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Independent Mexican Cinema and the Dream of a National Cinema in 1970s
Mexico

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Erika Michelle Ramírez Vargas

Committee in charge:

Professor Everard Meade, Chair
Professor John McMurria
Professor Max Parra

2011

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

Para mi familia en México y en los Estados Unidos.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANDA	Asociación Nacional de Actores
CUEC	Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos
CCC	Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica
CONACINE	Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica
CPC	Centro de Películas de Cortometraje
FIAPF	Federación Internacional de Asociaciones de Productores Cinematográfico
PeliMex	Películas Mexicanas
Procinemex	Películas Mexicanas
SAI	Sindicato de Actores Independientes
STEANDA	Sindicato de Trabajadores y Empleados de la ANDA
STIC	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica
STPC	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Independent Mexican Cinema and the Dream of a National Cinema in 1970s Mexico

by

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Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Everard Meade, Chair

This thesis analyzes film production during the Echeverría sexenio (1970-1976) where Mexican cinema would undergo both an infrastructural as well as developmental change. The Echeverría sexenio followed one of the most traumatic moments in Mexico City's history where politicized thought would be violently repressed. As a result of political and cultural changes post the 1968 student movements many students would begin to experiment and create independent film under the newly developed cinematic schools. These would become the first attempts to revitalize the film industry as well as allow for the growth of new cineastes in Mexico. Mexico would

come to reanalyze itself, as a creator of Mexican representation within a modernizing international public sphere.

Mexico begins to develop itself internationally through independent cinema, which in turns becomes the opposite of its initial ambitions through its students. The independent aesthetic and content become appropriated by the state and become marketed as progress in national consciousness and international prestige. This outcome becomes problematized through the avenues in which independent cinema is distributed and screened for audiences.

As independent cinema becomes increasingly capitalized upon, distribution becomes the main element in which film can truly be an independent form. Creating public spaces in which filmmakers and audiences could discuss the developments and goals of independent cinema become the main source of the sub-independent level that would eventually become overlooked by the main consumer markets but would remain within the academic and intellectual spheres. This in turn would develop an unbalanced representation of the independent.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

This thesis examines how government and private interests in Mexico developed a “New Cinema” during the Luis Echeverria and Lopez Portillo sexenios for the modernization and development of a national independent cinema. Through a historical approach, while focusing on the decades right after the 1968 student movements and the Tlatelolco massacre, I trace the way that governmental and private groups developed specific cinematic goals through international and national influences as well as and built new distribution spaces for new Mexican cinema. I also discuss how the development of distribution space changed viewership in Mexico, creating a varied hierarchy of viewership for various classes, as well as how these classes influenced the development and evolution of film, in short how Mexico’s cinema became highly influenced by the political and intellectual class structure that was becoming disproportionately unequal even through the attempts of creating a balanced representative cinema for the new Mexican middle class.

Mexico’s development of a stable infrastructure helped create what was an emerging middle class during the mid 1950s and fully developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Job growth through new factories from international corporations became one of the main developments of a new class system for Mexico City. The modern development of new class systems, hierarchies in public education and academia’s intellectual classes would also create varied spaces for the new middle class to collaborate and create new film, from both a viewer’s and filmmakers’ standpoint. The

growth and changes in class systems would become highly influential to the development of public spaces for these new groups of people. As such distribution and viewing spaces become part of the public spheres that are influential to the development of a new Mexican cinema for the 1970s and onward.

Public space can be described as the medium for the free exchange of ideas, without any restrictions by a certain overarching structure. In Mexico City, public discourses through “public” spaces are highly dependent on the infrastructure of class, with its very real restrictions by cultural hierarchies that begin to develop in Mexico’s elite academic circles as well as the very closed political structures that have a strong hold over media during the same time period. Public space for the emerging middle to elite classes would come to consist of new theaters, schools, universities, venues for culture as well as the development of new print and broadcasting media. These emerging spaces would allow for a unique process of creativity between intellectuals and the filmmakers to discuss what new Mexican cinema would and should come to portray throughout the 1970s. The relationship between consumers, the filmmakers and critics each develop different views and relationships within the space that film is released, the actions taken by either of these therefore become the main development of what Mexican film will come to encompass throughout the decade.

The relationship between the consumer and the industry is unique in this time period in that the major consumers of Mexico did not see many Mexican films, but instead many “national” films were released and shown in international spheres. Mexico’s film industry was continuously authenticating itself through its recognition in European and American markets before fully immersing itself as Mexican cinema, and

was still not widely available to the mass public. This process of distribution went along side many of the changes that were occurring within the main film industry. Splits within the older most established industry would emerge with the development of two new independent levels of filmmaking. Apart from the older industry, main independent filmmakers would come to gain recognition internationally as well as nationally and was made up of recent film graduates. Alongside there was also growth of sub-independent filmmakers composed of amateurs as well as students who did not become a part of the larger industry. The development of various levels of filmmaking would begin to readapt film to new venues and varied forms of viewership influential to mass culture in film and media.

Distribution also changed significantly throughout this sexenio and was highly influential to the overall development of the Mexican film industry into the late 1970s. It was during this time that many of the film theaters were beginning to be owned by independent private organizations. Of as many as 300 theaters, the Echeverría government owned only 20¹ for the distribution purposes of national cinema. The private Compañía Operadora de Teatros as well as international companies from the United States would increasingly own a large percentage of distribution space within Mexico. As the university film schools matured, they would also become the main supporters of the cine clubs. Mexico City's history with cine clubs begins far before the 1970s new film movements but they revitalized along with Mexico's national cinema during this time period. The existing cine clubs as well as those developed by state

¹ Jaime Tello, "1947-1970, Notas sobre la política económica del 'viejo' cine mexicano," in *Hojas de cine: Testimonios y documentos del nuevo cine latinoamericano (coleccion cultura universitaria) (spanish edition)* (Mexico: Fundacion Mexicana de Cineastas, 1988), 28.

organizations provided the public space needed for audiences as well as facilitated exhibition for many independent films. Cine clubs became essential for the independent movements in cinema during the 1970s, as these were the main spaces where both audiences of all classes would be able to gather and share ideas surrounding the new cinematic movement.

Starting in 1970s, with the Luis Echeverría's sexenio, this paper explores how new venues of distribution and viewership in cine clubs as well as film formats used by the new cinematic generations from the film schools Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) and Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) were essential to the development of independent film groups who would become the new cinematic era for Mexico. These independent groups would be composed of marginal filmmakers who would collaborate between the arts and filmmaking with some of the better-known groups presenting themselves as los Superocheros, or the super-eights. These small subgroups would in part become influential to the larger cinematic productions but would eventually become less popular for larger audiences. In turn, superocheros and other smaller format films would become lesser-viewed cinematic "happenings" or momentary space specific screenings providing collaboration and discourse for a developing visual culture. Through these events many other cultural avenues would also begin to open, specifically that of the university, private or cultural venues for film showings that would include European, American or Asian foreign films most specifically based on the European auteur systems of the 1960s, that became very popular throughout the Distrito Federal as well as the rest of the country.

Using these points of reference, this thesis asks how the changes in film space created varied ideas, representations and the overall understanding of New Mexican cinema. By exploring the relationships between viewership and audience, this thesis explores how unequal relationships between state and private institutional funding force Mexican filmmaking into the independent sector and begin a new wave of authentication abroad. Alongside, national representation becomes problematic through the various levels of class structures that are attempting to redefine what Mexican cinema is expected to be. In answering this question this paper also explores how film and art groups from the 1970s created contrasting but fluid guidelines for independent film and media production through artist manifestos. This discussion involves a contrast of the standard form for contemporary media as well as developing a definition for what the modern standard was during this decade. This also provokes the question of why the contrasting “independent” standards appeared to be solely generational, influential only within select sub groups and thus, were not developed as a unifying standard for Mexican cinema but rather developed their own level of independent filmmaking.

Underlying analysis includes production processes as well as visual aesthetics that make up independent cinema and how this is different from the more accessible and popular cinematic productions. I also analyze how internal and foreign relations as well as filmmakers in relation to Mexico’s independent movement define independent film within the Echeverría sexenio. In terms of independent medias and generational influence from the Mexican film schools, these questions are the foundation towards understanding how Mexican cinema would help identify representational politics of the upper middle class to the academic classes in an attempt to create a new visual culture

that would challenge the traditional standards produced by earlier Mexican cinema and the visual arts.

1.1 Framework

Most of the theoretical framework that this paper surveys is contemporary to the time period of the Echeverría sexenio. Theorists influential to the analysis of these independent film movements are *The Origin of National Consciousness* by Benedict Anderson, which helps deconstruct how nations develop a unifying experience through published media and in extension through filmic national histories. The Third Cinema movement is also influential to the film groups that begin to develop specifically in Latin America during the late 1960s and early 1970s through its articulation of political and critical content for active audiences. Jürgen Habermas in *Public Spheres*, which discusses what the public sphere is and its use in creating social consciousness. Also Frantz Fanon's *National Culture* is extremely important to the development of a national conscious within Mexican cinema, most especially with the creation of different social classes and which class is the main developer of the overarching national conscious. I discuss these theories briefly as they pertain to the overall discussion to this thesis.

From the Third Cinema movement, key figures Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino wrote the manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema* in which they renounce the established film production model for its sole purpose of capitalist gain. They further their argument by stating that Third Cinema rejects Hollywood and European models of film production and opts to split itself off of the established entertainment value system

as well as the individual and highbrow “art cinema”. Third Cinema attempts to reject these notions by creating a cinema that seeks truths in social contexts and attempt to redefine the filmic medium as a powerful tool that takes the form of collective action. In terms of representation, Solanas and Getino would call for the everyday collectives to take hold of the camera as a tool to work for their own interest in an aggressive form. Third Cinema would allow a dynamism that forced the viewer to take an active role in as a participant and not a sole viewer. Third Cinema also had its role in expanding anti-capitalist forms of media and hence is notable for its influence on the later 1970s film movements.

Within Anderson’s *The Origins of National Consciousness*, Anderson discusses how national consciousness develops through shared experiences shared ideologies and shared common backgrounds. Anderson acknowledges that there have been three theoretical problems within the development of the nation. Firstly there is the distance between objective historiography and subjective nationalism that is part of various histories, more specifically in how the past is perceived versus how the present is perceived. The nation also becomes constructed as something that people naturally assume as part of modernity’s changing social constructions of a nation. Lastly Anderson refers to nationalism as having political power but little philosophical basis. It is mentioned that nationalism is “the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as neurosis in the individual”², claiming nationalism as a disease that holds humanity in a self-induced deteriorating frame. Anderson’s critique of the nation

² Benedict Anderson. “The Origins of National Consciousness,” in *Media in Global Context: A Reader*. (London: Arnold, 1997), 58-66.

becomes essential to understanding how both the Mexican state and subversive groups would analyze their own understandings of “the nation” and how this in turn attempts to deconstruct and create new forms of visualizing the nation through the development of a new national cinema.

Jürgen Habermas’ work *The Public Sphere* becomes relevant in describing how exhibition spaces become important for independent Mexican filmmakers. Habermas describes the public sphere as the domain in which individuals can form a public opinion. This considers how the public is accessible to citizens, as well as what constitutes a public, which for Habermas can be between any group of people in any given space where discourse is allowed. Media, television, radio and periodicals also constitute as a modern public sphere and can also be divided into a political or private sphere where a governing or private interest become involved. Habermas explains “public opinion” as “functions of criticism and control of organized state authority that the public exercises informally, as well as formally during periodic elections”³. Public opinion forms only if a public is engaged in discussion and can be protected within certain developed institutions of power via the state and markets. Representation also ties into publics as the public sphere serves to represent certain classes. Public power came into being through representative public spheres, within national and territorial states. Public power then becomes something tangible through the creation of state activity. Habermas explains that the “public no longer refers to the representative court of a person vested with authority...it now refers to the competence-regulated

³ Jürgen Habermas. “The Public Sphere,” *Media Studies: A Reader*. 2nd Ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 92-97.

activity of an apparatus furnished with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force”⁴. This shows the change within the public as not solely representational, where there are passive individuals taking in representation, but rather a shift towards the creation of a public dialogue.

Finally Frantz Fanon’s *National Culture* discusses how nations attempt to reestablish themselves aside from the colonial. Fanon describes this attempt as a search for a national culture, distinguished from the colonial influence, or rather a new national culture, after the colonial. Fanon claims there is a certain anxiety felt between “native intellectuals” to turn away from the Western influences, “because they realize they are in danger of losing their lives and thus becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people”⁵. Fanon also states that claiming national culture before the colonial period sets up for a future, postcolonial national culture. It is also important to note that Fanon does not believe that national culture should be constructed through the reconstruction of a past pre-colonial history, but rather through future or existing events that create a new national culture. “National culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature...A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence...”⁶. Through these

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 94.

⁵ Frantz Fanon. “National Culture,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 153-57.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, 155.

ideas there is a development of creating for the native by the native, rather than from the native to the colonizer, this is how national consciousness begins. Along with the creation of a national consciousness there is a certain level of appropriation from the past with a continuous dynamic force that works against Western ideas or forms.

Fanon's development of national conscience is extremely important in the development of the middle and intellectual class within Mexico. Since many of the producers of national consciousness are of these social levels, the ulterior risk of national consciousness is that it becomes limited. Retrogression may occur through the lack of national unity as well as the "incapacity of the national middle class to rationalize popular action, that is to say their incapacity to see into reasons for that action"⁷. The middle class, who maybe in a position where there is no longer a serious class struggle, will not find the fight for national consciousness as compelling as their position no longer requires a struggle- either physically or mentally. The middle class then is developed into a form of responsibility to help in the creation of a national consciousness, but because it is not part of the struggle or production in labor it is not part of the creation of national consciousness, thus it can only attempt to adopt its colonizers national identity.

1.2 Literature Review

Using this theoretical background as a launching point, many of the sources I have found have taken the Marxist approach to the development of cinema. There are various discussions about how the expected out come of growing capital was to be

⁷ Frantz Fanon, 156.

either through the development or deterioration of national cinema. The topic of independent film within Mexico has been written much more extensively within these last fifteen to twenty years. Many authors' focus of independent films during this time period usually discusses anthropological films. Many of these films were produced and funded by institutions such as the Instituto Nacional de la Antropología e Historia (INAH) and the now defunct Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). A majority of these independent sources have been for educational purposes, to instruct and to promote indigenous histories.

In certain first person accounts, such as Sergio Garcia's "Towards a Fourth Cinema", discuss how the various film competitions were one of the major reasons many students developed and gained an interest in creating films on super-eight, eventually forming groups that dedicated themselves in exploring representation with the medium. He also states that many of the projects produced by the groups associated with the super-eight formats, focused on social change, class mobility, as well as attempted to create a political discussion of their own youth movements that were largely influenced by American rock and '70s culture. He also discusses a timeline of the superochero events, mainly all the film competitions, as well as a large article printed by Excélsior that describes and critiques all of the films that were submitted for the Luis Buñuel film competition. He collected various other articles that were written about the events and gives his own take on the situations presented.

There are also certain manifestos that have been collected. Taller Cine Octubre, Grupo Nuevo Cine, *Ocho Milímetros Contra Ocho Millones*, and The Cooperative of Marginal Cinema, all discuss the politics of independence through the roles of the

director, screenwriter, producer as well as budgets that should be “allowed” or considered “independent”. Some, more than others, discuss the values attributed to the medium of the super-eight itself. An artistic conscious is created when using the super-eight formats for the purpose of social critique as well as calling for the development of a new Mexican visual culture. Not all of the groups share the same ideals, but many attempt to break from the established conventions of cinematic production as well as creating new visual representations, while attempting to provide a space for discussion and critique.

Many books have interviews with famous directors that were part of the early generations that many superocheros developed from. Directors such as Arturo Ripstein, Felipe Cazals, Paul Leduc, Emilio García Riera, and others, all offer insights into the beginnings of the CUEC, but often discuss and are asked about their own personal interests for larger features for “the future”, this is true for many of the interviews that were developed during the later 1970s and onward. Many of the interviews give little views or politics of the super-eight or independent film movement. In certain cases some of the directors do discuss “independent” film as part of their production politics which in turn become problematic for the then current establishment of what “independent media” should be defined as.

La era de la discrepancia, arte y cultural visual en México 1968-1997 also creates an expose of almost every art and film group that developed during the 1970s. It also holds introductions and comparisons to the artistic movements that were happening as well as comparing how many of the groups would come to collaborate and also break apart in order to form new groups that would have different interest politically and

artistically. The collaborators for this book were either researchers of the time period or were participants who contributed to analysis of the various outlooks that each group had on their art practice and cinematic production. Also discussed are the breaks in ideology between groups, how these affected artists and how these became influential to the later visual forms leading up until the 1990s.

Hojas de cine, a secondary source is a compilation of various articles, some of which actually take on the role of attempting to either create a timeline for independent cinema, and others create questions and debate over when independent cinema is produced in Mexico, as well as what the objectives and understandings should be produced from independent cinema. Some articles do not really answer the questions produced, but rather create an understanding that independent cinema in Mexico is largely composed of cinema that is produced outside of the established cinematic infrastructure, such as having funds from the Banco Cinematográfico, or having been funded by any sort of “private” production company as well. Many of the films discussed are produced for various film competitions that were created before the STPC’s “Primer Concurso de Cine Experimental” showing that there were many other competitions that did have a space for films that were produced largely by amateur or students that were not completely funded by the university. Some of these articles also argue that a cinematic production must comply with three different levels in order to “exist” within a larger framework. These three levels are described as the conception of the work, as well as the production and finally distribution. Distribution is the most important part of creating a cinematic piece, as it finds an audience and develops viewership for new forms of cinema.

Since distribution was so scarce for the “independent” films, many have considered this “movement” not as a movement but rather as an individual experience. Through this there was an inconsistency found within any sort of independent films and filmmakers. Many only created a few films and were never heard of again. They also explain that while some films attempted to create narratives, many fell into vanguard, militant, or solely political genre, but that all attempted to create a new aesthetic and forms that attempted a realism or that broke away from traditional models of cinematography. It also discusses a growth of animation within independent film, but does not go further into that discussion other than it did exist. It also begins to explain how independent distributors also started up after the 1970s in order to fulfill the lack of distribution modes that independent and amateur filmmakers sought.

This thesis attempts to fit into a historical dialogue by supplementing these other works as well as connect a history of distribution methods and public space theory for the development of Mexican cinematic national consciousness. Through the discussion of how the independent and sub-independent levels of filmmaking relate to the industry, this thesis also develops how the state is one of the major influences for the development of national cinema even through the development of an open venue for the revitalization of the film industry.

1.3 Methodology

Sources and methodology include building connections with the theory described with the analysis of sources found. Primary and secondary sources used are from various archives including the Cineteca Nacional de México, the Filmoteca de

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the Biblioteca Nacional de México, the CUEC library, La Hemeroteca Nacional de México, and the Archivos General de la Nación.

In terms of primary sources this project will look for documentation of various independent groups that are from the late 1960s and developed into the 1970s from the CUEC or the CCC as well as the arts and theater departments at UNAM. Types of documentation include published manifestos in campus newspapers, independent film publications that may or may not have been distributed on campus or in the city. Also useful correspondence between various heads of groups as well as correspondence of governing bodies that were overlooking said groups or was in charge of passing independent projects for production or distribution. Films, shorts, film posters as well as photographs of theater attendants and theaters, as well as any published statistics that would attempt to show the demographics that were attending either cine clubs or the larger movie theaters within the city are essential to this project.

Other primary sources that were useful are any sort of government documentation from any production company CONACINE, CONACITE I and II that would hold information about the productions made throughout the 1970s by any of the generations from the CUEC or CCC. Newspaper articles that discuss and helped create cinematic criticism as well as open discussion about the new films being produced from *Excélsior*, *Uno Mas Uno*, *Proceso*, *La Jornada*, and any publications that were distributed throughout the city, such as cine club pamphlets, and film festival pamphlets are also primary sources for this project.

Primary sources collected also include film magazines from the time period. Revista *Octubre* which was published by the Taller de Cine Octubre- one of several film groups that did attempt to establish a set of representational politics for the standard Mexican cinema was collected in its entirety at the Cineteca Nacional, and is useful in attempting to define an independent media source that managed to produce a formal magazine for academic and educational purposes. There is also Grupo Nuevo Cine that also had their own publication and did publish a manifesto that was circulated within their own publication in 1961. This publication only has seven volumes. It was also very common for this time period for many student run publications to have a very limited number of produced and published works.

Other primary sources used are pamphlets produced by certain cine clubs that developed into larger state controlled cine clubs. For example the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes created its own cine club INBA and produced two small pamphlets that discuss cinema produced during the 1970s. Since it was produced and published in 1980, it uses the year 1980 to “look back” to the past decade of cinema from a more modern viewpoint. Also any existing scripts or production notes, or any written text that dealt with the development of any films produced by either the independent cinematic groups or even the larger productions would be useful in terms of understanding artistic choices as well as understanding the directors attempt at producing a specific film, which would serve as a contrast to how films are then read by its viewers in cine clubs or theaters in general.

Secondary sources include compilations of journals, articles written on new Latin American cinema. There are many secondary sources that discuss two different

“new” Mexican cinemas, many refer to the later 1990s generation of filmmakers that gained a much larger audience, as they were much more commercially successful and widely distributed through Europe and then throughout Latin America. Many of the secondary sources discuss the developments of Third Cinema as a Latin American cinematic movement and how these are influential to the new cinema within the 1970s. While this is useful, it also becomes redundant; also there are many secondary sources that discuss various statistics of demographics attending theaters, such as age groups as well as take into account which films have more viewers. These statistics are usually published to show the contrast in the lack of family films as well as the development of a rating system. Many secondary sources also attempt to discuss and analyze independent cinema from the 1940s-1960s discussing how its purpose has developed and changed in relation to the nation’s standing. Many discuss the independent’s use for education as well as its use for politicizing groups of people.

Using these sources and theoretical frame works this paper will conclude in analyzing how Mexican cinema has produced independent film within an influential time frame for not only cinema but for the development of a new politicized visual culture. Cinema and the arts create incredibly influential depictions a dissolving Mexican identity while birthing a new one, both critiquing Mexican national consciousness as well as producing it. Independent visual culture becomes an important topic to consider as a part of the Mexican national consciousness as Franz Fanon would argue, it becomes a physical expression for the middle class that both exists in a marginal framework, yet still manages to create ripples within the larger construction of a national cinema. The paper attempts to look the independent cinema as not just an

individual experience but as a collective that intended in creating a new visual culture for its own view of modern Mexico.

Chapter 2.

Organizations and the Development of Modern Film Industries

2.1 Introduction

Throughout Mexico's Golden Age (1920s-1945), cinema became regarded as the national image that would represent Mexico within the state as well as abroad. Mexico's cinema during the Golden age had developed itself into a largely productive and high standard film industry, developing a star system as well as establishing well respected film directors and extremely well equipped studios for its production. During this time period Mexico's film industry was essential to the development of the national consciousness that would proceed the generations that developed during the late Golden Age. Though the national images and consciousness that the Golden Age provided became deeply ingrained into Mexico's idealized and imagined historical past, changes between middle class youth and academic classes became the major catalysts for the burgeoning cultural changes of the mid to late 1960s.

Events during the mid 1960s that were influential to the changes involved in filmmaking included the many political clashes with the student movements of the late 1960s, as well as the drastic changes in government involvement within film involving repression and censorship, altering between each sexenio. The late Gustavo Díaz Ordaz sexenio leading into the Luis Echeverría and Lopez Portillo sexenios would prove to be the most drastic and influential for development of a New Mexican cinema. Within these changes, filmmaking became the major source of development of a new national image of Mexico. The New Mexican cinema, both by its auteur and underground super

eight movements, created the visual forms in which to understand and remember the historical traumas that the developing generations Mexico had experienced in the later 20th century as well as create new experimental forms for the development of new forms of Mexican cinema not based on an ideological past.

Prior to the 1960s, Mexico's cinema was one of the main forms of projecting an international "Mexican" image. Mexico's Golden Age was eminent in this international development and became the turning point in Mexican history through its construction of conventional images of *mexicanidad*⁸. During the 1960s these established images began to shift into a new context of political and economic turmoil within Mexico leading towards high tensions that fell as the backdrop to this era. Demonstrations and protests became the face for Mexico through students, professors, workers, and civil rights activist who helped initiate various political reforms for the Mexican state during the late 1960s. By 1968 Mexico's student and academic populations had taken up the challenge to develop Mexico's national image to mirror their struggles. In terms of film, many works developed in criticizing and critiquing the times and political period of the Mexican state.

Mexico's modern age in cinema begins just after the 1968 student movements and the Tlatelolco massacre. This modern age in cinema notably embarks on developing documentary filmmaking as an independent practice and also begins experimenting with conventional genres by combining and recreating them. Amateur filmmakers also initiate a presence within the filmic industry as part of a sub genre of filmmaking; and new, well-recognized directors begin to flourish within the established cinematic

⁸ Charles Ramirez Berg *Cinema of Solitude* 1-5

industry. Along with these internal factors, many U.S. and European political and economic influences would help create filmic co-productions as well as develop a new culture industry distinct from an earlier nationalistic time period. These varying developments would constitute many of the internal conflicts the cinematic industry had during the 1970s.

This filmic decade extends between two important periods, the Luis Echeverría and the José López Portillo presidential sexenios, 1970-1976 and 1976-1982 respectively. Each president held important roles in the development of the Mexican film industry, as each would create laws or construct different governing bodies to oversee and control media development. Due to this, each sexenio had different goals for its cinematic advancement and both sexenios were highly influenced by external political and consumer forces. These complex changes in Mexico's cinematic industry begin to develop an independent international cinema. Mexico's cinema does this through its emerging culture industry, influenced and developed by government and private interests in Mexico as well as varying external projects abroad, in hopes of modernizing and developing of a new national cinema.

2.2 Censorship and Closed Doors

The governing political party that held office for over 40 years during the 1970s heavily influenced Mexico's film industry. As cinema would grow and develop, Mexico's government would regulate and control what would be produced through the cinematic banks. The banks would oversee projects and fund those that would meet the guidelines imposed by the government. The banks would make sure that films did not

present the Mexican government in any questionable or unfavorable light. This could be interpreted in any form, and would mostly consist of censoring films from being screened in theaters, altering scripts, or reediting film that was to be produced for the screen. This action would be the longest running form of regulation within the cinematic industry since the 1930s.

Film that was produced with questionable material was often held by certain “guidelines” and rules but were not often publicly censored, or publicly disclosed, throughout Mexican cinema’s history. There were however films that were mostly hidden from the public even after their screenings, this true for some early Mexican films such as *El Automovil Gris* (1919) which follows the narrative of a couple of young men who decide to rob from the wealthy citizens of Mexico City, created as a series, the thieves would often be portrayed escaping from the law. The Mexican government saw this as a representation of the new police system being inept; hence the thieves would be capable of overcoming the law. Since the film was based on real events, the Mexican government would make it clear that crime would not receive a penalty. It did this by supplementing film with a reel of news and archival footage of the supposed thieves of their actual execution, clearly stating that crime, even in film, would not go unpunished in Mexico.

Censorship or “fixing” films would become second nature throughout Mexico’s cinematic history. For each sexenio different people would take the role of editor for any film distributed under the large cinematic banks as well as films distributed under any government-sanctioned organization. The debate on how censorship would take shape was run at the Camara de Diputados or the Chamber of Deputies. There were

constant debates on the levels of available freedom of speech for filmmakers and any sort of media that would be available to wider audiences. Many of the debates would consist of debates against the freedom of speech that would create negative criticism against the Mexican state and government, which would try to create the most positive representations of itself to its citizens. Even though the debates would exist into the 1970s, the amount of deputies who preferred the censoring system overwhelmed those that did not and continued to require guidelines for content in films.

Filmmakers were often encouraged to cut scenes that might portray any criticism against the Mexican government that might display any means of corruption within the nation or to cut scenes that would damage the credibility or power of the state. There were many films that were produced that could not be screened until late in the 1970s because of the content and because the filmmaker would refuse to reedit the film for the screen. Many times these films would be sought after during a period when the film would be secretly screened for small private audiences, gaining a cult following or audience that would urge for the film's release to the general public.

Censorship was a concern for many filmmakers of the 1970s, and many would be able to find loopholes, either gaining approval through their own positive and popular recognition, while many would opt to not screen films to avoid changing their work and instead present their work internationally. This would be one of the underlying influences for many filmmakers to remain outside of the industry and create the beginnings of independent cinema.

2.4 Post-1968

There is evidence of the 1968 political movements trailing into the beginning of the Echeverría presidential sexenio. Events during the mid 1960s that were influential to the changes involved in filmmaking included many political clashes with the student movements, as well as a new level of government involvement within the film industry. Changes between the youth and middle class culture also became major catalysts during the mid to late 1960s. The growing audiences of the 1970s would help cinema develop new moral grounds as they focused on a wider political scope as well as became involved in a burgeoning consumer industry. These new audiences as well as the new forms of cinema would pave the way for a reinvention of Mexican cinema making itself distinct from the old industry structures. The new Mexican cinema, through major industry productions as well as auteur and underground super eight movements, would experiment with traditional and conventional visual forms in an attempt to understand historical traumas as well as represent the new urban and modern culture that Mexico had experienced in the later 20th century.

Mexico's film industry during the 1968 student movements and the Tlatelolco massacre suffered an increased amount of censorship in terms of public political opposition to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. Censorship extended not only into film but also into media broadcasting for television and radio where many of the station's owners and sponsors were tied to the PRI and overlooked the PRI's propaganda and airtime. The rise in censorship was due to the national and international disposition Mexico was attempting to create as a modern, innovative country. This

clashed with already overwhelmed population of students and workers involved in the protests against the Gustavo Díaz Ordaz government that was continuously not meeting their needs while repressing their political opinions.

These events would create a hostile environment not only for rising academics and critics but also for the students and workers who were attempting to reposition themselves in the social hierarchies of the intellectual and educated classes. Public space during the 1960s was under constant scrutiny and in danger of becoming inaccessible to any public other than the pro-Priista mentality (which meant anything between control of media and pro democratic representations of the Partido to local and governmental candidates under the PRI). In the process of creating a modern image of Mexico City on the international stage, the Díaz Ordaz sexenio managed to cut off new venues for Mexican filmmaking by cutting funds from the main cinematic banks as well as slowing the growth of new distribution spaces, either theaters or creating a hostile university setting for new venues.

As the film industry moves into the Echeverría sexenio the process of opening up new venues for filmmaking and viewership is renewed through excessive government funding through the creation of a new cinematic school in Mexico as well as the building of new movie theaters and cultural development institutions. Between 1970 and 1976 Mexico's established film industry begins to see a growth of new film students who establish themselves as independent filmmakers. These filmmakers begin to create a new space of distribution and viewership through the use of existing cineclubes and the new developing venues in university centers and academic cultural centers that are associated with state institutions such as schools or museums.

Throughout Mexico's cinematic history, the 1970s stands out as new ground for experimentation in filmmaking. This period in cinema is well known for expanding documentary filmmaking as an independent practice and also for a new beginning in experimentation with conventional genres. As the development of cheaper film and more accessible cameras expands, amateur filmmakers have a new presence within the film industry as part of a sub-independent genre. Through their development of an independent cinema, new well recognized, directors begin to flourish within the established cinematic industry.

Many internal changes to the main industry would be developed, most especially within film unions as they began to separate and open up to new members. International political and economic developments would also influence Mexican co-productions, genres, and aesthetics, developing new ties between national cinemas in terms of bi-national representation. This industry would begin to morph the historic national identity through a new consumer industry that developed from many international organizations, businesses as well as political governments, attempting to sell venues as well as their own films within Mexico. This new industry would begin to separate new generations from an earlier nationalistic time period that was widely seen through film. Filmmakers during the Echeverría and López- Portillo sexenios would begin to grapple with this change by attempting to create a national cinema that is unique to its history and at the same time well recognized abroad in order to become a commodity for national interest and more importantly international interests.

2.5 Three Levels of Filmmaking

Echeverría's sexenio between 1970 and 1976 produced the growth of state involvement and funding in cinema that had not been seen since the early Golden Age cinematic period. This time period also became the first time that the Mexican state fully involved itself in the production, exhibition and distribution of films, which allowed for an unprecedented growth in film development throughout the 1970s. This newly enacted state funding would give way for innovative and seemingly liberal outlooks on film, both as independent mediums as well as larger international productions. State funding would also promote new cinema through the development of two new film schools, the CUEC and the CCC. The Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) was founded in 1963, while the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) was founded in 1975. Both schools attempted to create a new generation of filmmakers that would lead Mexico's cinema into new directions in form as well as change the ever-popular cultural standards that were developed during the Golden Age period.

New generations of filmmakers from both film schools proved to be innovative in their understanding of film as a visual art form. There was a surge of student groups who would merge both film and the visual arts as symbiotic mediums, each medium creating new levels of representation for new ideas of the nation as it was experienced during the modernist movements Mexico City had in the eve of the 1968 summer Olympics. As various art and film groups begin to form they also mark the beginning of the various branches that Mexican cinema divides into during the decade. These

branches become established as three major film “industries” where filmmakers and viewers are divided through their class divisions as well as political ideology.

There are three divisions within Mexican cinema during the 1970s. The first and oldest is the main film industry, which is funded through private, and government funds through the various cinematic banks that were in charge of funding chosen films. Apart from the main industry two other sectors would form and merge into others. These two sectors would become known as the independent and separately the sub-independent sectors. Both sectors would start from the same ideologies centered in low budget filmmaking, but as distribution space began to be needed many filmmakers would split from the original independent ideals in order to merge with the main film industry. Through this merge independent film began to be seen in mainstream filmmaking, fitting into wider consumer film audiences. This establishes two industries, the original older industry, and the independent industry as part of the modernized original industry. The third falls under the split between the original independent branches of filmmaking. As the independent filmmakers divided, the remaining group would become the sub-independent group that attempted to fulfill original ideas presented by both independent groups.

These three different levels of filmmaking would recreate how cinema was produced in Mexico throughout the decade. Though these levels of filmmaking attempted to create an open forum for filmmakers of all areas, whether political or arts based, they would also prove to be highly unequal in how films were distributed as well as limited how these films were viewed through their selective distributions processes.

These changes and unbalanced methods would leave resounding effect on how Mexican cinema attempted to define itself during this unpredictable time period.

Chapter 3.

Los Independientes and the Industry

3.1 Introduction

One of the most important changes to the Mexican film industry throughout the 1970s would be the full development and most importantly full immersion of independent film into the main film industry. During the 1970s Mexico's film industry begins to make drastic changes from the originally tightly closed and conventional forms of cinema. Mexico's notable filmmakers remain as the head film producers and are no longer captivate the audience as much as the original Golden Age did. Mexico's economic changes allow cheaper and higher quality programming for television producers, and hence theater outings become less frequent. The changes in audience viewership create extremely unequal access to quality theaters and films and would eventually have Mexico's once successful movie industry to a standstill.

These abrupt changes would mostly be due to the closed system that the film industry had established since the early Golden Age film period. Much like the pseudo democratic political party that ruled Mexico since the Mexican Revolution, cinematic unions of the Golden Age had become the "dinosaurs" that would continue to rule over the film industry throughout the 1970s. This "traditional" cinematic industry would begin to see changes throughout the Echeverría sexenio. Mexico's previous sexenio would prove to be one of the most repressed in public opinion and expression, culminating in a tragic end, this enabled the Echeverría sexenio to create a wide spread effort in regaining the public's trust of the government. The government would propose

new funding for the cinematic industry to increase production of Mexican films and also increased spending for the development of theaters for the expected growth and renewal of Mexican cinema. Along with these changes, the Mexican cinematic industry would have to open its doors for new creative talent. These changes would eventually create new avenues of film production throughout the 1970s.

These changes would be met by two different groups of aspiring filmmakers, the first would be filmmakers who were already within the main industry's unions who could not initially produce their own work due to union restrictions, the second group would be students of UNAM's CUEC and later the CCC. These two groups would develop films that would fall under what was then considered independent filmmaking. As each group developed into very different forms of filmmaking, both groups would be highly influenced by the importation of foreign films. Its foreign influences as well as the new levels of distribution that it sought after and would mark the independent level of filmmaking. The development of an independent cinema would also create a different audience than what was traditionally found in the older cinema.

As independent filmmaking became increasingly popular different levels of viewership and increasingly different audiences would develop. Through their influences and content, independent film would begin to attract audiences of different socio-economic backgrounds. Though the Echeverría sexenio aimed at creating an open forum to have new cinemas expand and become the new Mexican cinema, the development of these cinema would split up viewership more than it had in the previous sexenios. Audiences would begin to change based on socio-economic class, where differences would often be seen through the educational or social involvement the

viewers had. Though this was not a recent happening to cinema viewership, it became much more distinct during the 1970s where new Mexican film would begin to experiment with aesthetics and genres.

The changes in viewership would create unbalanced and unequal access to much of the new Mexican cinema that was created throughout the 1970s for the general public. Distribution would also limit access to newer films due to limited showings and venues these films would be distributed to. This unbalanced form of viewership would effect the overall development of Mexico's modern cinema within the nation, where the general public would divide itself from what was meant to be the new representations of modern Mexican cinema.

3.2 The Independent and its Influences

Though there has been some interest in describing the 1970s filmic movement as a second but significantly smaller "golden age" in Mexican cinema, it is imperative to understand that the cinematic generations beginning in the new film schools were influenced by international film movements of the Nouvelle Vague⁹, Spanish Surrealism and Italian Neorealism. These influences would be followed by the developing Third Cinema philosophies from South America, which would become the main model for national cinemas throughout Latin America. Previous models of cinema were quickly rejected through the development of these influences and the younger generation of filmmakers. Though there would be a conflict of interest between

⁹ "Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México" last modified 2010. <http://www.cuec2010.unam.mx/pagina/es/5/centro-universitario-de-estudios-cinematograficos>.

independent groups, many of these influences would sway young filmmakers against the consumerist model of filmmaking, opting instead for the value of film as a form of self expression rather than for sole consumer values, while others would be swayed towards the consumerist model, hoping for larger productions within a new cinematic industry.

The Nouvelle Vague and Italian Neorealism was extremely influential in its use of non-actors and its attempt at depicting the realities of a post-war country. These films would often be exhibited within the university setting as well as the developing cine clubs throughout the city. These styles would become the foundation of the teaching methodologies that the CUEC and CCC would come to use for their first graduating generations. The development of the cinema schools allowed for new experimental ground as well as produced a new found interest in developing and finding contemporary aesthetics that differed from the Golden Age cinema.

Mexican cinematographers began to experiment with the eight-millimeter formats as well as sixteen-millimeter formats that would become an important factor in developing a different form of cinema. These would become traditional mediums used by students at both the CUEC and the CCC as they were inexpensive with labs readily available and would become iconic to the independent movement as the launching medium for experimentation. This format, though initially made for consumers of the middle class, was the preferred medium for the new filmmakers that would partake in the documentation of the independent film movement. Super-eight's compact attributes made it ideal for students and amateurs to develop and use this format for shorts and experimental films. Though there is often not an in-depth focus on the medium, it is of

extreme importance to the beginnings of this new cinematic movement. Using these mediums many students would come to participate in national competitions and international film festivals throughout the early stages of independent film.

This medium would also influence the beginnings of Mexico's first filmic manifestos. One group that was inspired by the cinema manifestos of Solanas' and Getino's, *Towards a Third Cinema*, which called for a cinema that would be separate from the art and Hollywood film that dominated most cinemas internationally, would become known as the *Superocheros*. Third Cinema's focus on developing a cinema that would develop an active audience would be extremely influential not only in the content produced in the new independent wave, but also in the development of audience dynamics. Audience members would begin to split and merge into different groups and separate from the general public to become various publics, each with certain tastes for variants of the experimental and new genres. As the independent groups began to become more involved in the Third Cinema influences they would begin to develop their own manifesto.

A group of highly motivated students as well as "independent" filmmakers (those who operated outside the industry's unions) who were also experimenting with film would lay down the first mission statement of what the initial *independent* film aimed to become. The group would call itself and drafted the manifesto titled *8 Millimeters versus 8 Millions*. This manifesto begins with a direct objection against filmmakers who were using the term "independent" to define their films within the larger industry setting. At this point, many filmmakers were still in between the use of various definitions of what the independent movement should be, with *8 Millimeters*

versus 8 Millions filmmakers would attempt to define the role and what independent film is within Mexico.

The manifesto outlines the ideals that independent cinema should comply by. The manifesto mandates that film production costs stay within low budgets, specifically discussing that production costs for a true independent film should not cost over ten thousand pesos¹⁰. It also states the medium chosen to produce film should not disqualify it from being considered a quality film, as well as goes further into critiquing major productions as unable to fully create representative film solely with a higher budget. The manifesto also states that the movement of new Mexican cinema began with the First National Independent Cinema Competition “Luis Buñuel” in 1970 and those who participated or work within the same spirit of the movement even if there are ideological divisions between the various independent cinema groups. Finally the manifesto states that the independents would work through any exhibition channel “but always with the very clear idea that the language of cinema must be at the service of the community and that we will continue to criticize the faults and errors of the system”, though this was not always the case in later film productions.

8 Millimeters versus 8 Millions offered one of the few defining moments for independent cinema during this decade. Many critics would consider independent cinema as film that would come from any source outside of the original film industry, essentially any creative work that would be separate from the traditional Mexican national cinema, the virtually non-existing and censored film of the 1960s or the

¹⁰ Ten thousand pesos during the mid 1970s.

exhausted churros of the 1970s. Under this definition, filmmakers that were not part of the unions working under the main industry would be considered independent filmmakers. Initially both groups had a lot of similarities. One factor that overlapped between both the manifesto group and the generally accepted as independent groups were distribution methods. Initially both would present their works at various film festivals or film competitions nationally and internationally and were known within the same film circles. They would also have the same influences for modern cinema but the level at which the independent groups would continue to work developed into two different levels, the industry independent and the sub-independent.

3.3 Appropriation and Film Festivals

During the low production years of Mexican cinema between the 1950s and 1960s Mexico's cinema would lose much of its funding and much of its audience to the increased development of television. Television would become extremely popular and was becoming more affordable for the middle classes. The entertainment space that movie houses once filled was constantly becoming replaced by cheaper and higher quality programming that was available in the comfort of peoples homes. Along with television, during the years that preceded the 1970s independent movement there were many attempted filmmakers who were not able to produce their films within the larger industry. This was due to the way the industry's union operated, where only union represented filmmakers could use studio sets as well as have access to actors (who were also part of a collaborating actors union). Some of these filmmakers who were marginalized by the industry were a part of the industry itself, but were not in control of

their own projects. Since these filmmakers were not able to create their own work within the unions or the studios they would attempt to create a venue for films that were considered “independent”, or simply not a part of the unions.

These two different factors would push union workers to create a space for the filmmakers who wanted a space for their work to be shown and considered for new works within the industry. Under this the unions would create the first national film competitions. The union funded film competitions were meant to “revitalize” the cinema with a fresh outlook by showcasing new creative projects from both filmmakers that developed projects from the new film schools as well as the filmmakers who were already working within the unions, though not as directors of their own projects. There is criticism against the true reasons behind the development of these competitions, in which they were meant to benefit those who were already working within the industry itself, as many of the judges were part of the industry itself¹¹. Never the less these competitions would be the official starting point for what would become known as the independent in Mexico’s cinema industry.

In 1964 the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica (STPC)’s section of Técnicos y Manuales launched a call for independent films for its first contest for feature length films in experimental cinema, (Primer Concurso de Cine Experimental en largometraje)¹². This would be the first of various other film calls that

¹¹ Emilio García Riera. “1953-1982 El Cine Independiente.” *Hojas de Cine*, Volume 2, (spanish edition) (Mexico: Fundacion Mexicana de Cineastas, 1988), 198-202.

¹² García, Sergio. “Toward a Fourth Cinema prologue: a marginal cinema.” *Wide Angle*, Volume 21, Number 3, July 1999, pp. 70-175 (Article), 87.

developed into the early 1970s. These events would help to validate the beginnings of both independent and student films. The films that competed and won were all adaptations of contemporary Mexican or Latin American literature. These films were successful enough to have garnered recognition and acceptance into the industry itself, this meant that many of the filmmakers who created the winning films were incorporated into the main cinematic industry.

Incorporation of filmmakers would become fairly common for many directors that created and submitted original work to international film competitions. This was not as true for the second S.T.P.C. competition in 1967, where a much smaller group of filmmakers would come out successful, one of these being Alejandro Jodorowsky who films *Fando y Lis* (1967) as an independent film but becomes appropriated as a series by S.T.I.C. The popularity of this series is what eventually launches Jodorowsky into the industry later creating the famous independent reels of *El Topo* (1970) and *Holy Mountain* (1974), two very experimental films which critique Mexico's history through visual aesthetics and strange narratives.

During the early 1970s many cinematic and art groups began to develop thematic film competitions in which many CUEC students would present their original work. Film competitions held in the past during the mid 1960s would be influential to the independent movement as the surfacing of the intellectual and cultural ideas that younger generations had and presented as national cinema. In 1969, soon after Jodorowsky's immersion into the industry, Felipe Cazals, Arturo Ripstein, Rafael Castanedo Pedro Miret, Paul Leduc and the critic Tomás Pérez would form the group Cine Independiente. This group would become well recognized internationally through

its participation with Cazals and Ripstein's films in the Primera Semana del Cine de Autor de Benalmádena, España¹³. It is important to note that during this time period Mexican cinema as it was seen internationally was exclusively nonexistent. The international participation this and other groups had in international film festivals would promote the new image of Mexican cinema without the acceptance or internal recognition from Mexico itself, simply because these films were produced outside the national productions of film.

Mexico's film industry would constantly change throughout the 1970s, and would either continue to increase in structural development or would fail to develop in relation to the government's financial involvement. Historically the Mexican government would appropriate innovative visual representations by publicly sponsoring filmmakers in order to appease masses and establish a seemingly liberal outlook on state run organizations. During the 1970s this becomes problematic for various groups that are attempting to create and sustain independent aesthetics and modes of production separate from the state, since many times these groups run the risk of reappropriation by the state. Though reappropriation of aesthetics may not be completely distinctive in creating an independent cinema, one must look at the developmental processes to separate the independent from the appropriated industry driven "independent". Separately the conflicts of interest are apparent in the "buying-in" of various filmmakers into more profitable productions- those that become fully funded by state means, and as such have a higher production costs, producing a much cleaner and

¹³ Emilio García Riera. 203-204.

pleasing aesthetics. Cinematic production attempting to be or become “independent” may not necessarily have the option to buying in to the larger scale productions, and either remain within the independent realm or abandon the project.

Recognition from international film festivals became the primary tool for national recognition in Mexico. This was for any films that would prove to be successful in any international venue, it was not limited to the independent filmmakers who were able to produce films through the CUEC or CCC or those that were produced outside of any studio or school. Many filmmakers were able to create films that were commercially successful within Mexico, as films became appropriated by Mexico and then transformed into representations of the new Mexican cinema. Part of the commercial success these films found was garnered under the label as the new Mexican independent cinema, which implied that the films that should be well received by both general audiences and critics would be a part of new independent Mexican cinema.

This form of appropriation and presentation would continue throughout the 1970s, with many successful and popular films becoming well received within the international audiences that were resurfacing as well as the national audiences that were also evolving into different groups. Of these independent films, Felipe Cazals film *Canoa* (1976) stands out as experimenting with themes in terms of retaining or producing a politicized critique while also working with groups of non-actors all while working within the industry sphere. This film becomes one of the more popular examples of film that retains independent aspects while working within the larger productions of industry films.

3.4 *Canoa*

During the Echeverría years, traditionally censored themes began to open up as possible venues for filmmaking as well as promoted new directors and encouraged co-productions with the state.¹⁴ It was during this period that the film *Canoa* (1976) was produced. Felipe Cazals film, *Canoa*, documents the events of September 14-16th 1968 in the small town of San Miguel de Canoa. *Canoa* is a filmic adaptation of real events that preceded the infamous Tlatelolco Massacre on October 2nd 1968. These events influenced Cazals to create *Canoa*, which documents and mirror the Tlatelolco Massacre through a prophetic event that would reflect on history through questioning and critiquing the violence surrounding the student movements as well the levels of restraint on self-expression throughout the 1960s as well as undisclosed censorship throughout the 1970s.

Felipe Cazals' film *Canoa* makes an interesting example of how film begins as an independent project and moves on to become "reappropriated" by the industry. As part of the generation that is influenced by the third cinema movement, Cazals becomes one of the main filmmakers who lead the 1970s independent generation to international and national recognition. Since there is a large overlap between the industries' regulating organizations (CONACINE, CONACITE) and the state government, the industry is often viewed as state governed. Though Felipe Cazals' film was distributed nationally and internationally it is important to note that Cazals started making films from an independent stand point where he and other filmmakers would attempt to create

¹⁴ Treviño, Jesús Salvador.

film with critical subjects¹⁵. With this in mind, many of the industry independent films, including *Canoa*, managed to develop various political or social commentaries that were successful enough to find loopholes within the industry, preventing a large amount of censorship or reediting, and without fully compromising itself as independent works.

Canoa follows the story of four university employees from the Autonomous University of Puebla who set out on a mountain climbing trip at La Malinche, just outside of Puebla. On their way they become stranded in San Miguel de Canoa due to weather conditions. Without anyone willing to offer a place to spend the night, they risk danger and violence from the townspeople who have grown hostile towards outsiders due to high tensions the local priest brewed in his masses against “communists” outsiders. The employees barely make it through the night as the entire town has riled up in arms against them, beating them close to death or lynching them. In the end the employees are saved by the Puebla police and ambulances called in by some of the more levelheaded town’s people. Throughout the film, Cazals points out specific events that occurred days prior to the Tlatelolco event and situates *Canoa* linearly within the various events that accumulated to the tensions of San Miguel de Canoa. This establishes *Canoa* as a metaphorical film representing the tensions that were running high during 1968.

As a CONACINE production, *Canoa* had to go through artistic supervision, otherwise known as indirect censorship, in order to be funded by the government funded collective and become an official national feature film. Though *Canoa* did not have to cut scenes out of its original version, it had to work with the ideas of state

¹⁵ *Manifesto 8 Millimeters versus 8 Millions.*

censorship in order to be funded and get shown. This was done by purposely curtailing the “moral” and resolution in the film by directly having state intervention as the saving grace for the University employees as they near their deaths. Though the state is shown in an acceptable light, the state as an institution does not leave the moral of *Canoa*’s narrative. The religious aspect of *Canoa* takes on the image and impact of the state sanctioned violence as well as “the issue of political intolerance” in relation to the Mexican state during the earlier and Luis Echeverria sexenios.¹⁶ State funding becomes relevant in the films from this era in their attempt to create a critique of the Mexican government, many films must, like *Canoa*, restrain themselves at different levels in order to subversively reach their audience in hopes that the audience will perceive the film as a criticism and incite thought.

Canoa takes from documentary forms to create a complex narrative each aligning to establish one large narrative. *Canoa*’s documentation establishes three different narratives, beginning with what seems like a classical spectator narrative, with the audience as the voyeur, the first scene is of two newspaper reporters sharing the San Miguel de Canoa story, this is followed by the title sequence that is carried out in black and white with hand held camera shots, remnant of newsreel footage, of the crime scenes in San Miguel de Canoa. This title sequence begins what will become the documentary portion of the film, though this sequence is unique in setting the beginnings of what will be told as “truth” using this specific style of newsreel editing. Later the viewer encounters the voice over narrator that never reveals himself but

¹⁶ Andrea Noble. *Mexican National Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge, 2005, 111.

continues forward in its investigation for the truth. The narrator is introduced while he explains where the town is situated while giving some historical information. The narrator occasionally stops speaking and pans towards a specific individual of the town who also carries the audience through the narrative in an interview like fashion. This town's member talks directly to the camera, to the audience and carries the narrative with specific answers to questions that go unasked. The film cuts between these three different styles of narration to achieve a greater understanding of the events that occurred, by situating the audiences as voyeurs and then by informing them and finally by allowing them to become active members of the discussion through the town's members direct discussion with the audience.

Canoa follows these three narratives, cutting between each one, allowing the audience to reflect on the given information. This is crucial for the audience so that they not only get caught up in the culminating violence, but also step back from the intense content and reflex on how these events they see as spectators were similar to what they live and experienced as Mexican citizens. *Canoa* was released almost ten years after the Tlatelolco massacre; spectators were able to take into consideration the direct criticism of the Mexican state in the Echeverría sexenio in relation to the Díaz Ordaz sexenio. Through this spectators were able to take into consideration the direct criticism of the Mexican state in its current (1976) disposition in relation to the events in 1968.

Student uprisings and political tensions become crucial to the understanding of the film in relation to the Mexican people and nation. Within *Canoa*, religion becomes the governing state through a series of persuasions by the town's priest. Along with a mixture of predetermined fear of "communist outsiders" and symbolically the

revolutionary undercurrent, Cazals is able to establish a parallel narrative to the events that occurred almost ten years prior. Cazals points this out within *Canoa* during two scenes; first one of the characters reads out a local paper's article on the student demonstrations near the University of Puebla stating that the events were "anti-Mexican" and further stating "what do these students know about economics, politics, and Marx?" Through this statement the Mexican governing state weakly justifies itself as all knowledgeable by attempting to discredit the autonomous educational systems. Further into the film, after the violence against the university employees, the main town member is asked to explain the town's actions; which turns out is a series of masses the local priest dictated for the protection of the town's patron saint, San Miguel de Canoa which becomes metaphorical to protecting the *patria*, or the nation state of Mexico. Viewers examine the idea of the Mexican nation and the need for a change within political platforms in order to properly serve its people, the need to remove political policies for self interests and examine the church and state to establish an understanding on whether or not these institutions are holding the audience's, the character's and the nation's best interests.

Canoa purposefully creates a narrative that bridges historical accounts with engaging criticisms, allowing the viewer to use historical knowledge as well as their own accounts for the events staged in the film as well to critique how the national cinema would come to create new perceptions of history. Felipe Cazals does manage to create a film that both divides itself into a part of the industry's system of appropriation as well as retains some level of independence not through funding but rather content, even if it must be limited to the promotion of the Mexican government.

3.4 Cine Clubs, the Public and Distribution

As filmmakers would go on to produce for major film industry companies, the role of distribution rose significantly throughout the development of the new Mexican film industry. Various monetary offers allowed the filmmakers to have access to a larger budget as well as a chance to expand the new independent to new and larger audiences with a larger distribution network and better promotion throughout university and suburban settings. Through these events many other cultural avenues would also begin to open, specifically that of the cine clubs that developed and became very popular not only throughout the Distrito Federal, but also the rest of the country. Cine clubs would become the most important distribution sources due to the fact that the main theaters were state or privately owned and focused on the commercial films rather than cultural films.

It is important to note that during the 1960s, many film theaters were owned by organizations that sought the commercialization of film, where the monetary profit was the main interest rather than the development or interest in culture. In the 1960s the Banco Cinematográfico bought out the entire Jerkins group's Compañía Operadora de Teatros¹⁷ theater chain though the Bank limited itself to solely administering the company. By 1971 the state would outright own both the Banco Cinematográfico along with its theater chain, Churrubusco studios. Publicly and privately mixed ownership were the distributors Películas Mexicanas and Cimex as well as the promotional firm

¹⁷ Jaime Tello. 1942-1970: Notas sobre la política económica del "viejo" cine mexicano. *Hojas de Cine*, Volume 2, (*spanish edition*) (Mexico: Fundacion Mexicana de Cineastas, 1988), 198-202.

Procinemex¹⁸. Distribution space would change with the development of the film schools, which allowed the expansion of the university-supported cine clubs throughout Mexico City. These cine clubs developed by the universities provided the public space needed for audiences as well as facilitated exhibition for other films that would otherwise not have a distribution space for the general public. Cine clubs became essential for the independent movements in cinema during the 1970s, as these were the few spaces where very low budget films could be exhibited and were also the spaces where both middle class academics and students could form a symbiotic relationship.

Cine clubs are formally known as venues for the distribution and viewing of art or specialty film. Usually films that were not touring larger theaters or films that would fall under a certain theme or category that the club specialized in. they can most often be compared to the museums of the film world, and have a very early start in Mexico. The Golden Age of Mexican film as well as the European cinema would create the first interests in developing cine clubs in larger cities during the 1930s and onward, during the 1970s cine clubs became much more popular in smaller suburbs or newer urban spaces. As such cine clubs were meant to be open spaces and not limited to a certain class structure based on economic or intellectual sustenance. The cine clubs would often cater to those who would have an interest in the films that the cine club specialized in.

Since cine clubs would screen specialized films as well as promote the cultural aspects of cinema many of the viewers would come from those involved in the

¹⁸ Carl J. Mora. "Mexican Cinema: Decline, Renovation and the Return of Commercialism, 1960-1980," in *New Latin American Cinema Volume Two Studies of National Cinemas*, ed. Michael T. Martin. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 47.

independent or sub independent film movements or were a part of industry and academic fields. The most popular cine-clubs would be part of the university and would gain a wider audience throughout the later part of the 1970s. Hence, the production of cine clubs in the university setting would begin to limit physical access to academics and its affiliates. This would create a split between the viewers that would be able to see the new Mexican cinema that was being produced by the industry as well as by the schools. Along with this division, the films that would be available to the larger general audience would continue to be the cheap churros that the industry was producing at large throughout the 1970s in order to sustain itself from the quick monetary return produced.

During the 1970s the cine clubs would become the main alternative to the larger theaters that were losing their filmic value, where churros were often the headliners for several weeks at a time. As these spaces were being developed, the separation of the general public becomes much more obvious than before when television began to take over the entertainment sphere that film once had dominated. During the 1970s television was the preferred source of entertainment and its alternative would be the cine club for any foreign film as well as cultural film that Mexico would produce and distribute. Film theaters would begin to focus on films that offered content that was no longer as welcomed or accepted by the middle class family structure.

The divisions between the middle class, academic and industry cultures were much more evident throughout the 1970s through the entertainment value each group had. As was evidenced by the independent filmmakers who would participate in the industry itself, independent film was not accessible to everyone at the larger film

infrastructures, many of the films produced that were independent outside of the industry would not be available to many of these groups of audiences and would then have to establish an even more closed group of viewers. The fragmenting of viewers as well as distribution spaces allowed for an increased level of unequal opportunities for both new Mexican cinema to be viewed by the general Mexican public and hence be recognized by the public instead of the industry or university structures in which the cinema flowed through. These offered one of the first divisions of cinema from the larger produced films that would be screened in larger theaters and by filmmakers with industry funding creating two levels of viewership as well as filmmaking.

This would be one of the over arching inequalities of the new cinema movement, but it would also be met with the unbalanced levels of distribution and recognition of the independent when other groups would form and branch off to become a subset of the new independent movement. As film competitions, cine clubs, and performance spaces grew, an interest in dialogues concerning independence from state influence became fields of debate and expression. Young filmmakers and students began to develop various groups that dealt with and expressed the political concerns of their state. Grupo Musas, the Superocheros, Grupo Imagen, Grupo Liberación and the Cooperative Marginal cinema, these independent groups would develop the new audiences that would support this new film movement. CUEC students would also become part of this dialogue in the early 1970s with the production of documentary films from the archival footage of the student movement within Mexico City.

These groups would become part of the larger dialogue for social change and create many of the graphic and cinematic pieces that became iconic to the urban youth

culture. Many of these film groups would continue to work within university campuses in Mexico City and become political influences on other student groups that were not necessarily invested in a political ideology. The CCC as well as the visual arts departments began to establish their own subgroups that sought to create work that challenged the established visual representation of the new middle class and Mexican youth. These subgroups would in part become influential to the development of larger cinematic productions and would eventually become less popular in drawing larger audiences, in contrast this produced momentary and space specific screenings providing momentary cinematic ‘happenings’, in the moment improvised film screenings. This would become a common form of distribution throughout Mexico City as well.

3.5 Funding

The nationalized independent and the parallel sub-independent cinema both developed from government funding throughout the Luis Echeverría sexenio. In an attempt to regain the public’s trust that was lost in the previous sexenio, Echeverría would encourage filmmakers to produce films on “the great human themes of the Mexican Revolution; to undertake social criticism, to initiate self-criticism”; this placed the government in a position to “finish the nationalization of the film industry and to furnish its filmmakers with the necessary wherewithal to elevate the quality of their art-increased capital, political support, and artistic freedom”.¹⁹ Through these new policies and developed funding for Mexico’s film industry, various different government funding collectives would develop during the 1970s; including CONACINE

¹⁹ Jesús Salvador Treviño, "The New Mexican Cinema." *Film Quarterly* 32.3, 1979, 26-37.

(Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica) in 1973 followed by CONACINE I and CONACINE II (Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica de Trabajadores y Estado).

The Echeverría sexenio publicized itself as being an open forum for new cinema as well as creating new governing bodies that would help fund and produce these new films. CONACINE, CONACITE I and II and the CCC were all created in support for this new sexenio in cinema. CONACINE was founded in 1974 as an extension of the Banco Cinematográfico while both CONACITE were founded in 1975 and modeled after CONACINE²⁰. Though there were some confrontations with the old private studio system and the Banco Cinematográfico, these productions would come to open cinema to new directors and new generations of the CUEC and the CCC. Though Echeverría would publicly support and invite social criticism within cinema, these governing production companies would still need to initially approve scripts and later need to approve of the actual film produced (often altering the film if it was not within certain guidelines) before it could move on to the distribution and exhibition process. These would become the formal processes and regulations that would oversee most of the 1970s, of which some of the film generations would participate in, while others would develop different means of funding, often out of personal funds, as well as distribution and exhibition.

3.6 Conclusion

Within the 1970s the factors that affected the production of film included levels of newfound consumerism, middle class development through foreign investors, the

²⁰ Carl J. Mora. 48.

development of youth culture from American influences, changes in government regulations regarding film, and U.S., European and Third Cinema influences in film becoming a world commodity. Mexico's means for finding a new nationally recognized film industry comparable to its Golden Age period combined with its need to gain a modern international presence during the time of the Olympics in 1968 and beyond caused Mexico to fully exert itself in finding new genres and new filmmakers to support as part of a new cinema. *Canoa* is prime example of early independent film from Mexico that offer insight to the types of films that were being produced within the Echeverría sexenio and later during the López Portillo sexenio. Cinema began to develop an independent format in terms of content, though its funding became internalized, for the development of a national cinema representative within Mexico and abroad. This new cinema helped create new genres, developed a new type of documentary filmmaking, sought out new audiences within cine clubs, developed a consumer culture, bent moral subject matter within churros, or B-movies and critiqued the growth of commercial bodies impacting Mexican culture as it become a consumer culture. Mexico grapples with these changes by attempting to create a national cinema that is unique to its history and at the same time well recognized abroad as a marketable and artistic medium for modernization.

Chapter 4.

Los Superocheros and Sub-Independent Groups

4.1 Introduction

As the independents gained international and national recognition the sub-independent would begin to form a different audience and distribution ground. Many of the new groups that were not adopted by the main industry would begin to create their own niche in university cine clubs as well as the private homes of the filmmakers. Distribution methods for these groups would be a main priority to the development of what these groups would attempt to define as *independent*. Adding to the definition of independence also included the content that these sub-independent filmmakers would partake in. Third Cinema, the 1968 student movements, the Tlatelolco massacre, Hollywood, and popular culture from the United States as well as Europe would have an overwhelming influence on these groups and would be the basis of how these groups would remold an old national identity in their own attempt at a modern global Mexican cinema.

As with the industry independent filmmakers, the sub-independents were equally influenced by auteur cinema from Europe. This is evident since the beginning of 1930s with works such as Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* as well as the filmic repertoire that Luis Buñuel would produce throughout his career in 1950s Mexico City. As auteur cinema develops throughout Europe new styles of filmmaking surge in its influence throughout Mexico, specifically the styles of Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, and art cinema from Spain. These styles become extremely popular during

the Echeverria sexenio and into the Lopez-Portillo sexenio. Popular newspapers *Uno Mas Uno* and *Excélsior* would begin to heavily document these various international and national film screenings in art film houses as well as many cine clubs throughout the city²¹ and often critique these films as becoming the new models that Mexican cinema should strive to become²².

4.2 Distribution

Along with this appreciation of foreign films, there were also harsh critics of many of the same films being produced at home as well as abroad, but the underlying result for all was publicity. The owners of newspapers or television stations often monitored publicity through periodicals or television and would often restrain from publishing anything that would not meet their political stance nor benefit their business, in which case these would often coincide. Mexican films that were recognized through these mediums would consist of feature length films from major production studios and therefore many of the films coming out of the lower level industries were not able to receive much publicity on their own. For these groups publicity was often done through the CUEC, UNAM, CCC or IPN and its affiliated television and radio stations, which kept even sub-independent groups substantially dependent on academic governing systems. This form of publicity not only restricted general audiences from direct access

²¹ See *Uno Mas Uno* and *Excélsior* Newspaper clippings on page .

²² See *Uno Mas Uno* articles.....

to sub independent groups but also created uneven levels of distribution between each level of filmmaking.

Filmmakers from the sub-independent groups would have to bypass the development of an uneven distribution network as well as indirect censorship for many of their films by submitting them to international film festivals or distributing films for screening in private homes or privately owned cine clubs that were not established or governed by any state directed position. As distribution becomes limited to university-funded cine clubs, or government funded cultural centers²³ viewership is also limited. During this time period many of the filmmakers were recent graduates or were still students who had ties to various university groups that would help establish different types of student audiences. Many of the film viewers for the sub-independent groups that were not students would be made up of academics or populations from a higher level of education that would take social interests in art or experimental film. These audiences would be extremely different from the general audiences of the main industry, which was made up of the general audience.

4.3 Sub-Independent

In many ways these differences in venues of distribution and viewership would consist of what became known as the sub-independent in cinema. Independent cinema often meant creating films with politicized themes or content on a low budget and on smaller format film- in this case super-eight and sixteen-millimeter film. Along with

²³ Cine Clube INBA'80 *El Cine Mexicano de los 70's visto desde los 80's*, (Mexico D.F. Vol. IV), Num. 620, Julio 1980.

these technical differences there is also the development of a niche audience, through specific genres and venues. The development of films in this level is mostly for the application of social thought as a politicizing agent for the public that the films are intended for. This is in stark contrast to major industry productions and the top tier independent industry where films are meant for a larger general audience. Sub-independent films are usually produced for an intended audience, so that the filmmakers expect a certain type of viewer. This does not mean that the films produced are not critiqued but that there is a level of expectation of a cult audience, separate from the general audience. Since these films tend to attract smaller audiences, many of the films produced at the sub-independent level are often not for profit. These films are therefore made with intentions of creating a public dialogue for self-expression or to create new visual forms as an artistic form of experimentation and self-expression that would not be restrained by funding organization for industry standards.

As certain critics tend to define independent film both as a funding and content difference the underlying difference between the sub-independent and larger independent cinema is the levels of access for distribution as well as the level of politicized thought. Mexico's top critics would have trouble defining independent film, as there were new cinematic production companies who would come to fund the more popular projects coming out of the original independent movements, but would acknowledge the existence of an "experimental" cinema. In certain cases the sub-independent encompasses films that for political reasons become censored and are not allowed to be distributed to larger theaters or film houses. A number of these films become cult hits where their notoriety of censorship as well as limited screenings in

private homes and in cine clubes caused them to gain popularity and critical acclaim by a certain audiences²⁴.

Within this level of filmmaking, censorship and funding would become the most common obstacle for amateur as well as student filmmakers to gain access to any well-recognized national public space. Through this sub-independent film would actually become the public space for novice and experienced filmmakers to create and screen projects within their own groups for themselves.

4.4 Influences

The events of the late 1960s heavily marked the sub-independent groups, many of which created idealized political discourses in their own publications and films. These mediums would usually address various different groups' thoughts against an unbalanced social class system that grew out of a rising consumer and governmental industry. Mexico's growing corporatist political sector would become one of the most targeted topics of these groups through both plot driven narratives to the aesthetic experimental films. These changes would establish the foundation of political thought in which various student groups would form and begin to produce the first student independent films.

²⁴ Emilio García Riera, "El Cine Independiente 1953-1982" in *Hojas de Cine*, (Mexico: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1988), 197.

Riera discusses the work of Giovanni Korporeal who filmed *El Brazo Fuerte* (1958), which critiqued caciquismo in a small town in Michoacan, Mexico, was not allowed to screen under censorship restrictions and was not released to the general public until 1974.

Students along with professors and workers developed the Consejo Nacional de Huelga as the official spokes group for students within both the IPN (Instituto Politécnico Nacional) and UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) as well as many other universities and preparatory schools associated with these national schools. This group would become one of the larger groups that would create a political discourse for many of the students that would segment into their own fields within the universities. Young filmmakers and students began to develop various artistic and filmic groups that engaged in the current political state within Mexico and expressed their own concerns as students within a modernizing and globalizing nation. Grupo Musas, the Superocheros, Grupo Imagen, Grupo Liberación and the Cooperative Marginal cinema, among others were some of the independent groups that were influential to this new film movement. CUEC (Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos) students would also become part of this dialogue with the production of reactionary films towards the Tlatelolco Massacre as well as archival footage of the student movement within Mexico City. These groups would become part of the larger dialogue for social change and create many of the graphic and cinematic pieces that became iconic to the national youth culture of the urban city.

Along with the intense historical background that would come to influence these filmmakers were the developments of a new theoretically based form of filmmaking. From the beginning of the 1970s cinema throughout Latin America began to be influenced and move towards a *third cinema*. Third cinema became the model for new cinema developing from Argentina as described by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema*. Solanas and Getino discuss that

cinema of the third world should resist the consumerist cinema that was being fed into the increasingly wide viewership of developing nations. Solanas and Getino would advocate for films to become anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist as well as reject the Hollywood model of filmmaking, which included the star system of Hollywood through its marketing and commoditizing of actors for a larger profit.²⁵ Third cinema also aspired to create a cinema that would avoid a passive audience and activate its viewers towards political participation within their state. Third cinema had a lasting influence on many of the filmmakers that were participating in documenting the events of 1968, and was also influential in the use of super eight-millimeter film as the decade moves into the mid to late 1970s. Under third cinema, films were attempting to break the fourth wall through content as well as spectator participation- where the action of being a spectator became a politicizing factor.

Other heavy influences would of course include the cinema that was being shown to these students through their own schoolwork. The staples of auteur cinema from the French New Wave, included works by Jean Luc Godard, François Truffaut, as well as the theory surrounding auteur cinema²⁶. Through Italian Neorealism filmmakers would be influenced on the same level as Third Cinema, with the use of non-actors, shot on location versus a film studio, and the subject matter of the poor or working class as portrayed in realistic narratives- reflecting on the effects World War II had on

²⁵ Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, "Towards a Third Cinema". *Reviewing Histories: Selections from New Latin American Cinema*. Ed. Coco Fusco. (Buffalo, N.Y.:Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center), 1987.

²⁶ Auteur cinema theory as described in Truffaut's "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français", where the auteur is the director, so that his vision is the final product and hence creative authorship remains with the film director, even if filmmaking is a collaborative process.

marginalized populations. These films would influence how students would come to reflect on previous traumatic revolutions and would also allow students to begin to question representation of history through their projects.

4.5 The Superocheros and Other Groups

Pervious models of cinema were quickly rejected through the development of this young generation of filmmakers. Cinematic representations of a national identity were no longer seen as they had once been established during the Golden Age period. An important development to this new cinema was the development of the super eight-millimeter film that Eastman Kodak developed. This format, though initially made for consumers of the middle class, was the choice medium for the new filmmakers that would partake in the documentation of the student movements. Super-eight's inexpensive and compact format made it ideal for students and amateurs to develop and the accessibility to cheap processing or university labs made super eight filmmaking the most ideal medium for sub-independent cinema.

Examples of sub-independent filmmakers that used the super eight-millimeter format were productions by Raúl Kamffer, Sergio García, Leobardo López who were UNAM students during this time period. Amongst these were also many leading artists of the ENAP, (Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas), the arts division of UNAM. ENAP became the starting ground for many graphic workshops, famously the Taller de San Carlos, or the San Carlos Workshop, where most of the block print posters and flyers for the student movement's protests were created by its students. Much of the graphic art created during this time period became politically committed to the protests and also

began to “object the dominance of official art institutions and the commercialization that art had escalated to in the 1960s”,²⁷ ironically during this same period the use of commercial techniques allowed for these politicized works to become widely available through multiple prints and easy circulation for a wider audience. Amongst these workshops were art and film groups that would merge in order to create works as a collective. The *Mural efímero* (1968) is an example of this type of collaborative work by student artists as well as an example of one of the first super eight films that would document and create a unique work in response to the political tensions of the time period.

Mural efímero and El Grito

The *Mural efímero* (1968) is the title of the documentary recorded by Raúl Kamffer, and the mural itself. It is a mural that was created by art students of UNAM on the main campus site in support of the student protesters from the 1968 student movements.²⁸ The mural is made out of metal sheeting that is used for a variety of things, including roofs for makeshift shacks and fencing, in this case it is built upwards so that the mural essentially becomes a tall square like building, rather than a long extended wall. Student artists from ENAP modified the mural daily; Raquel Tibol offers her first account experience with the mural as using “strongly expressive lines and colors...the whole thing looked like collage of paintings, some of which made no

²⁷ Barnitz, 270.

²⁸ López, Leobardo A. dirección, *El grito* [videorecording] : México 1968 / El Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos ; textos, Oriana Fallaci y Consejo Nacional de Huelga ; gerente de producción, José Roviroso. (México, D.F. : Ensenada Films : CinemaFilms), 2007.

reference to the events that were growing increasingly tragic with every day, although some did depict those events in an eloquent way”.²⁹

The artists who did depict events of the student protests, for example, were Arias Murueta who “hung a torn up doll with colored strings hanging from its belly; this little object paid homage to a young girl who had died with her guts exposed on August 28, during an act of repression in the Zócalo”.³⁰ The film itself starts out with the credits alluding to the content. They feature a student’s hand painting the credits on glass with diluted red paint where soon after the credits would be written they would disappear as the paint dripped down the glass. The film documents how the scaffolding was set up for students to reach the higher ends of the metal walls, but they do not appear to have ever fully completed the mural to the top. Every side of the mural is painted and each image is distinguished through technique and personal style of each of the artists.

The imagery used and repeated throughout this mural and the student protest are contrasts of peace and violence, producing dark heavy outlines that depict rough figures of gorillas dressed as soldiers, skulls with war helmets, clubs and bayonets, as well as flowers and doves and large yellow suns. The film itself creates a critical outlook of the mural, as it documents the students collectively painting the mural, advising each other on their progress and setting up the scaffolding throughout voice-over poetry of similar political sentiment. The last few minutes of the film document an event at the mural, where various students set up their graphic artwork on display to sell, as well as live performances of students reciting poetry and various bands or individuals playing

²⁹ Debroyse, Olivier ... [et al.]; edited by Olivier Debroyse ; [translations, Joëlle Rorive y Ricardo Vinós, James Oles]. *The age of discrepancies: art and visual culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*. México : Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México : Turner, 2006, 38.

³⁰ Debroyse, Oliver, 38.

music. Throughout the entire film there is a non-diegetic organ playing with a slow and repetitive tempo while the narrator recites poetry within intervals; the relationship between the narration and the images depicted, is through the vivid poetry itself in its description of the violence witnessed as well as critiques the state. Both Raúl Kamffer and the *Mural Efímero* depict how film and the visual artists would support each other as well create two separate pieces that akin to the student movement in support for the students and victims at large.

The mural itself creates a contrasting piece with the various murals found at UNAM's campus. Many murals founded at UNAM were created during the nationalistic muralist movement of the earlier decades; in contrasts the student's mural attends to the current struggles the students had been facing. It is important to note the historical ties that bind the national muralist movement parallels with the developing national cinema in a certain mimesis of creating a national visual representation, and how this documentary and experimental film works in contrast to these established images of Mexican nationalism. The greatest and most important contrast within this is the clear example of students representing themselves through the once sanctioned mural forms, versus the government's own ideologies representing the larger Mexican state for them as it was done throughout UNAM's campus and Mexico City. The film becomes one of the first documentary and experimental works to come out of the student protest as reactionary film.

One of these most outstanding films that further explored documentary and experimental filmmaking is *El Grito* (1968), which was compiled together by Leobardo López Aretche who, despite being imprisoned managed to salvage his several reels that

he had documented, producing over eight hours of documentation of the student protests.³¹ *El Grito* consists of documentary footage of the culminating months before the October 2nd Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City. As a development of the CUEC, students were given reels to document the student protests in order to create a historical archive and to participate in the protest itself. CUEC students who produced the best reels were often given more film stock with which to continue documenting. The footage that made up this film was taken from various different reels from different demonstrations throughout the student movement.³² López himself recorded most of the film stock used, but many others also participated in the production of additional film stock for the development of the longer documentary film. The resulting film became *El Grito*, which was cut and edited by López as well.

The film itself is divided into months between June through September, each depicting how the violence towards the students escalated as well as how the demonstrations grew larger moving from the schools to the occupation of the Zócalo of Mexico City. Many of the shots are panning the areas of demonstrations, these shots are intertwined with montages of photographic stills of violence against the students and regular civilians; this frames the acts for the viewer, stopping the image in mid-action for the viewer to imagine what the following action will be in each photograph. These interwoven stills also increase the focus on the violent government retributions taken against the students. *El Grito* can be described as one of the only existing filmic records created by students of the movement. This film establishes the atmosphere that the

³¹ Ayala Blanco, Jorge. 4.

³² Ayala Blanco, Jorge. 5.

students dealt with against the violent repression of Díaz Ordaz's militant forces that lead up to the most violent and repressive demonstration by the government.

The documentation of these events is crucial to understanding and critiquing the films surrounding the development of Mexican memory and traumatic history. The Tlatelolco Massacre was the climax of a series of demonstrations and protests that had started in the earlier months of 1968 as depicted in *El Grito*. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's policies continued to move towards the right gaining more disparities and limitations for the development of the state.³³ These massive student demonstrations set off a chain of various other protests throughout the entire Mexican state, which in turn were also influenced by the public events coinciding around the world. During the early 1970s many cinematic and art groups began to develop thematic film competitions in which many CUEC students would present their original work. Film competitions were also held in the past, during the mid 1960s, such as the S.T.P.C.'s (Union of Film and Industry Workers) I Experimental Cinema Competition and II, but would be short lived due to loss of interest and a failed attempt at renovating a stagnated Mexican cinema.³⁴ It was five years later after the first S.T.P.C. competition that many younger filmmakers would attempt to create a new and dynamic cinema through the sole use of super-eight films.

³³ Hershfield, Joanne and R. Maciel, David. *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. Wilmington, Del. : Scholarly Resources, 1999, 200.

³⁴ García, Sergio. "Toward a Fourth Cinema prologue: a marginal cinema." *Wide Angle*, Volume 21, Number 3, July 1999, pp. 70-175 (Article), 87.

El Fin 1970

One of the most prominent of these competitions was the National Independent Cinema Competition, for the Luis Buñuel Award. The Grupo Musas, one of the artistic outlets for many art students, musicians, poets and writers, organized this competition for the first time in 1970. Participants were given a theme; “Our Country” in which they would create original works.³⁵ Of this first competition the newspaper Excélsior stated “In the Luis Buñuel Competition it would seem that all the young people wanted to make the same film, full of political concerns”³⁶; this can be considered partially true, as many of the participants created films that all were in relation to the political protests of the late 1960s a few years before, but whether or not these films aimed at a political critique- they all some of the first attempts at entering a traditionally “closed industry”. Of the nineteen participants, Sergio García would become one of the five awarded one of the highest honors. Sergio would become one of the major participants of the super-eight sub-independent film movement. The film that gained a lot of interest and awards was *El Fin* (1970) by Sergio Garcia.

Sergio García’s film *El Fin* is a surreal film that shows the viewer the internal conflicts between the youth culture and the growing consumer culture that fueled the middle classes. The film begins with a title sequence in an old abandoned building where the walls are whitewashed but decaying, revealing the cement and brick lying underneath the white washed areas. The credits are written onto these walls in red paint with fast brushwork. These images are paired with the song *The End* by The Doors, one

³⁵ García, Sergio, 95.

³⁶ García, Sergio, 97.

of many influential bands during this era. The title sequence is relevant as it foreshadows the decay of an established structure; with an attempt to remain visible through a faint clean exterior of simple white paint- this is to say, a cover up. The film progresses from these images to its main character, a young mustached man, who appears to be in his twenties, behind bars in one of the same old decaying structures. The camera zooms into an extreme close up of the young man's face, which then cuts to the same man in a full body shot as he is walking up over the edge of a large tree bark in the middle of a forest as but is now fully bearded and wearing a suede vest with blue jeans.

The following sequences show the man running through the forest intertwined with still shots of a woman painting. The woman who is in a more park like area suddenly waves towards someone outside the frame, which cuts to the man walking towards the camera from the forest. The film cuts between both the man and woman meeting each other, when they finally do meet the film progresses as the two enjoyably run through the forest together. The camera cuts through various actions the couple does together, including playing music and talking while sitting at a campfire on a more pastoral field. At the scene of the campfire, the camera pans from the couple to the campfire and cuts quickly to a medium shot of a man dressed as a mariachi or vaquero on a horse. As the camera zooms out to reveal the vaquero and the horse the music is suddenly changed from *The End* to the theme of 1966 film *The Good The Bad and The Ugly*.

The film then pans the vaquero in a wide-angle shot as the vaquero rides out of the right side of the frame. The film cuts to a close action shot of the vaquero's foot

stepping next to the campfire the couple had been sitting at. As the camera zooms out to reveal the vaquero inspecting the camp it cuts to various images of five different characters each running out from behind bushes or trees within the same field. These five characters feature a woman who is dressed in a pink full body nightgown while carrying a baby bottle full of milk, as well as a soldier with a gun or bayonet shaped object running out in a combat fashion. Right after the soldier runs out of the frame the film quickly cuts to a businessman as well as a priest. These five characters are shown chasing the man and woman through the forest, eventually solely chasing and cornering the man to a large rock wall, similar to that of a pre-colonial pyramid structure. All five of the characters are then individually shown in separate attempts to pull and influence the bearded man into different controlling narratives.

As the music changes back to The Doors' *The End*, the first narrative takes place. The mother, represented by the woman in the pink nightgown and bottle, is shown straddling the man lying down on the rock wall as she attempts to force the bottle into the man's mouth as he violently shakes his head back and forth avoiding the bottle. The camera zooms into an extreme close up of the man as his face painfully shakes back and forth avoiding the bottle. The camera zooms into this image to the point where it is blurred out and pans out towards the sky. This is immediately cut to the image of a younger boy of about fifteen, running to the edge of a rooftop on an undisclosed house, watching and shaking his head as he looks out beyond the roof, appearing to having witnessed the action against the bearded man. This then cuts to the next narrative of the bearded man sitting in a courtyard while playing the harmonica; a priest walks up behind him and slowly blindfolds him. As the priest walks away, the

film cuts to a shot of the younger boy as he shakes his head and looks out of a street corner towards what appears to be the bearded man after he has been blindfolded. The soldier narrative follows this, where the soldier forcefully lifts the bearded man from his collar from the sitting position he was in, although he is no longer blindfolded.

Lastly the bearded man is seen walking down the street next to a modern business with the businessman who appears to be showing him the wonders of business and the growth involved through lively hand gestures. Both the businessman and the bearded man are then shown to be in the same comfortable middle class home. The businessman begins to control the bearded man's actions starting with forcefully taking out a marijuana joint the bearded man is shown smoking from the his mouth. Along with this he then forces the bearded man to drink from a Coca-Cola bottle. This scene is particularly interesting as it depicts a close medium shot of both the bearded man and businessman through profile views, the bearded man is physically lower than the business man as the business man opens up a coke bottle and forces it into the bearded man's hands. The camera zooms into the bearded mans face for a close up as he is drinking from the Coke bottle. The Coke bottle's label is directly facing the camera and the viewers, this makes a sinister reference to iconic Coca-Cola commercials, where the viewer is shown a person enjoying the refreshment; in the film, the bearded man repulses at the drink after one sip but then is physically forced to drink the entire bottle by the businessman.

This image is then cut to the soldier striking down the previously seen younger boy, with his bayonet or gun object. The camera focuses on the boy's bloody face as the image blurs out into a kaleidoscope of various images, the first being the plaza at

Tlatelolco where the massacre had taken place. As the kaleidoscope images move faster The Doors' *The End* becomes more chaotic and faster paced to a rhythm that becomes crazed. The kaleidoscope moves from the image of the plaza to the Tlatelolco apartments to Coca-Cola billboards, as well as various other ads and commercial images of popular and overarching companies such as Volkswagen, Ford, Sanborns, all important companies and businesses within Mexico's developing consumer market. After this montage of images the film ends with scenes showing the same bearded man, clean-shaven driving a red Ford Mustang on the newly built freeways and streets of Mexico City.

Through these images *El Fin* clearly expresses the youth counterculture as it is confronted with five different forces, each representing Mexico in different aspects. The first can be regarded as Mexico's Golden Age filmic history, with the vaquero alluding to a pastoral idealistic past as well as its colonial history. The priest clearly represents its indoctrinated religious history from the colonial era and also reflects the then current sentiments on religion, as an attempt to "blind" Mexico's youth as well as alluding to having successfully blinded Mexico in the past. The youth culture is also confronted with the brute dictatorial force that is resistant towards change as seen in the presidency through the soldier, as well as Mexico's evolution into a corporatist economy and state within the modern world within the businessman's influences. Finally, the confrontation with the mother figure in the pink robe alludes to a the "mother" state, where the patriarch or matriarch assumes power and forces its best interests for the nation state. Largely metaphorical, the film gathered great reviews from various newspapers that covered the first cinematic competition put up by Grupo Musas.

These films and competitions would become the starting points for a younger cinematic tradition of the superocheros, or the super-eights. After this competition many filmmakers divided into various cinematic groups, each with their own agenda of how films should be made in terms of politics as well as relying on being independent filmmakers in order to stay true to a non-commercial film. Groups that came out of these types of competitions included Grupo Imagen, Grupo Liberación, the Experimental Cinema Workshop, the Cooperativa de Cine Marginal or the Cooperative Marginal Cinema, among others.³⁷ These groups usually shared members but were often divided in their attempts at creating a new cinema, even though they had similar goals. Along with these divisions, many filmmakers would often leave the groups to further their practice under established Mexican studios. Though the super-eight-film movement was short lived, lasting just over two decades, it managed to create works that truly reflected the resonating clashes between the new generations and the traditional cinematic industry that Mexico had longed to reestablish.

4.6 International versus National Recognition

Though the sub-independent groups would also participate in international film festivals and also become recognized, many would not be as lucky (or unlucky) to have been invited into the larger film industry as their counterparts had in the mid 1970s. Often sub-independent filmmakers would participate in national film festivals that would receive little if any recognition abroad, and did not receive enough recognition within Mexico in order to gain more than a few press releases within UNAM's *Gaceta*,

³⁷ García, Sergio, 119-129.

the university newspaper, or other literary works that these groups created such as *Revista Octubre* by the group Taller Cine Octubre, named after the October 2nd Massacre.

More often these groups would begin to focus on establishing a national authentication of their cinema through cinematic publications much like the *Cahiers du Cinema* of France, or the politicized *Cine Cubano* from Cuba. These publications would have a deep impact on the films created throughout both independents but would only be heavily produced and executed by the sub-independent levels. Due to the lessened levels of restriction in funding and distribution space, the sub-independents were free to experiment in any idea the filmmakers dared. *Revista Octubre* would become the space for many of these ideas to be discussed and evaluated by other filmmakers involved in the movement. *Revista Octubre* would prove to become one of the most influential film magazines created within Mexico by Mexican filmmakers and writers. This publication would become the closest document to authenticate the sub-independent movement by creating a written space for the movement.

4.7 Conclusion

The sub-independent is one of the most unique filmmaking levels that Mexico's film and art schools were able to produce during the 1970s. Their influence in later film productions is invaluable to creating a "do it your-self" attempt at film and breaking the inaccessibility of filmmaking to a wider public, which was not often seen in the impenetrable established film industry. Newfound accessibility, low budgeting,

politicized thought and content all were the foundation of the independents of both tiers, but was carried out strongly through the sub-independent groups.

What strengthened the sub-independent groups were their writing as well as their interest in experimenting with the traditional formats of film. Though limited distribution space would highly affect the numerical success of these films, their success can be measured in their influences upon both the independents and the resulting outburst in creative and experimental cinema that Mexico's new cinema would need in order to establish a more open environment for filmmaking for future students and experimenting filmmakers.

Chapter 5.

A New Mexican Cinema

5.1 Conclusions

Mexico's cinema transforms itself into three different overlapping worlds, each with its own viewers, distribution spaces and its own ideological goals. Mexico's middle class would be the main audience group that would benefit and suffer during the 1970s. The Echeverría sexenio proved to be efficient in gaining control over the Mexican cinema industry after decades of private control. Echeverría's attempts to revitalize Mexico's cinema was also an effort to socialize cinema in a way that would allow it to become more accessible to the Mexican public as viewers as well as participants in the film industry. Revitalization efforts included gaining and creating a new generation of filmmakers both experienced and inexperienced allowing for a growth of creative projects that would represent Mexico as it was modernizing. These efforts would not go unnoticed, Mexico's cinema managed to gain newfound international recognition and interest, through the development of both independent cinemas, the industrialized independent as well as the sub-independent groups.

All three levels of filmmaking would come to make three types of viewership, which would consist of more than specific groups of viewers, rather would form different spaces for the exchange of ideas. For the sub-independents viewership was one of the most important goals in developing a politicized film culture. Many of these distribution spaces would serve as the only feedback and critical analysis that many of the sub-independents would be able to receive. Wide public appreciation and screenings

were limited for this level of film making, making it one of the most underserved film communities in Mexico's modern cinema.

Though this is not uncommon in many film histories, the 1970s becomes a unique period where there was an active interest in transforming what Mexican cinema would become for the current viewers and population as a whole, by students who had developed a wider cinema dialogue than their counterparts in the older cinematic industries. The independents that managed to merge with the industry through their established connections within the industry itself or through international recognition would be within the privileged public sphere of the revitalized and internationally accepted new Mexican cinema. This would lead to great creative pictures under the guise that these films and filmmakers were able to work within an open industry, fully able to express their views under the state controlled industry.

Films of the early 1970s created varied ideas of the representation and the overall understanding of New Mexican cinema while screenings would help create dialogues between the viewers who would attend. These dialogues would allow for the innovative aesthetics of representation to be reflected in literary magazines, cine club magazines, cultural sections of newspapers and so forth, which would allow these representations to reach audiences beyond the theaters. This would create the additional nationalization of the new Mexican cinema not only through screenings but through print. As these spaces of representation develop they become the grounds for accessibility to the general audience that is not usually found in the theaters for the sub-independent or the independent levels.

As the Echeverría sexenio would attempt to move away from the poorer quality films by buying out the industry, the Lopez Portillo sexenio would come in to regain a solely consumer film industry with cheaply made films and poor content. Since many of the independent and sub-independent films were mainly accessible to the middle classes, the percentage of the public who would actually see the new cinema that was to represent Mexico would be much smaller than the general audiences that would see the cheaper films screened at the theaters. This eventually limited the accessibility of films to a short frame. The middle classes who would have direct access to either cine clubs or theaters owned by the industry would easily obtain access to the new Mexican cinema that was being produced. The middle class did not represent the majority of the population in Mexico City, which was constantly experiencing migration from other states, but those that represented the middle class would mostly be composed of educated classes as well as those who were in established jobs that allowed them to afford stable housing within the city and its suburbs.

Class as well as state would become the largest influences of distribution and viewership of film. The state however would not be able to directly influence the publics that would form at the sub-independent level nor the international publics that would also explore the visual representations that Mexico's independents and sub-independents were distributing. Since class is directly influenced by state structures, both the classes and the publics would relate in defining representation through cinema. Using Habermas' theory on the relationship of the state to the public sphere in order to explain how the state would help develop an unbalanced public space, it is imperative to

see how the state controlled industry would ultimately influence the public space formed by the films that were screened and distributed nationally.

Habermas' Public Sphere explains that the state power is the counterpart but it is not part of the public space formed around the critique of the state's power³⁸. Using this explanation, Mexico's development of a public sphere at the industry level allows the state power to only exert itself over the regulation within its industry but not the production or screening of films from those outside of the industry. Also as the state power the expected role is to care for the public and seek out the well being for the public. Though this might be an expectation, it is evident that the Mexican state is not fully interested in the well-being of the state at the cultural level, but rather uses the cultural innovations for the commercialization of film production, where its benefits would be towards the development of the industry at large as a commercial space for foreign investors as well as the internal market of viewers, which would become consumers instead of viewers.

The expropriation of the film industry would ironically establish an unbalanced and mostly closed film industry similar to that of the previous sexenios under the Golden Age film industry as well as the later 1950s and 60s. By limiting the accessibility of the new Mexican cinema to the wider general audiences, new Mexican cinema would fail to fully represent its audience and the Mexican nation as a whole. This would develop an unbalanced representation of what both independent groups

³⁸ From S. Seidman (ed.), Jürgen Habermas. *The Public Sphere. Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, trans. S.W. Nicholson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); originally published as "Öffentlichkeit", in J. Habermas, *Kultur und Kritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973) 92-93.

were attempting to create as the new Mexican cinema in terms of what it should be and what the industry would allow it to become. Since viewers did not have the direct access to these films it would be difficult to establish within the nation a cohesive Mexican cinema of which all levels of class would consider representative, or to at least consider as part of the historical Mexican cinema.

Revitalizing the industry financially was not as successful as the Golden Age, but was the largest improvement since the 1950s through the 1960s when film production was at its lowest. The revitalization of film content was also different in its attempt to move away from disengaging film. Along with this was the means of revitalization, which did start within the state's control over the industry, but also mostly on the development of international recognition which was one of the most important venues for the authentication of Mexican film within Mexico itself. Fanon's critique of the national consciousness becomes problematic as Mexico's independent groups are continuously influenced by foreign influences, though they are adapted with the events that happened within Mexico itself. History and international influences merge to develop this new cinema, which in turn cannot fully represent Mexico's citizens as whole. Nationalized Mexican cinema at this point cannot fully represent them through its limited viewership and through the serious lack of cultural and educational background that these films would require for engaging viewership.

Limited exposure as well as engaged viewership would not allow a full revitalization of film within Mexico. Public space would become the source for engaged

citizens and reflexive films as new Mexican cinema would develop independently. Mexico's cinema would be reinvented for separate viewers and not as a unified cinema, where it could be considered fully representative of a modern Mexico within the nation as well as abroad. This does not resolve itself through content or solely through viewership, but rather through the accessibility to film and distribution. The changes in film space created varied ideas of representations and the overall understanding of New Mexican cinema while the relationships between viewership and distribution would reflect the unequal relationships between the state and the independent sector as well as how these were reflected within the participants and consumers of films.

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