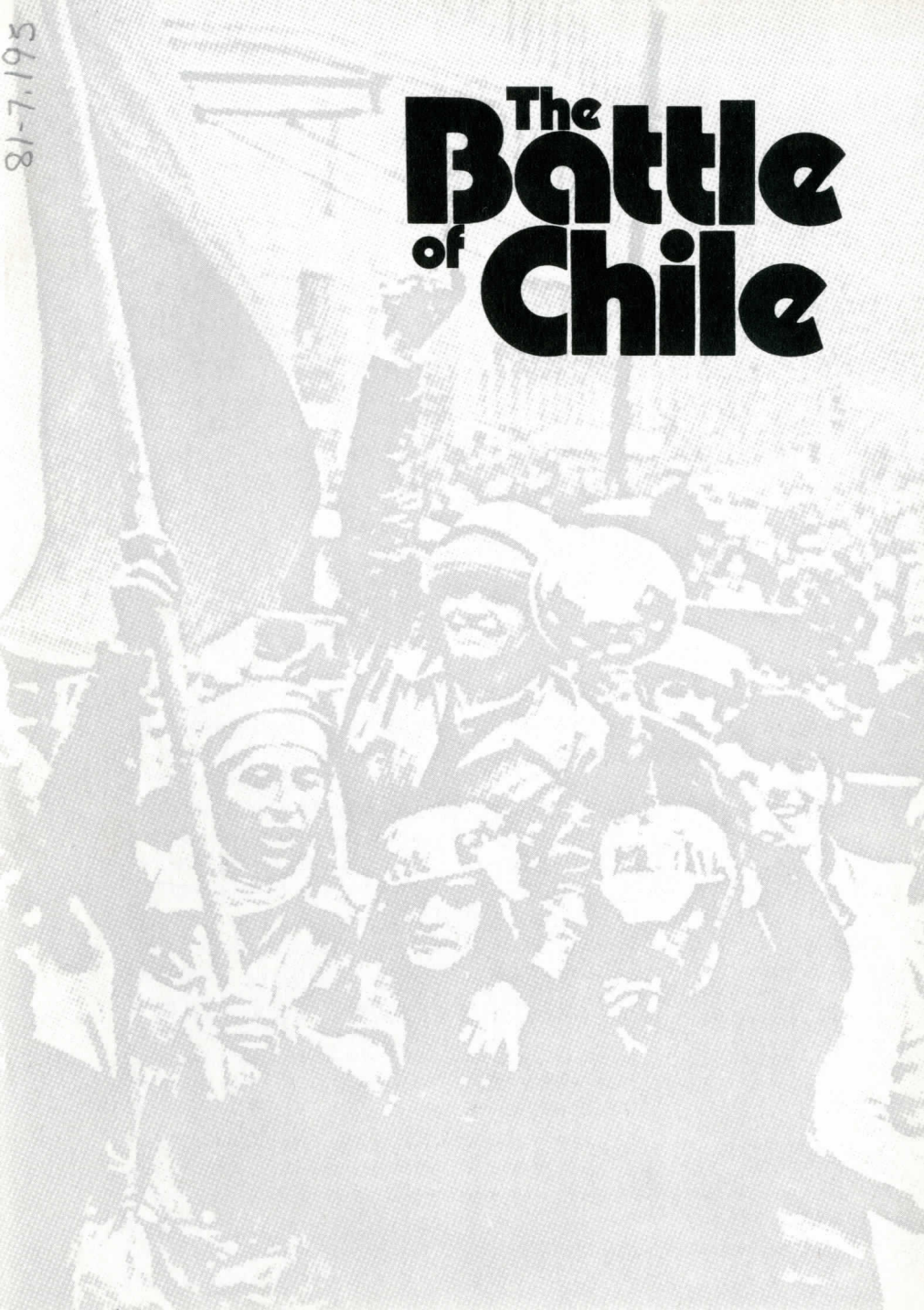


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# The Battle of Chile



**AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIO GUZMAN**

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At the time the interview was conducted, *The Battle of Chile* was not available in the U.S. It is now being distributed by the Tricontinental Film Center, 333 Sixth Avenue, New York, NY 10003.

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# **POLITICS AND THE DOCUMENTARY IN PEOPLE'S CHILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIO GUZMÁN ON "THE BATTLE OF CHILE"**

*Julianne Burton*

## ***Introduction***

OVER THE PAST DECADE, filmmakers, film critics, and film viewers on the left have actively participated in the quest for a *revolutionary* cinema. But depending on the filmmaker, the critic, or the viewer, the term "revolutionary" has lent itself to many interpretations. Is the simple act of filming a proto-revolutionary process—as in Vietnam, Mozambique, or Cuba—a sufficient guarantee of the revolutionary nature of the product? Or does the measure of a revolutionary film lie in its formal break with the style and techniques of bourgeois movie-making, as the work of Swiss filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard or Brazilian director Glauber Rocha seems to propose? Does revolutionary cinema presuppose a break with the whole of Western film tradition, in content as much as in form?

Since the mid-fifties, numerous Latin American intellectuals, in response to incipient social transformation in their countries, have utilized the film medium to describe, catalyze, and direct that transformation. Inspired by the neo-realist cinema of postwar Italy, with its documentary aura and social preoccupations; by classical Soviet cinema; and by the Buñuel of *The Young and the Damned* (Los

*Olvidados*, Mexico, 1950), Argentines, Brazilians, Uruguayans, Bolivians, Cubans, Chileans, Colombians, Peruvians, Mexicans, and Venezuelans have attempted to found national film movements and to reappropriate a medium too often defined and dominated by imperialist interests. Many of these movements—the Brazilian case is no doubt the most obvious—have not been able to transcend a very limited bourgeois nationalism, and instead of combating the existing bourgeois (or even proto-fascist) state organization, they have allowed themselves to become inscribed in it.

Perhaps it is through the issue of *context* that militant Latin American filmmakers have made their most significant contribution to the widespread attempt to develop a genuinely revolutionary cinema. Along with Chile's Miguel Littín, Bolivia's Jorge Sanjinés, Argentina's Fernando Birri, and all the post-revolutionary Cuban filmmakers, many Latin American cineasts assert that no film is a self-contained entity to be evaluated solely on the basis of its narrative content and formal technique. Each film emerges out of and is directed toward a particular historical, social, political, and cultural context. The revolutionary nature of any film, these director-theoreticians insist, is in large part determined by its mode of production and its mode of distribution, by the human relations that brought the film into being and the human responses it engenders as it interacts with its intended audience. Revolutionary films are thus conceived of as *activators* in the political struggle between the classes.

According to many representatives of this view, a film cannot, by definition, be deemed revolutionary except in relation to the particular socio-historical context for which it was intended. Several militant Chilean films, made in the last months of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government and prevented from playing their intended role by the military coup of September 1973, can now be viewed and evaluated only within socio-cultural contexts that are largely irrelevant to the original impetus behind them.

*The Battle of Chile: The Struggle of a People Without Arms* is such a film. This three-part, four-and-a-half-hour panorama of the struggles and contradictions that riddled the last year of the Allende government is a sober, even austere, depiction of contemporary history. Shot in black and white, without the embellishment of music or showy editing techniques, tersely narrated and unrelentingly thorough, the film challenges the assumptions and the capacities of those who subscribe to the notion that the film medium is intellectually less demanding than the written word.



Parts 1 and 2 of *The Battle of Chile* ("The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie," 1975, and "Coup d'État," 1976) have been widely viewed in Europe after taking prizes at the major European festivals: at the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes and the Berlin and Moscow film festivals, at Pesaro (Italy), Grenoble, Leipzig, and Benalmadena (Spain). They have been viewed in Africa and in the Orient. After pre-release screenings in Santa Cruz and Berkeley, California, this spring, the two completed portions of the film will be available to United States audiences through Tricontinental Film Center.

In the opinion of two of the members of the Equipo Tercer Año collective which made the film—director Patricio Guzmán who granted the interview, and producer Federico Elton who helped correct and edit it—the following interview is the most comprehensive to appear in any language to date. The import of the interview goes beyond the insights it offers into *The Battle of Chile*, the virtually unprecedented historical and political significance of the film notwithstanding. Guzmán takes care to set the experience and the undertaking into the context of the ideological struggle then taking place in all the Chilean media—the press, radio, and television as well as film production. The larger context of the entire political and economic struggle then being waged in Chile is also present as a kind of framing for the experiences narrated and the information conveyed.

Because of the rich detail on the genesis of the film and on the organization and relations of production during the actual filming and after, because of the filmmakers' careful evaluation of prior models and Guzmán's consistent emphasis on the analytical and dialectical components of the group's approach to the task of filming day-to-day political reality in Chile, the interview offers a potential model for approaching the task of analyzing and documenting political upheaval. It is of value not only to politically committed filmmakers working in a broad range of settings and circumstances but to political theorists as well. The impact of the interview is enhanced by an unusual combination of the analytical and the anecdotal, the theoretical and the personal. Finally, in his analysis of how response to the film has varied according to existing political conditions in the different countries where it has been shown, Guzmán contributes to the theoretical and practical appreciation of the contextual nature of the filmviewing experience.

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*How would you describe The Battle of Chile to American audiences who have not been able to see the film, since it is not yet in United States distribution?*

The film is an attempt to convey in as much detail as possible the nature and consequences of political events in Chile during the last year of the Allende government. What was happening was of great interest outside as well as inside of Chile, not just for other Latin Americans, but for the workers' movement on an international scale.

What Chile represented, after all, was a sort of twentieth-century Paris Commune. It was fascinating to see the incarnation of almost all the major ideas of Marx and Lenin. In the third year of the Popular Unity government, 1973, there were key ideas from *State and Revolution* and *The Civil War in France*, for example, which the Chilean people were compelled to confront on a very practical level.

What was going on was of such intense interest that we realized that our camera should encompass as much as possible. We needed to use a wide-angle lens and to situate ourselves at as great a distance as possible from events while still being able to record them. We needed to make sure that the entire process—all of it—was contained in the film.

And not from a narrowly partisan point of view. We realized that it would be a mistake to analyze events from a single perspective, because the interesting thing was to represent *all* points of view within the left. The same ideological battle then going on in Chile could occur in France or in Italy, for example, in a very similar way. And it will also occur in Mexico or in Venezuela when things enter a more critical phase. The far-reaching relevance of the political model then being tried in Chile was one of the factors that motivated us to make the film.

*How would you describe the two parts of the film that are now complete?*

Part 1, "The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie," tries to shed light on a fundamental aspect of the problem in Chile: the mass uprising of the middle and upper sectors of the population, in collaboration with foreign interests, and the actions taken by the government and

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*I am grateful to Federico Elton, head of production on the film, for his corrections and additions to the first draft of this interview. The interview was conducted in Havana in January 1977, in Spanish; the translation is mine. —J.B.*

by the left as a whole to curb this insurrectionary escalation among the right-wing.

The primary contradiction in the first film is thus between fascism/imperialism/bourgeoisie on the one hand and the working masses on the other. The masses are only present in Part 1 as a point of reference, since the major focus of this segment is to demonstrate how the right, through their use of the mass media, and financed by imperialist interests, succeeded in mobilizing the middle class "masses," thus preparing the way for the coup d'état. This is of course the most unique aspect of the Chilean coup—that the right succeeded in arousing massive resistance among all sectors of the bourgeoisie and in the armed forces, as well as among one sector of the proletariat: the copper miners of El Teniente mine.

Part 2, "The Coup d'État," centers around the same contradiction. It continues to show the mass agitation of the bourgeoisie in opposition to the democratic popular forces, but it adds a third dimension: the diverse and competing strategies which existed within the various groups on the left. This is why the second film is much more difficult than the first. Maintaining the same dialectical style of narration (the voice-over narrator provides only the most essential background information; the bulk of the analysis is given directly by those who participated in the events which the film records) the viewer has to grasp for her/himself this triple contradiction.

*What about the third and last part, currently in the final editing stages?*

Part 3, "Popular Power," is the simplest of the three. It is a very affectionate evocation of the mass organizations during the Popular Unity government, and in particular during the year 1973. These were very practical organizations which answered needs like how to get food and supplies to the population, how to get a greater yield from a plot of land, how to organize a peoples' supply store (*almacén popular*), how to set up a production committee in the factory.

There were many times during the struggle in Chile that the popular forces would distance themselves temporarily from the action in order to discuss the nature of the socialist state which was then in the early stages of construction. This was a very calm and measured process, very touching at times. This theoretical development of the workers and peasants—always based on their practical



experience—was extremely impressive. The footage we have of these occasions is the most convincing proof of the enormous degree of consciousness among the Chilean people.

If we had inserted these sequences along with the rest of the footage, these discussions would have appeared unreal in the midst of pre-civil war conditions. So, we edited the first and second parts of the film, we set aside all these sequences which depicted the incipient stages of people's power in Chile. This footage will make up the third film, which will be a kind of complement to the first two.

It is a very partial vision because it doesn't deal with the super-structure. The parties are not directly represented. Only the workers are there, following the orientation of their particular parties, of course; but the striking thing is that within the bourgeois state apparatus, with all the existing contradictions of the Popular Unity government, and with the enemy right on top of them, they undertake—with utmost calm—the discussion of what the future will look like. This segment also deals with the people's views on the armed forces. These are the two themes of Part 3. It is almost complete. We hope to have it finished by the end of April.



Patricio Guzmán

*Could you summarize the genesis of The Battle of Chile? How many people set out to make the film, and how did you decide to go about it?*

The film was made by a team of five people. We began filming in February of 1973. But before starting the actual filming, we had frequent meetings to decide on the approach we would use.

From the very beginning, our idea was to make an analytical film, not an agitational one. Naturally, we thought our audience would be Chilean. Three possible roads seemed open to our country at that time: a fascist coup d'état like the one that actually occurred, or a civil war which offered two alternatives: the victory or defeat of the popular forces. None of us believed at that juncture that the current situation could sustain itself for very long.



We all believed that, in the event of a civil war, the popular forces would eventually win. We expected there to be a split in the armed forces which never actually occurred, given that the soldiers and sailors who were loyal to Allende were identified and purged before the September 11th military coup.

If the civil war was to result in a victory for the popular forces, we reasoned, our footage would be of great use to the workers and the peasantry, and to the Chilean left as a whole. When a civil war is won, and the first stage in the construction of a new socialist state begins, there is a transition period in which it is very important to analyze what has gone before. Our purpose was to serve as witnesses to what was going on in Chile at the time.

If there was to be a coup d'état, as in fact there was, we knew that we had all the more reason to do what we were doing, since our footage would be a sort of commemoration and tribute to all that the Chilean people had accomplished in those years of democratic people's government.

And so the coup, though it certainly succeeded in preventing the screening of the film in Chile—for the time being at least—did not really alter either our purpose or our approach. These have been invariable.

The members of the group got together in December of 1972 and agreed that the most important thing to do in Chile at that particular moment was to make a film about what was going on in the country from day to day. Any fictional screenplay, any film structured around a plot—no matter how good—seemed to us to be completely upstaged by events themselves.

There was another consideration as well. Since the organization of the state was still holding together, it was actually possible to film the events of the class struggle with relative calm. You could film what was going on as easily as you would film a landscape. It was possible to capture the different sectors involved in the class struggle as if in cross-section. It's true that a certain daring was required, since we infiltrated the right sometimes at great physical risk, but certain guarantees still existed, and we took advantage of them. We also devised our own guarantees, carrying multiple sets of credentials at all times. One day we were filming for Chilean television, the next day for French or Swiss TV.

*Were there any particular films or filmmakers to whom you looked for models in the project you were about to undertake?*

When we started to debate the methods we would use to make the film, we didn't have any instruction manual to indicate how to go about documenting our own reality. There are very few documentary theorists anywhere on whom we could rely. We had access to all of Cuban documentary cinema, and it was through repeated viewings of these films that we extracted what were for us the essential elements. Julio García Espinosa's *Third World, Third World War* (Cuba/Vietnam, 1969) seemed to us to offer a particularly important model.\*

The Cuban film magazine *Cine cubano* carried translations of the writings of the Russian revolutionary filmmaker Dziga Vertov. Julio García Espinosa's essay "For an Imperfect Cinema" was also an important theoretical source. We also read some unpublished pieces by the contemporary French documentarist Chris Marker,† who began to correspond with us, and several articles by other French filmmakers, including Louis Malle on the filming of *Calcutta* (1969).

Next we put together a sort of manifesto listing various approaches that we might follow, what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and why. We tried to develop a system of classification for all the kinds of documentary with which we were familiar: simple exposition, like the film I mentioned by Louis Malle, for example; the agitational documentary, like almost all the films that were being made in Chile at that time, and like the majority of the Cuban documentaries; and the analytical documentary, which didn't really exist in Chile. Although many Chilean films had some analytical sequences, the purely analytical documentary did not exist in our country. We made the same discovery when we studied Cuban documentary production. The closest thing to what we had in mind was Julio García Espinosa's *Third World, Third World War*. We were not familiar with Pastor Vega's *Viva la República* (Cuba, 1972), or with other films that were made later on.

*What about the influence of other Latin American films? For example,*

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\*Julio García Espinosa, vice president of the Cuban Film Institute, made *Third World, Third World War* in North Vietnam at the height of the U.S. assault. The film was made collectively, and the perils of the process gave rise to a particularly spontaneous and innovative style. García Espinosa's influential theoretical essay, "For an Imperfect Cinema," which Guzmán refers to in the next paragraph, is a direct outgrowth of this experience.

†Chris Marker is a leading French documentarist, best known in this country for *Sunday in Peking* (1955), *Letter from Siberia* (1958), *La Jetée* (1963), and *The Battle of the Ten Million* (Cuba, 1970), as well as for the production of *Far from Vietnam* (1967).

*those which had been shown at the Viña del Mar Festival in 1967?*

According to the criteria we developed, *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Argentina, 1969) might be classified as an analytical film. But it never had the same grip on us as *Third World, Third World War*, for example. *Vidas Secas* ("Barren Lives," Brazil, 1963), although it is a fiction film, uses a kind of expository documentary style. There were a few documentaries by the Brazilian filmmaker Leon Hirszman which we liked a lot. Of the Uruguayan films, we were only familiar with one of Mario Handler's, *Me Gustan los Estudiantes* ("I Like Students," 1968), but it seemed to be pure agit-prop. We also considered all the documentaries that had been made under the Popular Unity government in Chile, by the left as a whole and in particular by those who worked in experimental filmmaking with Pedro Chaskel. But we perceived all of these as being either denunciations of particular problems or examples of agit-prop or of partisan filmmaking, without any real analysis of what was about to happen.

Our next step was to write out various work methods. The first one we analyzed was the chronological one; that is, the attempt to film what is going on around you day by day or week by week in succession. We discovered that although this might be very interesting, many events occur only as the result of a long process—a process which, in the last analysis, often seems invisible. What you are able to film is the culmination of the process, the final, visible event: the workers taking over a factory, for example. But to film this culminating point is to leave out a whole series of important considerations: Why did they take over the factory? What does the government think of the occupation? Who are the leaders of the takeover? How do the workers perceive their interests in this situation? What solutions to their problems do they seek via this route? All this occurs *before* the takeover. So we concluded that a chronological structuring was very incomplete and excessively superficial. We had already used a similar approach in an earlier film, *The First Year* (1971), and had no desire to repeat it.

Later on we realized that if, for example, you are going to film a factory takeover in the moment that it occurs, you must initiate a whole series of inquiries in order to find out why, when, where, how, who, and for whom. You begin to realize that by delving deep enough into a single problem you touch upon many different aspects of the larger situation. It is like the expanding waves which keep growing outwards after you throw a stone into a pool. We



called this approach "the nucleus method." It involves locating a nucleus of conflict within the general situation, within the panorama of the class struggle. In the process of filming a single event, you begin to touch upon other related ones.

We then looked at another approach, that of analyzing reality chapter by chapter, section by section. For example: education, the social sector of the economy, the conflict between Allende and the bourgeois parliament, the mass insurrection which the forces of imperialism institute in Chile with the help of the bourgeoisie. Each of these is a sample chapter. If you take one, then another, and then another, with five or six you can have the key segments. But then you realize that the chapters have no firm boundaries to separate one from the other. They are all interrelated, and you are not able, for example, to isolate the conflict between Allende and the parliament because it is in some way connected to all the other issues. This is the reason why we abandoned this approach.

But the other approach, the nucleus method, also involves substantial risks, because sometimes you can confuse a single problem, especially one at the base level, part of the workers' movement, in such a way that you begin to think the entire revolutionary process is tied to this one phenomenon. This is not really the case, since there is always a dialectical relationship between the superstructure and the base, between the political parties and the masses, for example. There is a tendency to get off the track a bit and to conclude that the revolution is equivalent to the creation of a people's supply store (*almacén popular*) or the government's institution of the Food and Price Control Boards. So you conclude that the revolution is purely a workers' phenomenon in which the workers and the peasantry are the center and the heart. Naturally this is a sector of key importance, absolutely essential, but it is not itself the complete picture. This nucleus by nucleus approach leads you to overemphasize particular sectors. You confuse small representative and symbolic elements, when what one is attempting to do is to encompass the entire picture.

*It sounds like there was no ready-made approach sufficient to your analytical needs. How were you able to get around this impasse?*

After carrying out a sustained critique of other approaches, we came to the conclusion that what we were after was the dialectical sum of all of them. We also concluded that the important thing is not so much to settle on a single fixed methodology as to single out



theoretically the key points at which the Chilean class struggle intersects. Which are the key points through which the proletariat and the peasantry must pass in the conquest of state power? And which are the key points through which the bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies must pass in order to reappropriate that power? If you locate these fifteen or twenty battlegrounds within the larger conflict and you pin them down one by one, you're going to have a dialectical vision of what is going on. This was the approach we finally agreed to use.

The theoretical outline that we developed divided Chilean reality into three major areas: ideological, political, and economic. Our point of departure was a Marxist analysis of reality, which we then applied in small chapters which accounted for the seventy-odd divisions in the outline. All the members of the group took part in the process of developing this outline, as well as the editorial team from the magazine *Chile Hoy* and in particular Marta Harnecker.

The "screenplay"—if in fact you can call it that—thus took on the form of a map which we hung on the wall. (Our editing room, as you can see, is full of diagrams and outlines.) On one wall, we listed the key points of the revolutionary struggle as we saw them. On the other, we would list what we had already filmed. For example, if the problem of education appears on the one side, on the other we noted what schools or universities we had gone to and what specific sequences corresponded to the theoretical section. So, we had the theoretical outline on one side and the practical outline of what we had actually filmed on the other.

*In addition to the complex theoretical and methodological decisions you describe, did you face practical obstacles as well?*

Definitely, since at the time we began to film there was no raw film stock in Chile. It was one of the many commodities kept out by the economic blockade organized by the United States. (There was also a great shortage of commercial films during this time, organized by the North American film distributors.)

To try to import raw film stock through official channels could take a year or more. So I wrote a letter to Chris Marker explaining our projected film and our desperate need for film stock. Within two weeks, we got a letter from him and a package containing the film we needed.

Of course, the major practical obstacle was the nature of the project itself. What we were setting out to do was extremely

ambitious, overwhelmingly so. As Chris wrote in his letters, "What you are trying to do is insane, it's impossible, it's just too big." And I would write back saying, "You may be right, but it doesn't matter. We're going to make the effort, no matter what." All the members of the group started out from the same shared realization: that what we were about to attempt was impossible, but that we were determined to undertake it anyway.

We began to film almost every day, on an average of twenty to twenty-five days per month. Our equipment was very limited: one Eclair camera, one Nagra sound recorder, two vehicles. We worked without ever giving any public notice of what we were doing. We didn't grant a single interview or press conference. We didn't tell anyone except the absolutely indispensable people what we were about. These precautions enabled us to engage in a kind of semi-clandestine filmmaking, allowing us to infiltrate the right with a good deal of confidence and, at the same time, to film our own forces without the cumbersome and disruptive presence of a huge team of filmmakers.

Since many groups of workers knew and trusted us, and since we always tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, we could work among them very much at ease. We would arrive at a given meeting hall and immediately set up the key light, but we would try not to distract people with a lot of cables and loud conversations. We almost never spoke among ourselves in anything but a whisper. We came to be so in tune with one another that in the final months of the filming, the process was almost automatic and communication between us on the shoot was virtually reduced to an exchange of glances.

We went out to film almost every day. We had a clearly defined work plan. We usually ate in the same factories where we were filming. Often we would sleep in the truck. There was a great sense of fraternity generated by this process, not just because we were all good friends who are very fond of one another, but also because we understood one another, and knew that what we were doing together was of crucial importance. We were all convinced of the relevance of the project, and that was extremely important in binding us together and in helping us to develop a smooth work process.

The film was a collective undertaking, but within the collective a certain division of labor was always preserved. That's why the film has a director. In other words, we did not confuse our ideas of a collective with the kind of idealist notion of a group in which everyone is responsible for everything and for nothing. Instead, each of us was responsible for a particular aspect.

Federico Elton was in charge of fund-raising and production. Jorge Muller was the cameraman and director of photography. Bernardo Menz was the sound technician. José Pino was the assistant director and handled the lighting. Marta Harnecker collaborated in the developing of the shooting script, and occasionally joined us on the shoots. (She does the interviewing in one of the sequences at El Teniente mine, for instance.)

There was no contradiction between my role as director and the rest of the collective, and there isn't to this day. That would be absurd. The director's role is to give direction to the collective, taking advantage of all the opportunities that arise for a dialectical analysis of the existing situation. As a group, we would have many heavy ideological debates because our members were from different political parties. But I would continually warn the group against getting mired down in partisan disputes, because that's where we would have to trade in our wide-angle lens for a narrow point of view. That was the main role I played as director within the collective.

Since the film project was semi-clandestine, as I said before, and we had specific divisions of labor, none of us, except me and my *compañera*, knew where the film was stored. After each shooting session, I would collect the cans of film. I'd store the magnetic sound tape in one place and the film footage in another. Only my wife and I knew where this material was kept. It was very important that as few people as possible had access to this information, because in critical situations, the less known the better.

*Could you describe how the group worked together during the actual shooting process?*

Because we had our compass during the filming, we weren't merely dragged along by our senses and our immediate perceptions. It's true there were many beautiful events—Quilapayún and other groups of musicians performing, the people bearing flags and banners—but the film does not let itself get carried away by such things. It is not a sensuous film. It makes no concessions to the viewer. It offers little relief. It is really a filmed essay.

Much later, here in Havana, when the editor and I were looking over all the material, he said to me, "This is a monster! This is incredible!" We had so many hours of footage, but there was almost nothing that we wanted to discard. Not because we were determined to put everything into the final film, but because the



filming had been based on an outline, an analysis of the situation based on Marxist categories, what we actually decided to film almost always proved crucial.

It's true that it was monstrous in quantity and scope. However, as we began to organize it, we realized that the best form or montage was to respect its own autonomy. It was not necessary to do elaborate cutting and restructuring because the material had a prior structure, in form as well as content. From a formal point of view, there *is* a sensual dimension to the film, since once the project was clearly worked out on paper and in our heads, we could liberate our expressive capabilities, freeing the camera to make very long takes.

Our method was not to disperse the crew, always to stay close together. I would always stand next to Jorge Muller, the cameraman, surveying the action and trying to anticipate what was to come. Whenever what was being filmed reached a climax, as soon as I'd see, for example, that the workers and the fascist groups had hit a high point in their street battle, then I would say to Jorge, "Now you need to climb up on this box here, but don't look at it. Keep on filming. I'll steady you while you climb up. Now you have the best possible angle on the whole thing. Stay there until I tell you, because to the left a troop of police whom you can't even see yet are about to come into view. As soon as they come into range, close in on them." This kind of interaction accounts for the *mise en scène* of the film. As I tried to anticipate for him what was about to happen, I could tell him to pan, to lower the camera, to raise it, instructing him to make certain movements that are much more readily identified with fictional than with documentary filmmaking. But why shouldn't they be used in documentary film if they enrich the medium?

We had hand signals which we used to communicate with one another. This is how I would give instructions to Bernardo, the soundman. The assistant director was in charge of turning on the lights. Sometimes I would be whispering directions to the cameraman and the assistant director, at some distance from us, would turn on the lights. That was a signal to be on the alert, that something important was going on.

*What prior training did you have as a filmmaker?*

I studied film in Spain, at the Escuela de Cine in Madrid, in the late sixties. My major interest then was fictional filmmaking, not documentaries.



I returned to Chile in 1970, with the triumph of the Popular Unity coalition in the national elections. I was all set to make fiction films. I had various screenplays in hand, and even some possibilities for financial backing.

But I soon realized that my ideas were completely outstripped by reality. When you see a workers' demonstration pass by your window, and you listen to the rhymed slogans they are shouting, it is much more appealing simply to follow that demonstration. They go to the government palace and call for Allende; Allende comes out and speaks to them; meanwhile the right wing is organizing on the other side of the street with the intention of provoking an incident; a street fight ensues. What is going on is amazing because the class struggle is so apparent and so compelling.

To see a whole people waking up after having been dormant for several decades. Peasants organizing land takeovers, workers occupying factories, the government nationalizing industry, and the right withdrawing, closing in upon itself for the time being. At last the possibility of a real revolution exists. To bear witness to this is so absorbing and so marvelous that I began to feel that to make a film with actors, with make-up, with costumes and dialogues written by someone else didn't make any sense at all. It was completely overridden by what we were all living through.



*A scene from the film*

And so, in 1971, I got very wrapped up in making *The First Year*. It is a very sensuous film, full of affection but without analysis, a kind of commemoration of what was going on at the time. The film was very well received in Chile and abroad. Many said that it was precisely the kind of filmmaking that we should be developing at that time.

Chris Marker was very taken with it. He took a print back to France with him, and had it dubbed into French. Many leading French actors and actresses—Françoise Arnoul, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret—participated in the dubbing, and they made an excellent version of the film.

In 1972, I began work on a fiction film called *Manuel Rodríguez*, based on the life of a guerrilla hero of the Chilean war for independence. He was the one who prepared the way for San Martín to come and free Chile from the Spanish. The film has a lot in common with Manuel Octavio Gómez's *The First Charge of the Machete* (Cuba, 1969), since it is a kind of post-facto historical documentary which exposes and attempts to take apart the means through which it is told. We hadn't seen *The First Charge*, nor had we met Manuel Octavio, but the projects were extremely similar, as I realized when I arrived here in Cuba.

We only managed to film two or three sequences. We had to stop work because of the truck owners' work stoppage of October 1972. The film was suddenly left without funding, and we had to abandon the project because we had no way of finishing it without funds.

As you know, the truckers' "strike" was the first coordinated offensive by the middle class as a whole against the forces of the left. The result was an incredible shortage of goods and resources. Although the country continued to move forward, because of extraordinary efforts on the part of the workers and the peasants along with other allied segments of the Popular Unity coalition, we suffered an incredible drain of funds. Our balance of payments was thrown completely off balance, all imported goods stopped coming in, there were no bank credits, stockpiles of spare parts were used up and could not be replaced.

Raw film stock was one of the very last priorities. Chile Films, the national film production company under whose auspices we were making *Manuel Rodríguez*, ceased being a production company in the broad sense and was only able to produce newsreels. We realized that through Chile Films we weren't going to obtain anything, so we left the organization and began trying to figure out on our own what we could do.

We made a film called *The Answer to October* which is about sixty minutes long. It simply attests to how the working class, particularly that of the *cordones industriales* [industrial belts made up of factories that have been taken over by their workers] in Santiago managed to keep production going in spite of the boycott organized by the right. The factories continued to function even though the engineers and technicians refused to come to work, because the workers realized that with one engineer "borrowed" from somewhere else, they could coordinate production and keep the factory going. They began to get together with the workers of neighboring factories, thus developing territorial concentrations of factories under workers' control. Theoretically, these *cordones industriales* also had a higher level of organization called the *comando comunal*. But this level of organization was only implemented among the workers of Barrancas, and in a rather embryonic stage at that. The *cordón* represents the industrial segment, but students, housewives, middle-level professionals would unite with them to form the *comando comunal*, a higher level of popular power.

This is what we were filming. As soon as we finished shooting, we gave the film over for agitational use. Since we were filming in 16mm, the film was destined exclusively for use in the mobile circuits, organized by Chile Films to bring relevant cinema into factories, schools, and neighborhoods.

It was at this point that we definitively decided that all fictional options were completely overruled and that what was necessary was a great analytical film. We decided to dedicate all our energies to this end, and wrote to Chris Marker requesting film stock. We organized the collective, got hold of an Eclair and a Nagra, and threw ourselves into the filming, which lasted a year.

*How many members of the collective had prior experience in filmmaking?*

It is interesting that the collective was almost completely made up of people without prior experience. It was the soundman's first film. The production chief, an architect by training, was also without previous film experience. The assistant director was a sociologist and an economist; it was the first time he had worked on a film. Marta Harnecker, one of Chile's leading political theorists, had worked on *The First Year*. (We had been friends for several years. I met her when she was studying Marxism in Paris with Althusser in 1967. She returned to Chile at the same time I did, when Allende came into power.) Jorge Muller virtually shoots his first film with



*The Battle of Chile*, since the work he'd done prior to this film—with Raúl Ruiz, for example—failed to reveal his extraordinary talent. You can see that the potential is there, but it was in our group that he fully began to realize his creative capacity.

*The Battle of Chile* was also a completely new experience for me, since the instruction manual for making such a film does not exist. I'm the member of the group with the most formal training, but in such circumstances, though preparation is important, the most important thing is a clear political vision. And this was where we all coincided.

*You have alluded more than once to Chile Films. Could you elaborate on the organization and function of this state film enterprise during the Allende years?*

I spent two years as part of Chile Films. During the first year I worked under Miguel Littín\* as head of the Documentary Film Studies division. There were five divisions in all: fictional film, documentary, animation, children's films, and educational films. Miguel was head of the entire industry, though he remained only about a year, until the end of 1971. When he resigned, we all resigned en masse along with him.

*Can you specify what motivated all of you to leave Chile Films?*

Well, the first thing to keep in mind is that the whole issue of film in Chile is not a separate question, but is tied to the issue of the means of communication in general. Film was not prey to a unique set of problems; its problems were shared by the other mass media as well. It's just that the crisis was more apparent and more pronounced in the film industry than in other areas.

What happened is that the ideological struggle going on within the forces of the left played itself out in microcosm within Chile Films. As you know, there were always two blocs within the Popular Unity Coalition: one sector favored following the "peaceful

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\*Miguel Littín, best known of all the Chilean filmmakers of the Popular Unity period, produced two outstanding features—*The Jackal of Nahueltoro* (1968) and *The Promised Land* (1973), both distributed in this country by Tricontinental Film Center. Under the UP government, he also made a documentary called *El Compañero Presidente* (1970), which records the conversations between Allende and Régis Debray. Now in exile in Mexico, Littín has made a third feature (*Letters from Marucia*, 1975), and is currently working on a fourth, possibly in collaboration with the Cubans.



road to socialism" to its final consequences; the other sector, supported from outside the UP by the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) argued that the potential for progress within the existing state apparatus was limited, since that apparatus could be expected to break down as soon as the class struggle reached a critical point.

Both these factions wanted to control Chile Films, so the struggle that developed within the organization was a political and in the final analysis an ideological one: What kind of cinema did we want? How was it to be made? To whom was it to be directed? What forms would it adopt? The two factions were in head-on conflict over these questions because the former favored an agitational, analytical cinema with the goal of maintaining the existing organization of the state and never giving the right wing any indication that we had any intention of abandoning the law, whereas the latter faction, likewise in favor of an agitational and analytical kind of filmmaking, saw this as a vehicle for preparing the masses for a more or less imminent civil war.

These are roughly the outlines of the struggle waged within Chile Films. Both Miguel and I were part of the group that foresaw the breakdown of the state apparatus. It was for this reason that Chile Films found itself without film stock at a particular juncture because the Popular Unity government decided that there was such internal chaos within Chile Films as to make the organization functionally inoperative. They would only supply the necessary raw film stock after some sort of political accord had been reached. Miguel finally said, "OK, I'm no longer going to take responsibility for this. I prefer to leave, to make my own film independently and to keep working for film and for the revolution on other fronts but not as an administrator, not as a bureaucratic functionary."

That was more or less how we all saw things at the time. Our goal was to take action, to make films—no matter how—because there is always going to be an ongoing ideological struggle. Since the historical period was so intense, what happened is that almost everyone left Chile Films to form small working collectives. The avalanche of events was so overpowering that no one could remain behind closed doors saying, "Well, as long as the ideological struggle isn't resolved, I'm not going to do anything." Instead, people continued to make films despite the ideological debates, reasoning more or less as follows: "If Chile Films is shut down or its activities curtailed, it really doesn't matter. Let the people involved solve the problem. We'll just go on making films."

That's what we did, and so did Miguel Littín, Sergio and Patricio Castilla, Pedro Chaskel with his Experimental Film group, and others making films from their particular work base.

In the second year of the UP government, 1972, there was an institutional reorganization of Chile Films with the goal of giving a certain degree of economic coherence to its film production, something that we had not done. What we had tried to spark was a kind of broad and non-sectarian creative drive. The subsequent administrative stage was certainly, from an administrative point of view, the most coherent period for that state film enterprise. But it was sterile in creative terms. Even though what Chile Films was about had at last been defined in political terms, the majority of the filmmakers were no longer part of the organization, having already decided to work outside it. And they were not about to return, because Chile Films really had nothing to offer them except the rental of cameras, lighting equipment, and so on.

*How would you go about placing the conflict within Chile Films in the context of the intense ideological battle being waged in other sectors of the communications media at the time?*

The process that occurred in Chile Films was similar to what was happening in television, in the newspapers, within the radio stations. The difference is that the radio stations, for example, were in private hands. If you own a radio station, then you control the ideological slant that characterizes that particular station. If the station is controlled by a particular party, it carries that particular line, and there is no internal conflict. Likewise with the press. Different publications express different points of view according to the interests that control them. The ideological struggle between different sectors of the left, for example, is resolved at the level of the individual reader who might read several different newspapers corresponding to different leftist groups and then develop a personal synthesis of the issues.

The struggle in the sphere of television was also a tense one, since all political lines had to coexist on a single channel. But at least the image of the enemy was clearer in this medium. There were no right-wing filmmakers in Chile; the people who formed part of Chile Films were all on the left, so we struggled among ourselves. But more than half of the television sector was in the hands of technicians and directors who belonged to the right wing or to the Christian Democrats. Therefore the ideological struggle

related to TV always had an attenuating factor: "We can debate all we want among ourselves, but we can't forget that the enemy is right here in our midst." The issues became clearer at an earlier stage.

There were two television channels "controlled" by the left, 7 and 9. Channel 7 did not belong to the left, properly speaking. It belonged to the government, which had to share it with all the existing political forces, including those on the right. The law specified that the station had to give a certain amount of time to the National Party, to the Christian Democrats, and so on, as well as to each separate component of the left coalition.

Channel 9, on the other hand, was completely in the hands of the left. It was the only television channel that was genuinely aimed at the working class. However, it lacked technical assets and because its antenna was very poor could only be viewed in the capital, not in the provinces.

Generally speaking, the right consistently won the ideological battle because it had greater means at its disposal, including seventy percent of the radio stations and eighty percent of the press. We were consequently always at a disadvantage. There was no way to overcome this problem, because of the disproportion involved. But the problem was intensified by the fact that we on the left were always divided by at least two or three competing strategies. One sector, for example, felt that television should be measured, calm, cautious, objective, because the majority of those who own TV sets belong to the petty bourgeoisie and the majority of the petty bourgeoisie support the Christian Democrats. Therefore, they argued, if you were to produce a militant, combative kind of programming with the aim of mobilizing people, you would offend these sectors of the population. They would then object vociferously, claiming that the government was trying to manipulate people, to persuade them by force, and you would have yet another conflict on your hands.

Another sector argued that no matter how cautious, calm, and persuasive you are in your programming, the petty bourgeoisie is still going to accuse you of being biased and manipulative. Since you'll always be at a disadvantage, they would argue, it is better to make no concessions and instead to dedicate all one's energy to developing a militant, combative kind of programming, aimed at mobilizing the workers and the peasants, consistently on the offensive.

This debate about what was to be done in the communications



sector is simply another manifestation of the debate about what was to be done in the Chilean revolutionary process as a whole, since the media are not independent or isolated but are part of the larger political struggle for political power. The two poles—people's power and the strategy of the anti-fascist front—fought and debated among themselves up until the very day of the coup.

Although it is true that imperialist interests, international reaction, and the national bourgeoisie are responsible for the coup, the defeat is also due to the lack of a unified political direction among the forces of the left, to a permanent vacillation between two conflicting strategies, and to a byzantine ideological debate about what needed to be done.

*Did all work on the film come to an immediate halt when the coup of September 11, 1973 occurred?*

Actually, we continued to film in the aftermath of the coup, as long as our raw film stock lasted—but within the relative safety of our living rooms, from the television set. No one in the world except us thought to film the first televised communiqué of the junta, for example, on the very evening of the coup. We have other footage as well—the swearing in of the junta, the bombing of the national palace from the army's point of view. It seems unbelievable now that they actually televised such things. It shows their lack of judgment, their ignorance of the media.

*Did the coup place the members of the collective in imminent danger? How many of you left the country?*

All the members of the production team—with one crucial exception—left Chile after the coup. We managed to escape in an orderly and staggered fashion, without taking asylum in any of the embassies, because we decided that there were many others much more important than us. We camouflaged ourselves, so that no one ever found out that we were filmmakers, and we were allowed to leave the country.

As I said, we left in a pre-arranged order. The assistant director was the first to leave. He was a Spaniard who, like all foreigners, was in great danger because of the xenophobia of the military junta. I was the next to leave, followed by the producer and after him the soundman.

It was decided that Jorge Muller, our cameraman, should be last.

He managed to find work as a technician in advertising, but in November of 1974, more than a year after the coup, he and his *compañera* Carmen Bueno were arrested and imprisoned. It was a totally unexpected move. There was no evidence against them, and no charges were ever made. They were simply made to disappear. The families were never notified. The Swedish and French governments have made high-level appeals for Jorge's release, but Pinochet's government continues to deny that he was even arrested.\*

In Carmen's case, there is more certainty that she was in fact murdered by the junta, but we have not received this news about Jorge. The campaign for his release continues. And it will persist until the junta gives us an explanation.

I was arrested shortly after the coup, and spent two weeks in the National Stadium. One of my neighbors denounced me. They searched my house five times. They learned that I was a technician, a teacher of communications, but nothing else; they never found out that I was a filmmaker.

While I was under arrest, the other members of the group got together and prepared themselves for the contingency of being arrested as a group. They assumed that since I had already been taken, all the military would have to do is pull the thread, and they would all be arrested. They had to decide whether to begin to get the material out, or to hide it even more. They met with my *compañera* and decided to get the footage out of the country. They also formulated a strategy for doing this. At this stage, it was not just the group's problem, but a concern of the entire Chilean resistance movement. Everyone carried out his or her part. No one broke down at any moment. They managed to stay calm. Little by little, the footage began to leave the country. Amazingly enough, not a single meter of



Jorge Muller

\*The Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Filmmakers coordinates efforts in this country in the campaign for the release of Jorge Muller and Carmen Bueno and for numerous other Latin American film workers. For further information, contact the Committee at 339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012 (212-260-7620) or write directly to the Chilean embassy in Washington, D.C.

the twenty hours of footage was lost. Not even a fragment of the magnetic sound track. It took us six months to recover all the footage.

Of the five of us, four spent time in jail after the coup. Federico Elton, the chief of production, had his house searched and sacked twice; they took him to the Escuela Militar. At the moment when Bernardo, the soundman, had the footage in his possession, the building he lived in was searched from top to bottom—except for his apartment. This was pure chance, a reflection of the chaos and total arbitrariness that existed at that time.

Under those circumstances, with a little luck, you could pass undetected in a whole range of situations. That period of arbitrary repression lasted about six months. In the subsequent period—once the DINA [Chilean secret police] was organized and all intelligence agencies centralized—the repression became more selective and it became much harder to leave.

*Has the collective remained together outside of Cuba?*

Though most of us left originally for various European countries, we've all gotten back together again here in Havana. With the exception of Jorge, we were all together here during the editing of Parts 1 and 2. The assistant director, though he is no longer in Cuba, is still in contact with us. The producer, who is now in charge of world distribution for the film, works out of Paris. The soundman is in Spain working with Carlos Saura,\* but he remains in close touch. The editor, Pedro Chaskel, and Marta Harnecker, who served as an advisor on the film, are here in Cuba permanently.

*Did you attempt to find support for finishing the film in Europe before deciding to come to Cuba?*

Yes, we asked Chris Marker for financial help since he had been very involved throughout. Chris spoke with Simone Signoret, with Yves Montand, with Frédéric Rossif, and others. But I began to realize that the film was enormous, that it was not one film but several, and that it was necessary to have the security to edit the footage calmly. It was not to be subjected to a standard production schedule—three months for the editing, three months for the sound mixing, and so on. It would be impossible to do it that way.

\*A leading Spanish filmmaker. His most recent film, *Cria Cuervos* ("Raise Ravens") won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes in 1976.



And so I began to tell Chris that we really needed a great deal of money, because we had to support the members of the group and their families, we had to contract new people to work on assembling the film, and above all, it had to be done at a leisurely pace. Other films would be coming out for the purpose of agitation and solidarity, but this film was a treatise, and had to be made at its own pace. A year, two years—it didn't matter, because ten years from now the film will still be relevant. Chris understood this reasoning, but we were unable to raise sufficient funds. Time was going by, and we kept meeting with various people, but getting nowhere.

That was when we met in Paris with Alfredo Guevara and Saúl Yelín of the Cuban Film Institute. \* "We would like to invite you to come to Havana to finish the film," Saúl and Alfredo said to us. "You'll have access to all that you need. It's up to you as a group to decide." We talked it over, and we agreed. We all came to Cuba. And here we had the good fortune to be reunited with Marta Harnecker, who got here two months before we did.

We also got back together with our editor, Pedro Chaskel, here in Cuba. He had not taken part in the filming, nor had he been directly associated with the group in Chile, though we were certainly close friends. When I left Chile, I asked my *compañera* to tell Pedro that he was the person I wanted to edit the film, if he was willing to do it. He agreed, and it was for that reason that he decided to leave Chile, because he had a concrete task to do. Had that not been the case, he would have stayed.

*How would you characterize the editing style used in the film?*

Pedro is an extraordinary editor, not because he knows how to stick things together, but because he respects the integrity of the material. He uses a "low-profile" style of montage where the editing is barely noticeable. This was *very* important. I don't think that the job could be done with another editor. Pedro has a very penetrating way of looking at the material.

And in addition, Pedro also became part of the screenwriting team, because the script of the film is "signed" by all of us—by me as the director, but also by the assistant director, by Pedro, by Marta, by Chris Marker, by Julio García Espinosa.

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\* Alfredo Guevara, director of the Cuban Film Institute since its founding in March of 1969, has recently been appointed vice-minister of culture. Saúl Yelín, chief of international relations and promotion, and long a leading force in the Film Institute, died of a heart attack in February of this year at the age of forty-two.

Chris had written many letters to us during the filming, making many valuable suggestions. Every two weeks or so we'd get another letter from him, full of very wise advice about what is most important in documentary filmmaking. They were always very simple points, but at the same time extremely mature—not the kind of advice that just anyone would be able to give you. He's one of France's most incorruptible filmmakers, and he shared a wide range of political and ideological knowledge with us. So his name also appears among those credited with developing the screenplay for the film.

And then, too, we discovered Julio García Espinosa. We already felt a great affinity with him, even before meeting him, because many things he discusses in "For an Imperfect Cinema" were things that we wanted to know about in practice. And we had seen his *Third World, Third World War* five or six times in order to learn as quickly as possible how to film reality.

So once in Cuba, we entered into a marvelous and sustained dialogue with Julio, who was named as ICAIC's [the Cuban Film Institute's] advisor on the film. We all grew in many ways—politically, ideologically, cinematographically—through our work with him. Julio helped us take some distance from the experience we had so recently and so intensely lived through. We were still traumatized when we arrived in Cuba, asking ourselves, "How did this happen? How is it possible?" It was Julio who helped us situate ourselves theoretically with regard to what had happened in Chile, to adopt a historical perspective which was of definitive importance in enabling us to deal with the material calmly.

Julio was very taken with our footage; in fact, he was fascinated by it. The great contribution he made was to guide us in the editing of the film, but in a very low-key way. He was always present, but he let things develop according to their own internal logic. His role was to facilitate the contributions of others. And when no one had anything to contribute, when the group was going through a crisis, that was when Julio came in to make concrete suggestions. But when we knew exactly where we were going, the role he played was to stimulate our own creative process, questioning every aspect of what we proposed to do. This challenged us to be very clear about what we were doing and why, to examine every decision continually. We would have long meetings, the whole group of us at the editing table, for two or three hours at a stretch.

Julio also made an important contribution on the ideological level, promoting unity rather than exclusivity while the footage was being

edited. He realized the historical importance of the material and urged us to keep the film as broad as possible, but within the margins that seemed tolerable to us, and without ever dictating to us the political perspective the material should adopt.

Finally, Julio never put the film on a fixed production schedule. On the contrary, we were the ones to promise that we would be finished in a given span of time. But every time we said six months would do it, it turned out to be eight, then ten, then a year. Each part of the film has taken us a year to edit.

*What is there about this particular film that makes the process so time-consuming?*

It's not just the editing that's involved, but the underlying analysis on which the editing is based. For instance, we put together a chronological chart of the events in Chile that is really mind-blowing. It's probably one of the most exact chronologies of the period to be assembled anywhere. Of course it's impossible to encompass absolutely everything, because the information you have access to today is very incomplete. So we did our best according to what was feasible. And this is more or less what the nature of our work has been here in Cuba.

*Were you surprised at the international acclaim the film received upon release?*

Yes, it was a total surprise. I thought that the film was a brick—a heavy and difficult movie that makes no concessions to the spectator. It's dry and apparently cold. But in spite of this, the film began to be invited to all the European film festivals, and according to the response, its importance for Latin America and the world at large continues to grow.

I never suspected that the film would receive such wide distribution. I thought its circulation would be very limited. In a certain sense, its distribution *is* limited, because it is always difficult to distribute a documentary widely, but I never imagined that the film would be met with such interest and acclaim.

In certain European countries where there are particular political parallels with what was attempted in Chile—France or Italy, for example, or Spain and even Portugal, once the film is allowed in—it has had a great impact. It was just recently shown in Spain at the Benalmadena festival, and is currently under review by the censors



for national distribution. They may reject it in the first round, but they will end up letting it through. Experts in Spain estimate that *The Battle of Chile* will run at least six or seven months in the large, first-run houses of the major cities.

*Has the response to the film varied from one country to another?*

Of course. Response to a film is not homogeneous or universal. Different films are perceived differently according to the particular context in which they are viewed. According to the particular level of class awareness which exists, a film is accepted or it isn't. In Spain, for example, the reaction to the film, to each frame, is so intense that as an outsider you perceive the response almost as a form of alienation. When I watched that audience of five thousand people viewing the film with an unbelievable, almost religious reverence, I felt the same way that I had in Chile watching a film by Santiago Alvarez.\* It made no difference how good the film was. What mattered was that we were living through an intensified period of class struggle which made us respond to what was on the screen in a very intense way.

*How would you characterize the response in France?*

In France, there's a lot going on at the level of the masses, but the intellectuals, who are usually the ones to see this type of film, are very disenchanted. They are used to criticizing all the films they see, submitting them to a rigorous intellectual analysis. But many critics on the French left, after they saw Part 2 of the film, were completely immobilized. They couldn't seem to regain their footing.

Marcel Martin, for example, saw the film five times. He didn't say anything to me; he just smiled as he left. And Louis Marcorelles saw the film four times. They realized that it is not a movie in the traditional sense because it has no plot structure, no climax, no dénouement, and that it has a density of information that few other films contain. But other critics, accustomed to doing a kind of facile, formulaic criticism, have been completely paralyzed. Either

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\*Santiago Alvarez, director of the Cuban Film Institute's "Weekly Latin American Newsreel," has earned an international reputation for his experimental documentaries. Among the best known in this country are *Now* (1965), on race relations in the United States, and *The Seventy-nine Springtimes of Ho Chi Minh* (1969), a poetic eulogy for the Vietnamese leader.

they opt for not writing anything or they make four or five very incomplete observations about the film. This is due to the dispersion of the revolutionary forces in France, the existence of many left splinter groups, their anti-Sovietism, their lack of revolutionary models, their failure to really incorporate the youth into a militant movement. All these things make for a very disenchanted public.

The way the film is perceived in France is totally different from the way the Italians see it, because in Italy people are closer to their parties, closer to their political process, closer to the possibility of winning.

We've had many problems arranging for the Portuguese distribution of the film. We were in touch with the Fifth Division at the moment when it was erased from the map, so to speak. Then we made other contacts, but they too were wiped out. So because of the current political situation, we've had a series of setbacks. The Portuguese film distributors who've been in touch with us recently strike us as a little too profit-oriented, so we have been unwilling to deal with them. Since we're confident that it's not a film that is going to go out of style, we can afford to take our time. Maybe two years from now, the proper opportunity will present itself.

In addition to the Scandinavian countries and the rest of Europe, countries like Ethiopia have also expressed interest in the film. But in Ethiopia only one kind of audience will see it—the military. This is another example of how the film corresponds to different needs in different countries according to the particular political juncture. Because in the Ethiopian army, there exists some of the same ambivalence that existed in the Chilean armed forces as to whether to take a *putschist* stand or to join the popular struggle. So our film reveals to them how the Chilean armed forces were led to execute such a sinister historical role against their own people.

In some countries, the audience is primarily students. In others, like Italy and Spain, it is much more working class. In Sweden, the film was shown on national television, so people viewed it alone, in their homes. You might ask whether this is not a violation of the message of the film, since people view it as they would any other television program and it might be followed or preceded by a "pure entertainment" show. But it really doesn't matter. As soon as it becomes common knowledge in Sweden—next year or in the year 3000—that there is such a thing as a working class, that there is a bourgeoisie and an oligarchy, that transnational corporations do exist, and that Sweden is also a sub-imperialist power—when all this becomes clear, I don't care how many centuries it takes—*The*

*Battle of Chile* will be among the first films to hit the screens.

*How would you evaluate the overall impact of the film?*

It is not a film whose primary motive is the quest for international solidarity or an agitational film whose value depends on a certain set of historical circumstances. It is not a sentimental appeal for people to give money to the Chilean cause. Instead, the film nakedly reveals our lack of direction, the massive offensive organized by the right, the internal disagreements on the left, but without mystifying the situation. It takes down the shades and shows things as they were.

In this sense, I think it is an optimistic film. Because it shows what happened, and to the extent that it does this, people will learn from it, draw lessons from it, and continue to fight. The film neither mystifies particular historical figures nor ceases to recognize what they represented, as is the case with Allende, for example.

*What is your estimation, from today's perspective, of the Allende government's relation to the revolutionary process in Chile and in the rest of Latin America?*

According to my way of thinking, the UP government was not impeding or short-circuiting the revolutionary process in Latin



*A scene from the film*



America. On the contrary, it was accelerating that process. But it was just one stage, one phase, one period which has to resolve itself by assuming the offensive in order to move on to the next period, which is of necessity one of confrontation. I do not want to negate the validity of the UP as an experiment in political change a priori. I see it as a very interesting and extremely important attempt.

This is why the enemy—imperialist foreign interests—unleashed all its potential in Chile. They were well aware that if what the UP government was undertaking had any chance of succeeding, even with all the economic chaos that existed at the time, the next day would see the same thing taking place in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Bolivia, everywhere. It was a movement that had to be stopped by whatever means. That is why we were smashed, at least temporarily—because at that particular moment we were the vanguard of the entire continent.

*How would you compare The Battle of Chile to other films about Chile, or to other historical documentaries?*

The criteria we used to make the film were not a-partisan or “objective” in the traditional bourgeois sense. This is not a film made by journalists or reporters who go to Chile, make their movie, and go away again. Instead, each one of us, as Chileans, had a personal commitment to what we were filming. Our objectivity was based upon a militant position *within* the struggle. This is the essence of the film, and it was something we anticipated before we even began to shoot.

We tried to film reality dialectically. For example: what a minister says, what the workers say, what the minister answers, what the workers answer back, what the woman who lives near the factory says, and so on. We went about assembling the “story line,” inasmuch as there is one, dialectically, following a series of interwoven and often opposing threads. *Hearts and Minds* seems to me to be a good example of this technique because it avoids the use of voice-over narration.

*La Batalla de Chile* is not a film designed like a roadmap. “Just follow the arrow and you will find out what happened in Chile.” This is the formula used in *La Spirale* (France, 1976), for example.\*

\**La Spirale* was made by Valérie Mayoux, who collaborated with Chris Marker on the editing of *The Battle of the Ten Million*, and by Armand and Michèle Mattelart, leading theorists of cultural imperialism and the mass media in the third world. (The Mattelarts had lived for more than a decade in Chile before they were forced by the coup to return to Europe.) Chris Marker also collaborated on this film.

Don't get me wrong. I think it is a great film, the best I've seen on imperialism in Chile. But the method used in that film is the opposite of ours. Ours is dialectical because it was filmed that way, whereas *La Spirale*, based on archival material, necessarily has to employ an indicator, an arrow which says that the spectator should interpret the reality in a particular way. This is also a valid approach, but we find the other more effective because we were trying to capture reality on the spot, not after the fact. Our film demands a higher level of participation on the part of the spectators, requiring them to draw conclusions on their own.

*Thinking back on the modes of organization of the two parts of the film, it seems to me that the first section had a much more synchronic organization, what I think you called a "nuclear" structure in the sense that it is based on various nuclei, by examining all the related facets of a particular phenomenon. The second part seems to follow a more rigorously chronological plan.*

No, that chronology is just an external dimension of the organizing principle of the film. Though the second part refers more often to the sequence of events, to day-by-day occurrences, it is really less chronological than the first part. Part 2 is much more dialectical because in it we take the method even further. There are no chapter divisions in the second part, for example, and yet there is a vision of the whole. Nor are there boundaries between one thematic sequence and the next, because there is always an underlying conceptual sequence which we are following.

Part 3 promises to be a bit more like the first part, more expository. Although it's also true that the third part is the most tender. All the love that was poured into the filming (and I believe that if you're not in love with what you're doing, you're really not doing anything) is distilled into Part 3. What I experienced in Chile was an immense tenderness toward what was going on. I was perfectly prepared to stay and sleep at the places where we were filming. We could have given up our apartments and gone on safari like nomads.

The third section focuses on several particular characters, and it follows them, makes friends with them. It is almost as if they are the protagonists of the film in the traditional sense. This may well change the form of the film. There will be a greater use of music, for example. There may be many moments when less is said and more is lived.

The daily lives of the Chilean masses, for example, the changing

relations between men and women, the new sensorial experiences open to these people for the first time—all this was also in the original outline. We were unable to film but a small part of this, however. The little that we did manage to film will appear in Part 3.

I would have loved to have really immersed myself in what the people were doing at that time on a personal level, in what they were feeling, in their gains and frustrations, in their experimentation. In this sense, the Chilean people were very advanced. The country was on the way to abandoning its macho tradition, for example. Women were very involved in the political process, often in positions of leadership, in the working class as well as among the bourgeoisie. It would have been very important to show this, particularly in light of the heavily macho tradition in the rest of Latin America.

*Perhaps you'd like to make a final comment about the personal transformation that took place in you, the filmmakers, during the process of making the film.*

The film was an incomparably intense experience for all involved, not just in its historical dimension or for whatever virtues it may have as cinema, or because of the fact that we managed to rescue it from the chaos and devastation that followed the coup, but because it was a monumental experience in each of our lives.

It is not our wish to begin immediately making another film in exile on what we see as the major themes of our work no matter where we are—fascism, imperialism, and the Latin American people. We have no urgent stake in being “professionals” in the technical sense of the word, putting out films regularly. You make films when they are politically imperative. So it is not necessary for us to try to maintain a *career* as filmmakers but rather to work for the resistance movement on whatever level is useful. The film itself taught us this.

Through the lived experience of the film, we all came to understand what it means to live through a revolutionary process—what ideological struggle really means, what fascism looks and feels like, what it means for the enraged middle class to rise up against the workers, how invisible imperialism can be—because in Chile you don't see Phantom jets spewing napalm as in Vietnam; what you see is imperialism reflected in the attitudes of the middle class.

The experience of making the film marked us for the rest of our lives. Everything else is merely a figure of speech.



# THE BATTLE OF CHILE

## A Tricontinental Film Center Release

### CREDITS

Director . . . . . Patricio Guzman  
Production Manager . . . . . Federico Elton  
Editor . . . . . Pedro Chaskel  
Director of Photography . . . . . Jorge Muller  
Assistant Director . . . . . Jose Pino  
Sound . . . . . Bernardo Menz  
Advisors . . . . . Julio Garcia Espinosa and Marta Harnecker

Produced in 1973-76 by the Equipo Tercer Año with the collaboration of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and Chris Marker. Running time: Part I, 106 minutes, b/w. Part II, 99 minutes, b/w. Spanish language dialog with English language subtitles. No MPAA rating.

### EQUIPO TERCER AÑO

The production crew consisted of five Chilean technicians—Federico Elton, Jorge Muller, Bernardo Menz, Jose Pino and Marta Harnecker—under the direction of Patricio Guzman. This collective filmed throughout Chile from February to September, 1973, working under semi-clandestine conditions at all times (utilizing different sets of false press credentials, for instance). After each shooting session, Guzman would collect the film and put it into hiding.

During the coup, the homes of the director and producer were searched; Guzman was held for two weeks in the National Stadium and Elton was held for 24 hours in the Military School in Santiago, although it was not discovered that they were producing a film. Later, over a period of six months, the film was smuggled out of Chile bit by bit. Facilities for the editing and completion of the film were provided by the Cuban Film Institute.

In November of 1974, Jorge Muller, the film's cameraman, and Carmen Bueno, an actress who had also assisted in the production of the film, were kidnaped by agents of the DINA, the Chilean secret police. Both were reported to have been imprisoned at the Tres Alamos concentration camp outside Santiago, although the military junta denies any knowledge of their arrest or whereabouts. An international campaign demanding their release has been conducted since their disappearance by the Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Filmmakers (339 Lafayette St., NYC 10012), whose sponsors include Francis Ford Coppola and Jack Nicholson, among others.

### AWARDS

Part I—Grand Prize, Grenoble International Film Festival, 1975; "Novais Texeira Award", French Film Critics Association; plus screenings at the Director's Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival; Berlin Film Festival; Moscow Film Festival; Pesaro Film Festival.

Part II—Grand Prize, Grenoble International Film Festival, 1976; Grand Prize, Benalmadena International Film Festival, 1976; Grand Prize of the International Jury, Leipzig International Film Festival, 1976; plus screenings at the Director's Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival; Berlin Film Festival; Pesaro Film Festival; Melbourne Film Festival.