Seeing Cuba: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's Memories of Underdevelopment

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Abstract
This essay reconsiders Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*, not only in light of its director's career and the source novel from which the picture was adapted (Edmundo Desnoes' *Inconsolable Memories*), but also in light of the historical, social, political, and cultural context that produced this Cuban film.

Keywords: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, Cuban cinema, Edmundo Desnoes, *Inconsolable Memories*, docudrama.

Resumen
Este ensayo reconsidera los *Recuerdos del subdesarrollo* de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, no solo a la luz de la carrera de su director y la novela fuente de la cual se adaptó la imagen (*Recuerdos inconsolables* de Edmundo Desnoes), sino también a la luz de lo histórico, social, político y cultural contexto que produjo esta película cubana.

Palabras clave: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*; Cine cubano; Edmundo Desnoes; *Recuerdos inconsolables*; drama documental.

Karl Marx and Gutiérrez Alea

Marxist aesthetics has, at its best, been better than most Marxist art. From the beginning Marx and Engels had ideas on the subject that subsequently have usually been ignored. Engels told a novelist that he was not at fault for failing to write "an authentic Socialist novel": "That is not at all what I meant. The more carefully concealed the author's opinions are, the better it is for a work of art" (Beyer, 98). More positively, Marx wrote to Ferdinand Lassalle about the latter's only play, a tragedy titled *Franz von Sickingen* (1859), that he "ought to have allowed the heroes of his tragedy the possibility of being faithful to their own selves, of testing their capabilities to the very limit, of exploring the internal, organic dialectics of their own personalities" (Arvon, 37).

Despite the fact that he was from Communist Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea himself appeared to splendidly satisfy the above injunctions, making only the movies he

wanted to make and retaining complete artistic control over them. At once his country's foremost director and a committed believer in the Communist revolution, Gutiérrez Alea nonetheless frequently used his films either to satirize the flaws and stupidities of Castro's regime or to treat sympathetically those Cubans who had been marginalized by their own government. *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966), for instance, darkly ridicules the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of post-revolutionary Cuba, while *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) explores the soul-searching alienation of a bourgeois intellectual who chooses to remain in Castro-country, in the midst of revolutionary fervor, rather than flee his beloved Havana for Miami. *Guantánamera* (1995), for its part, is a black comedy that follows one family's attempts to transport a corpse from Guantánamo to Havana during a time of acute gasoline shortages; whereas *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994), though not without its comic moments, is essentially a serious, compassionate consideration of homosexual life—and heterosexual response to that life—in a country not known for its tolerance of "alternative lifestyles."

From 1971 to 1976, however, Gutiérrez Alea did not make any feature films, and there were rumors that, though he was no political dissident and was an early and devoted supporter of Fidel Castro, he had been silenced—even imprisoned—by the Castro regime for ideological reasons. Was he being punished for having lost sight of the primary goal of Cuba's revolutionary filmmakers, which was to decolonize the taste of the Cuban film-going public, for decades subjected to standard Hollywood fare? Gutiérrez Alea's *A Cuban Struggles Against the Demons* was made in 1970, just before the drought, and he himself called it "very confused because it is too overladen with various layers of meaning, and with excessively difficult metaphors" (Burton, 122). What a familiar smack of party-dictated recantation in that line. Gutiérrez Alea's first film after his "period of instability," *The Last Supper*, released in 1977, gave substance to the rumors about his silence: it is very *un*confused, too overladen with various layers of banality and with excessively transparent metaphors.

Completely contravening Gutiérrez Alea's best film, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, as well as the aforementioned precepts of Marx and Engels, *The Last Supper* is a belabored, ineffectual allegory of the tyranny of Christian liberalism and the historical necessity for a socialist Cuba. If *Memories* revived somewhat the idea of extension of consciousness through political change, *The Last Supper* proves yet again that the Marxist state, once changed, loses interest in change and becomes interested only in confirmation. And in lying: in repeating *ad nauseam* the lie that the deplorable deceits and tyrannies and egocentricities of rampant capitalism will disappear in a Marxist state, when, as a matter of too easily cited horrible history, they are merely metamorphosed into different channels under different names and are often aggravated.

Communist films are at their best, obviously, when filmmakers of talent choose subjects that can be explored to their fullest and developed in ultimate subtlety without abrading the dicta of the state. Such a film is *Memories of Underdevelopment*, my subject here. It was Gutiérrez Alea's fourth film, produced after *Stories from the Revolution* (1960), *The Twelve Chairs* (1962), *Cumbite* (1964), and *Death of a Bureaucrat*. The first of the post-revolutionary Cuban features to be admitted into the United States (in 1973), *Memories* remains the Cuban cinema's one great international success. It was to have been shown in a festival of Cuban films in New York in 1971, but the U.S. Treasury Department intervened because of "licensing irregularities" and the festival was canceled. Then, in 1974, the State Department itself refused to grant Gutiérrez Alea a visa to attend the awards ceremony of the National Society of Film Critics, at which he was due to receive a special prize for *Memories*.

Memories of Economic Underdevelopment

First, let it be said that *Memories of Underdevelopment* is an extraordinarily sensitive piece of work, made with tactful, confident skill that proves itself through reticence. The film reveals the influence in tempo and introspection of Michelangelo Antonioni—not exactly an exemplar of Marxist vigor. Like the Hungarian picture *Love* (1971, Károly Makk), *Memories* is one of those complex, self-questioning movies that occasionally come from police states in their periods of planned relaxation. The triumph of that police state—of Castro's Communist revolution in 1959—was followed by immediate and sweeping reforms in the Cuban film industry, which by then was producing little but pornography. The Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, or ICAIC)—of which Gutiérrez Alea was a founding member—confiscated foreign production and distribution agencies, then took charge of every aspect of the Cuban film industry from production to exhibition, including import and export, publicity, and archives. New and well-equipped studios were built, and production teams were trained in crash courses by Czech technicians. Castro's regime, like that of the Soviet Union before it, had always had great faith in the cinema as an instructional and agitational tool (all the more potent in a country with much illiteracy). But the result, in the case of *Memories*, is the very opposite of the gung-ho stuff one might expect from a newly organized Communist government: a non-propagandist, non-caricatured film about a non-revolutionary, produced by a country whose own slogan-bred revolution was less than ten years old.

Based on the 1962 novel *Inconsolable Memories*, by the Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes, *Memories of Underdevelopment* provides a witty and intricate insider's view of the Cuban revolution, within a time frame that spans the two most precarious moments of its history: the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Sergio, a former furniture-store owner in his late thirties, now living off indemnifications from the government (for property he owned that was confiscated), reflects upon his life, his loves, and his ambivalent detachment from the social transformations that surge around him. Like the "superfluous man" of nineteenth-century Russian literature, he longs to be caught up in some great cause but, disabled by his parasitic conditioning and self-absorption, does not know what role he can play in the shabby and noisy yet vigorous new Cuba. Neither a revolutionary nor a counter-revolutionary, Sergio would like to be writer, which he perceives as a vocation outside the realm of political imperative. Idly observing the revolution from a safe distance—through a telescope—in a penthouse atop one of Havana's tallest buildings (in the well-appointed district of Vedado), Sergio chooses, however, merely to write in his diary and toy with erotic daydreams.

Before retreating to his penthouse, he bids goodbye to his parents, his wife, Laura, and later his friend Pablo, but a certain critical "curiosity" (as he describes it) keeps him from following them to Miami. When he returns home, he remembers (with the aid of a tape recorder) his quarrels with Laura, and we also see flashback fragments of Sergio's relationship with Hanna, his German-born first love; he fantasizes an affair with his pretty Protestant maid, Noemí; he plays at writing; he watches the city from the telescope on his terrace; and he waits. Taller than most Cuban men and with features more European, Sergio has also always been more "European" in temperament and interest, has always felt equivocal shame and pity toward Cuba; now he feels hopeless about, yet fascinated by, the revolution. Will this island ever get over its (to him) congenital underdevelopment?

Bored and sexy, he picks up a girl one day, a would-be actress from the working class named Elena, and has a brief but complicated involvement with her. He tries to "Europeanize" this young woman with visits to museums and a trip to Hemingway's former home—a sharp, double-edged sequence that touches on the social role or conscience of the artist, the necessary death of the old kind of writer, however esteemed, in the face of a new society. Uncertain of her position with Sergio and even frightened by him, Elena tells her parents that he raped her. He is tried—and acquitted. By now it is 1962, the time of the Missile Crisis. Sergio goes back to his terrace: to wait, to watch, to wonder. In the final sequence, big guns rattle by at dawn while Sergio lies in bed, immobile and disinterested.

A series of documentary and semi-documentary sequences persistently interrupts this already discontinuous narrative line. Apparently disconnected, irrelevant, and dissonant, these sequences (including one concerning the excesses of Batista's brutal regime) in fact function as a kind of commentary that puts Sergio's attitudes and experiences into perspective. Though the protagonist views the world around him through eyes dim with bafflement, skepticism, and narcissism, Gutiérrez Alea's fictional documentary or docudrama as a whole offers a view of the early years of the Cuban revolution of unparalleled complexity and insight. The self and society, private life and public history, individual psychology and historical sociology—this, then, is the core of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and film has rarely (if ever) been used so effectively to portray such a relationship. Put another way, it is the dialectic of consciousness and context—Sergio's experiences, feelings, and thoughts as they are confronted by the new reality of Cuba—that forms the basis of *Memories*.

Visually, the film's dialectic is presented through the use of the three aforementioned forms of cinematic structure: documentary, semi-documentary, and fictional footage. Documentary or newsreel footage and semi-documentary scenes are used to depict the Durkheimian "collective consciousness" of the revolutionary process, a consciousness that is preeminently historical. This material presents us with the background of the Cuban revolution and establishes the context of the picture's fictional present, by placing it between the 1961 exodus in the aftermath of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the defensive preparations for the Missile Crisis of 1962. The majority of the fictional sequences are presented in the traditional form of narrative cinema, in which the camera functions as omniscient narrator. However, at times the camera offers us Sergio's point of view, the way in which his consciousness realizes itself through his forms of perception—*what* he looks at, that is, and how he sees it. One is made to identify with Sergio both when the (omniscient) camera dwells on him and when it conveys his subjective recollections or adopts his point of view. Thus the film creates an identification with what it is simultaneously criticizing. We sympathize with and understand Sergio, who is capable of moments of lucidity. However, we are also made to understand that his perspective is neither universal nor timeless but instead a specific response to a particular situation.

How to See Cuba

Sergio's way of seeing was formed in pre-revolutionary Cuba. As a member of the educated elite, he developed a disdain for Cuban reality and a scorn for those who believe that it can be changed. Critical of his bourgeois family and friends (who are nevertheless capable of making the commitment to leave Cuba), he is unable to overcome his own alienation and link himself to the revolution. The ultimate outsider,

Sergio attempts to content himself by colonizing and exploiting women—a metaphor for the Euro-American colonization of Cuba. Indeed, his only real field of action consists of the women whom he objectifies and tries to transform according to borrowed (European) criteria. He condemns Ernest Hemingway for the way he molded his Afro-Cuban servant to his needs, but he fails to realize how the same criterion should be applied to his own persistent cultural and sexual appropriation of the women in his life.

Memories of Underdevelopment opens with scenes of a street carnival. Through the credits one sees dancing couples—detached yet absorbed—gyrating to the insistent beat of Afro-Cuban drums. This "typical" scene, virtually *de rigueur* in movies made in Cuba throughout the country's pre-revolutionary cinematic history, is here filmed in highly atypical style, as a handheld camera darts back and forth through the crowd more like a participant than a spectator. Shots suddenly ring out. A man lies prostrate. On the pavement, a shiny substance catches the light. Anxious onlookers block the view. A man flees, instantly swallowed up by the crowd. The inert body is hoisted high and carried away. The dancing continues, but the camera fixes on the glistening face of one black woman who stares back—arch, intent, challenging. A freeze-frame concludes the credits.

In a matter of seconds, then, a stereotypical view of Cuban life has been revived, only to have its illusion of exoticism and obliviousness shattered by unexpected, unidentified violence. What has been established, in fact, is the tension between past and present, archetype and reality, pre-revolutionary dailiness and indiscriminate, counter-revolutionary violence. The participant-spectators resume their dancing, but the camera intervenes to freeze the action like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence. Members of the film audience, non-participatory spectators at the outset, are thereby challenged to consider their own role in regard to the film that is about to unfold. What follows continues to startle, to provoke, and to challenge its audience.

The first four sequences of *Memories of Underdevelopment* alternate subjective and objective camera styles, setting up the tension that will continue throughout the film. The aggressive camera and quick cutting of the credit sequence give way to a more restrained, *cinéma-vérité* style in the airport scene, where Sergio bids goodbye to his family. The flashback on the returning bus reviews the airport farewells from Sergio's point of view, but they are paradoxically less "subjective" than the earlier shots from his relatives' perspective because of Sergio's insensitivity and nonchalance. In the third sequence, the camera alternates between the protagonist's point of view as he surveys his apartment and, later, the city below, and a more "objective" shot, which includes him in the frame. The viewer is distanced from Sergio here by his obvious boredom and detachment: his yawns and even belches do not exactly stimulate audience identification.

Humor—with Sergio as agent (ceremoniously tossing a dead bird over the balcony as he twists Castro's triumphal phrase about the Cuban people on the move) or victim (collapsing onto a wooden hanger)—again brings him closer to us. But when he switches to poetic diction, he creates distance once more. The telescope that Sergio uses to safely survey the city below itself is a visual metaphor for his distance from his fellow Cubans. Though "seen" through Sergio's eyes, the poignant individuality of the faces glimpsed on the Havana street in the fourth sequence calls the reliability of his perception and perspective into question. Such techniques persist throughout the film, establishing a dynamic and multi-level relationship between viewer and protagonist that is primarily a function of the camera's careful regulation of point of view.

Complementary and sometimes conflicting elements of Sergio's personality are embodied in the very people who share his life. Of the four women among them, Laura,

his wife, represents the Euro-Americanization of the Cuban bourgeoisie. Sergio has transformed her from a "slovenly Cuban girl" into a woman of elegant exterior, as artificial and empty as the cosmetics on her dressing table or the gowns left behind in her closet. He rummages through his wife's abandoned belongings, trying on her furs and manhandling, so to speak, the icons of her femininity—a powder puff, pearls, lipstick. Sergio then sits down with the lipstick in front of a mirror and proceeds to doodle with it. He scribbles on the mirror not so much to interfere with its reflection as to put, rather narcissistically, the finishing touches on his own self-portrait. Finally, he takes one of Laura's stockings and pulls it over his head, in a telling distortion of his own features, as he listens to the tape recording of a conversation in which he and his wife are arguing, first about a movie they have seen, then, as he taunts her, about Laura's attempts to disguise her vulgar origins with all the commodities women are offered for the construction of their glamorous image.

Hanna, in contrast to Laura, is a natural blonde who represents the real thing rather than an imitation. A Jewess who fled Germany with her family during World War II, she finished her schooling in Cuba, where she became, for Sergio, "the best thing that ever happened in my life." Though continuing to idolize Hanna as the ideal woman, he nevertheless let her slip through his fingers—postponing their marriage and his literary career for the sake of his furniture store. Material aspirations, then, not romantic obstacles, were responsible for Sergio's loss of his "one true love."

Elena, for her part, may be from the working class but she is clearly not a "new Cuban woman." She aspires to be an actress so that she can "unfold her personality," and she longs for luxurious goods from the United States, but she resists the European mold into which Sergio tries to fit her. Elena has her own vitality—one that Sergio dismisses as hopeless inconsistency, a symptom of his country's underdevelopment. In contrast to her, Noemí, who represents the rural proletariat, is made exotic for Sergio by her Protestant religious beliefs but in the end remains purely an object of fantasy. The disparity between reality and Sergio's elaboration of it is always too great, as indicated in this case by the contrast between Noemí's baptism ceremony, as perceived in his erotic imagination, and the documented reality of the baptismal photographs that she brings him.

Pablo, the protagonist's one male friend, represents everything in his past life that Sergio now actively rejects. Pablo is small-minded, crude, self-deluding, and self-righteously "apolitical." Sergio, on his second trip to the airport, watches Pablo and his wife leave with relief, as if he had regurgitated them, or so he comments in voice-over. Again in voice-over, Sergio speculates that, although it may mean his own demise, the revolution is his revenge against the stupid Cuban bourgeoisie and against idiots like Pablo. As they part, the latter signals to his friend through a glass partition, gesticulating dramatically and mouthing words that Sergio cannot or will not comprehend. Looking at Pablo, Sergio sees himself in the glass, but it is a self that he now consciously rejects. From this point on, these two belong to different worlds, and there can no longer be any communication between them.

Each of Sergio's personal relationships sheds light on his concept of underdevelopment. For him, "culture" and "civilization" are synonymous with economic and technological development. Further, he rejects Cuban cultural forms in favor of the more "cosmopolitan" tradition of Europe and the United States. Hanna is the woman of his dreams because she belongs to this world, but Sergio settles for Laura, whom he successfully molds into a Third World imitation of "first world" elegance. Laura, however, abandons her husband for the very comforts of the developed world that he has taught her to appreciate. Unlike his wife, parents, and Pablo, Sergio does not

choose permanent residence in the U.S. when the opportunity arises but instead remains behind in Cuba because, despite his social class and cultural bias, he feels a certain bond to the fate of his small but determined island homeland. The decision to stay notwithstanding, Sergio retains his former assumptions and continues trying to live "like a European," shepherding Elena around to museums and bookstores and eventually ditching her when she fails to let herself be "developed" according to his formula.

This, then, is Sergio's subjective world as *Memories of Underdevelopment* presents it—part of which he rejects, part of which he cannot or will not escape. It is, basically, the world that Desnoes portrays in the novel. The film adds a new dimension, placing Sergio in his historical context through its extensive use of documentary and semi-documentary footage of both contemporary and past events. That is, Gutiérrez Alea's film "objectifies" the novel's internal monologue by Sergio, criticizing and contextualizing his psychological subjectivism and confronting his attempts to retreat into his pre-revolutionary psychology, as well as his pre-revolutionary ways of seeing, with the "fact of history" as presented in documentary images of the revolution taking place in his country.

There is a remarkable variety to these sequences. Montages of still photos in the style of the Cuban film documentarian Santiago Álvarez are inserted at several points: when Sergio reflects on hunger in pre-revolutionary Cuba and in all of Latin America; when he recalls the humble origins of the late Hemingway's faithful Cuban servant; when the Soviet tourists at the Hemingway residence, now a museum, thumb through the novelist's photographic mementoes of the Spanish Civil War. There is television footage of Marilyn Monroe, of American soldiers at Guantánamo Naval Base, of blacks being beaten in the heyday of the American civil rights movement, and, finally, of Fidel Castro's speech reaffirming Cuba's autonomy and resistance in the face of John F. Kennedy's nuclear threats. At one point, the camera even peruses a newspaper from headline to comic strip. Sequences at the José Martí Airport, at a swimming pool, along Havana's streets, and in the Hemingway museum themselves are recognizably "real" rather than reconstructed for the film. The actors insert themselves into these sequences or situations in such a way as to interact with, and against, a natural background.

Documentary, Semi-documentary, and Fiction

The resonances among the documentary, semi-documentary, and fictional sequences are what make *Memories of Underdevelopment* such a thought-provoking and fertile film. Through this interaction among the different sequences, and often as a function of dramatic irony, the vision of the picture not only exceeds that of its protagonist but also often undermines or contradicts it. Sergio, for example, reads aloud a Marxist analysis of the fallacies of bourgeois morality as evidenced by the Bay of Pigs invaders, and, as he does so (like a newsreel commentator), the film offers a visual rendering of that analysis: we see a newsreel of the invasion; the captured mercenaries being marched along, hands on head; and the interrogation of forty of these prisoners by a panel of journalists, in a packed Havana theater, just a few days after their defeat. The impact of such a visual rendering is to demonstrate that actions, not intentions or rationales, are the final arbiter of an individual's social role and ideological stance. Though Sergio intellectually grasps this point, he fails to connect it with his own life in any way. He fails to realize that he, too, is an accomplice of reactionary forces, precisely because he will not abandon his position of critical superiority to participate, to act, in the world around him, to engage with it in a political manner and thereby recover the dialectical relationship between individual and group.

One semi-documentary sequence adds a special note of self-reflectiveness and self-criticism to *Memories of Underdevelopment*. Sergio attends a roundtable discussion on "Literature and Underdevelopment" (an event that actually took place in 1964). Among the participants (the Haitian poet René Depestre, the Italian novelist Gianni Toti, the Argentinian novelist David Viñas), as the representative of Cuban letters, is the novelist Edmundo Desnoes himself. As he pontificates on the racial prejudice directed not only toward blacks but also Latin Americans in the United States, the camera, first in medium and then in long shot, underlines the fact that Desnoes and the rest of the panel are being served by a black attendant who fills their water glasses—completely unacknowledged by them.

Desnoes, together with the rest of the panelists, exposes himself to further criticism, even ridicule, when a member of the audience (Jack Gelber, a New York playwright and author of *The Cuban Thing* [1968]) interrupts the proceedings to criticize—in English—this "sterile and impotent form of discussion" as inappropriate to a revolutionary society. The planes of "reality" and "fiction" are further mixed when Sergio, whom the editing identifies with Desnoes, leaves the scene profoundly troubled. He confesses his lack of understanding, slowly advancing toward the camera, saying that the American was right, that words devour words and leave one, finally, in the clouds. The graininess and increasing closeness of the shot here cause Sergio to appear to disintegrate as he muses, "Now it begins, Sergio, your final destruction."

Such critical self-reflectiveness in the film is not confined to the appearance of Desnoes. When Sergio takes Elena to the Cuban film institute, the "friend" to whom he had promised to introduce her turns out to be Gutiérrez Alea, appearing as himself. The transition from the restaurant where Sergio picks up Elena to the film studio is nothing short of brilliant. Elena says that she wants to be an actress so that she can be someone else without its being thought that she is crazy. Sergio answers that actresses, like broken records, only repeat the same lines and movements over and over again. The ensuing shots—cyclically repeated scenes of female nudity and not-quite-culminated sexual contact—are revealed, when the lights come on, to be film fragments within the film *Memories of Underdevelopment*: a collection of erotic clips that Fulgencio Batista's censors, always obsessed with keeping up appearances, found "offensive to morals and good breeding." As the two men and one woman walk out of the screening room, Sergio asks Gutiérrez Alea what he plans to do with the film clips. The director replies that he intends to use them in "a sort of collage, a film that will have a bit of everything." The viewer discovers that Sergio's doubts over whether the revolutionary government will release such a picture are ultimately unfounded, since the film described in this conversation is precisely the one that the audience is watching.

This sequence is a kind of crossroads in *Memories*, a high point of ironic humor and technical virtuosity that also reveals self-deceptive attitudes toward sexuality. What has been shown, after all, is the same kind of hypocritical sexual elusiveness and game-playing in which Elena herself is about to engage with Sergio. Simultaneously, the

sequence takes masterly advantage of the camera's ability to reduplicate action, transcend space, and ignore time. It totally confuses the planes of fiction and documentary truth, which remain more clearly separate in the rest of the film; undercuts the entire question of censorship; and, most important, allows the film's director in person to present his audience with a major key to understanding the picture he has made. Indeed, *Memories of Underdevelopment* is a cinematographic collage, not only in its variety and scope, technical eclecticism and visual juxtaposition of evidence from real life and film fiction, but also in its effect—in the way the combination of the fictional and the documentary, "artifice" and "reality," exceeds and transcends the sum of both parts. Finally, as a key to the self-reflectiveness of the film as a whole and the purpose behind it, this sequence postulates an alternative to Sergio—that of Gutiérrez Alea himself, a bourgeois artist who has turned his energies, and the skills that are a product of his former privilege, toward creating a complex, uncompromising work of art from a perspective of political commitment.

Revolution or Revolving Door?

Memories of Underdevelopment continues to engage the sympathies and admiration particularly of American critics, not only because its protagonist is wry and urbane, because its style is sophisticated and intelligent, but also, and perhaps most tellingly, because it is viewed as an expression of the artist's doubts and ambivalences about the Cuban revolution. Ambivalence, detachment, distance, equivocation: these familiar motifs of political and cultural alienation recur in countless American writings about Gutiérrez Alea's film. Yet for many North American critics, Sergio's impassioned denunciation of pre-revolutionary Cuba itself goes either unperceived or unexamined.

Memories of Underdevelopment poses not simply one social critique, then, but several overlapping ones. Sergio is critical of what he sees around him in the present, and behind him in the past, but he increasingly rejects his own analyses—thus casting doubt upon his status as a commentator. Through its documentary counterpoint, the film often steps back from its protagonist and offers a critical perspective on him that is independent of his own point of view. And in the sequences in which Edmundo Desnoes and Gutiérrez Alea themselves appear, *Memories* also becomes self-critical. Through its identification and distancing devices as well as its fictional and documentary sequences, moreover, the picture works to break down the dependency of the viewer on narrative structures that isolate the individual from the group, and it works to discourage the viewer from selective, hence limited perception. The challenge posed to the viewer is to perceive the completeness of *Memories*: its integration of diverse, even contradictory components into a unified aesthetic whole. Faced with the persistent dilemma of the politicized artist—either to portray the actions and interactions of history or to penetrate the individual psyche—Gutiérrez Alea refuses the choice, positing instead the dialectical interaction of historical circumstance and personal consciousness.

As a work of performance, *Memories of Underdevelopment* rests, finally, on the vision and exploration of personal or individual consciousness, on Sergio's character and the casting of Sergio Corrieri in the role. Corrieri's face and manner fix the delicacy, the intelligence, the faded strength, the stubborn curiosity that are needed. To put the matter in shorthand, what the film gives us is an Antonioni character in the middle of a political revolution, a man who comes out of 100 years of cultivation-as-refuge and now faces profound changes that may alter the reason for that refuge, as well as the refuge itself. Sergio is an anachronism who lives in quasi-fear that he may turn out *not* to be an anachronism, who has only a shaky faith in the revolution that may make him, and people like him, obsolescent.

Sergio's own fate is finally and paradoxically irrelevant, however, for as *Memories* ends the camera moves out from his individual vision to the larger world—and the revolution—beyond. The closing section of the film shows Sergio's ultimate self-paralysis as the city around him prepares for the playing out of the Missile Crisis. History in this way becomes a concrete, material process that, ironically, will be the salvation of all the uncommitted, insubstantial Sergios of Cuba. There is no alternative to the present and coming change in the country, says *Memories of Underdevelopment*, but will this finally change the alternatives for all Cubans, and for Sergio in particular? Out of a revolution bred on slogans came a film without answers: thus lending some credibility to the revolution, at least for the time being.

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***Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968)**

Director: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

Screenplay: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea & Edmundo Desnoes, from Desnoes' 1962 novel *Inconsolable Memories.*

Cinematographer: Ramón F. Suárez.

Editor: Nelson Rodríguez.

Music: Leo Brouwer.

Production Designer: Julio Matilla.

Costume Designer: Elba Pérez.

Running time: 97 minutes.

Format: 35mm, in black and white.

Cast: Sergio Corrieri (Sergio Carmona Mendoyo), Beatriz Ponchora (Laura), Daisy Granádos (Elena), Eslinda Núñez (Noemí), Omar Valdés (Pablo), René de la Cruz (Elena's Brother), Edmundo Desnoes (Himself), Jack Gelber (Himself), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Himself)

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996)

Il sogno de Giovanni Bassain (1953)
Stories of the Revolution (1960)
Twelve Chairs (1962)
Cumbite (1964)
Death of a Bureaucrat (1966)
Memories of Underdevelopment (1968)
A Cuban Struggles Against the Demons (1971)
One Way or Another (1974)
The Last Supper (1976)
The Survivors (1979)

Up to a Point (1983)
Letters from the Park (1988)
Strawberry and Chocolate (1994)
Guantánamera (1995)

Filmography: Key Works of Post-Revolutionary Cuban Cinema

Stories from the Revolution (1960), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Death of a Bureaucrat (1966), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Memories of Underdevelopment (1968), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Lucía (1969), directed by Humberto Solás
The First Charge of the Machete (1969), directed by Manuel Octavio Gómez
De la Guerra Americana (*The American War*, 1970), directed by Pastor Vega
A Cuban Struggles Against the Demons (1971), directed by T. Gutiérrez Alea
The Days of Water (1971), directed by Manuel Octavio Gómez
The Man from Maisinicu (1973), directed by Manuel Pérez
One Way or Another (1974), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
The Other Francisco (1975), directed by Sergio Giral
The Last Supper (1976), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
The Teacher (1977), directed by Octavio Cortázar
The Worms (1978), directed by Camilo Vila
El Super (1979), directed by Orlando Jiménez Leal & Leon Ichaso
Portrait of Teresa (1979), directed by Pastor Vega
Guardafronteras (1981), directed by Octavio Cortázar
Cecilia (1982), directed by Humberto Solás
Guaguasí (1982), directed by Jorge Ulla
The Other Cuba (1983), directed by Néstor Almendros & Orlando Jiménez Leal
Up to a Point (1983), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Improper Conduct (1984), directed by Néstor Almendros & Orlando Jiménez Leal
Lejanía (1985), directed by Jesús Díaz
A Successful Man (1985), directed by Humberto Solás
Amigos (1986), directed by Iván Acosta
Clandestinos (*Living Dangerously*, 1987), directed by Fernando Pérez
The Beauty of the Alhambra (1989), directed by Enrique Pineda
Alice in Wondertown (1991), directed by Daniel Díaz Torres
Strawberry and Chocolate (1994), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Madagascar (1994), directed by Fernando Pérez
Guantánamera (1995), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
Bitter Sugar (1996), directed by Leon Ichaso
Vertical Love (1997), directed by Arturo Sotto Díaz
Life Is to Whistle (1998), directed by Fernando Pérez
Waiting List (2000), directed by Juan Carlos Tabío
Honey for Oshún (2001), directed by Humberto Solás
Todo por ella (*All for Her*, 2002), directed by Pavel Giroud
Red Cockroaches (2003), directed by Miguel Coyula
Suite Habana (2003), directed by Fernando Pérez
Viva Cuba (2005), directed by Juan Carlos Cremata & Iraida Malberti Cabrera
Havana Blues (2005), directed by Benito Zambrano
A King in Havana (2005), directed by Alexis Valdés
Cercanía (2008), directed by Rolando Díaz

The author of many essays and articles over the years, R. J. CARDULLO has had his work appear in such journals as the *Yale Review*, *Film Quarterly*, *Modern Drama*, and *Cinema Journal*. For twenty years, from 1987 to 2007, he was the regular film critic for the *Hudson Review* in New York. Cardullo is the author or editor of a number of books, including *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950*, *Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft*, *Soundings on Cinema: Speaking to Film and Film Artists*, and *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*. He is also the chief American translator of the film criticism of the Frenchman André Bazin, with several volumes to his credit, among them *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the '40s and '50s* and *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism.*

Cardullo's own film and drama criticism has been translated into the following languages: Russian, German, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish, Korean, and Romanian. He earned his master's and doctoral degrees from Yale University, another master's degree from Tulane, and a B.A. from the University of Florida. Cardullo taught for four decades at the University of Michigan, Colgate, and New York University, as well as in Finland, Turkey, and Kurdistan.

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