

## BETWEEN EXPERIMENTAL AND FACTUAL: TWO TEXTS ABOUT FILM IN THE THIRTIES<sup>1</sup>

Alfonso Puyal  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

"Our demand was the documented fact."  
Hans Richter<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this contribution is to rescue two texts written about film in the thirties by Arturo Ruiz-Castillo. These are articles that, although at the time appeared in journals, have gone unnoticed because they are not well known magazines. A preliminary study of them and the cultural context in which they were conceived will help better understand what is undoubtedly the darkest period of the director, one that started in 1931 with the first experiences amateur and ends with propaganda documentaries made during the Civil War for political organs of the Republican side, including the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals or Republican Left. Among the papers held by Spanish Film, hardly any information is available about this period and some of these films continue to be missing today. It is symptomatic that among the biographical data typewritten in 1947, the director qualifies of "circumstantial movies" these war documentaries. This understatement may be due, rather than a waiver of its bygone work, at the political discretion that he should have kept in the first years of the regimen.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the place occupied by Ruiz-Castillo in the intellectual and artistic life in the years of the Second Republic, one must mention a number of professional and vital circumstances that certainly make him an active participant. And, what is more important for what we are concerned here, film will be present in many of the initiatives undertaken. At the university stage, studies in Exact Sciences first and Architecture afterward, will put him in contact with the cultural activity of the FUE (Scholar Federation of the University). His love of drawing will end-up keeping him away from the university in order to create posters, murals and illustrations, and then continue as artistic director in New Library, publishing house owned by his father, for which he would make hundreds of covers, influenced without a

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the research project titled *Nuevas formas del paradigma ficción/no ficción en el discurso audiovisual español (2000-2010)*, reference no. CSO2009-07089, funded by the Research and Development Plan of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

<sup>2</sup> Richter, Hans. *The Struggle for the Film: Toward a Socially Responsible Cinema*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Wildwood House, 1986:42.

<sup>3</sup> Film critic Florentino Hernandez Girbal writes of *Guerra en la nieve* [War in the Snow] that is "directed and photographed by a young man who is now a genuine reality and hides his name with the initials A.R.C., who authors also with Rafael Gil, another of the best short films carried out recently: *Save the Harvest!* [...] In this film are joined the happiest cinematic expression, the fair and concise development of the theme and artistic beauty", in "short film production [En este film se unen la más feliz expresión cinematográfica, el desarrollo justo y conciso del tema y su belleza plástica]." (*Blanco y Negro*, January 1939, Cánovas, and Pérez Perucha, 192).

doubt by graphic design from Germany or the Soviet Union.

During the summer of 1933 he is part of the university's Mediterranean cruise, a trip organized by the College of Liberal Arts from which a sixty-minute documentary is filmed, named *Mediterranean Cruise*: "The university had chartered the MV City of Cadiz, filled with students and professors to visit Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Greece, Italy and Mallorca. It was a wonderful journey of studies that Gonzalo [Menéndez-Pidal] and I shot a documentary film" <sup>4</sup>(Ruiz-Castillo 1995: 23). The initiative, far from being a simple souvenir item, was a reflection of emerging filmmakers interest in ethnography and archeology, interest to which years before the Surrealists had joined, through the magazine *Documents*. In 1934, designed the chassis of the mobile-library for the third Madrid Book Fair to be held the following year. The vehicle was equipped with projector screen and 16 mm film, radio, long plays, microphone and speakers. The idea was to make a campaign of "cultural propaganda", according to ARC- to promote reading, in line with the initiatives of Educational Missions and La Barraca. Ultimately, the trucks responded to the extension of the audiovisuals as educational resource, something that goes back through the fusion of travel and means of communication materialized in the trains of agitation and propaganda of the Soviets. From this project Ruiz-Castillo made *El Libro va por el camino* [*The Book Goes on the Road*], about the book fair and the tour of the bus-stand through different locations.

Already deep in film practice, one can distinguish two types of films made by Ruiz-Castillo in the period prior to the war: avant-garde films and anthropological documentary films. Influenced by the films of episodes, Ruiz-Castillo recalls, "I made my first film with a Pathé-Baby. My second film was about an avant-garde subject I never understood but it gave me a lot of prestige among my friends. After 'I created' the war in Europe in three minutes with the title of *Gas*."<sup>5</sup> In light of the many filmographies prepared by the director as a résumé, these early trials minded amateur served as pilot, filmed with a narrow lens camera, limited to four and were realized in the years 1931 to 1932: *Gas: La guerra del 14* [*Gas: the 1914 War*]; *Bandit*: essay with bandit, *Surrealism*: essay, *Tricks* and *funny games*. About the first one, the filmmaker writes in his autobiography: "In collaboration with Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal made his first film trials on 9 mm film and with an ambitious theme, the European war. It's called *Gas!* and in its shooting he is involved as an actor, designer, director and 'special effects'."<sup>6</sup>

This is the framework within which the first of the articles reviewed must be placed,

---

<sup>4</sup> Original text in Spanish: La universidad había fletado la motonave Ciudad de Cádiz, la llenó de estudiantes y profesores, para visitar Túnez, Egipto, Palestina, Turquía, Grecia, Italia y Mallorca. Y fue un viaje maravilloso de estudios del que Gonzalo [Menéndez-Pidal] y yo filmamos un reportaje cinematográfico" (Ruiz-Castillo 1995: 23)

<sup>5</sup> Original text in Spanish: "realicé mi primera película con una Pathé-Baby. Mi segunda película fue sobre un tema vanguardista que nunca entendí pero me dio mucho prestigio entre mis amigos. Después 'realicé' la guerra europea en tres minutos con el título de *Gas*." In "Responses of Arturo Ruiz-Castillo for the magazine *Sipe* to a few questions from Javier Bañón Seijas", the text was typescript and dated December 14, 1948 which is among his papers, pending classification. I thank Javier Herrera, from Spanish Film, access to the Ruiz-Castillo file.

<sup>6</sup> Original text in Spanish: "En colaboración con Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal realiza sus primeros ensayos cinematográficos en película de 9 mm y con un tema ambicioso, la guerra europea. Se titula *¡Gas!* y en su rodaje interviene como actor, decorador, director y 'efectos especiales.'" Biographical notes on Arturo Ruiz-Castillo", file dated in Madrid January 8, 1947 found in Filmoteca Española Library.

"Some Things About Our Films," published in the university magazine *Compluto* in November 1932. His biography continues: "This is followed by other outlets in 16 mm and acquires a universal movie camera and goes out through the towns to discover frames". This modality would consist of "folk stories" -in a later text he groups them into "Castilian themes, cultural and reporting,"<sup>7</sup> found among them *Romería de Juarillos* [*Juarillos Pilgrimage*] (1932); *Tres estampas de Castilla* [*Three Prints of Castile*] (1933); *La mancha y el azafrán* [*The Stain and Saffron*] (1933), or *Escuela de anormales: estudio didáctico* [*School of Abnormals: didactic study*] (1933). The approach of Ruiz-Castillo to different realities of the Spanish people will be the hinge between the pilot period and war movies.

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL EUPHORIA

The film articles reproduced in the Appendix present some ideas that shed insight into his way of thinking about cinema and, more importantly, on his film production. The main argument used by these articles are focused on the expectations placed on film as a medium of expression and ideological weapon, or put another way, how the thought of an author as Ruiz-Castillo can be extrapolated to a whole set of concerns that were present in the theory and film practices of the moment; concerns that occur in a time lag between the end of the avant-garde film and the beginning of a documentary film committed to the social and political events leading up to the conflicts of war.

Certainly, film reflection done by filmmakers themselves that could be done in Spain in the thirties was a more or less informal corpus, built with elements of judging evidence and personal appreciation, and influenced by certain aesthetic theories. The two foci of cinematic reflection will come from French impressionism and the Soviet school, especially the latter will join the formal component with the ideological program of a regimen akin to the Republic. In the Spanish case, many of those reasons, sometimes simply poured into critical reviews or interviews, shone through the film medium's potential as a new language to be erected not only in a powerful entertainment industry, but also and especially in vehicle dissemination of ideas and ideals.

Over subsequent decades, Annette Michelson has been outlining a hypothesis denominated "epistemological euphoria." Broadly consists in the theoretical reflection and film practices, prior to the introduction of sound, built by a generation of filmmakers and thinkers for whom "Film promised to be a complete, new and privileged access to a full and more cordial understanding of the phenomenal world and its transformation" (Michelson 1999: 85). On that roster Michelson includes directors such as Dziga Vertov, S. M. Eisenstein, Jean Epstein or intellectuals as the art historian Élie Faure and, tangentially, Walter Benjamin. It is the article "Film and the Radical Aspiration" (1966), published in the American independent film magazine *Film Culture*, where she presents for the first time the belief in the intellectual potential of the medium:

The excitement, the exhilaration of artists and intellectuals involved indirectly in the

---

<sup>7</sup> Biographical notes on Arturo Ruiz-Castillo" from weekly magazine *Dígame*, Madrid, May 1952 in Filmoteca Española Library.

medium was huge. In fact, some euphoria engulfed the performance and film theory from the earliest times. For them there was, ultimately, a very real sense in which the revolutionary aspirations of the modernist movement in literature and art, on the one hand, and a utopian or Marxist tradition on the other, could converge on the hopes and promises, undefined until now, of the new medium (Sitney 2000: 407).

This exaltation of the capabilities of the language of cinema was moving in two directions: first, the creative element, embodied in the photographic values of an image in motion, in the artistry of the shots taken from unusual angles and the expressive strength of the assembly; the second was the ideological trend, so that, first with the news and shortly after with the documentary, film was being used as a propaganda tool of the highest order. And the field most suitable for analytical investigation was in documentary mode. Basil Wright, filmmaker of the British documentary school, was a good example of this euphoria:

The film seemed to offer a wonderful and free means of expression [...] I think the period was of great change and opportunities [...] Society was in transition, and the film offered a way to participate in a new road towards social change. We were looking for new uses for movies and for a new kind of cinema<sup>8</sup>. (Aitken 1998: 248)

It is precisely in each of these two extremes-the aesthetic and the political- where Ruiz-Castillo articles place their emphasis. While "Some things about our films"(1932) is poured into the expressive power of cinema, "Cinema in the war" (1939) is given to the ideological values of the documentary.

## AN INTUITIVE THEORY OF FILM

As a member of FUE and on behalf of the architecture students, Ruiz-Castillo joined in 1932 the university theater La Barraca. He would be responsible for designing the stage, building the sets and lighting. In the biographical note mentioned above we read out that "Resolves the staging of the work" and that "For the first time lights shine 'cinematically' the Spanish scene." It is during the summer of 1932 when he shoots along with Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal the eight-minute report that shows the first outings of La Barraca in Burgo de Osma and Vigo, the appearance of Federico García Lorca in *La vida es sueño* [*Life is a Dream*], and the assembly of the stage for the representation of *La guarda cuidadosa* [*The careful guard*] in Almazán (Soria).

One of the publishers of FUE was *Compluto*, a magazine edited in 1932 by the Professional Federation of Students of Philosophy and Liberal Arts and encouraged by professors such as Manuel García Morente and students like María Zambrano. The School will move to the University of Madrid in January 1933 and the air of renewal was felt in

---

<sup>8</sup> Original text in Spanish: El cine parecía ofrecer un maravilloso y libre medio de expresión [...] Creo que el periodo fue de grandes cambios y posibilidades [...] La sociedad estaba en transición, y el cine ofrecía una manera de participar en un nuevo camino hacia el cambio social. Estábamos buscando nuevos usos para las películas y para un nuevo tipo de cine.

cultural and publishing initiatives as *Compluto*. Half thinking and half cultural magazine, the index included collaborations on philosophy, art and archeology and pedagogy. In addition, the magazine will include in its two issues some contributions on film. In its first issue the Valencian artist José Manaut Viglietti will take care of two feature films of fiction that respond unreservedly to the ideology of the FUE: *Generalnaia liniia* [*The general line*], 1929) by Sergei M. Eisenstein, and *El camino de la vida* [*The Road of Life*](Putevka v zhizn, 1931) by Nikolai EKK.

Fernando Gutierrez Mantilla, acting as technical advisor to the Film Department of the Federal Union of Hispanic Students (Unión Federal de Estudiantes Hispanos – UFEH) will write *Cinema Universitario*, a text which dictates the spirit that should be followed by the student movement: "Let us try to create a selective nucleus of viewers, not with a sterile intellectual or avant-garde urge, but to form the shock troops of the common people" (*Cómpluto*, October 1 1932: 37). The text advocates defending educational film against commercialized film, touching on diverse topics: the activity of the film societies fostered during the Republic, the importance of amateur films, among which were included those created by Ruiz-Castillo, the creation of a film studio on the future University City, or the lack of existence of the announced National Institute for Educational Film. It is curious that makes an objection to the representations of classical theater staged by the Pedagogical Missions and La Barraca, in the beginning the two groups had similar ideology of the FUE. Mantilla is referring to an incentive "that, without appearing bad, it seems to us far less effective than the cultural use of *cinema* [que, sin parecernos mal, sí se nos antoja bastante menos eficaz que la utilización cultural del *cine*]" (37). This policy of perpetuation of cultural traditions by the "higher ministerial level" is facing the thinking of a generation of enthusiastic young people who see in film a new vehicle of expression and disseminator of ideas. Before his militant activities in the field of cinema, Fernando G. Mantilla had excelled as a radio commentator for Radio Union. His section "Revista cinematográfica" as well as his written contributions to *Ondas* proposed a critique that went beyond mere anecdote about the stars or movies. His adherence to the Communist Party will lead him to form in July 1936, the Cooperative of Film Workers with the goal to produce and distribute documentaries of war.

In the second issue of *Cómpluto* one can find the article by Arturo Ruiz-Castillo entitled "Some things about our films" and opens with the following statement:

When doing a little quiet the history of film, one will see how all the essential moments of this history are those in which someone tried to liberate film from literature or some other trickery. And all of this evolution of film in order to establish itself as an independent and authentic art is thought by the intentions of those who want to make of it a new medium of old expression. (*Compluto*, November 2 1932: 23)

The paragraph raises the contradiction that existed during the formative years of cinema to the effect that while the new medium has been invested of some specificity with respect to the other arts, an appeal was made to them in order to give it artistic legitimacy. The article then goes on to defend the autonomy of film as a medium of expression, mainly

through "the purity of the cinematic vision, the image without content plot, without overwhelming and chained logic" [la pureza de la visión cinematográfica, de la imagen sin contenido argumental, sin lógica aplastante y encadenadora] (24). The bulk of the text consists of the gloss of three films that show his way of conceiving the film: *Casas y cosas* [Houses and things], *Dos días sin agua* [Two Days Without Water] and *To shift: estudio sobre la sensibilidad* [To shift: a study on sensitivity].<sup>9</sup> The pages are illustrated with three alleged images of the films; and are supposed to because the movies do not seem to be but the product of a private joke. Indeed, as reported by Menéndez-Pidal, the authorship of the article was actually his own hand and that of Luis Meana, another partner of FUE and a member of La Barraca, whom had signed under the name of Ruiz-Castillo, apparently without his knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Even if this anecdote was true one can recognize in the article some of Ruiz-Castillo's ideas. What it is glaring is that both filmmakers had been making cinematic experiences in those years close to formal form. This is therefore an article of questionable attribution, but in any case serves as a common need to lay the foundations of his thinking on film.

## A CINEMA OF URGENCY

The political events that transpired in Europe in between wars caused a number of directors to begin considering a more local cinema, closer to the present and less concerned with experimental investigations. The German artist Hans Richter, who in the twenties began his film career with abstract animations, soon realized that shift: "The vanguard as purely artistic movement has passed its peak and has gone on to focus on social and political film, mainly in the documentary"<sup>11</sup> (Richter 1947: 18). The reason is that the artist need not but be concerned with reality and acts accordingly. But, while these filmmakers were going to put the aesthetic findings to the service of social or political regimes, they were creating a sort of stylization of reality through the documentary. It is in this approach where one can understand the work of filmmakers and operators who made war documentaries.

The series of films made by Ruiz-Castillo during the civil war can be completed according to the filmographies prepared by the director, except that, at times, his actual participation was limited to work as cameraman, editor or producer of animations.<sup>12</sup> Possibly

---

<sup>9</sup> Among the short films and documentaries produced in 1932, under the designation "avant-guard film", Manuel Rotellar (162) cites two of them: *Houses and Things* and *Two Days Without Water*. Possibly, Rotellar would have obtained them from the article signed by Ruiz-Castillo in *Compluto*. In any case, none of them appear in the filmographies drafted by the director, so perhaps is referring to invented titles and therefore non-existent tape.

<sup>10</sup> Interview in San Rafael (Segovia) on December 18, 2003 with Gonzalo Menéndez-Pidal, who provided me a copy of the second issue of *Compluto*, unfindable in libraries consulted.

<sup>11</sup> Original text in Spanish: "La vanguardia como movimiento puramente artístico ha atravesado su clímax y ha seguido su camino para concentrarse en el filme social y político, principalmente en la forma documental."

<sup>12</sup> The list of documentary as a director shall be as follows: *Dieciocho de julio* [Eighteenth of July] (Izquierda Republicana, 1936), with photography by Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, *Guerra en el campo* [War in the Field] (Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, 1936), with the collaboration of Menéndez Pidal and Enrique Díez -Canedo, *Madrid, capital de España* [Madrid, Capital of Spain], unknown 11-minute film that Ruiz-Castillo noted in several filmographies; *Prisioneros en Valencia* [Prisoners in Valencia] (Popular Film, 1937), the film collection *Un año de*

is due to his affiliation to the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture the most fruitful when reviewing his documentary work. During the visit that a journalist made to his headquarters in Madrid in September 1936, the poet Rafael Alberti announced that "We will open very soon, a room for film screenings, which will bring the first of many films sponsored. In the inaugural function, dedicated to the Soviet ambassador—we will premiere the reports of the fronts that are underway by Ruiz-Castillo and Díez Canedo's sons."<sup>13</sup> (ABC, September 18 1936: 14). The interest of the alliance for political propaganda through cultural products, interest which will extend to the theater, print edition, the posters and radio will focus on film in a special way.

The newspaper *El Mono Azul*, one of the spokesman for the group published "Two good documentary of the war", where *Guerra en la Nieve* [War in the Snow] (Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, 1938) and *Soldados Campesinos* [Farmer Soldiers] (Antonio del Amo and Rafael Gil, 1938) are presented, which Ruiz-Castillo is editor. The article conveys the hopes invested in the potential of propaganda cinema:

In Madrid there are two, three or four filmmakers who can make good movies, and they have made movies because the Army has put them behind the lens, has given them staff and resources and left them to do. Have done and there are their movies. Propaganda is found within propaganda that is done outside and is effective and good. There is film made and more to do, a cinema of urgency of today and a base of the great Spanish cinema of later. Absorb and make propaganda films.<sup>14</sup> (*El Mono Azul* 46 July 1938:6)

It is in the next issue of this journal where Ruiz-Castillo publishes, "The film in the war" (*El Mono Azul*, 47 February 1939: 102-103), although as is clear from the text, is written the year before.<sup>15</sup> In it is revealed, firstly, the exaltation of the powers of the cinematic

---

*guerra* [A Year of War] (Popular Film, 1937), *Cirugía y recuperación* [Surgery and Recovery] (Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, 1937), *Guerra en la nieve* (Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, 1938), in collaboration with Díez-Canedo, son, and *Salvad la cosecha* [Save the Harvest] (Central Chief of Staff, 1938), co-directed with Rafael Gil. In the same manner makes a series of collaborations, among which are: *Defensa de Madrid* [Defense of Madrid] (International Red Cross in collaboration with the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, 1936), with final recitation of Rafael Alberti, *Soldados campesinos* [Peasant Soldiers] (46 Division El Campesino, 1938) directed by Antonio del Amo and Rafael Gil and assembly Ruiz-Castillo, reports for the newscast *España al día* [Spain up to date], produced and distributed by Popular Film, assistance in several films for *España en llamas* [Spain in Flames] (Helene van Dongen and Joris Ivens, 1936-1937).

<sup>13</sup> Original text: "Se inaugurará, muy pronto, una sala para proyecciones cinematográficas, donde se darán las primeras de cuantas películas patrocinemos. En la función de inauguración —dedicada al embajador soviético— estrenaremos el reportaje de los frentes que están realizando Ruiz Castillo y Díez Canedo (hijos)."

<sup>14</sup> En Madrid hay dos, tres o cuatro cineastas que pueden hacer cine bueno, y han hecho cine porque el Ejército los ha puesto detrás de sus cámaras, les ha dado colaboradores y medios y les ha dejado hacer. Han hecho y ahí están sus películas. Propaganda se encuentra con una propaganda que se hace fuera y es efectiva y buena. Hay un cine hecho y más por hacer; un cine de urgencia de hoy y una base del gran cine español de después. Contágiese propaganda y haga cine.

<sup>15</sup> Under the content and style, one can risk the hypothesis that, despite not being signed, "Two good documentaries of the war" is written by Ruiz-Castillo, even when talking about films that he was directly involved:

apparatus: "Filmmakers, give them light in the eyes of cinema that are wide-eyed and very narrowed! And able to capture it all"<sup>16</sup>(102). Moreover, the paper shows the ability of film to capture historical processes: "This war film has all the importance of the authentic observer and the true historian, but also the conscience of what was" (103). The following paragraph dispels any doubts about the candor of the camera to say that the filmmakers, "real soldiers in the news war, of truth and lies" (103), are advancing quality cinema in Spain. What our author does is to give the cameraman an epic sense that it equates to the armed soldier, "I had an Eyemo camera with 30 meter chassis. With it and a 50 mm lens only did the films of the war"<sup>17</sup>(López Clemente 1979: 1402). The statement shed by the director in the interview reinforces this idea, referring to the camera in terms of a weapon.

In the essay *War and Film*, Paul Virilio provides a more than interesting connection between the sight of the gun and the display of a picture camera, so that, from the First World War, the arms were equipped with observation instruments and image capture. It will come indirectly vision where human perception, image, still or moving, and weapons are integrated into one device: "For the man at war, the role of the weapon is the role of the eye" sentence Virilio [Para el hombre en guerra, la función del arma es la función del ojo]" (1989: 20). To this we must add the charged propaganda value of wartime messages, in poster form, report, news or radio address: "The real power was now divided between the logistics of the arms and the images and sounds between the cabinets of war and propaganda departments [...] 'Propaganda is my best weapon!', said Mussolini" (Virilio 1989: 53). The logistics of perception to which Virilio refers, the uses of propaganda as an ideological weapon, are intuitively present in the arguments found in "Cinema and War" by Ruiz-Castillo:

Progress and deadly inventions have made of war unbearable and difficult art. Photography has risen to the level of the circumstances and has become complicated. If the camera is like a gun, the film camera would be the machine gun firing its 24 frames per second, launching its wounding bursts onto the battlefield, but their shots will never be lost. 18(102)

The article closes with a reflection, which defends that the "cinema of emergency" caused by the military conflict can be a spur to form a new generation of young directors who make quality film, something that was already timidly brewing in the years of the Republic. The film articles by Ruiz-Castillo deal with two facets, which in the beginning may seem

---

first as director (*War in the Snow*) and the second as an editor (*Peasants Soldiers*).

<sup>16</sup> "[Cineastas, dadles luz a los ojos del cine; que son ojos muy abiertos y muy entornados! ¡Y capaces de captarlo todo]"

<sup>17</sup> "Yo tenía una cámara Eyemo con chasis de 30 metros. Con ella y un sólo objetivo de 50 mm hice las películas de la guerra."

<sup>18</sup> "Los progresos y los inventos mortíferos han hecho de la guerra un arte insoportable y difícil. La fotografía se ha puesto a la altura de las circunstancias y se ha complicado. Si la cámara fotográfica se asemeja al fusil, la cámara cinematográfica sería la ametralladora; disparará sus fotogramas a 24 por segundo y lanzará sus ráfagas hirientes en el campo de batalla, pero sus tiros no quedarán nunca perdidos".



antagonistic: the cinema as art, the first, the war theater, the second; facets facing the poetic function of the film with the ideological function. But, it is precisely this dichotomy that will define the documentary film of the thirties, and warned by Peter Wollen in "The two vanguards" (1975) as a practice film caught in an ideology that demanded photographic realism and another that sought formal innovation and experiment (1982: 98). The Ruiz-Castillo texts also reveal a trend that was generalized from the French and Soviet schools: the filmmaker as a theorist, a theory lacking in certain moments of expository consistency that we have described as intuitive, but that is a symptom of epistemological euphoria proclaimed by Annette Michelson: cinema considered as a radically new and vital instrument of inquiry and analysis (1990: 21). Immersed in this environment were the essays and documentaries of Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, a film halfway between experimental and factual.

Translation by Ana George

## Bibliography

- Aitken, Ian, ed. *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*. Edinburgh UP, 1998.
- Cánovas Belchí, Joaquín, y Pérez Perucha, Julio. *Florentino Hernández Girbal y la defensa del cinema español*. Universidad de Murcia-Asociación Española de Historiadores del Cine, Murcia, 1991.
- López Clemente, José. "Directores españoles de ayer: Arturo Ruiz Castillo." *Arte Fotográfico* 332 (1979): 1041-46.
- Michelson, Annette. "The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System." *October* 52 (1990): 17-38.
- . "Eisenstein at 100: Recent Reception and Coming Attractions." *October* 88 (1999): 69-85.
- Richter, Hans. "A History of the Avantgarde." Frank Stauffacher, ed. *Art in Cinema*. San Francisco: Museum of Art, 1947: 6-21.
- Rotellar, Manuel. *Cine español de la República*. Saint Sebastian: Festival Internacional del Cine, 1977.
- Ruiz-Castillo, Arturo. "El crucero universitario." *Crucero Universitario por el Mediterráneo*. Ed. Juan Pérez de Ayala. Madrid: Residencia de Estudiantes. 23-24.
- Sitney, Paul Adams, ed. *Film Culture Reader*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000.
- Virilio, Paul. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Wollen, Peter. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*. London: Verso, 1982.

## APPENDIX I

Arturo R. Castillo, "Some things about our films." *Compluto*, 1.2 (November 1932): 23-25.

One has to do things and not talk about them. But, sometimes one has to talk and not just talk the talk, so that others do not talk and become disoriented. I say this because maybe one of the things that has hurt film the most has been to write about it. Nothing comes out of the hands of critics as pure as it came in, much less film, which by its very incomprehensibility has escaped from the hands like a shiny and recently caught fish.

When doing a little more calmly the history of film, one will see how all the essential moments of this history are those in which someone tried to liberate film from literature or some other trickery. And all of this evolution of film in order to establish itself as an independent and authentic art is thought by the intentions of those who want to make of it a new medium of old expression.

Film can not serve to express a more modern way what so far has been expressed through more or less inadequate medium, but that all original means of expression needs something original to say it, because it is precisely this uniqueness of the content that

produces the originality of the means of expression.

Today there is an idea that has been forgotten, which has been the savior of the movies produced, or rather than forgotten, assimilated and taken into account, but misleading. This idea, or conception of cinema, which in front of an entire film tradition defended the purity of the cinematic vision, the vision without content plot without overwhelming logic and shackled.

I doubt very much that there is a show better than a dream. And precisely the cinema is the medium of expression that can best perform this wonderful lack of interlocking, this absence of everything real, though perfectly real, that is what we love about the dream.

Therefore, when we have tried to express through the cinema an aesthetic idea, we have always followed that purity, that freedom that leads to pure image or poetic imagination. It is perhaps in our film *Houses and Things*, where that ineffable feeling can be perceived, that is achieved at the sight of the poetic elements triggered, that is, without chains, or other ties that would obscure the pure flow of image, action, because ultimately the film is nothing but the pure action converted into image.

We have always been preoccupied about this element of the action, because action is the essence of cinema. Everything made static, standing, in the film are merely literary paralysis and deformities. The introduction of the foreground and slow action, are the introduction of psychology in film, Literature from the false. There cannot be but action in that which by its very materiality is constantly moving, everything else is intents to wrong and distort what is in essence the Cinema.

We have also been concerned about the consistent idea of the dream. Because it cannot be said, indeed, that in sleep there is no logic, but there is a logic of the dream, or in a dream. There is in it, events that necessarily are produced with arrangements of certain laws that do not surprise us, but they produce in us the sharp anguish that we still remember when we wake up. And this feeling of anxiety is what we have tried to achieve in our movie *Two Days Without Water*, which is presented in events that are not related but only by subconscious needs, by unreal logic, anxiety and obsession about something that pursue us and is little by little catching up. It is, then, transferred to the screen the harrowing sensation in our dreams we are caught by those who chase us in the dream.

Finally, in the film *To Shift* (Study on the sensitivity), we tried to achieve a process of diversification of consciousness in the same subject, caused by the anguish of not being able to return to his time in the past, and the return to that past moment rebuilding backwards everything that happened. It is a very interesting film, which shows various aspects of an action as it takes its normal development or disrupted development, starting with the end and ending at the beginning.

Because among other things from the many virtues that have not been exploited in film, there is this to be out of time, not subject and this tiny moment that is now present and that flees into the past, unable to stop or return to find.

## APPENDIX II

Arturo Ruiz Castillo, "The theater of war." *El Mono Azul*, 4.47 (February 1939):102-3.

Usually people talk about themselves and are critical of everything else. About film, little has been said and much has been written, but has been written about this or that actress, her costumes and her whims, her divorces and her cheated husbands.

In Spain little and bad cinema has been done, and this is known around the world. In Spain there are great studies, technical equipment and the best technicians as the best foreigner. Geographically it is a privileged country. Has tremendous and arid plains, lush valleys, hot sand, very intense vegetation, icy mountains, a beautiful sun, a blue and a gentle sea, a coast terribly punished by a raging sea. A country like this: peaceful, stormy, sweet and surly. And yet this extraordinary setting is still there waiting. There are also writers, painters, photographers, actors and residents simply filled with great intuition.

Why has film not been made? Let's see. The silent film came and went and left through Spain and left us nothing. The sound film or spoken came to show us how on the screen you can do horrible things, spoken and sung in bad theater, bad literature, bad photography and bad taste. Came to filled us with sorrow, to those who believed to have found an illusion in it.

I do not deny some exception in the false effort obtained by making a bit of frivolity. Also in war this frivolity can be found, but bad, that the good has its charms.

And so the good cinema remained hidden in a privileged brain, but late, and thrown into this war, unpublished forever.

I, the viewer, complain of this wonderful absent art. Essence of all the arts by an accumulation of them. Filmmakers, give them light in the eyes of the film, which are wide-eyed and very narrowed! And able to capture it all!

We are at war and we are in Spain. The year is 1938, two years of a new life to be lived very quickly now that death haunts us closely.

The Spaniards want to catch up, they are in a hurry. In less than a year they have made a formidable army, and are now making a great nation. And now the war is war, and in war all is war. The cinema in war will also be a weapon to use.

Progress and deadly inventions have made of war an unbearable and difficult art. Photography has risen to the level of the circumstances and has become complicated. If the camera is like a gun, the film camera would be the machine gun firing its 24 frames per second, launching its wounding bursts onto the battlefield, but their shots will not be never lost. Afterwards, the laboratory shows us again the extraordinary scene of combat. And then the repetition will launch a few copies around the world, stuck in tin boxes, and there they will go for him for a lifetime. It will be the tormented souls of the twentieth century.

That war film has all the importance of an authentic observer and a true historian, but it is also like the living conscience of what it was. At this time, filmmakers, real soldiers in the war of news, truth and lies, are making the principle of the good film that can be done in Spain. His great films will then be bloody memories for themselves and, simultaneously, a great tribute. Young filmmakers, stand firm, may your eyes without fear pull up the stark reality of the tragedy and glory of Spain! And when the war ends the film will be mature and be one more surprise to the world, one of many that Spain shall give.

Filmmakers, I, the viewer, will cross over to your side...