrants to the United States and former artists in Roosevelt's New Deal arts initiatives, a more in-depth examination of their roles in the Division is outside the purview of this work. Ultimately, both the Rosskams and Delanos were accused of sympathizing with the communist cause, which resulted in Jack Delano being reassigned to a less prominent role on public television and Rosskam effectively forced out of the island, though the latter did maintain a friendly relationship with the Muñóz Marín government.

[8] The figure of Oscar Torres has deservedly become the subject of recent epistemological reinvestments from scholars and artists elsewhere in Latin America, particularly in his native Dominican Republic. In 2019, film critic Luis Beiro Álvarez published a comprehensive biography of Oscar Torres, to which this research is greatly indebted. The work succinctly establishes a chronology of the filmmaker's many travels and, most instructively, compiles a dossier containing a surfeit of personal documents which include letters, photographs, film reviews, essays, interviews with family and close collaborators, and other miscellaneous writings. Alongside this work—and ostensibly as a result of the limitations of the biography—Beiro Álvarez published a semi-fictional novel, *Nadie te vio morir* ("No one saw you die," 2019), which is loosely based on Torres' life and is a speculative attempt to fill in the gaps in the record. Despite a palpable commitment to the recuperation of Torres' life and work, Beiro's novel suffers from several flaws, the occasional embellishment, and one glaring omission: namely, the author's refusal to even acknowledge the filmmaker's queerness once within the book's three-hundred-plus-page span. The sum of these criticisms calls to question the novel's relevance to a truthful accounting of the life of Oscar Torres, even as a piece of speculative fiction. Lastly, in 2022 Oscar Torres' distant cousin Victoria Linares directed a film that takes as its object their shared queerness—that of Torres and the director. *Lo que se hereda…* (*It Runs in the Family*, 2022) draws a parallel between Torres' and Linares' lives as queer film professionals within a deeply conservative Dominican society and a state apparatus still hostile to non-normative forms of sexuality and gender expression. The film begins to do the work of separating Torres' personal desire and aspirations from his perceived debt to the national-cultural canon.

[9] Ana López, "Greater Cuba," In *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts,* eds. Ana M. López and Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 38-58.

dispersed over geopolitical space and time is what warrants history's attention. Oscar Torres presents the historian with a moving target. One must move with it.

As a minor figure within minor cinemas, Oscar Torres' life and art deserve an account that goes beyond national-cinematic paradigms. This study makes use of extensive primary material from archives in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic the attempt to marry the separate threads in Caribbean—and, indeed, global—film historiography with which Torres' life and career intersect. In the process, this inquiry may serve as an illustration of the limits and virtues of Film Studies' recent investments in hybridity and transnationalisms in the Latin American context.[10] As a case study of an unlikely South-South institutional crossover at the height of the Cold War, Torres' cinema adrift between islands and continents suggests that the history of new cinematic waves in the Hispanic Caribbean is neither an uninterrupted transmission nor an exact road map from the Global North to the islands, given the particularities of the region and its shared histories of colonialism, underdevelopment, and displacement. Beginning with a critical biography of Torres' exile and education, the chapter will trace his political evolution through close readings of both his films and his activism, carving out Torres' significance to Caribbean history beyond cinema. In analyzing his films between the DivEdCo and the ICAIC, I identify shared themes of rural collectivism and racial justice in his work for two state cinematic projects considered ideologically and stylistically incongruous with one another. The chapter ends with a reevaluation of Torres as a tragic figure by revealing the true plenitude of his artistic production and political activism of his later years—elsewhere described through the lens of Torres' creative stagnation, substance abuse, and internalized homophobia. As both pioneer and afterthought, Torres' is an understudied case that

[10] These works include Masha Salazkina's 2012 essay "Moscow-Rome-Havana," Salvador Salazar Navarro's *Cine, Revolución y Resistencia* (2017), and the co-edited anthology *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960* by Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (2017).

articulates the long-rumored, if not aspirational continuities between the institutional film initiatives of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth and the Cuban Revolution, enriching both.

Transatlantic Torres: Dreams of Cinema and Revolution under the Trujillato

> *Your persistent and unjustified absences from the lectures at the Centro places you at risk of being expelled from enrollment in the current academic year 1952-53. Before making that decision, we ask that you urgently let us know of your intention.*
>
> - Centro Sperimentale Director Giuseppe Sala, Letter to Oscar Torres, 17 December 1952
>
> -

Oscar Torres' political formation and travels within the Caribbean began at a young age. Torres was born in Guantanamo, Cuba to a Dominican mother and Puerto Rican father, as his father had been contracted as a bookkeeper for a sugar company in the area. The Torres family would relocate to the Dominican Republic when Torres was six years old, where his father had developed a relationship with the Vicini business family in Santo Domingo.[11] Torres led what appeared to be a conventional, if not unassuming life as a member of a privileged economic class in that island, even spending summers abroad in the U.S. and Europe. Despite—or possibly because of—this privileged status, the Torres-De Soto family soon became opponents of the Rafael Trujillo government, which had by then conducted a *de facto* nationalization of most of the country's heavy industry and agriculture. In particular, the event around which the family's anti-Trujillo ethos would consolidate was the 1945 exile of Moisés de Soto, Oscar's uncle, for his lectures against the regime while serving as a professor at the University of Santo Domingo. While in exile in Puerto Rico, De Soto would later participate in the failed Cayo Confites invasion of 1947, which fixed the family into

[11] Victor Manuel Tavárez Cabral, interview by Luis Beiro Álvarez, *Oscar Torres: El cine con la mirada universal* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2019): 98. The Vicinis are known to be the wealthiest family in the Dominican Republic and were considered architects in the country's transition to a provisional democracy following Trujillo's assassination in 1961.

Trujillo's crosshairs.[12] Oscar Torres, once insulated from his family's subversive activities due to the demands of his education and his itinerant residence in the island, would not remain a bystander in politics for long.

In 1947, while a law student at the University of Santo Domingo, Torres begins to take an active role in political organization through his family's sponsorship of the *Juventud Democrática* (Democratic Youth), a group comprised of college students which espoused anti-*trujillismo* from the left and was responsible for several demonstrations between 1946-47. The core of the group originated from the more militant activities of the *Juventud Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Youth), which had operated clandestinely since 1944 and would emerge two years later re-branded as a social-democratic party in its public phase. According to Virgilio Díaz Grullón, Torres' participation in the activities of the Juventud Democrática would gradually escalate, taking on editorial duties for the organization's publication *Grito* and assuming a leadership role following the 1947 banning of the organization during an intensified period of political repression by the Trujillo regime.[13] Despite his developing voice in the affairs of the opposition party, Torres likely avoided becoming the target of repression due to his mother's U.S. citizenship and his family's class status. Eventually, Torres would drop his law studies to devote himself to his creative work, which also helped to keep him out of the regime's crosshairs briefly.

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[12] The failed Cayo Confites expedition was one front of a liberation group that came to be called the Caribbean Legion, which in the 1940s planned the overthrow of dictatorships across the Central American and Caribbean region. Originally planned to depart from the eponymous Keys in central Cuba, the group of approximately 1200 armed men had intended to invade the Dominican Republic and depose the tyrant Rafael Trujillo in 1947, but the plan was foiled once the United States—then a strong ally of Trujillo—coerced the Cuban government into conducting mass arrests of the conspirators and tipped off the Trujillo administration. In addition to De Soto, many other notable members share a connection to Oscar Torres. Pedro Mir, poet and eventual collaborator with Torres on the screenplay for *Realengo 18;* Juan Bosch, the first democratically-elected president of the Dominican Republic whose numerous social-democratic causes received direct support from Torres; Virgilio Díaz Grullón, author and comrade of Torres in the Juventud Democrática; and Fidel Castro, who participated in the failed invasion as a 21-year-old and would have Torres under his employ twelve years later.

[13] Virgilio Díaz Grullón, *Antinostalgia de una era* (Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1993): 63.

Still especially practiced in neither art nor agitation, Oscar Torres' professional life began as a film critic in Santo Domingo. His early interest in cinema is comprehensively recorded in the 1951 editions of the Dominican newspaper *El Caribe*—a paper founded in 1948 as the official press organ of the Trujillo regime—where he takes up a position as art correspondent sometime in late 1950.[14] Subsequent to the publication of an unattributed series on the history of early cinema, Torres is put in charge of a weekly film column titled "Fábrica de sueños" ("The Dream Factory"), where the author became known for a critical perspective best described as equal parts jokey and trenchant. In his column, Torres would advocate for the exhibition of European cinema in Santo Domingo, then a relative rarity on Dominican screens, though his many reviews of Italian and French films during his six-month stint suggest that he was successful in this regard. Despite having established himself as a journalist, Torres' columns trail off in the second half of 1951. On September 9, a lone article in the entertainment section of the newspaper announces his abrupt departure for Italy to enroll in the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia ("Centro" or CSC) in Rome, promising that his critical work would continue to be published from abroad.[15]

In Rome, Oscar Torres flourished as a filmmaker in the company of the booming Latin American presence at the Centro (Figure 3.1). Among many other prominent enrollees, Torres would share his classrooms with the likes of Cuban filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa, the Spanish-Cuban cinematographer Néstor Almendros, and the figure many consider the father of the New Latin American cinema, the Argentinian Fernando Birrí.[16] Despite

[14] It has been stated in his biographical work that Torres was hired by El Caribe as a film critic. However, an article dated January 1951 mentions Torres' participation as judge in a photography contest being held by the newspaper and lists him as an "art writer." The record shows that his work as a film columnist is a position he successfully created for himself. "Se Inaugura un Concurso de Aficionados a la Fotografía," El Caribe, Jan 28, 1951, n.p.
[15] "Sale Hoy Hacia Italia Oscar Antonio Torres," El Caribe, September 9, 1951, 9.
[16] Flavia Laviosa, Alfredo Baldi, Jim Carter, and Diego Bonelli, "International students at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome: 1935-2020: A history to be written," *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 9.2 (March 2021). Other CSC students included the Colombian writer and father of magical realism Gabriel García Márquez, the Cuban-Italian author Italo Calvino, founder of the Cinemateca Brasileira Rudá de Andrade, and the Peruvian conceptual artist

the creative effervescence implied by this group, Torres' time there was marked by repeated truancy, even receiving written reprimands and threats of expulsion from his professors.[17] According to his CSC classmates, Torres was known to step out for a cigarette in Rome and wake up the next day in Milan.[18] He visited Eduardo Manet in Paris, he attended the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in the former Czechoslovakia, he was involved in the aforementioned communist student congress in Bucharest, he polished his Greek in Athens, and, finally, he traveled to Moscow multiple times for reasons unclear (though likely worth pursuing as part of a future research project on the political activities of the New Latin American Cinema contingent in Europe). Absensteeism notwithstanding, Torres did do *some* work at the Centro. He performed as an extra in Folco Quilici's *Passegiatta di buon mattino* (*A Nice Morning Stroll*, 1953) and did uncredited technical work for Vittorio De Sica's *Stazione Termini* (*Termini Station,* 1953) and Carlo Lizzani's *Cronache di poveri amanti* (*Chronicle of Poor Lovers,* 1954). Following his graduation from the Centro, Torres was courted by some in the Italian film industry, but Torres' compulsive cosmopolitanism would eventually lead him either find or found a tropical neorealism closer to home.

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, to name a few. Many other figures associated with Latin American cinema would follow in the ensuing decade.

[17] Beiro Álvarez, 263. In the appendix to Beiro Álvarez's biography of Torres, he includes the following letter:

[18] This is one of many choice anecdotes told by Torres' cousin, Manuel Miranda De Soto, in the film *Lo que se hereda* (Victoria Linares Villegas, 2022).

Figure 3.1 Oscar Torres posing with Italian Communist Party posters in Rome (left); Torres with his CSC classmates, in order of appearance from left to right: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Torres, possibly Julio García Espinosa, Italo Calvino, and Gabriel García Márquez (right). Photographs taken from Beiro Álvarez, 259-261.

Torres' departure from the Dominican Republic in order to pursue an education would seem an uneventful and, in fact, logical progression in his filmmaking career. However, some clues in the Dominican press suggest that Torres' was a forced exile. A year into his studies at the CSC, Torres was implicated on the first page of El Caribe under the headline "Dominican Enters Communist Plot Against Republic."[19] The article tells of a seizure of literary materials that contained communist propaganda from a Czech merchant ship entering the Santo Domingo (then called "Ciudad Trujillo") port. One the materials, a travel diary attributed to Torres, was found to contain evidence of his participation in the 1952 Congress of the International Union of Students, a sort of spiritual successor to the Communist International that drew left-revolutionary student groups from around the globe, but particularly from Latin America and Eastern Europe. The specifics of his plot against

[19] "Dominicano Entra En Plan Comunista Contra República," El Caribe, 5 November 1952, 1.

Trujillo are not mentioned in the column, though one "Tomás Gutiérrez"—current classmate and future ICAIC co-worker—is listed as Torres' Cuban co-conspirator. The piece concludes that, since this diary was addressed to the family members of Torres who lived in Santo Domingo, every attempt should be made to detain and question the named recipients of the contraband. In all likelihood, the lurid details of Oscar Torres' alleged conspiracy against the Dominican state and his outing as a communist were elements of a planted news story meant to discredit the Torres-De Soto family. The news also had the secondary effect of flagging Torres for detainment should he try to re-enter the Dominican Republic, while making him the subject of surveillance by Dominican intelligence operatives wherever he traveled. Thus, the state could now justify, retroactively and in perpetuity, their persecution of the Torres-De Soto's, which may have been the objective of the Trujillo security apparatus all along.

Statements made by members of his family reinforce the theory that, in this stage of his life, Oscar Torres was a partisan moonlighting as a film critic—not the other way around. Torres' mother is credited with saying that his son had been incarcerated by the regime sometime toward the end of his tenure at *El Caribe* in the summer of 1951, an unconfirmed claim that has been repeated in his colleague's recollections of the filmmaker's own anecdotes of life under the trujillato.[20] Torres' hasty resignation and his simultaneous enrollment at a university on the other side of the Atlantic—combined with his having received this belated *j'accuse* from the Generalissimo's own newspaper—color the way we understand Torres' exit, which was likely the result of a negotiation between the well-placed family and the Trujillo government. The compromise could have entailed a more elegant exit from his prominent position at *El Caribe* contingent on Torres' immediate departure from the Dominican Republic in place of a lengthy prison sentence—or worse. This interpretation of Torres'

[20] Manuel Miranda De Soto, interview by Luis Beiro Álvarez, *Oscar Torres: El cine con la mirada universal* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2019), 107.

foundational exile accentuates the poignancy of his final words on the film beat. In a piece written aboard a transatlantic ship, Torres includes remarks about watching his Caribbean fade over the horizon, his distaste for the urban sprawl of New York City (his penultimate port of call before Rome), and the true cost of his displacement. Destitute in every sense, Torres signs off, "The scent of Dominican earth still on me, I'm assailed by nostalgia. This is the price."[21] Torres' next opportunity to realize his dream of cinema, though not necessarily of revolution, would have to happen elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Filming the Black, Rural, and Radical: The DivEdCo Years

For the Division, making a documentary about the Black and sovereign Caribbean was a great limit. Nevertheless, Oscar would insist…

- Catherine Marsh Kennerley, 2008[22]

In 1953, Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education had undergone profound changes following the departures and reassignments of the Division's foreign-born founders, Jack Delano and Edwin Rosskam. The agency would restructure in such a way that the former apprentices would take over leadership of the individual units, thus creative control would be transferred from the imported talent to the homegrown with occasional assistance from selected invited filmmakers from the U.S. mainland. In the absence of any senior film professionals in-house, director Fred Wale leaned on the established networks between the DivEdCo and the United States Information Agency, contracting documentary filmmaker Willard Van Dyke to help with the transition. Van Dyke, as detailed in Chapter 1, leaned toward a more worldly vision for the Cinema Unit, doubling its festival submissions and sending its artists abroad with more regularity than his predecessors. The

[21] Oscar A. Torres, "A bordo del Vulcania," El Caribe, 24 October 1951, 18.
[22] Marsh Kennerley, 212.

Division's films were already becoming more than a mere organ of Puerto Rican governance around this time as the island assumed a new role as the "showroom of the Americas." Through expanded distribution channels such as the USIA and UNESCO, the DivEdCo films were used to demonstrate to the developing world the promise of the post-war liberal-democratic order and the success of the U.S. economic model. Contrary to the liberal-internationalist educational cinema being exported by aforementioned agencies, the films of the DivEdCo were favored in the global South due to the transparency of their developmentalist aims and the perceived universality of their humanist themes. What had begun as a modest attempt to bring the schoolhouse to the screen had suddenly found itself on the international scene, with countries as geographically and culturally diverse as Canada, India, Mexico, and dozens more importing, dubbing, and inserting into their curricula films from the Puerto Rican program.

Following his abrupt departure from the Centro Sperimentale in 1953, Torres had settled in the Puerto Rican capital of San Juan and found work as a journalist for the daily newspaper *El Imparcial*. In 1954, Torres applied a position as an assistant director within Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education, an organization with which he would remain associated for the entirety of his professional life. In Oscar Torres' candidacy, Willard Van Dyke had identified a documentarist who would be uniquely suited to the task of teaching an expanded audience and personally recommended the Dominican transplant for a permanent position at the Division.[23] As the DivEdCo's only professionally trained filmmaker, the influence of Torres' stylistic and formal signature on the Division is often overlooked. His presence as a direct link between Italian neorealism and the midcentury government film in Puerto Rico is neglected even in analyses of the Division which precisely attempt to document this aesthetic lineage. As the most well-travelled artist

[23] Fred Wale to Mariano Villaronga, Secretary of the Department of Education, 8 April 1954, in Beiro Álvarez (2019), 274.

on the roster, Torres brought to the studio a cosmopolitan sensibility, remained an active participant in Caribbean political affairs, and trained his camera on the many of the undocumented recesses of Puerto Rican society, images often at odds with the Commonwealth's cultural-nationalist project.

The initial stint at the DivEdCo from 1954-1958 resulted in three films which seem to further the familiar dictums of Puerto Rican institutionalized culture on the surface, but also signal an emerging aesthetic and political unease as an agent of the territorial government. In *Nenén de la ruta mora* ("Boy of the Moorish Road," 1955) and *¿Qué opina la mujer?* ("What Do Women Think?," 1957), Torres navigates the rigid ideological demands of his new employer while also exploring themes of racial and gender (in)equality that would mark in his later work. In 1958's *El yugo* ("The Yoke"), Torres shrouds in the language of cooperativism his affinity for other, more radical forms of collectivist forms of economic and social organization. Throughout his Puerto Rican oeuvre, a concern for the rural peasantry is palpable, but Torres' attention often went beyond the thematic requirements of the Division, which viewed the countryside as the site of the most dramatic effects of the reform project and its people as the segment most in need of assimilation in the island's modernization. At the time of their exhibition, however, none of these films on their own would have hinted at their author's communist leanings, though an analysis of the films' production materials may give the reader a hint in that direction—not to mention its author's renewed political activities outside of work hours. Viewed today as a cohesive expression of its filmmaker's style and politics, the early DivEdCo years encapsulate some of the themes that would reemerge throughout Oscar Torres' career, in particular the role of Black and rural populations in the reform process—and later, in processes of revolution.

In 1955, Torres wrote and directed the docudramatic short *Nenén de la ruta mora*, the first of the Division's films to center Afro-Puerto Rican culture. The film is about a child's first experience

of the carnival called *Las Fiestas de Santiago Apostol,* an Afro-diasporic take on the Spanish Catholic procession of St. James that takes place every summer in the majority-Black township of Loíza. Nenén, whose nickname is a colloquial way of addressing adolescent boys in Puerto Rico, has reached the age where he can attend the festivities of *Santiago de los Niños* on the final day of the carnival. The film follows Nenén as he meets a *vejigante* called Cumbé, a mythical, horned devil who harasses the local adults into coming to church. Together, they attend the festival, but not before allowing themselves to be sidetracked, dancing and playing along the beach as they gradually make their way toward the town's center, where they partake in the festivities before returning to their respective homes.

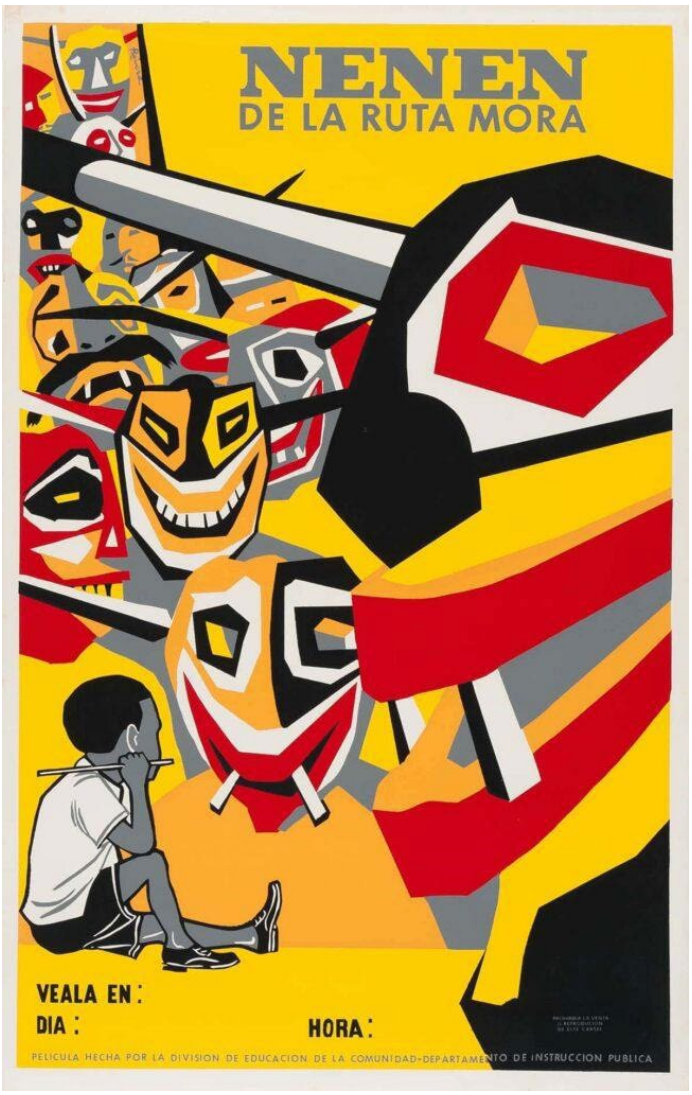

Figure 3.2 Poster for *Nenén de la Ruta Mora* (Carlos Raquel Rivera, 1955, silkscreen).

Dabbling in ethnographic modes reminiscent of Jean Rouch's African oeuvre, *Nenén* was nevertheless an odd entry into the DivEdCo catalog for numerous reasons. It was the rare film where the dramatic storyline is not centered on a definitive social problem, by the director's own admission.[24] It was exceptional as one of the few films at the time which the Division chose to circulate without an accompanying literary module to distribute as part of the field screenings, as

[24] Oscar Antonio Torres, "Informe sobre proyecto de realización del corto cinematográfico *'Nenén de la ruta mora',"* Mimeographed script, File No. 057 Nenén de la Ruta Mora, Fondo DivEdCo, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

internal communications suggest that its educational value is self-evident.[25] *Nenén* also holds the distinction of being the second film to be shot in color in the island's history, trailing only the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture founder Ricardo Alegría's *Las Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol*, which had only four years prior to Torres' film resorted to color technology to similarly capture the blue of the sky, the white of the sand, and the Black of the skin.[26] In the proposal for the project, Torres states that he wanted to make sure that "the coldness of the document" did not suffocate the lyrical qualities of Loíza's folklore while also trying to avoid making of loiceño tradition a tourist spectacle.[27] Torres' film would not seek to edify the cultural and religious practices of *loiceños* with the same bluntness of prior ethnographic incursions on the subject, as the generic ambivalence of the docudrama allowed for some hybrid elements—namely, that of fantasy—to seep into the narrative.[28] The tactical inscription of Afrodiasporic culture and its unclear *use* in the context of the DivEdCo as the media organ of Puerto Rico's Popular Democratic Party renders the film an oddity to the canon as of 1955. In particular, Torres' attention to the labor of *loiceña* artisans, the ambiguous and fragmentary mode with which he films the festival scenes bearing the heaviest burden of ethnographic meaning-making, as well as the unorthodox (and perhaps ineffective) pedagogical strategy of privileging the perspective of a child (Figure 3.2)—still naive to the very traditions that previous ethnographies of Loíza would charge to instinct—stand out as an affirmation of blackness within a corpus of films otherwise tasked with perpetuating the myth of racelessness and flattening

[25] Marsh Kennerley, 145.
[26] For critiques of the film from a postcolonial perspective, see: Dania Abreu-Torres, "(Des)Articulando la negritud: codificaciones de raza en el cine nacional puertorriqueño," *Centro Journal* 28.2 (Fall 2015): 132-161; Hilda Llórens, *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Race, Gender, and Nation During the American Century* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); and my forthcoming essay, "Littoral Blackness: Race, Cinema, and Midcentury Cultural Nationalisms in Puerto Rico," *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas* (Fall 2023-Winter 2024).
[27] Torres, "Informe…", 2-4.
[28] Mariam Colón-Pizarro, "Poetic Pragmatism: The Puerto Rican Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) and the Politics of Cultural Production, 1949-1968." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011): 196.

difference. As a politically ambivalent and pedagogically redundant film object, *Nenén* was effectively the Division's first "standalone" project—a film made for film's sake.

Oscar Torres' second film for the DivEdCo is a similar attempt to integrate another minoritized segment of the Puerto Rican population into the political project of the Commonwealth: the working woman. *¿Qué opina la mujer?* ("What Do Women Think?," 1957) is a documentary short intended to highlight women's contributions to Puerto Rican society and reiterate the rights of women as protected by the newly ratified constitution. In Puerto Rico, the enfranchisement of women both in the ballot box and in the workplace was gradual and fragmented, but even then, women faced the added obstacles of literacy tests, the aforementioned demands of domestic labor, and voter coercion by family members or intimate partners. Before the construction of urban factories, women were relatively housebound, possessing neither the access to education necessary to build their careers nor the expectation that they should want to labor outside the home. The film encourages women to participate in the electoral process, join social clubs, or enter the labor pool all the while preserving qualities of femininity and meeting their expectation of performing domestic labor. According to René Marqués' script, the short was meant to accompany—or perhaps temper the national reception of—Benji Doniger's *Modesta* (1957), which narrated the emancipation of women from the domestic arena in more insurgent terms. Carmelo Esterrich has argued that the cultural environment in which the DivEdCo's post-screening discussions took place were often conducive to dismissals of the films' female protagonists and other sexist behavior on the part of the men in attendance.[29] But despite the convincing case for equality presented in *¿Qué opina la mujer?,* the film is not a feminist undertaking, as it positions the heteronormative nuclear family as the ideal

[29] Esterrich, 142.

and is ultimately a film addressed to men. If the documentary speaks to women at all, it is to remind them of their traditional roles in society just as much as their bitterly attained freedoms.

Figure 3.3 The opening shots of *¿Qué opina la mujer?* showing a woodcut sequence of a typical Puerto Rican marriage credited to artist Luis Guzmán Cajigas.

The film opens with woodcut images of a typical Puerto Rican marriage before and after the Commonwealth, as shown in Figure 3.3. Their insertion in the opening credits is meant to draw a distinction between ideas of the woman's role throughout history and the roles which Puerto Rican modernity now demanded from them. In a departure from previous films, *¿Qué opina…?* is structured in such a way that a dramatic narrative—an argument between a man and wife after the latter announces her desire to attend community meetings—is interspersed by interviews that invoke the authority of prominent female public figures of the time in an appeal to their participation in Puerto Rican agriculture, education, and industry. These segments feature interviews with women such as the then-current First Lady, Doña Inés Mendoza, as well as Margot Arce de Vázquez, one of the first women to graduate from the University of Puerto Rico and the founder of the flagship campus' Hispanic Studies department. Mendoza engages in an extended metaphor between women's fertility and the land's, praising her husband's achievement in irrigating formerly abandoned lands in the valleys while also encouraging women to tend to their own gardens, understood here to be both a nudge for women to work but also to tend to their husbands and, in due time, reproduce. There is also the strange matter of setting the interview segments with Arce de Vázquez, an internationally renowned scholar of Hispanic literature, not in the office, classroom,

library, or archive, but in her own home, sitting on her sofa, and holding her young daughter. Mendoza's clumsy appeal and Arce de Vázquez's more measured address to their respective admirers were both open invitations meant for women to resist the wholesale imposition of modernity—to exercise their rights in partial form while voluntarily surrendering others in Muñóz Marín's project of social reform. The inclusion of both these figures as models of the modern woman rapidly snaps into more conservative ideas of what it means to be a woman in ways that undercut the promise of the film's title.

In the film's pre-production, Oscar Torres had resisted the plan to center the film around the interview with Inés Mendoza, who had submitted edits of her own to the script with the explicit purpose of highlighting her husband's championing of women's rights. Her version of the film read more like a campaign speech, which some in the writer's room feared could be interpreted as the Division providing a forum for naked propaganda for the Popular Democratic Party (or PPD, the party founded by Muñóz Marín) if included in the final film. Torres' counterproposal was to have a *campesina,* or woman peasant, conduct the interview with Mendoza in front of the governor's mansion to make the socialite Mendoza appear more relatable but also to lend a naturalism to the segment by conducting it as a conversation between two persons onscreen. René Marqués, head of the Division's Editorial Unit, rejected cutting the First Lady's screen time as an "artificial and violent" deviation, preferring a format that had an off-camera male narrator serving as interviewer as a more palatable alternative.[30] By way of a compromise, he suggested that Torres reduce Mendoza's screen time, but allowed her to control the content of her interview and to use the documentary short as a pulpit for her husband's administration. In *¿Qué opina la mujer?,* Oscar Torres' concern for

[30] Memo from Marqués addressed to Torres, "Texto propuesto por Doña Inés para la secuencia de su entrevista a incluirse en el libreto de la película corta ¿Qué opina la mujer?," Oct 19 1955, In José Antonio Rivera González, "Género y proceso democrático: Las películas de DIVEDCO, 1950-1970 (PhD Diss, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2003), 284.

the women of the rural peasantry was overruled by DivEdCo leadership in favor of giving the First Lady a platform.

By 1958, Torres was feeling the restrictions imposed on the Division's cultural production by the PPD, which now faced internal and external challenges to Muñoz Marín's leadership. In the cultural sector, this power struggle played out in the transference of complete editorial control from the Cinema to the Editorial Unit, where Muñoz Marín ally René Marqués could more tightly refine the Division's messaging. Torres would not write another film for the rest of the decade, though his next film project matched him with a screenwriter from the Editorial Unit who resulted much more amenable to Torres' socialist leanings in Pedro Juan Soto. The PPD administration, aware of the unrest on the part of the agricultural, livestock, and fishing sectors as Puerto Rico's economy shifted away from farming to manufacturing, pushed the establishment of rural co-ops as a bulwark against market loss. Beyond that, Editorial—the unit in charge of all of DivEdCo's literary supplements—sought to quell an anti-Americanism that seemed to grow more common in the reception of their films and in Puerto Rican society more broadly. One of their pamphlets reads, "Cooperativism is one of the most effective barriers against two of the gravest threats to modern society: capitalist exploitation on the one hand and communist on the other."[31] In *El yugo* ("The Yoke," 1958), Torres masterfully balances the conservative pull of DivEdCo's messaging with his own convictions about labor rights, drawing a parallel between the emancipation of Puerto Rican youth from their families and that of the working class from predatory middlemen.

Set in the coastal town of Fajardo, *El yugo* follows Manolín, a local fisherman who is trying to save up enough money to elope with his fiancée, Adela. Fishing is one of the few steady sources of

[31] *El cooperativismo y tú* (San Juan Departamento de Instrucción Pública División de la Educación de la Comunidad, 1960): 53

work in the town of Fajardo, but many have struggled to sell their wares in the changing landscape of the Puerto Rican economy, which has disrupted supply chains and the usual distribution channels following an influx of foreign supermarket chains. In the uncertainty, resellers like Don Tello exploit the workers' unfamiliarity with retail and take a disproportionate cut of the earnings. At home, Manolín works to win over his future in-laws, who had previously denied his advances because of his meager earnings. However, despite Don Tello's stinginess, Manolín has been able to save up enough to provide for Adela and he is finally granted her hand in marriage. Their honeymoon consists of a trip to the capital city, San Juan, where Manolín is shocked to find voluminous quantities of fish sold affordably in the markets. The reseller's con revealed, Manolín hatches a plan to form a fishermen's co-op, with each member taking turns fishing, packing, and hauling the day's catch, thus eliminating the middlemen (Figure 3.4). Despite Don Tello's tantrums and boycott, the members of the newly established co-op park their pick-up truck on the beach and watch as local fishermen spurn Don Tello to sell their merchandise through the co-op. The film ends with the reassurance that the young Manolín can both provide for his family as well as his fellow fishermen, his wife having escaped from the constraints of an overprotective family and his co-op from the clutches of a preying capitalist.

Figure 3.4 Workers pull a fishing boat out of the water (left) and Don Tello weighs the day's catch (right) *in El yugo* (1958).

Filmed entirely with a non-professional cast, *El yugo* is one of just a handful of films in the DivEdCo canon that could feasibly be called neorealist, despite the label being indiscreetly attached to much of its production in the 1950s. All of the cast is comprised of amateur actors and the film is shot on location, both in the beach town of Fajardo as in the boulevards of San Juan. Beyond these formal considerations, Torres transplants some of neorealism's ethical concerns, particularly its focus on injustices along class divides between rural and the urban. For example, although Pedro Juan Soto's writing is cautious, the synopsis he provided Fred Wale labels generically refers to the members of the co-op as "revolutionaries."[32] In this regard, *El yugo* is remarkable within the entire catalog of DivEdCo films because of its depiction of urban life in midcentury Puerto Rico, which would have been a departure from the usual strategy of encouraging rural audiences with *jíbaro* (peasant) characters onscreen.[33] The prosperity and abundance of San Juan is rendered here in full and, thus, so is the disparity of a typical *sanjuanero*'s quality of life when compared to a worker in the countryside. Manolín, figured as flaneur in the capital city, gains first-hand experience of how his rural labor provides for urban life. Thus, the revelatory moment of the encounter between the urban and the rural becomes the catalyst for a labor dispute. In essence, the jíbaro protagonist of *El yugo* is radicalized through the shock of his encounter with modernity and the consequent reevaluation of the scale of Puerto Rican societal transformation against the interest of the working class. Such an emphasis on class struggle and historical ruptures would place Torres' film well within Latin American proto-neorealisms, though in its own time any claims of a neorealist influence in the cinema of the DivEdCo may now be almost wholly attributed to Torres' contributions.[34]

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[32] Pedro Juan Soto, "Sinopsis de EL YUGO," Mimeographed script, No. 113 El yugo, Fondo DivEdCo, AGPR.
[33] *Jíbaro* is the colloquial word for "peasant" in Puerto Rico, but many DivEdCo films depict the figure of the *jíbaro* as an idealized folk hero.
[34] Oscar Torres, Memo to Miembros del Comité del Programa, "Documental Dramático sobre Vieques," 1954-1957, Archivo Inactivo del Departamento de Educación. Perhaps the furthest Torres got to getting neorealism in through the Division's backdoor is an unfilmed script written between 1954-57. The untitled film was planned as an episodic docudrama that showed life in the Puerto Rican island municipality of Vieques, two-thirds of which the U.S. Navy had

If Torres was not a communist prior to his departure from the Dominican Republic, he had certainly become one by the time he left Rome. Parallel to his directorial career at the DivEdCo, Torres contributed his significant editorial prowess to the journal *Vanguardia Revolucionaria Dominicana,* published by an underground collective of Dominican exiles who had mainly settled in Puerto Rico. In addition to his main role as the journal's editor from 1954 to 1958, Torres also published columns in which, among other things, imagined the role that cinema would play in a post-Trujillo Dominican Republic. In one article titled "The Urgency of a Democratic Reeducation," Torres proposed the DivEdCo as a model for the new Dominican education system, which would be implemented in that neighboring island with a few notable modifications.[35] In contrast to the Puerto Rican project, Torres envisioned the planned program would be a decidedly political venture which, while not necessarily favoring one political party over another, would adopt a firm, combative stance against the legacy of the trujillato. The program should conceive of its target community in the broadest possible terms, reaching equally the rural laborer in the countryside as it would the Dominican soldier in their barracks to force the latter to identify with the former. Such was the tone of many of Torres' columns for the VRD, as he attempted to generate a coalition of Dominican exiles, communists, social-democrats, and "Bochistas" organized under the common cause of antitrujillismo.

converted into a military base and occupied for the majority of the 20th century. In the untitled film, Torres' depicted the North American presence on the island as alien to the nature and culture of the island. For example, some scenes would show the forced seizure of land from farmers on the part of soldiers. Another unusual approach placed the spectator in the perspective of a reluctant soldier, who nevertheless chooses to follow orders against the interests of his fellow "citizens," the viequenses.

[35] Oscar Torres, "Urgencia de una reeducación democrática," *Vanguardia Revolucionaria Dominicana* 2 (December 1956): n.p.

Figure 3.5 Photograph of stacked, unclaimed carpetas from *Las carpetas* series (Christopher Gregory-Rivera, photographic series, 2014–present).

Torres' sharpened revolutionary politics in his initial Puerto Rican stint are substantiated by recently declassified files from the State Police of Puerto Rico, an illegal surveillance program is commonly known as *las carpetas* or "the files" (Figure 3.5). The PR Police had notoriously collaborated with the FBI from the onset of Puerto Rican "self-governance" as part of the broader COINTELPRO program which surveilled communist elements and subverted pro-independence organizations, much like it had on the mainland against anti-war and racial justice organizations. During this time, the Luis Muñoz Marín government was particularly wary of Dominican exiles in Puerto Rico, both because of potential plots to depose a neighboring head of state on the one hand or because many were suspected of being spies for Trujillo. Because of this security concern, Oscar

Torres was the target of police surveillance from the very start of his time in Puerto Rico, even being accused at one point of fabricating bombs in his San Juan apartment using foam rubber from his mattress.[36] From December 1955 up until his departure for Cuba in the Fall of 1959, Torres had accrued no fewer than twenty-five confidential reports detailing his participation in political rallies and pickets.[37] The overwhelming majority of these memos, reports, and write-ups describe consistent, sometimes daily actions held across from the Dominican Embassy in San Juan demanding the immediate arrest of Rafael Trujillo, denouncing his most recent political assassination, and flying the flag of the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*. Among the many speeches and slogans Torres was immersed in at these rallies, one warning from a University of Havana law student may serve as an encapsulation of Torres' pan-Caribbean political formation. In June 1958, the student speaks, "We Cubans have had to submit to a great sacrifice to do away with the dictatorship of Fulgencia Batista, but Batista, compared to Trujillo, was a child."[38] Like so many striving freedom fighters from the former third world, Oscar Torres was heartened by the triumph of the revolution in the neighboring Cuba. Already exiled and unable to make revolution in his home island, Torres resolved instead to make it *to* the Revolution.

Exporting Reform: Oscar Torres in Cuba

Not for any 'DeMillean' pretense, but simply because the filming locations are so remote and lacking in amenities, our group will require a great deal that for any other shoot would be inconceivable… Things that will not only allow us to live with a minimum of modern comforts, but also to conserve our energy for the task ahead and return to Havana safe and sound without becoming bait for the crocodiles in the swamp (hold on to your seat, Yelín, because the list is long).

- Oscar Torres, Location Scouting Report to ICAIC's Saúl Yellín, Alfredo Guevara, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, October 1959[39]

[36] In reality, he had fallen asleep while smoking a cigarette, which caused the bed to catch fire.
[37] Carpeta No. 16717 Oscar A. Torres, División de Inteligencia de la Policía de Puerto Rico, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.
[38] Carpeta No. 16717.
[39] Oscar Torres, "Conclusiones respecto a los problemas de filmación del documental sobre la Ciénaga," Report to Saúl Yellín, Alfredo Guevara, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Mimeographed documents, Tierra olvidada file, Cinemateca de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.

In September 1958, Oscar Torres tendered his resignation from the Division of Community Education to Fred Wale in a letter postmarked from Caracas, Venezuela.[40] His exact activities in the Venezuelan capital during the ensuing year remain largely unknown. In Torres' last published column for the Vanguardia Revolucionaria Dominicana, titled "Autopsy of a dictatorship," the author interprets the successful coup that had removed the Venezuelan military dictatorship and its president Marcos Pérez Jímenez earlier that year as a forecast for other imminent revolutions in the region. Dominican exiles were drawn to the Venezuelan case ever since former president Rómulo Betancourt had become a vocal opponent of the Trujillo regime throughout the 1950s and Torres in particular considered the uprising a simulacrum for the eventual overthrow of their own dictator in Santo Domingo.[41] Torres calls Caribbean despots such as the Dominican Trujillo, the Venezuelan Pérez Jiménez, the Nicaraguan Somoza, and the Cuban Batista "all dogs with different collars."[42] What seemed to attract Torres to the Venezuelan case was the popular mass and unity that opposition groups had managed to attain. He preferred this concern for the preservation of social-democratic institutions over the disparate violent skirmishes taking place in the Cuban Revolution, which he took to signal a division in the opposition that Batista had thus far been able to exploit. Whatever his tactical inclinations in times of revolt, Torres' esteem for Betancourt's Venezuela abated soon after the latter assumed power and immediately banned the revolutionary communist

[40] Beiro Álvarez, *Oscar Torres*…, 278.
[41] Not much is known of the period between Torres' resignation from the DivEdCo, his time in Venezuela, and his arrival in Cuba sometime between July and September 1959. Many of Torres' former comrades at the Juventud Democrática had taken refuge in the South American country, in particular one close friend named Juan Ducoudray. The itinerant president of Venezuela and head of the opposition to the dictatorship, Rómulo Betancourt, had become Trujillo's public enemy number one and was the target of an assassination attempt by Dominican operatives following his denouncement of the dictatorship in the Dominican Republic at an Organization of American States meeting in 1960, which resulted in the attempt on Betancourt's life that would the international community against the regime later that year.
[42] Oscar Torres, "Autopsia de una dictadura," Vanguardia Revolucionaria Dominicana, April 1958, n.p.

and socialist parties that had proved integral to the country's liberation.[43] Torres would find himself in a familiar position, dissatisfied and in search of his revolution in the Caribbean.

In the meantime, Oscar Torres' *El yugo* was enjoying a successful festival run, premiering internationally at the Venice Film Festival in 1959. Also at the Venice festival that year was the first delegation of Cuba's Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry, headed by director Alfredo Guevara, who would have seen the former Centro Sperimentale alum's film win an honorable mention.[44] Although the extent of Oscar Torres' and Guevara's contact prior to the festival is unclear, Torres had kept in touch with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea following their time at the CSC in Rome. The latter had even extended an open invitation to join the ICAIC's predecessor, the film club Nuestro Tiempo, since its foundation, which had since then become a more attractive career option as the group of Cuban cinephiles now endeavored to construct and institutionalize a national, revolutionary cinema. The ICAIC's recruitment of the fellow Caribbean filmmaker only hastened following the conclusion of the festival. In September 1959, Gutiérrez Alea writes Guevara a letter informing him that Torres had reached out to him from to expressed interest in finally joining his former classmates in Havana as soon as possible. Gutiérrez Alea wrote to Guevara on behalf of Torres, "[Torres] possesses a lot of experience and he is very well trained. I offered him a salary of $250.00 to become the director of a documentary unit and I hope he accepts."[45] He would arrive in Cuba sometime in the fall of 1959. In the process, Torres would become the first "foreign" filmmaker to find permanent work in the ICAIC following its foundation, though Torres' early departure in 1961 and the ensuing arrival of more illustrious artists from the Global North has since obfuscated that fact. The next two sections reexamine the formative months between his arrival in

[43] Ángel M. Rivera Rivera, *Luis Muñoz Marín y la Revolución Cubana, 1959-1962* (San Juan, Editorial Patria, 2019): 148.
[44] Luciano Castillo, "Fellini in the Cuban Context," in *A Companion to Federico Fellini,* eds. Franke Burke, Marguerite Waller, and Marita Gubareva (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020): 451.
[45] Alfredo Guevara, *Tiempo de Fundación* (Madrid: Iberautor, 2003): 48.

and departure from Cuba to recontextualize Torres' contributions to the ICAIC's early internal debates; to trace a continuity between his Puerto Rican films of social reform and those he made in Cuba; to examine his place among and in relation to other visiting filmmakers at the time; and, lastly, to produce a record of Oscar Torres as an agent—if an ill-fitting and highly distractible one—in the design of a new Cuban cinema.

Already among the most accomplished filmmakers on the ICAIC roster, Oscar Torres was quickly put to work, taking part in a location scouting trip a mere week into his ICAIC tenure, where he was to take notes in advance of the Institute's most ambitious documentary film to date, *Tierra olvidada* ("Forgotten Land," Oscar Torres, 1960).[46] The documentary was meant to reveal to the rest of the island the plight of coalworkers living and laboring in the Ciénaga de Zapata, a 1,700-square mile stretch of swampland in the Matanzas province whose farthest reaches were only accessible via waterways. Life in these swamplands was harsh. It consisted of 14-hour workdays, limited access to nutritional foods, near universal illiteracy, and a drastically shortened life expectancy, as described by Torres himself in his production report to ICAIC leadership, in which he also requested provisions and accommodations for what he estimated would be a 54-day shoot.[47] Sarcastically referred to by Fidel Castro as his personal "El Dorado," the wetlands had become the center of major infrastructural development and a marker of the modernization project. The ICAIC had taken it upon themselves to document the material improvements the Revolution had brought to the

[46] The working titles for the film were "Ciénaga de Zapata" and "Algo nuevo en el pantano" ("Something new in the swamp").

[47] Among these requests are helicopters, boats, and Jeeps for quicker access to the town of Santo Tomás, which they reached after trekking for four hours on foot from the nearest roadway. Torres also requested repeatedly throughout the report one of the yachts seized by the Rebel Army nearby, so that they could lodge right on the shore of the Hatiguanico river. There was no word on whether these accommodations were offered. Torres, "Conclusiones…"

countryside, a significant thematic continuity for Torres given his previous work documenting remote and formerly isolated rural communities in rural Puerto Rico.

Both Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Alfredo Guevara envisioned the film as the first of a two-part documentary series on the *ciénaga* which responded to the priorities of the new state. The first film would demonstrate the generalized inhospitability of the region and the hopelessness of the locals prior to the arrival of the rebels in a semifictional fashion—this would be the focus of Torres' resulting film—and the second a triumphant documentary piece celebrating a rapidly transforming Cuban countryside where the peasant is no longer a "slave to nature."[48] The sequel would feature Rebel Army engineers dredging the swamplands, carving new roadways, erecting schools and hospitals, among other technical and civic innovations mustered by the new government, and would be filmed at a later date. Much like the documentaries *Esta tierra nuestra* and *La vivienda* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1959), *Tierra olvidada* would follow the more didactic style of early ICAIC nonfiction shorts released during or shortly before the Year of the Agricultural Reform, demarcating a rupture in the span of Cuban history, in no uncertain terms, into a period before the Revolution and the period after.[49] Despite the plans for a serialized documentation of the development of the Zapata swamplands, Oscar Torres' version of film would be the only one shot. More importantly, *Tierra olvidada* would be the Revolution's first docudramatic picture.[50]

Tierra olvidada begins with the pained wailing of a woman (Fela) going into labor in the village of Santo Tomás, a small inland islet in the heart of the Ciénaga de Zapata. We learn that she is the

[48] Alfredo Guevara, August 28, 1959, Letter to Dr. Antonio Nuñez Jiménez, Mimeographed documents, Tierra olvidada. Doc. 1960. Documentación., Cinemateca de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.
[49] Hernán Farias Dopazo, "El campesinado en el cine documental cubano de la primera etapa de la Revolución (1959-1961)," in "Revolución Cubana y documental - 60 años," eds. Ignacio del Valle Dávila and Mariana Martins Villaça, DOC On-line (2019): 303. In this initial year, the Institute filmed its educational films rapidly and often with a voiceover narration, a technique from which ensuing directors would distance themselves.
[50] Elizabeth Sutherland, "Cinema of Revolution: 90 Miles from Home," *Film Quarterly* 15.2 (Winter 1961-62): 45.

wife a *carbonero* (Tito, a coalworker) when the narrator laments, by way of a summary, that upon their child's birth the swamp is fated to become "their crib, school, and grave." Over a somber narration, the film documents a typical workday for the men of the marsh. Shirtless, sunbeaten coalworkers wade chest-deep through the tarred water and trawl the swamp bed for viable coal logs. They mount wood piles on canoes and tow them through muddy corridors until we are shown the dangerous process through which vegetable charcoal is made, by burning the wood in a central kiln, the extreme smoke and heat a virtual death knell for the workers. The film later re-enacts the visit of engineers and construction crews—played by none other than the film crew themselves, Torres included—who have come to the village to survey the terrain and take accurate measurements for the planned dredging of the swamp, the construction of roadways and bridges, and the laying of train tracks. But modernity cannot come fast enough. As the coalworkers and engineers discuss the future of the swamp, Fela goes into labor midway during the day-long trip to the nearest hospital. The rail car is forced to stop in what the spectator assumes is the middle of nowhere, but as Fela gives birth, it is revealed that the delivery is taking place adjacent to one of the first few dredged sections on the outskirts of the swamp and close to a nearby town. The family returns to Santo Tomás with a healthy baby and, having now witnessed that that the rumors of progress reaching the ciénaga are true, are now secure in the knowledge that the Revolution will soon be able to provide for them too.[51]

To the initiated, these images recall those of *El mégano* (1955), a short directed by Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea five years prior that applies precepts of neorealism to

[51] In his 2002 memoir, *Tierra olvidada* production assistant Alberto Roldán writes of the lead actress' delivery, "December 17. On our way back to Havana we received dismal news from the swamp. Evelia gave birth to a healthy baby boy. It was an inauspicious delivery, but upon leaving the hospital the boy began to bleed from the navel and the mother didn't realize it until they were already on the boat headed back to the swamp… In the time it took to turn back, get to the town, and head to the hospital the poor boy had already bled out. A terrible ending to a story that did not have to end this way…" Alberto Roldán, *La mirada viva* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2002), 45.

the Cuban reality under dictator Fulgencio Batista—in this case, the very same exploitation of the coalworkers in the bogs—and serves as a precursor to the creolized neorealism that would become the model for a national cinema following the Revolution. Torres was familiar with the film, if not through his correspondence with Gutiérrez Alea and his cineclub in the '50s, then certainly during the preparatory stages of his first documentary. Upon its initial showing in 1955, *El mégano* had been seized by the Fulgencio Batista regime and was among the first films to re-premiere upon the ICAIC taking control of film exhibition. Further, Gutiérrez Alea had furnished Torres with the production notes of *El mégano* in advance of his own scouting trip, suggesting that both Torres and Gutiérrez Alea considered *Tierra olvidada* a continuation of the central idea illustrated in that earlier treatment. Both shorts approach the subject of the exploitation of the coalworkers sympathetically, with the major distinction lying in the means through which the community is expected to address the problem at hand. Far from being "*El mégano* revisited," as Michael Chanan remarks, *Tierra olvidada* departs from the original by striking a more hopeful tone than a denunciatory one.[52] In Gutiérrez Alea's and García Espinosa's film, the portrayal of children as the ultimate heirs of their parents' suffering is meant to invoke not so much a bright, albeit distant future, but a prolonged injustice that could only be interrupted by radical social upheaval. [53] Torres' incrementalist vision of the ciénaga's remaking is not yet the future promised by the Revolution, nor does it imply the arrival of a radical rupture from the hopeless, stagnant "before" represented in *El mégano*. To this end, *Tierra olvidada* was well received upon the film's national release, with critics praising the decision to "[disregard] the easy and false path of portraying the 'before and after' of the Revolution."[54]

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[52] Chanan, 130.

[53] Anastasia Valecce, *Neorrealismo y cine en Cuba: Historia y discurso en torno a la primera polémica de la Revolución*, 1951–1962," (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020): 114.

[54] Jaime Soriano, "Tierra Olvidada," Revolución, Oct 11, 1960, n.p. Soriano continues, "…it is undeniable that we are witnessing a cinematographic persona that thinks in cinema, 'sees' in cinema, and produces himself, aptly, in cinema. With *Tierra olvidada* Torres demonstrates himself a filmmaker capable of situating himself in any given environment, capturing its film essence and returning it to us in a richly articulated film language and an honest, powerful expression."

Figure 3.6 The arrival of the engineers to the ciénaga in *Tierra olvidada* (Torres, 1960), led by Oscar Torres himself (bottom right).

Tierra olvidada also takes a different path to representing the arrival of Havanites to the ciénaga and thus attempts to make plain the idea of non-hierarchical labor and the abolition of class divisions in those politically convulsive times. While in *El mégano* we are shown images of wealthy tourists passing through the swamp and taking part in a virtual human safari, Torres positions the outsiders in his film as part of the working class, though not without a brief recourse into humor.[55] The self-referential nature of the arrival of the surveyors and engineers can be understood both as a tongue-in-cheek cameo of the filmmakers-cum-movie stars, but it is also indicative of Torres'—and, indeed, of the ICAIC's individual film units'—horizontalist approach to labor. In the first edition of

[55] One would get the impression of Torres' lightheartedness in his correspondence with ICAIC administrators. In the production notes, Torres' requested to ICAIC executives that the crew camp out "Sierra Maestra style" in the swamp. Elsewhere, he jokes about going over budget and wonders aloud if Fred Zinnemann made a mistake by not choosing Playa Larga as the filming location for *The Old Man and the Sea* (1959).

Cine Cubano, Alfredo Guevara summarizes the task of the documentarian in the first year of production,

> The camera is not a passive subject. Within it courses a film by way of a clockwork precision, and a ray of light penetrates the camera like the germ of life when *man's eye and hand* choose it. The eye and the hand remain in tension. Technically they must achieve the same results, and their reflexes must be as precise as a machine. Behind them another force: the artist, their talent, and their creativity are its conscience. Because of them, the same camera that documents reality and narrates the hard labor of the peasants and the imperialist exploitation and plunder of our riches, becomes, in one fell swoop, an instrument of transformation.[56]

Guevara here is adopting a stance against a cinema of diagnosis, positioning the filmmaker not as a mere courier of development, but its agent, a notion that would be more fully explored in the ensuing decade with the development of the New Latin American Cinema. In *Tierra olvidada,* Oscar Torres takes the dialectic of the hand and the eye from the page to the screen. In the scene depicting the arrival of the technicians from Havana, the narrator explains that locals have been noticing the changes coming to the ciénaga, "like the visit from those engineers and their strange machines…" The machine in question, set on a tripod and through whose viewfinder the locals are encouraged to peer, is not a camera, but a theodolite, used to measure the terrain in preparation for its development (Figure 3.6, top right). Torres places himself next to the apparatus while the carboneros take turns looking through its viewfinder (Figure 3.6, bottom left), a gesture—if Guevara's assertion holds—meant to invite the community to take part in the ongoing transformation of the country, both in its construction as well as its documentation. The reflexive device of his recasting of the director as foreman is notable as it playfully betrays Torres' own understanding of his changed responsibilities in a rapidly democratizing Cuba. In the DivEdCo, field technicians and social workers would venture out into the countryside to survey the pressing social needs and issues of the local community, but they would not make art. It was the artists in San Juan

[56] Guevara, 75. Emphasis added.

who would repackage solutions these social issues in film, graphic arts, and literary material under the expectation that their own creative labors be effaced in the resulting image. In Cuba, this distinction between filmmaker and field worker, between artist and technician was the problem itself: the camera was to be as crucial to the country as the level to the architect or the machete to the caneworker.[57] The new Cuban cinema believed that film and fieldwork were one and the same.

Despite the seeming ideological alignment between the ICAIC's conception of social reform and Torres' thematic allegiance toward the peasant subject, *Tierra olvidada* required slightly more oversight during its production than other contemporaneous documentaries, likely because the film strained the definition of what the Cubans considered documentary to be in the first place. In late 1960, the ICAIC was a government body still in the process of consolidating all film production under its umbrella, even as it required the resources of the rebel army and the talent of outside filmmakers. Torres' relative autonomy as head of his own field unit, as well as his own institutional formation in Puerto Rico, posed a unique challenge. For example, Torres' script drastically deviated from the plan outlined in previous conversations with Alfredo Guevara, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, José Massot, and Humberto Arenal, where the initial two-part structure of the film had been agreed upon. Torres had submitted a detailed script following the customary format of a DivEdCo project containing a rationale and stating learning outcomes for the film, but in a departure, Torres would work in a voiceover narration, not unlike the one used in his first film, *Nenén de la ruta mora.* In his correspondence with ICAIC subdirector Saúl Yellín, Torres writes that, in his estimation, the screenplay "carries more the scent of mud than picaresque lyricism," signaling that he aimed for a

[57] Guevara, 78. Guevara writes explicitly of the flashbacks juxtaposing the carboneros' and Fela's labor in *Tierra olvidada*: "These repetitions are neither passive nor do they merely serve as illustration, but instead they reach us with a newfound force. We are no longer observers. The hard work of the carboneros acquires another meaning, and our understanding becomes more direct and profound. This is how we 'overcome' the artificiality of certain images and perceive the tragic content of its formal beauty. This contradiction is not resolved on the screen, but it is so violent and dramatic that it is resolved in the spectator's conscience.

more sober or pragmatic depiction of the difficulties in integrating the carboneros and their families into the revolutionary project.[58] Torres' vision was to thread a dramatic storyline—in this case, the odyssey of a woman in labor being transported to the nearest medical facility over the course of a day—into the documentary image as a way of intensifying the already palpable scenes of impoverishment and suffering. The drone of the voice of God narration was meant to accentuate the film's verisimilitude. In short, Torres was an artist practiced in a highly particular liberal tradition of problem films, from which something like *Tierra olvidada* would not radically depart. If, as David Brancaleone writes, *El mégano* was an attempt to put Zavattinian ideas into practice, "having nothing to do with the pioneers of documentary, the great Robert Flaherty or John Grierson,"[59] then *Tierra olvidada* was an attempt to synthesize the two operative tendencies in the Latin American nonfiction cinema of the time, owing more to the latter tradition. With the delivery of the healthy baby and the dredging of the swamp, Torres' script baked in a dramatic closure, which was a narrative device the revolutionary line would come to avoid in favor of the imperative that the Revolution had to be continually litigated, defended, and refined. Torres would have some explaining to do.

The stylistic tension between documentary form and narrative realism informed debates within Cuban film culture between 1959 and 1960. Cuban artists and intellectuals attempted to merge the useful with the aesthetic, a boundary where revolutionary didactic cinema, feature films, newsreel, and observational documentary lay equal claim. Despite many of the ICAIC founders' stated willingness to sacrifice their own aesthetic pursuits in the service of an urgent and useful cinema in those early years—a sacrifice best exemplified by the aforementioned *Esta tierra nuestra*—even Tomás Gutiérrez Alea would soon disavow that style of documentary filmmaking as too dull

[58] Oscar Torres, "Guion cinematográfico para documental sobre Ciénaga de Zapata," Tierra olvidada. Doc. 1960. Documentación, Cinemateca de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.
[59] David Brancaleone, *Cesare Zavattini's Neo-realism and the Afterlife of an Idea* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 216.

and ponderous to serve the needs of the Revolution in perpetuity.[6061] However, it does not appear that the ICAIC's stylistic disagreements with Oscar Torres originated from the latter's uncompromising position on the artist's absolute creative autonomy. In an undated letter to Alfredo Guevara, Gutiérrez Alea, in his capacity as script supervisor for *Tierra olvidada*, identifies a potential hazard in the docudramatic form proposed by Torres,

> [The two-film] idea seems good to me, but always contingent on one aspect that feels difficult to attain: that we find two stories of impact with which we may, without much artifice or forcing a narrative, clearly elucidate the central idea that we're presenting. This proposition is highly dangerous since it limits the field of action for the filmmaker and forces him to run the great risk of producing a work where the preconceived message prevents him from attaining a high degree of artistry. I'm sure that it's not impossible to reach a result both useful and of a certain quality based on this idea, but *it is a risk*, without a doubt […] I believe that two short films have a greater chance of achieving the ideal result, each in its own style, rather than having two film stories in which we *mix drama with a propagandistic message too rigid and precise*.[62]

In Gutiérrez Alea's estimation, the main issue with Torres' version of the film, in addition to leaving little material for the ICAIC to film at the ciénaga for its planned bipartite series, was that *Tierra olvidada* was too baldly propagandistic. This is no minor critique. Contemporary accounts of Torres' clashes with Cuban officialdom presuppose his resistance toward artists becoming mere pamphleteers for the state and his unwillingness to adopt a more conventional film form, but this line of critique suggests otherwise.[63] Gutiérrez Alea had assigned Torres to this project precisely because he intended the resulting film to be the Cuban answer to Joris Ivens' *Zuiderzee* (1930) or Pare Lorentz' *The River* (1937) and had identified similarities in Torres' work for the DivEdCo. He

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[60] Paul A. Schroeder, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: The Dialectics of a Filmmaker* (Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 2014): 11.
[61] Silvia Oroz, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: los filmes que no filmé* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1989): 33.
[62] Memo from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea to Alfredo Guevara and Co., Undated, "Tierra olvidada. Doc. 1960. Documentación.," Cinemateca de Cuba. Emphasis added.
[63] Luis Beiro Álvarez, *Nadie te vio morir* (Santo Domingo: Banco Central de la República Dominicana, 2019), 193. In Beiro Álvarez semifictional novel based on the filmmaker's life, the socialist Oscar Torres faces the moral dilemma of having to make propaganda films for a government which, by then, had all but declared its socialist nature. As the author recounts with no small degree of ahistoricism and political illiteracy, Torres instead chooses to abandon the Revolution over disagreements with the Cuban government but has no qualms with continuing his film practice propagandizing for the governments of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico in the 1960s.

considered Torres to be independent in all matters creative despite the strict ideological purview of his previous employer, entrusting him as a guest filmmaker to make an artful piece of educational cinema that highlighted the modern man's triumph over nature.[64] The purpose of this educational cinema would be to render propaganda, in the final account, obsolete. In the strategy of collating drama with propaganda, however, Gutiérrez Alea saw a form that promised both disruption and diversion yet ran the risk of delivering neither with equal force. The story was too indebted to bourgeois cinema to properly agitate and the narration was too overbearing to elicit the audience's sympathy, as the film's exhortations were liable to being received by the peasantry as another imposition from Havana.[65] Torres' compulsion to dramatize the changes happening to Cuban society was interpreted by Gutiérrez Alea, channeling André Bazin, as a lack of faith in the image or in the possibilities of the medium.[66] In defense of his own early observational documentaries, Gutiérrez Alea resisted calls to flood film with information while also suggesting that, in those days, to be a filmmaker the only responsibility was to pick up a camera and point it at the masses.[67] Convinced of the need to find a novel film form befitting of the present Cuban reality, ICAIC leadership had already considered the neorealist influence of those first years the main compromise, a temporary and pragmatic solution that sufficed in the immediate term, but nevertheless was to be thought of as a stopgap until such a time as a new, revolutionary, and decidedly Cuban aesthetic would emerge.

[64] Memo to Alfredo Guevara, Cinemateca de Cuba.
[65] As the literacy campaign would establish a year later, the act of teaching in the revolution should be mutual, thus avoiding a schema whereby only the urban-educated would be expected to teach and the peasantry to learn.
[66] Oroz, 35.
[67] Moreover, the Ciénaga de Zapata already carried a symbolic weight to both Cuban cinema and revolution that was lost on non-Cubans: it was the subject of what many considered to be the first revolutionary film in El mégano, it became the site of the first triumph of the Revolution's public works agenda, and soon it would become the battleground where the Rebel Army would successfully repel a counterrevolutionary invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

Figure 3.7 Oscar Torres (at head of the table) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (third from his left, leaning into the shot). Photograph from Beiro Álvarez, 260.

It stands to reason that the disagreement between the two artists was more than a case of professional rivalry or creative differences, but a deepening fissure in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's and Oscar Torres' political outlooks in the intervening years following their time at the Centro Sperimentale (Figure 3.7). In Rome, Torres was a self-described communist, while Gutiérrez Alea had only reluctantly entertained members of the Sociedad Nuestro Tiempo who identified as Marxists, a descriptor Gutiérrez Alea himself would not associate with until after the Revolution. Since then, each had come to side with the other' position. Gutiérrez Alea, while a fierce critic of both socialist realist and bourgeois avant-garde tendencies in Cuban art, did not shy away from criticizing the perceived deficiencies of Cuban-style socialism in his own films, even as he depended on the system to continue to make his cinema. The Revolution had granted him the film body that he had been trying to build for over a decade and, as such, he was willing to negotiate within it and in pursuit of Cuba's national cinematic aspirations. On the other hand, Torres' work can be best characterized by its cosmopolitan sensibility and its thinly veiled desire to export reform, if not incite outright revolution—both of which were symptomatic of his decade-long status as political exile and

traveling filmmaker. Torres had grown relatively comfortable in the service of less-than-radical programs of social reform in the Caribbean, as evinced by his work for the early Luis Muñoz Marín administrations and his support for social-democratic figures such as Rómulo Betancourt in Venezuela and later Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic. Given the positive reception *Tierra olvidada* had received and its uncontroversial subject matter, the fact of Torres' having exercised a degree of autonomy within the ICAIC's institutional workflow did not affect the Dominican transplant's standing among his Cuban colleagues. Among the artists and technicians in the greater, extra-institutional Cuban arts community, however, Torres was developing a reputation for having an individualistic streak. Still very much invested in processes of revolution, Torres would devote the rest of his time in Cuba toward finding the balance between utility and artistry—and finding a story equal to the historical weight of the images before him. But in that search, as one former collaborator remarked, "Oscar was totally independent."[68]

Docudrama or Tropical Neorealism?: Film Style from the Commonwealth to the Commune

> *A good day spent with a team of young filmmakers who are shooting a film on the peasant uprisings of '33. Torres, the director, has already made a feature film. Manning the camera, Tanner, a young cinematographer. They are happy with their footage, but they had difficulties with the sound. That will come, soon they will have mastered it. As for the Revolution, I think we should expect a lot from the young Cuban cinema…*
>
> - Joris Ivens, 1961[69]

In late 1959, the ICAIC would bring Italian screenwriter Cesare Zavattini to help train its film technicians, soothe any lingering ideological and aesthetic differences among its artists, and get the island's nascent film apparatus off the ground. Throughout the prior decade, Zavattini was known for his close contacts with Latin American and Cuban filmmakers between 1953 and 1962. During that time, he corresponded with the members of the cineclub Nuestro Tiempo, visited Cuba

[68] Orlando Jiménez Leal, interview by Luis Beiro Álvarez, in Beiro Álvarez, 126.
[69] Draft of script for *Carnet de Viaje* by Joris Ivens, "Carnet de viaje. 1961. Doc.," Cinemateca de Cuba.

on three separate occasions (two prior to 1959), and provided technical staff and talent from the Italian film industry to serve as ambassadors of Zavattini's internationalist neorealism and communism. The discourse on Zavattini's personal project of exporting neorealism to Cuba often runs through his work on *El mégano* (1955)*, Historias de la Revolución* (1960)*, Cuba baila* (1960), and *El joven rebelde* (1962)*,* all projects led by his close collaborators Tomás Gutiérrez Alea or Julio García Espinosa to varying degrees.[70] Oscar Torres, though he did not share the same familiarity as his former classmates, was nevertheless positioned firmly within "Za's" orbit, as the Latin American understudies affectionately called their Italian mentor. Upon his arrival in Havana in the fall of 1959, Zavattini organized a series of seminars with his former CSC students in which together they discussed the role of cinema in Cuba's society and trained aspiring filmmakers in attendance in all aspects of the medium.[71] The discussion billowed out into broader disputes about the nature of art, with proponents of neorealism, socialist realism, *verité*, and other approaches splintering into different groups. In addition to these theoretical debates, the students and the teacher would co-write a series of scripts to be filmed at a later date. Beyond the law which founded the ICAIC and Fidel Castro's famous address to the intellectuals, one could argue that no single event was more consequential to the design of an institutional Cuban cinema in this stage than the conversations that took place in those rooms between December 1959 and February 1960.

Although there is little material available to elucidate the substance of these meetings in detail, what little survives establishes Oscar Torres as a fixture of Zavattini's film seminars.[72] Among

[70] See: Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Orígenes, evolución y problemas," In *El cine documental en América Latina,* ed. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2003), 40; Mariano Mestman, "From Italian Neorealism to New Latin American Cinema: Ruptures and Continuities during the 1960s," In *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style,* eds. Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (Jackson, MS: Mississippi UP, 2012), 171; and Valecce, 121-162.
[71] Other participants were José Massip, José Hernández, Héctor García Mesa, Manuel Octavio Gómez, and Mercedes Cortázar.
[72] A special dossier on Zavattini published by the Italian journal *Bianco & Nero* in November-December 1999 contains all the surviving scripts in the original Italian. Some details from the seminars were furnished through the author's e-mail correspondence with Mercedes Cortázar from March 23-30, 2022.

the many unfilmed scripts that Cesare Zavattini co-wrote in Cuba, the project in which Torres was most involved was one titled "El pequeño dictador" ("The Little Dictator"). The short film, told in the manner of a farce, would have been a satire of a Latin American despot in the style of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). The story was to follow a fictional dictator of an island country in the Hispanic Caribbean during the last days of his failing regime, generally portraying the titular character as aloof, his rule vulgar to the point of absurdity, and his sycophants as spineless enablers of his grip on power. At his side, the servile journalist is cast in the supporting role to show how mass media is manipulated to ensure the despot's permanence in power. Naturally, the film ends with the journalist left despondent on the tarmac as the dictator flees the island following a successful revolution.

Several disagreements cropped up during the screenwriting workshops where the idea was first hatched. Brancaleone writes, "Strangely enough, the Cubans were not planning to send up their own dictator, Batista, but Trujillo," as his reign was so bloody and cruel that it was considered in the writers' room an almost ready-made parody of itself. [73] However, the Cubans feared that some of the images of this fictional dictator could remind spectators of Fidel Castro's ubiquitous media appearances and the mounting allegations of his cult of personality. In the end, Zavattini overruled the original idea and instead had the script edited to have the recently ousted Fulgencio Batista in the titular role. It is difficult to imagine that the initial idea of writing a *comedietta* about the tyrant Rafael Trujillo, who had supported and conspired with Cuban counterrevolutionaries exiled in the neighboring Dominican Republic, did not rely extensively on both the wit and experience of Torres. After all, the script is littered with details that Torres, as a Dominican political exile and a former cog in the trujillista press apparatus, to which the former *El caribe* correspondent would have been

[73] Brancaleone, 285.

uniquely privy. In the end, the ICAIC quietly shelved the project as Zavattini became consumed by the two planned feature-length films. Upon Zavattini's return to Italy and despite his years-long insistence that the young filmmakers see "The Little Dictator" through, the project was abandoned.[7475]

Torres' contribution to the seminar suggests that he had begun to cast his gaze beyond the Cuban Revolution as explicit subject matter and, in the case of "El pequeño dictador," beyond the Cuban island altogether. His recourse into comedy also suggests a hedge on the ICAIC's ongoing investment in neorealism as a discursive strategy, either the burgeoning Cuban variant or the one relentlessly coached by Cesare Zavattini. Torres' films featured explicit denunciations of substandard living conditions and more direct strategies for mass instruction of a rural populace that were ill-fitted to the ambiguous and allegorical stylings of late Italian neorealism, despite sharing much of its ethical concerns. Other notable divergences from Zavattinian neorealism can be traced to the workshops. The trio of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, and Alfredo Guevara attempted to resolve these tensions with Zavattini in spite of at times acrimonious disagreements and breakdowns in communication, as has been extensively documented by scholars of the period.[76] Another, more impassioned internal schism was quickly forming between the three-headed ICAIC leadership and figures such as Néstor Almendros and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, both of whom argued for the absolute autonomy of the artist over the needs of what they considered to be partisan bureaucrats. Zavattini, although firmly in the camp of a cinema committed to the demands of the

[74] Brancaleone, 287.
[75] Zavattini inquired about the film as late as August 1960. He writes to Guevara, "You've yet to tell me anything regarding "The Little Dictator." Have you abandoned the project? All of you had seemed so convinced that a fresh, fun, and useful film could be made of it. The group had agreed to send me updates about this project. After such long hours we spent working on it, it would have been interesting for that young group to have kept correspondence with me […] about to bring that that kernel of a project to a more visible phase. Even today that project seemed as difficult to develop as it was interesting, but above all worth the effort, as you yourself so bravely recognized." The letter went unanswered. Cesare Zavattini, Letter to Alfredo Guevara. August 16, 1960, *Cine Cubano* 155 (2002), 68.
[76] I am referring to the recent work by Valecce, Brancaleone, and Mariano Mestman.

Revolution, mediated between the two factions to a point, though he would reserve for himself the final word in most cases.[77] Although he would express opinions later in his career that would have been sympathetic to Almendros' position, Torres was far from a proponent of *l'art pour l'art*. In his estimation, his own art simply warranted a more compelling story in order to be of service to the Revolution.

Following the conclusion of the seminars, the ICAIC began work on its next phase by gradually incorporating feature filmmaking alongside its documentary and newsreel operations. Unsurprisingly, the first few feature-length films made after the Revolution all bore the mark of Cesare Zavattini's influence. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea' *Historias de la Revolución,* an episodic film conceived in the style of *Paisá* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) or *Raíces* (Benito Alazraki, 1955), contains three stories of the different fronts of the Cuban Revolution. Aside from *Historias*—viewed as the island's quintessential neorealist import—Julio García Espinosa and Zavattini had worked together on *Cuba baila* ("Cuba Dances," 1960) since 1954 and would join forces once again for the troubled production of *El joven rebelde* ("The Young Rebel," 1961).[78] By the summer of 1961, as Cuban long-form films enjoyed extended theatrical runs, publicity for these films frequently included a third title: Oscar Torres' *Realengo 18* (Figure 3.8).

[77] Brancaleone, 219.
[78] Oroz, 40-41.

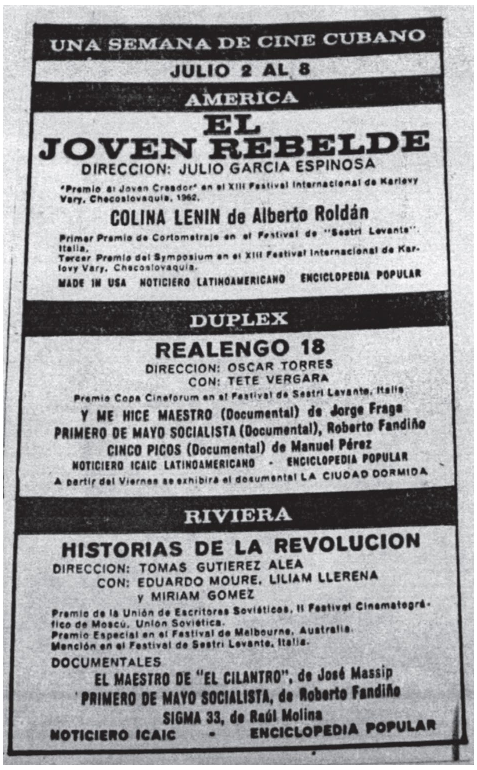

Figure 3.8 Havana showtimes from the newspaper *Revolución* in the Summer of 1961.

Oscar Torres, like most attendees, had emerged from the seminars without being chosen to film one of Zavattini's screenplays. Instead, Torres was instructed by the ICAIC to film another documentary again focused on Cuba's rural communities, which ultimately became the Institute's third feature film. By the middle of 1960, he would collaborate with Dominican poet and fellow exile, Pedro Mir, to adapt a screenplay that would take Torres to his birthplace in Cuba's far east. They would settle on *Realengo 18,* a serial reportage of the peasant uprisings near Guantánamo penned by another Antillean traveler, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, in 1934. In a peculiar reversal of Torres' own migratory history, de la Torriente Brau was born to Puerto Rican author and freedom fighter Salvador Brau in San Juan, Puerto Rico, but would later relocate to Cuba to become a journalist reporting on the early atrocities of Batista and his bloodthirsty Rural Guard. In what must have sounded like an invitation for the itinerant Oscar Torres, de la Torriente Brau's master work

opens with a famous line, "If you want to know another country, without traveling to foreign lands, go to *Oriente* [the eastern provices]."[79]

The history of Realengo 18, as de la Torriente Brau reports it, documents the initial abuses of the Batista regime shortly after his having taken power, as North American multinational corporations—namely, the Maisí and Guantánamo Sugar Companies—quickly descended upon Cuba's east in search of virgin land for their agricultural operations. In response, the peasants who inhabited the land, took up arms against the collusive forces of Batista's Rural Guard. Lino Álvarez, a lifelong resident of the *realengo* (parcel of unoccupied land) who had previously worked for one of the encroaching companies, rebels against orders to evict what the Batista government had deemed "illegal squatters" on government land. Aided and abetted by the Cuban Communist Party and organized under the slogan *tierra o muerte*—"land or blood"—the armed revolt was successful in temporarily repelling further incursions by U.S. *geófagos,* a derogatory term which translates to "land eaters" and became an umbrella term for American imperialist designs for the region. All of these elements are present in the film, including the character of Lino Álvarez being played by a local, uncredited *realenguista* (a resident of the commune). The narrative embellishments by Oscar Torres include the unlikely *guerrillera* Dominga, played excellently by Teté Vergara, as the protagonist who tries to make a home while the occupying forces conspire to seize her land and break apart her family. Her husband, a modest coffee farmer, is one of the leaders of the resistance alongside Álvarez. Ñico, their son, is unmoved by either the defense of the realengo or its looming seizure, but in his ambivalence, he is persuaded to join the Rural Guard and act against his own community's interests. The climactic scene features a standoff between the Rural Guardsmen, Ñico among them, and Dominga, whose appeals to her son are ignored. Just as it seems that the soldiers will be

[79] Pablo de la Torriente Brau, *Realengo 18* (Havana: Ediciones Nuestro Tiempo, 1962), 67.

successful in fencing off the land, a line of peasants armed with long guns and machetes descends from the hills and forces the army's retreat. A sort of inversion to the plot of Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926)*, Realengo 18*'s mother is radicalized by the dual losses of her husband and son, though here the son is positioned as the enemy. However, in the defense of their land, Dominga makes a home for the broader community of realenguistas and its inheritors.

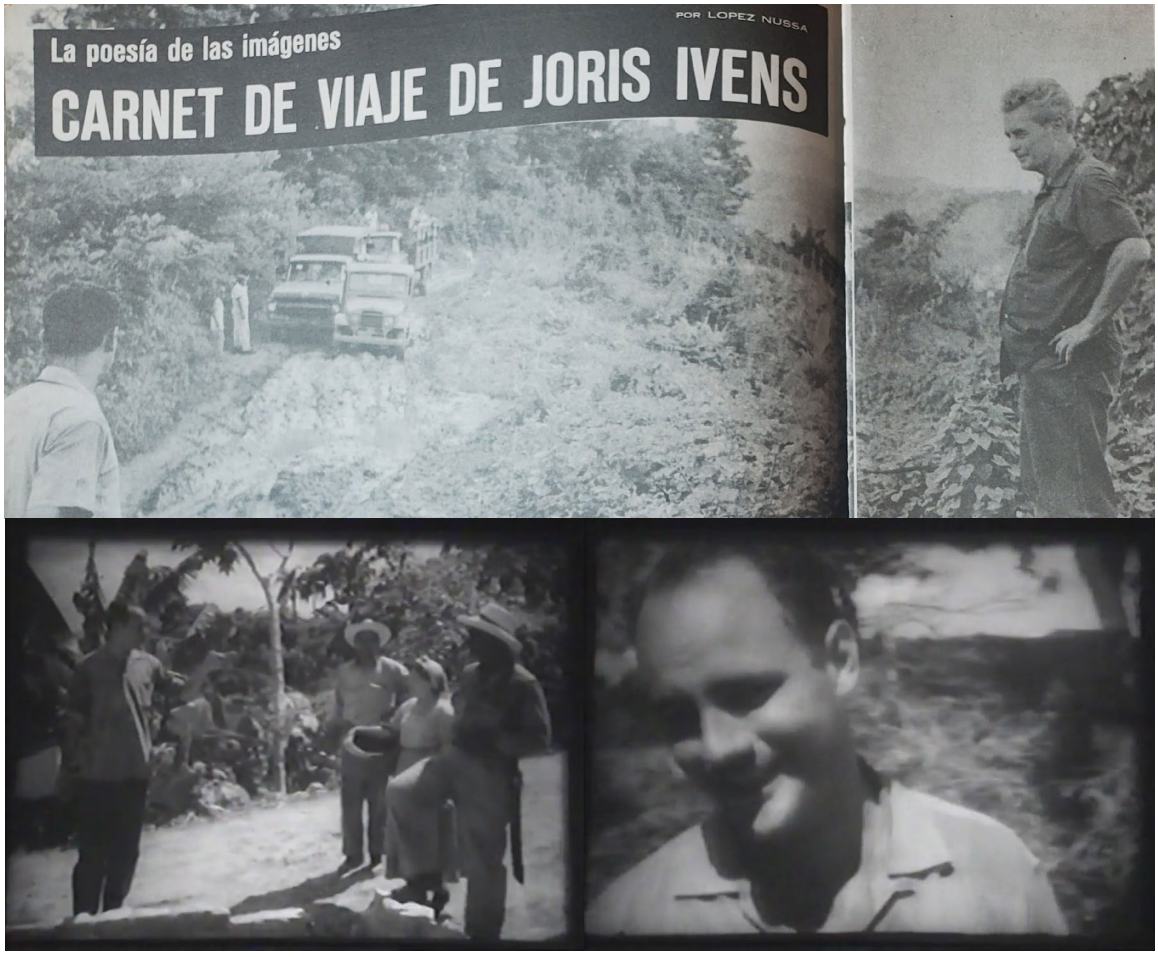

Figure 3.9 Oscar Torres and Joris Ivens conversing in their shared shooting location (top, photograph by López Nussa), taken from "*Carnet de Viaje* de Joris Ivens," *INRA* 1, no. 11 (December 1960): 42; Torres stands in as the face of the young Cuban cinema in *Carnet de viaje* (bottom).[80]

[80] The top image from the INRA article for which I am still trying to locate the bibliographic information. Oscar Torres is on the left, facing away from the camera. Joris Ivens is on the right.

Pablo de la Torriente Brau's story was ripe for the historical epic treatment, which became ever more urgent as the new government renewed its appeal to the eastern countryside that had given the Rebel Army so many of its signature victories. Originally conceived as a ten-minute-long documentary short, Torres successfully argued for the film to be extended to feature length after visiting the realengo and living among the countryfolk, many of whom were themselves veterans of the 1934 conflict.[81] Torres' new vision had captivated the Institute such that they mobilized quickly to promote the film. *Cine Cubano* published in advance an excerpt of the screenplay in a two-page spread of its inaugural 1961 issue.[82] In late 1960, Joris Ivens would visit Cuba to shoot a couple of documentaries with a team of local technicians.[83] Ivens' first Cuban film, *Carnet de viaje* ("Travel Notebook," Joris Ivens, 1961), was a road movie meant to highlight the changes happening to Cuban society in each corner of the island. The last stop on the cine-tour: a visit to the shooting location of *Realengo 18* in the colonial city of Trinidad.[84] In the resulting scene, which is accompanied by the voiceover narration included in this chapter's epigraph, Ivens identifies the promise of the upstart Cuban cinema in the figure of Oscar Torres (Figure 3.9). However, he most telling comments in the lead-up to the film's release belong to Alfredo Guevara who, despite rarely speaking publicly on unfilmed projects, fails to contain his excitement in a 1960 interview:

> A long time ago the idea came up to make a film about our *campesinos* and later it was decided that it should be about the Realengo 18… Not that long ago we sent a director, technicians, and workers to that zone to shoot. The director, Oscar Torres, a young guantanamero…

[81] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Realengo 18," Combate, Aug 16, 1961, n.p.
[82] Oscar Torres, "Secuencia de un guión," *Cine Cubano* 4 (January 1960): 62-63.
[83] Thomas Waugh, *The Conscience of Cinema: The Films of Joris Ivens, 1912-1989* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016). To date, little has been written about Ivens' Cuban films, much less about the details of the interpersonal relationships he cultivated in his two trips to Cuba. Aside from Waugh's work on the subject, Joris Ivens' importance to the formation of documentary practice on the island remains a curiously obscure fact to English-speaking scholars. Ivens' Cuban films, both *Carnet de viaje* ("Travel Notebook," Joris Ivens, 1961) and *Pueblo armado* ("An Armed People," 1961, a short covering the capture of counterrevolutionaries in Escambray), are among the rarest to find of his filmography. In addition, the two films are the least ambitious of Ivens' storied filmography, since he had to work mostly with an inexperienced crew, a narrowed thematic field, and subpar equipment. For example, his films omit direct sound because the ICAIC's sound equipment was being used by Torres for *Realengo 18*.
[84] Itinerary for Joris Ivens' Cuba Visit, 1960, *Carnet de viaje* notes, Digital scan, Joris Ivens Archive <https://www.ivens.nl/zoeken/13939?view=publication&type=documenten>

> showed great enthusiasm to document all of the great qualities of the people of this land. From there the idea was raised to make not a documentary, but an experimental film, where the very campesinos would be the actors.[85]

This description by the ICAIC director is noteworthy for two reasons. Torres' improvisation had created a generic slippage between the neorealisms pursued in the Institute's two priority projects and *Realengo*'s own discretionary use of neorealist devices, such as the casting of non-professional actors and location shooting, but also its depiction of the quotidian oppression under which realenguistas lived. This slippage may explain why the film was often called "experimental" by film critics and ICAIC functionaries. It might be instructive, then, to compare how the three films were discussed in the months leading up to their releases. While *Historias* is an explicit attempt at a neorealist episodic film in both form and content, its context—filmed within a year of the rebel victory—positions the film as little more than a mere replication of historical events, by the director's own admission. The subsequent *El joven rebelde* faced numerous issues during its production as the underlying ideological-aesthetic schisms between old world neorealism and the creole variant intensified, but nevertheless the project was billed as the Cuban answer to neorealism and its status as Italo-Cuban collaboration was featured prominently in the press.[86] Second, the decision to commit to producing a feature length film responds directly to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's criticisms that Torres find a structuring narrative that, "without much artifice or forcing a narrative," could contain a fictional drama and preserve its documentary and educational force, in this case taking the form of an epic based on true events. This was no small adjustment, either. Torres made the decision *after* visiting the realengo, living among the realenguistas, and learning first-hand the

[85] "Realengo 18, un canto de rebeldía: Habla Alfredo Guevara, director del ICAIC," Sierra Maestra. Sep 4, 1960, n.p.
[86] In particular, García Espinosa clashed with Zavattini over the latter's insistence that the protagonist of his film be an ideological *tabula rasa,* an otherwise ignorant peasant that became radicalized as revolutionary skirmishes drew closer in proximity. García Espinosa viewed this scenario as implausible given that the Revolution's most decisive gains came in the eastern countryside, largely in part due to the peasantry's predisposition to the cause after years of abuse by the Batista regime. See Joseph Francese, "The Influence of Cesare Zavattini on Latin American Cinema: Thoughts on *El joven rebelde* and *Juan Quin Quin*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24:5 (2007): 431-444.

terms of their struggle.[87] In the blending of de la Torriente Brau's reportage and the contemporary living conditions of the realenguistas, Torres had found his transhistorical subject. To go a step beyond the casting of non-professional actors and instead feature actual veterans of the uprising, in the case of *Realengo 18,* seems a decision made as much in the interest of effective pedagogy as dramatic force, a synergy in which Torres was well-practiced following his time in the DivEdCo.[88] The fact that Torres had adapted a widely known historical event that appealed to folk sensibilities and made use of a local film cast and crew led many Cuban critics to proclaim that Oscar Torres had created what was, up until that moment, the first true all-Cuban film.[89]

Realengo 18 is uniformly tagged as an experiment in pre-release publicity materials, though it remains unclear how the film stood as a radical departure from ICAIC production at the time. Press materials acknowledge the amateur actors, the natural photography, and the palpable cultural effervescence of the eastern provinces rendered faithfully by Harry Tanner's cinematography, yet critics tended to stop short of calling *Realengo* neorealist as they so often did for the other features. In fact, the word "experiment" may be among the least ambiguous used to describe *Realengo.* The magazine *Bohemia* announced the film as a semi-documentary. Similarly, *Cine Cubano* introduced the

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[87] Rodríguez Alemán, n.p.

[88] This sentence refers to a point I will make in Chapter 1, that the casting of non-professional actors between the DivEdCo docudrama and Italian neorealism is neither a merely stylistic nor necessarily ethical concern. In DivEdCo's case, the purpose was mainly pedagogical. The representation and protagonism of peasants was intended as evidence of Puerto Rico's shift to more participatory forms of governance, epitomized here by the literal instrumentalization of the individual in the service of the state's project of cultural-nationalist consolidation. To approximate the ways in which I argue that neorealism was adapted to the Puerto Rican context, one could say that using this strategy, the aim of the DivEdCo would go beyond the peasant actor seeing themselves represented onscreen. The specific effect of the semifictional mode is that that actor's community would *look* for themselves onscreen as well, thereby initiating a process of identification with the characters onscreen, whether they were neighbors or not. The DivEdC-ian docudrama invoked the precepts of neorealism to the degree that it could successfully instrumentalize an address to the mass refracted through the lone volunteer.

[89] Fausto Canel, "Realengo 18," Revolución, Aug 9, 1961, n.p; Néstor Almendros, "Nueva Película Cubana," *Bohemia* 52.45 (1960), 88. The authors are likely referring to the fact that none of the ICAIC's invited filmmakers, such as Zavattini or Joris Ivens, had had a hand in making the film. Canel and Almendros are also dismissing pre-revolutionary Cuban cinema as too indebted to bourgeois film to count as fully Cuban. For all intents and purposes, in Cuba Oscar Torres was considered Cuban first before any other Caribbean demonym.

film, then called *Los campesinos* ("The Peasants"), as a "cine-documental" experiment, the hyphen likely used here to signify a strong dramatic treatment of an otherwise nonfictional narrative—a docudrama, by any other name.[90] This last description is as close as Cuban film critics would come to identifying a stylistic continuity between the DivEdCo and the ICAIC in Torres' work. This is to say, the literature that positioned *Realengo 18* as an experimental film is presumably citing Guevara's original description of the project months before the film's June 1961 premiere. The unanimous critical confusion regarding generic descriptions for the film on the part of Cuban cultural workers lends credence to the idea that *Realengo* was seen not as exemplar of the shape of Cuban cinema to come, but as its exception. *Realengo 18* is thought of as rogue adaptation of Italian neorealism—based on material neither new nor rendered in a particularly realist manner—which stood in direct contradiction to Cesare Zavattini's warning about realism and retrospection: "The cinema should never turn back. It should accept, unconditionally, what is contemporary. *Today, today, today.*"[91] Although *Realengo 18* can be called an experiment only in the context of the ICAIC feature catalog up until that point, the main difference was Oscar Torres' choice to couch a contemporary critique of Cuban society—in this case, a timely call to defend the homeland in the face of a looming invasion—within a historical event (Figure 3.10). This would later be adopted as a common narrative device during the so-called "baroque period" of the Cuban cinema of the ensuing decade, as artists came to rely on period films in an attempt to circumvent censorship or proactively self-censor.

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[90] The full quote reads as follows: "Taking history and confronting it with Cuba's present, Oscar Torres, Dominican screenwriter-director at the ICAIC and one of its strongest assets, has achieved in "Los campesinos" that firm and direct tone borne out of the countryside in Realengo 18 and all the men who call it home. Treated as an 'Cine-documental' experiment, "Los campesinos" introduces a measure of vigorous revolutionary expression to a form that, preserving the highest artistic value, is capable of reaching the rural masses in Cuba and the rest of the world." "En Realengo 18," Cine Cubano 3 (November 1960), 46.

[91] Cesare Zavattini, "'Some Ideas on the Cinema' (1952)," *Cesare Zavattini Selected Writings* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), n.p.

Anachronisms notwithstanding, Oscar Torres' *Realengo 18* is also, ironically enough, a fitting byproduct of Cesare Zavattini's hope for the upstart Cuban cinema, though it is unclear to what extent Za was aware of or involved in the project. In one of his workshops in Cuba, Zavattini was asked how the young filmmakers should go about filming the Revolution. His reply was that Cuban cinema should "seek out the personal in each [historical] event," emphasizing the need for Cuban cinema to address the Agrarian Reform since this had been the mechanism that had most deeply affected the lives of the average Cuban.[92] As the legislation through which the revolutionary government was able to abolish landlessness, Zavattini—along with many of the artists and intellectuals of the global north who visited the island around this time—considered the Agrarian Reform the 26th of July movement's closing act. The documentary shorts which were meant to educate the recipients of parcels of land on how to work their newly acquired terrains—specifically, *Esta tierra nuestra, La vivienda,* and *¿Porqué nació el Ejército Rebelde?* ("Why Was the Rebel Army Born?," José Massip, 1960)—reflected the urgencies of the period. In them, neither García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea, nor Massip figured to reshape a national cinema, yet these early contributions to a national film imaginary greatly informed the pedagogical targets of Cuba's visiting cineastes, Zavattini chief among them. Nourished by neorealism but conceived at arm's length of the institutional power center, *Realengo 18* became in 1961 the primary film vehicle through which the Revolution argued in support of the momentous changes happening to Cuban society, a fact made more remarkable by the experimental label that was attached to the film.

[92] Brancaleone, 219.

Figure 3.10 The climactic sequence of *Realengo 18* when the armed guajiros rise up over the hill to confront the Rural Guard.

In taking the Agrarian Reform as its inspiration, Torres comes closest to reconciling two themes that have been central to his previous work: the plight of rural communities and agrarian labor under the threat of foreign capital and the representation of an Afrodiasporic presence in the countryside whose mere acknowledgment was of secondary importance to both the Cuban and Puerto Rican nation-building projects. If jíbaro came to refer to the raceless poor in rural Puerto Rico, then, in Cuba, the word *guajiro* was similarly deployed to flatten difference among rural peasants swept up in the revolutionary project.[93] Much like the institutional appropriation of "jíbaro" in Puerto Rican culture, the terms were meant to denote rural subjects engaged in some capacity in the labors of the Agrarian Reform, while ironically effacing the histories of Afro-Cuban participation in popular uprisings and land conflicts in the Oriente province that preceded the 1959 Revolution, though the latter had now taken the former as subject matter in the revolutionary government's renewed appeal to the provinces.[94] In retrospect, Cuba's declaration of the socialist nature of its Revolution in 1961 was long overdue as far as the eastern communes were concerned,

[93] The word *mambí*, itself taken from 19th century conflicts against the Spanish empire, was often used interchangeably in this context as well, albeit it denotes a belligerence that resembles the more contemporary usage of the term "guerrilla fighter."

[94] Beyond the class-based implications of the terminology, the word *realengo* in Cuba also implies Black-owned lands and is used to describe the settlements of unused, state-owned land in the more remote provinces. These communes were settled in part by freed and enslaved Afro-Cubans who fought against the Spanish in the wars of independence, also known as *mambises*. In contemporary parlance, the term "realengo 18" is used to refer to any messy situation.

since most of its residents had been card-carrying members of the *Partido Socialista Popular* (Popular Socialist Party) until its forced disbandment in 1953 and that the 26 of July Movement rebels received material support from realenguistas throughout the campaign.[95] In the people of the realengo, Torres found a community at the intersection of his disparate political commitments: an anti-racist, anti-imperialist coalition led by the rural working class and in which women led or participated in equal and earnest manner.

Realengo recollects these political projects, only partially pursued in Torres' DivEdCo films and *Tierra olvidada.* Set in what was known as the "Black Belt of Oriente," much was made in the cities of the authenticity of the characters' dialect, which was tinged with regionalisms inflected by its African diasporic presence, both Spanish-speaking or migrants from Haiti and the British West Indies. This aspect of realism in Torres' Cuban films is a repetition of a much earlier concern of his. Namely, Torres had applied the same strategies toward the peculiar manner of speech of loiceños when he filmed *Nenén de la ruta mora*. Another motif that remains consistent from that first film in Puerto Rico through to his Cuban filmography is Torres' subtle portrayal of Afrodiasporic religious syncretism, as shown in the funeral scene for Ñiko's father. If these choices were remarkable in the Puerto Rican context because they were relatively unmediated and liable to misinterpretation, Torres' choice to show Black ritual mourning posed a direct challenge to Cuban cultural policy which relegated these expressions of spirituality as a symptom of marginalism. In the film adaptation of *Realengo 18*, the opportunity had finally been presented for Torres to merge the Black *and* radical traditions he had only been able to pursue separately for the DivEdCo.

Upon its release, Cuban critics were overwhelmingly of the belief that *Realengo 18* amounted to a new high-water mark in Cuban film, albeit with several caveats. Nevertheless, a puzzling aspect

[95] Sara Kozameh, "Black, Radical, and Campesino in Revolutionary Cuba," *Souls* 21.4 (2019): 295.

of the film's reception—and perhaps decent indicator of the film's significance to the emergent Cuban cinema—is the degree to which the film seemed to produce polarized lines of critique during a time when cultural workers exercised a deliberate critical generosity toward contributions to the national cinematic project. Evaluations of the film varied wildly between the celebratory and the apologetic, often even within the same review. Fausto Canel laments that the film falls short of its ambition to trace a new path for Cuban cinema, much like its feature length predecessors, due primarily to problems with the editing.[96] Despite this concession, the critic ends his piece by stating that *Realengo 18* is, "The best film made by the ICAIC, which is to say, the best Cuban film ever made."[97] J.M. Valdés Rodríguez similarly labeled it the best of the current crop of features while criticizing its "semidocumentary" mode, though not because of its dramatic storyline. Surprisingly, the author thinks that the film did not lean into nonfiction in the necessary depth, failing to depict the leading role Fulgencio Batista played in the bloodshed or showing the nearby presence of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.[98] Stateside, Elizabeth Sutherland, writes a comprehensive account of the upstart Cuban cinema in 1961 in which she singles out *Realengo* for its "lack of studio artificiality" and "convincing naturalness."[99] On the docudrama, she questions the ability of film to express national issues through individualized melodramatic relationships—part and parcel of Torres' ouvre—and labels it as a problem that the ICAIC had yet to resolve. Neither has the passage of time has not swayed the opinions of contemporary accounts of *Realengo 18*. Over time, retrospective accounts have not shown the film the same qualified kindness, often offering critiques in exact

[96] Most writers at the time mention that at least fifteen minutes of run time were ultimately cut from the film. Eduardo Manet, who is often credited as the film's co-director, admits that certain concessions had to be made during editing, in part due to some of the footage becoming unusable and because Oscar Torres—Realengo's would-be editor—would leave the island in 1961. Most outlets tend to disagree on the nature and extend of the cut sequences. Although the film was said to have been edited down from 90 minutes to 70, the final cut of the film clocked in at 59". For what it is worth, Manet does not consider himself a co-author and had forcefully minimized his involvement.\. José Lezcano Hernández, "'Realengo 18' y la lucha del campesino contra los latifundios," *El Socialista.* July 11, 1962.
[97] Canel, n.p.
[98] José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, "Estreno de la película *Realengo 18*," in Beiro Álvarez, 195-198.
[99] Sutherland, 45.

opposition to the positions of *Realengo*'s contemporary critics. Alfredo Guevara, in the last of his memoirs, considered *Realengo 18* the least technically accomplished film of the period. Although Harry Tanner's photography at the time was criticized for its privileging of Dominga's interiority to the detriment of the landscape—it was, after all, a film meant to highlight *land* reform—the camerawork had never been singled out for its stiffness and detachment, as it does today. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá places *Realengo 18* within a continuum of Italian neorealism's failed imports in Latin America, or the derivative neorealisms of the period, or sketches toward a homegrown variant that are today remembered for their sincerity and clumsiness in equal measure.[100] However, as this section details, *Realengo 18* must be reexamined through a lens that accounts for its author's broader filmography, the film's perceived experiments in semi-documentary form, and its reception over time and in relation to *Historias de la Revolución* and *El joven rebelde.*

As *Realengo 18* reached on Cuban screens, its director would not stay to bear witness. Oscar Torres abruptly left Cuba in the fall of 1960 for reasons unclear, which has become a central subject of speculation, including my own. *Realengo 18* was finished by Torres' close collaborator Eduardo Manet, though the latter has forcefully minimized the extent of his participation in the film. In Torres' absence, *Realengo 18* premiered at the La Rampa theatre on July 22nd to an audience attended by such figures as Ernesto Guevara and Osmani Cienfuegos.[101] Much like its author, *Realengo* was well-traveled on the international circuit. It won the second prize at the Festival of the Peoples in Florence and honorable mention at Leipzig, making it the most successful Cuban film from the first three years of the ICAIC. In the ensuing years, *Realengo 18* became among the first Cuban films to be selected for wide distribution among the USSR and the People's Republic of

[100] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Tradición y modernidad en el cine de América Latina* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2003), 38.
[101] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Grán éxito en el cine La Rampa el estreno de 'Realengo 18'," *Combate,* July 23, 1961, n.p.

China. The pomp of Torres' film's premieres in Cuba and abroad evince a need to return to *Realengo 18* as an important piece in the formation of the new Cuban cinema.

Although today Oscar Torres' films are considered minor contributions to early sketches of a Cuban cinema, it is vital to analyze his departure from revolutionary Cuba in the context of his broader career and identity. In the main, his homosexuality is often cited as a primary culprit, as it is assumed—mostly via the realm of *chisme*—that Torres was the target of persecution by the Cuban government.[102] This theory is countered by the fact that the Revolution did not officially begin to crack down on groups with non-conforming gender identities or sexualities until well after Torres' departure, most infamously in the October 1961 raids on brothels and gay clubs. Moreover, Torres operated within the larger Cuban film community amongst many prominent queer men, such as Néstor Almendros and Eduardo Manet. Other theories as to why Torres, who had spent a decade at that point trying to find a political context amenable to his style of social films, abandoned the Revolution begin with the speculation that Torres left Cuba as the island began to feel the intensifying threat of war from the U.S. toward the end of 1960, an instinct that would be validated by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in April of 1961.[103] Since he possessed United States citizenship, it is likely Torres feared his presence in Cuba and his work for the ICAIC could be interpreted as a case of defection. Orlando Jiménez Leal, protagonist of *L'Affaire PM* who would work with Torres again in Puerto Rico, claims instead that Torres sensed the Cuban government's gradual winnowing of certain forms of artistic expression, but there is little evidence we can uncover in his Cuban filmography to suggest that his artistic vision was somehow more constrained by the Revolution than it was in any of the other countries where he made films. Although it is not as satisfying to those who may be invested in Torres' life—gossips and historiographers alike—his departure from

[102] Díaz Valcárcel, 189.
[103] Luciano Castillo, personal communication, Havana, Cuba, April 2022.

Cuba was mostly amicable, according to his collaborators from across the political spectrum. Moreover, given that no restrictions existed in international travel from Cuba at the time and that Torres possessed a mobility afforded to him by virtue of citizenship, the impulse to uncover some salacious impetus for his exit may reveal more about the researcher than the researched. Perhaps it is best to remember the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose own 1959 invitation to visit Cuba was signed by Oscar Torres: "Do not forget that the intellectual is never happy anywhere he goes. Cuba is now his paradise. I would hope it stays that way."[104] If Oscar had once left the Cinecittà, then surely paradise posed no obstacle.

Against Tragedy as Method

There exists a misconception that Oscar Torres' life after Cuba and, indeed, about his death in 1968 that dismisses this period as one marked by political inactivity and creative decline. The available historiography—fragmentary data points cobbled up from essays and memoirs—also suggests that Torres' activities between 1961 and his death in 1968 are some sort of mystery. What few details are mentioned tend to paint Torres as a tragic figure. Around this time, Oscar Torres would come to refer to himself as a *gusano de izquierda*. The first word, meaning "worm," was a derogatory term used by Fidel Castro to insult Cubans who had abandoned the island in the wake of the Revolution, perhaps chosen by Torres in a self-deprecating manner as he had left Cuba during the most formidable challenges to its sovereignty. The second word, "izquierda," is meant to describe his enduring belief in the political left, despite his departure. The resulting oxymoron only added to the filmmaker's mystique: a traitor to the Revolution, but still of the left.

[104] Jean Paul Sartre, *Sartre visita a Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones R, 1960): n.p.

Much of what is known about the last years of Torres' life stems from his periodic appearances in the memoirs and autobiographical novels of colleagues and comrades from the DivEdCo, the ICAIC, or the pro-democracy organizations he collaborated with in the Dominican Republic. Díaz Valcárcel, the author of this chapter's opening gambit, recounts how artists celebrated (or downplayed) *Realengo 18*'s success internationally, particularly its achievement as a precursor to what would later become known as Third Cinema, among other anecdotes from Torres' final years. However, recollections in writing of Oscar Torres tend to grow somber quickly, if not outright morbid. In a chapter dedicated to Torres entitled "Of How a Man Grew Accustomed to his Death," Díaz Valcárcel's tells of rumors of Torres' persecution in Cuba for his being homosexual, he reveals his struggles with alcoholism and drug use, his injuries because of intimate partner violence, and his ignominious death.[105] Alfredo Roldán, who was his production assistant for *Tierra olvidada,* is similarly incapable of recounting the experience of working with Torres without resorting to judgments about his supposed vices.[106] To say nothing of the work of speculative nonfiction that accompanied Luis Beiro Álvarez' biography of Torres, titled *No One Saw You Die* (2019). While ambiguity and tragedy do form a part of any honest assessment of Torres' life and career, it is misleading to suggest that Torres merely wasted away in the final decade of his life.

Evaluations of Oscar Torres' last years are content to conclude they belong to a man whose travels and travails may have finally caught up with him.[107] From these intermittent traces of Oscar

[105] Díaz Valcárcel, 189-192.
[106] Alberto Roldán, *La mirada viva* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2002), 41.
[107] The AGPR shows us the full extent of Torres' work for the Division. In a new, part-time role, Torres would produce four more films for the DivEdCo. *Caminos del cooperativismo* ("The Ways of Cooperativism," 1961) picks up where *El yugo* left off in encouraging the establishment of rural co-ops. In 1966, he directs *La ronda incompleta* ("The Incomplete Watch"), a sort of Puerto Rican *Titticut Follies* (Frederick Wiseman, 1967) His final film for the DivEdCo, *Olas y arenas* ("Waves and Sand," 1968), borrows its name from singer-songwriter Sylvia Rexach's most popular musical piece. Intended as a tribute to the recently passed Rexach, the film presents an elegant shoreside dance performance by her daughter, Sharon Reily Rexach, set to the tune of her famed ballad in what could be classified as the Division's most experimental film since the musical shorts of the late '50s. In terms of brute output, Torres' directorial credits for the DivEdCo in the '60s match those from his first tenure. In addition to his renewed labors for the Division, Torres

Torres, whether they are embellishments or not, it is as logical to draw a more complicated picture as it is tempting to revert to a characterization that casts his final years as either mystery or tragedy. Instead, these scattered accounts build an image of an artist tirelessly dedicated to his cinema and his islands. The Archivo General de Puerto Rico houses many of Torres' unfilmed and often unapproved screenplays for the DivEdCo, most of which were written during his second stint with the Division, during which time he produced as many, if not more scripts than at any point prior to his leaving Cuba in 1961.[108] One project titled "Quisqueya: Madre de todas las tierras" ("Mother of All Lands") presents the reader Oscar Torres, artist and agitator, with the mask off.[109] "Quisqueya" was another Torres' attempt to use the DivEdCo's film infrastructure to create a documentary, to be filmed in the island of La Hispaniola, about the history of the Dominican Republic and its significance to Puerto Rico's own history. Throughout the 50s, Torres had tried to use his experience making educational cinema for the Puerto Rican Commonwealth to build a similar film initiative in the Dominican Republic. In contrast to the relatively apolitical themes of the DivEdCo, Torres's argued that its Dominican variant would need to adopt a militant *antitrujillista* position.[110] "Quisqueya" would dress that attitude in the rhetoric of diplomacy between neighbors. In reality, Torres' final proposed project was a power play meant to leverage the PPD's—and, therefore, its Hispanophilic platform's—loosening grip on local governance by conducting cultural outreach toward its Spanish-speaking neighbors. The idea was a reworking of René Marqués' proposed *Las Antillas Mayores* ("The Greater Antilles"), a documentary series that had been planned in 1958

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crossed over into commercial filmmaking during this time, adapting screenplays for Jerónimo Mitchell Meléndez's melodrama *La vendedora del amor* ("The Love Merchant," 1964) and the co-produced Mexican-Puerto Rican comedy *La criada malcriada* ("The Spoiled Maid," 1965).

[108] Notable among these are the unfinished scripts believed to be authored by Torres for films by the name of "Strokes" and "Violación" ("Rape"), two projects whose obviously delicate subject matter rendered them too risky for production. A third written in collaboration with Pedro Juan Soto, "Los inconformes" ("The nonconformists"), may have been filmed, but no copy exists within the General Archive.

[109] The word Quisqueya is derived from the Taíno language and translated to "Mother of all lands," though in contemporary usage has come to refer to the Dominican Republic.

[110] Beiro Álvarez, 137.

covering Puerto Rico's neighboring islands but which was surreptitiously shelved following the triumph of the rebels in Cuba toward the end of that year. With the backing of DivEdCo director Fred Wale, Oscar Torres wrote to the Secretary of Education in the Dominican Republic, Luis A. Duvergé, to sell their office on the idea of collaborating on a renewed documentary project on the Caribbean, which would ultimately be titled "Caribbean Siblings." In this message, one can begin to tease out how Torres' professional misadventures had only steeled his desire to make film on, of, or about his native Dominican Republic, a desire only made more urgent given the continued political destabilization in the island after Trujillo and the ensuing *coup d'états*. In his letter to Duvergé, Torres pleads,

> Unfortunately, that constant contact between *boricuas* and *dominicanos* isn't complemented by what is fundamental in these relations between peoples: mutual understanding. We're so close, we visit each other daily, but we also ignore each other daily. The ideas that Puerto Ricans have of the Dominican Republic are vague and diffuse: a mishmash of images of the *Trujillato*… with an authentic taste for merengue, a tendency to exaggerate the violence of the Dominican, and nothing else… The common Puerto Rican knows little of what constitutes the entrails of the history, culture and idiosyncrasies of the Dominicans. This is why we believe that the time has come to try [to reach that level of mutual understanding] through the most potent and impactful medium: cinema… The image of our people is already one familiar to Santo Domingo. Now we begin on the opposite road: to bring to our people the image of their Dominican neighbors and siblings.[111]

Torres is denouncing what he perceives to be a Puerto Rican-centric perspective that pervades the DivEdCo and Puerto Rican society at large, as evinced here and in the passage that opens this writing. By 1967, a profound nativism had taken root in Puerto Rican culture, but in the act of marking itself as dissimilar from the culture of its occupying country—the United States—a sense of exceptionalism had seeped into this new formation of Puerto Rican identity and presented a new obstacle toward the establishment of solidarity with its Caribbean neighbors, even a Dominican Republic with which Puerto Rico shared so much of its history and culture and that was only now

[111] Oscar Antonio Torres, Letter to Luis Alfredo Duvergé. Sep 13, `1967, Mimeographed documents, Madre de todas las tierras: Quisqueya - Oscar A Torres - 1967, Fondo DivEdCo, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2.

emerging from the long shadow of dictatorship. Torres is restrained in his language in this passage, conceiving of this emergent xenophobia as a pedagogical opportunity for both islands. Citing a deepening economic crisis, an ongoing political power struggle, and a citizenry unaccustomed to democratic enfranchisement in his native Santo Domingo, Torres proposed this project as a continuation of his attempts to establish a Dominican DivEdCo—his earlier attempt frustrated, Torres would now pursue the project by way of Puerto Rico.[112]

In the end, much like other exiled filmmakers associated with the New Latin American Cinema, Oscar Torres rededicated himself to the struggle that had originally radicalized him in his home country.[113] Contrary to assessments that define his work during this time as unfocused or desperate, the breadth of his efforts reveals a man rededicated to his struggle for Dominican liberation even after the assassination of Rafael Trujillo. In fact, his first film project after Cuba was a short didactic documentary titled *Sendas abiertas* ("Open Roads," 196?) in which he carefully instructs voters in the Dominican Republic how to cast their ballots. It would be the only film he managed to make in his home country. Back in Puerto Rico, he continued his political advocacy for the defense of democracy in the Dominican Republic by corresponding with organizers in Santo Domingo throughout the entirety of his exile.[114] His involvement in Dominican affairs only intensified during the Dominican Civil War of 1965 and the ensuing intervention by American troops.

Although in his last years he had grown to sympathize with the social democratic platform of the deposed Juan Bosch, the Puerto Rican Police reactivated his case file sometime after his

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[112] This is not the first time Torres would try to leverage an institution to funnel resources toward Dominican art or artists. For the score of *Realengo 18,* Torres commissioned Dominican poet Pedro Mir to write the lyrics to the theme music.
[113] Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996): 157
[114] Díaz Grullón, 64.

return from Cuba in 1961.[115] In 1965, the Police assigned an investigator to his case as the U.S. cracked down on Dominican insurgent groups taking refuge in Puerto Rico. When he is finally brought in for questioning, Torres provides contradictory details on his political activities when he says that he arrived in Cuba prior to the triumph of the Revolution or when he states that he had not been in Puerto Rico since his departure from Cuba in 1961. He assuages the interviewer that he had already been detained by the FBI in 1962, presumably for his time in Cuba, and that previous to that he had been interviewed by American intelligence agents questioning his participation in communist assemblies in Europe as well as the circumstances leading to his exile from the Dominican Republic.[116] By the end of his life, Oscar Torres is a man without a manifesto. Torres speaks of his radicalism in the past tense. When asked what his current politics were, Torres responds, "If you ask around some will say that I'm a communist. However, what I do not tolerate are dictatorships, neither on the far left nor the far right."[117]

[115] Little is known of his participation in the resistance to the military coup and ensuing U.S. intervention in 1965, but biographer Luis Beiro Álvarez has suggested that he renewed his collaboration with the Vanguardia Revolucionaria.
[116] His FBI file has yet to turn up.
[117] Carpeta No. 16717.

Figure 3.11 The final known photograph of Oscar Torres, appropriately sitting in front of either a Cuban or Puerto Rican flag (in Beiro Álvarez, 296).

Oscar Torres was found dead in his Miramar apartment on December 20th, 1968 of a suspected barbiturate overdose, although the official cause of death lists heart failure. He had recently turned 35 (Figure 3.11). In contemporary accounts of his life, perhaps due to the compulsion to argue for Torres as a forgotten master of some insular cinema, the reasons proposed for film history's broader disavowal of Torres amount to a reduction. They stipulate that Torres was too stubborn an independent thinker to fit into an institutional mission or that he was a rebel whose single cause of antitrujillismo was divorced from other contemporary liberation movements in the underdeveloped world. Such an interpretation of Torres' biography holds that the fruit of Torres' labors in art and politics were contingent on his ultimate return to a free Dominican Republic, an expectation that all other alternatives are tantamount to a failure. But that is not the image of Torres

that I have tried to render these pages. Oscar Torres' career was defined by repetition, stops and starts, travels across time and space from resistance to the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic, to unprecedented reforms in Muñoz Marin's Puerto Rico, to Cuba's Revolution—with several additional exiles and returns interspersed in between. He won many of his chosen battles for a man who chose to fight them all.

A significant reason as to why Oscar Torres' career warrants a revision is that it sits between two foundational moments in which Caribbean history necessarily begets a pan-Caribbean cinema: the ratification of Puerto Rican Commonwealth and the triumph of Cuban Revolution. When assessing a figure like Torres, a national-cinematic framework is incompatible with a full accounting of his contribution to Caribbean film and history. Only by taking a step back can one begin to see the transnational constellation of film cultures with which he came into contact, so that one does not miss the archipelago for the lone island. serve as a model for other minor figures within major cinemas whose collective histories are ripe for reexamination—or, if the argument presented in this chapter holds, the inverse. The particular focus on disagreements or misalignments, both political and aesthetic, is intended here as an alternative to a hagiography of the major figures in Latin American Cinema of this period. Torres, as a clumsy but committed radical filmmaker, may be best understood as a curious exception to the idea of the heroic filmmaker within the New Latin American Cinema. Viewed in this manner, Torres' constitutes a case whereby one may be able to re-route revolutionary Cuban cinema and, thus, the New Latin American Cinema through the small—or even smaller—places from which the movement's most radical innovations once emerged.

Coda: The End of an ELA

Hey! HEY! Wait a minute! Wait one second! Where do you think you're going?

Imagine this. You're sitting in the Caribbean countryside. A fabric screen hangs from the nearest tree—or maybe you're watching a mobile cinema projection. It doesn't really matter. It's dark and there are mountains around you. You've just watched a film. The screen goes dark. Your eyes refocus. Suddenly, the screen starts to flicker again. An anthropomorphic kidney bean begins a direct address to the audience. He introduces himself as Don Habichuela, or "Don Kidney Bean," the protagonist of the film you've just seen. He warns spectators,

Remember, when you buy products, especially imported products, you are paying for more than you think.

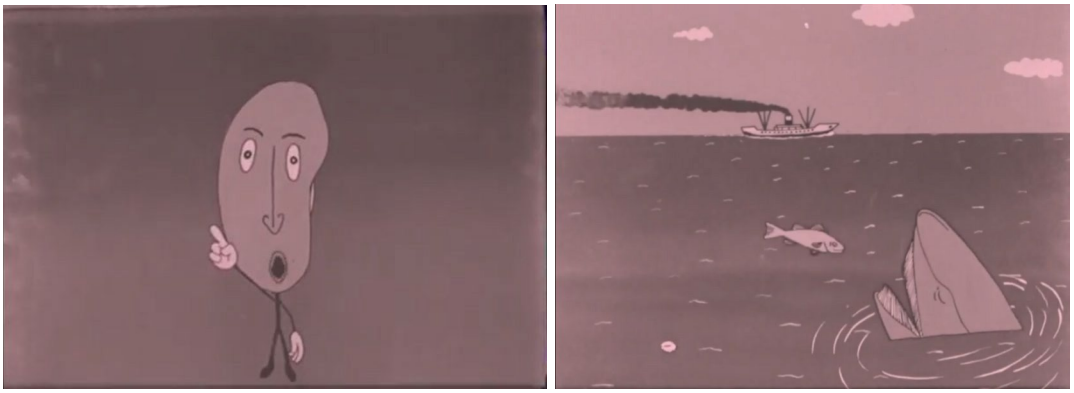

Figure 4.0.1. Don Habichuela (left) and a sampling of Rosskam's communist easter eggs (right) in *Un pedacito de tierra.*

First, you are paying those who plow, sow, and cultivate the product… The ones who harvest must be paid...
To load the product onto the boat, you need people and they won't work for free…

This is the animated short that served as the epilogue for screenings of *Un pedacito de tierra* ("A parcel of land," Benji Doniger, 1952) by Puerto Rico's Division of Community Education, a docudrama teaching rural spectators how to best utilize their state-allocated plots. It is thought to be the first animation in the history of Puerto Rican cinema. Written by screenwriter Edwin Rosskam

and animated by Juan Díaz, the processual film is an unsubtle manifesto against the protectionist trade model imposed on Puerto Rico via the Jones Act, which dictates that all imported products entering the island must be purchased from the U.S., thus making basic goods and groceries among the most expensive in the world.

> *You are also paying for the ship's voyage across the ocean. And that's not exactly a walk in the park! Someone has to unload the ship when it arrives at the port… Naturally, you have to pay them too…*

Don Habichuela reveals the absurd inefficiency of the Jones Act step by step to a rural audience. It's a statement against clientelism. In this way, the film upends much of what we thought we knew of this period in both Puerto Rican film and political history, as the short entirely undercuts the message of bootstrap ideologies and economic developmentalism of the preceding educational film. It is a direct reflection of Rosskam's own communist militancy. In the animated short, Rosskam takes aim at a target unheard of within the DivEdCo's body of work, the United States. It does so mere months after the island had entered into a permanent agreement of Free Association with the 82nd United States Congress. Rosskam would be forced to resign from the Division later that same year, but his message had already been sent.

> *See, you are also paying the import company… And for the storage... You are paying the driver who delivers the merchandise to the store... And he expects to get paid on time...*

Beyond the personal satisfaction of presenting Don Habichuela to you, the reader, you are also among the first to have seen these images in roughly 70 years, still as they are on the page. The documentary film which included the Don Habichuela epilogue was rediscovered in Puerto Rico's Moving Image Archive by head archivist Marisel Flores Patton in September of 2022. She unwound an extra film reel of *Un pedacito de tierra* that had been in storage for years. To her surprise, more and more frames kept appearing long after the credits of the live-action film.

> *Finally, the beans arrive at the store. And to conclude, the owner of the store, well, he has to make a living too.*

Seventy years later, Edwin Rosskam's message had been delivered. In his landmark essay, "¿De cómo y cuándo bregar?," Arcadio Díaz Quiñones theorizes his concept—familiar to any Puerto Rican—of *la brega*. To "bregar" means to deal with circumstances given, to engage in Sisyphean toil, to struggle from the minority position. Yet Arcadio sees in the daily chore of working through colonialism's duress the seeds of liberation. "Bregar is to act within the framework of a restricted freedom."[1] It is to acknowledge those restrictions and act anyway.

YOU pay for this. What I mean to say is, why do you have to pay so much?

But *bregar* can mean more than just to deal, to toil, or to struggle; it can also mean that all those efforts *took,* that they were worth trying, that the resistance to colonialism is working in some regard—*que la lucha nos ha bregado.* If the project of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism was successful, it was in its ability to make people believe that the institutions disseminating it were somehow infallible, immutable, and benign—and their agents loyal to their assigned mandates. Don Habichuela shows us that the individuals within that institution aspired to more. To locate the immanent resistance of pro-sovereign elements within the colonial apparatus is to acknowledge those who contested the legitimacy of the Commonwealth from its very founding. Don Habichuela carried Rosskam's message for seven decades, searching for its inheritors to pose the question,

If you have a parcel of land, why not [inaudible] it?

[1] Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, "De cómo y cuándo bregar," In *El arte de bregar: Ensayos* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2000): 81.

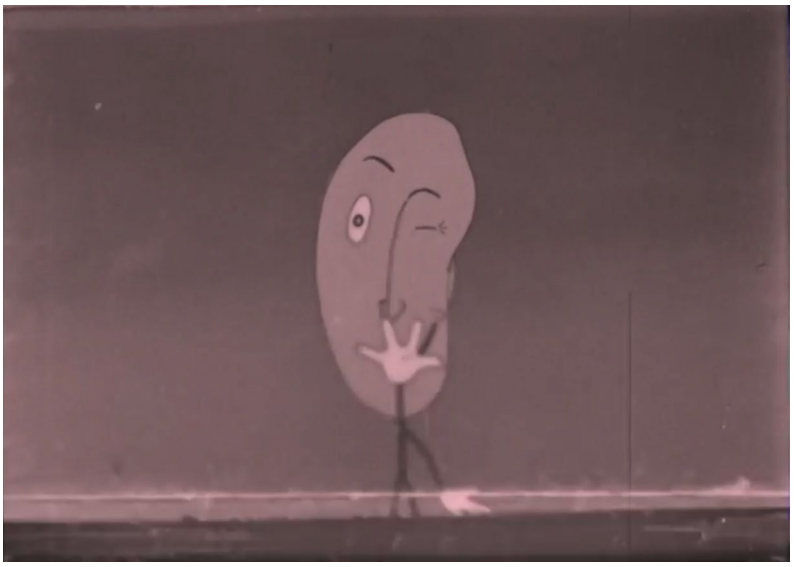

Figure 4.0.2. Don Habichuela winks and signs off.

…You see what I'm saying, right?

- Don Habichuela, *Un pedacito de tierra,* 1952

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