

Cinimalore: *State of Siege* as a Case Study

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Introduction

This paper examines the configurations of "cinimalore" and applies the cinimalore approach in a case study. For cinimalore the film is a document not unlike other historical materials. Just as the historian interprets data and written documents for complexity, so, too, film analysts must interpret the film image in its multiple aspects. Within the realm of cinimalore, film can be interpreted both as an image of reality and an element of lore. By focusing upon the latter, we aspire to de-emphasize the analysis of film as an aesthetic medium and to stimulate scholarly interest in cinema as a component of social myth.

Cinimalore is conceived as part of the lore of and about elites in contrast to the masses or folk. Thus lore is defined as noninstitutionalized knowledge in both folklore (its traditional or popular sense) and in elitelore (as seen in conceptual and perceptual information and views manipulated by unique individuals to justify their leadership).¹ Whereas the study of folklore is seen also to focus on such derivative fields as Indianlore and popularlore, the

¹ For discussion of the distinction between folklore and elitelore (folklore is found in the lives of both followers and leaders but elitelore is found only among leaders, if at varying degrees according to level of leadership), see James W. Wilkie, *Elitelore* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1973) and James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, "Dimensions of Elitelore: An Oral History Questionnaire," *Journal of Latin American Lore*, 1: 1 (1975).

examination of elitelore deals with its derivative genres, cinemalore and literaturelore. While distinction is made between the lore of those who lead and those who follow, we must recognize the interrelationship that exists between the two.. The lore of the elite, for example, is selectively influenced by popular belief, thereby creating an intellectual view of what the... folk" are all about.² Conversely, elite conceptions of the folk may be so persuasively presented in great literature that they come to be accepted as expressing the unarticulated folkways of the masses. This processual interrelationship of folklore and elitelore can be called "lore in the making," and it is what this paper is about. When film is examined in this light rather than through traditional film criticism, we can begin to see the cinema not as simply involving "truth" or "justice" but also as revealing important aspects of the lore of the time. In short, we suggest that the term cinemalore gives conscious form to analysis of the film as part of the customs, beliefs, ritual, and social myth that must be examined if we are to begin to understand our own time as well as times gone by.

The film *State of Siege* was chosen for our case study because, of its impact upon the public and upon academia since its release in 1973, public reference and debate having examined its implications as a valid historical record of events in the Tupamaro urban guerrilla rebellion from 1963 to 1972 against the Uruguayan government. This work by the Greek filmmaker Constantin Costa-Gavras is important because it utilizes fine cinema technique and powerful acting to transform political issues into a popular emotional experience. *State of Siege* purportedly "documents" the view that oven U.S. aid to Latin America really involves covert U.S. counter-insurgency that terrorizes and tortures whole societies. The sustained success of *State of Siege* in arousing audience indictment of U.S. involvement in Latin America is due largely to its simple message: the United States is the villain responsible for the underdevelopment of Uruguay, and hence Latin America. Implying that Uruguay is dependent upon U.S. trade and investment, the film urges that the U.S. yoke be broken.

While U.S. intervention in some Latin American countries might be attributed to the maintenance of local markets and local investments, recent statistics on trade between the United States and Uruguay suggest that this factor is not fully applicable in the case of Uruguay.³ The value of the film as an historical document. Therefore, is compromised, as is the generalization upon which it is based. More significant are issues which Costa-Gavras has

² For an analysis of such literature, see Maria Herrera Sobek, "The Function of Folklore in Gabriel Garcia Marquez," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975.

³ In 1972 the United States accounted for only 3.5 percent of Uruguay's exports (down from but 15 percent in 1960) and 12.9 percent of its imports. At the same time, 39.8 percent of Uruguay's imports came from the Latin American Free Trade Area. See *Statistical Abstracts of Latin America*, vol. 16 (1972), 502; and James W. Wilkie, *Statistical and National Policy* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1974), p. 290.

only marginally examined, such as Uruguay's imbalanced economic structure and the righteous moralism that characterizes U.S. foreign relations with small countries.

Through documentation of a single case *State of Siege* tries to slice through the complexities and ambiguities of twentieth-century affairs to offer the essence of truth in which the masses like to believe and for which intellectuals try to search. By documenting a case with which neither audience nor film critics have been sufficiently aware, the filmmaker is able to at once expose evil and at the same time be relatively free of scholarly criticism. Moreover, film criticism generally has been known for analysis of form and style rather than for historical message, the filmmaker's art (or at least the film critic's expertise) being considered too fragile (or too limited) to delve into the facts of the case. Through this allowance of artistic license, we presumably encourage and gain access to universal truth that overrides the detail of unique cases.

Given this tradition of film criticism and viewer lack of familiarity with the Uruguayan case of Tupamaro urban guerrilla action,⁴ most viewers have had to sort out for themselves the historical meaning of the film. And given the general lack of mass and intellectual sophistication concerning the film's subject matter, its structure, and its documentary status, there is little wonder that the subthemes of the film (including the role of political kidnapping and the goals of urban guerrillas) remain clouded in the public eye. Briefly stated, if we are to develop a new role for the historical documentary, must not we have a new type of film analysis critically sensitive to politicohistorical issues? Should not the events and issues posed by the sophisticated filmmaker be criticized on historical grounds in order to help unsophisticated audiences understand what they see?

With the filmic approach to history and contemporary life being increasingly used by academicians, debate about the historical documentary has involved a specific issue: Should a film be "true historically" or can film fiction better present the "inner truth" of the photographed themes? Writing about *State of Siege*, Mark Falcoff and E. Bradford Burns take opposing views of this question (see pp. 239-256 and pp. 257-263. below). And while it would appear from reading their arguments that film criticism has reached an impasse with regard to such films as *State of Siege*, we argue that the concept of cinemalore provides an analytic umbrella under which film as fiction and film as history can be examined to further scholarship.

In our view, then, development of theory and methodology for under-

⁴ The few journalistic works available (see, for example, Maria Esther Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas* [New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972] and *Generals and Tupamaro; The Struggle for Power in Uruguay, 1969-1973* [London: Latin American Review of Books, 1974]) only recently have been supplanted by scholarly analysis (see James Kohl and John Litt, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974]; and Donald C. Hodges, *The Latin American Revolution: Politics and Strategy* (New York: Morrow, 1974).

standing the film is crucial to understanding the role of film, especially when it plays a role documenting historical processes. Difficulty in analyzing the film to date stems more from an absence of critical theory and methodology than from the filmmaker's lack of clarity. It is the concept of cinemalore that provides a viable alternative to this vacuum. By refocusing traditional methods of film criticism to place filmmaking into a context of mythmaking, we seek to overcome the argument that because of the film's "art form," its message should not be subjected to the same canons of scholarly analysis as other forms of mythmaking.

Theory and Methodology of Cinemalore

Lore in the case of cinema refers to the folklore created intellectually through the medium of the film as well as to the lore of the filmmaker about how and why films are to be made. Another way of looking at cinemalore is to see it as involving two main bodies of information, one human and one technical, both being integrated into the filmmaker's lore and both involving manipulation of the filmic process.⁵ Questions such as the following indicate the spheres wherein revolve the filmmaker's lore: What were the intentions of the cineast? What themes and stylistics did he employ in previous productions? What might one deduce about his film based upon his training as a filmmaker?

As a means of evaluating this human input, the film analyst has access to several types of resource material, each traditionally used in isolation from or in weak, combination with the others: First, he can review, for example, the published material written about or by the cineast (filmmaker). Here, owing to several factors, the interview is of particular importance. Not only do oral interviews appear in film journals with relative frequency,⁶ but in most interviews, filmmakers are inclined both to discuss their films and to provide

⁵ A major difficulty in evaluating the filmmaker's technical input is that several aesthetic devices such as the close-up shot tend to elicit a particular response from the viewer. Thus, even if the cineast consciously used such a device to elicit that response, there would be no concrete means of determining to what extent the use of that device constitutes the lore of the cineast and to what degree it represents the qualitative structure of the medium.

⁶ In the case of Costa-Gavras, we have used no less than seven published interviews: (i) Dan Georgakas and Gary Crowdus, "Costa-Gravas Talks about Z," *Cineaste*, 3:3 (Winter 1969-1970), 12-16; (ii) David Austen, "Pointing Out the Problems: An Interview with Costa Gavras," *Film and Filming*, 16:9 (June 1970); (iii) Guy Braucourt, "An Interview with Costa Gavras and Jorge Semprun," *Film Society Reviews*, 6:5 (January 1971), 43-47; (iv) Harold Kalishman and Gary Crowdus, "A Films Is Like a Match: You can Make a Big Fire or Nothing at All," *Cineaste*, 6:1 (Winter 1972-1973), 2-7; (v) Michele Ray, "Interview with Franco Solinas and Costa-Gavras," *State of Siege* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), pp 141-158; (vi) Gary Gilson, "Interview with Costa Gavras," *Film and History*, 3:2 (May 1973), 11-20; (vii) Bruce Berman, "A Conversation with Costa-Gavras," *Take One*, 3:12 (November 1973), 23-26.,

the d'être for their work. This, in effect, provides access to their "(a) self-perception, (b) self-organization of ideas ... and (c) self-justification for actions . . . ," factors delineated as the basic elements in the concept of *elitelore*.⁷ And, a knowledgeable interviewer can often elicit candid responses from his subject.⁸ In the case of *cinematore*, this candor is generated when the interviewer enters into a relationship of empathy with the filmmaker in order to transmit the cineast's ideas to "the public." Film elite may be encouraged to speak frankly also because, in contrast to self-explanation, the interview situation does not give the appearance of arrogance in discussing personal achievements; most elites desire to act humbly even as they take credit for decisions or roles.⁹

Second, the analyst can examine biographical material, hopefully testing out his inferences in oral history interviews. While full biographies on most filmmakers are not available, skeletal biographies can be used to provide invaluable insight into the filmmaker's lore. For example, where did the cineast spend his childhood and adolescence? (This factor helps us to understand cultural intents.) At what university or film institute did the filmmaker study? (From this information we can draw inferences about the filmmaker's theoretical orientation.¹⁰) Under which producer-directors did the subject work? (This information is useful in suggesting the filmmaker's employment of particular film language elements or a particular film genre.)

Third, the analyst can study the cineast's other productions to develop a multiprong approach to the lore of and about cinema. Proponents of the "auteur theory" have used this approach in attempting to define cinema trends, and, in particular, to identify the stylistics of the "great" filmmakers. The basis of logic for auteurism is that a filmmaker develops a unique cadre of stylistics and film structure from which he does not deviate. Thus, characteristics which are identifiable in one film can generally be expected to appear in the cineast's other works.

Study of *cinematore*, then, provides a systematic means of analyzing the filmmaker's input. The film analyst's ability to strip away from principal

⁷ Wilkie, *Elitelore*, p. 9.

⁸ Among many film scholars, however, it is believed that oral interviews do not represent the cineast's actual beliefs. The reasoning is that most filmmakers look upon their films as self-contained entities and they would not have spent two years making a film if they could have expressed the same ideas in the context of words.

⁹ As noted in Wilkie, *Elitelore*, pp. 9 and 55, since the interview is not initiated by the leader, he does not lose dignity by talking "the initiative in telling his own story".

¹⁰ Because most film schools are inclined towards one particular mode or type of productions, we can conjecture that the filmmakers's own style was influenced, at least in part, by his academic training. On the one hand, a good example of film school inclinations is seen at the University of California, Los Angeles, where the focus is upon experimental production. On the other hand, at the University of Southern California, located but a few miles away, concern is with commercial cinema.

themes such "extraneous" material as technical "devices" or misleading film language is of particular importance in evaluating the increasingly popular "fictional documentary", of which *State of Siege* is an outstanding example. The term "fictional documentary" was coined by Joan Mellen,¹¹ and it has been used insightfully with regard to Latin American cinema by E. Bradford Bums.

For Bums, the fictional documentary film shares much in common with the documentary film because both are concerned with and interpret reality creatively and imaginatively: "In the nonfictional documentary, imagination is used in the technique of presentation, whereas the fictional [documentary] relates something imaginary or semi-imaginary. It takes some license with reality. Imagination is used to reconstruct situations that reflect and symbolize reality."¹²

The potential problems of the fictional documentary can be seen in Mellen's *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers*¹³ wherein she writes (p. 57): "Although it cannot claim to express the actual facts, *The Battle of Algiers* saturates us with the atmosphere of truth. For the duration of the film its images substitute for real events and immerse us into one man's view of the truth." It would seem from these scholarly observations that the fictional documentary filmmaker strives to capture this "inner truth.. by simplifying the complex process of historical causation. It should be noted, too, that in using substitute events to move beyond a superficial reality, the fictional documentary cineast may create as many myths as he destroys. And since no one man is ever apt to find complete truth, arguments that it has been found should, perhaps, be taken with great suspicion.

Yet, it could be argued that this "atmosphere of truth" reality provides the best kind of history, because it goes beyond the historical documents to re-create the emotion of the issues so often left out of traditional histories. John Womack, Jr. has indicated the importance of this historical approach in commenting upon another fictional documentary about Latin America, John Steinbeck's *Viva Zapata!*:

¹¹ See Joan Mellen, "Film and Style: The Fictional Documentary" (1973), reprinted in E. Bradford Bums, *Latin American Cinema: Film and History* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1975), pp. 67-92. According to Mellen (pp. 67-68), "the mid-nineteen sixties saw in world cinema a renaissance of the fictional rooted in concrete historical contexts whose action expressed the social conflicts of the decade and in some cases the century. In literature this form was developed during the same period by the "nonfictional novel," exemplified in Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*. Both nonfiction novel and fictional documentary aspire to revitalize their art in implicit protest against the retreat from commitment" and to explore the recent by giving "meaning" to history. "meaning," which destroys the "mystification of the political."

¹² Burns, *Latin American Cinema*, p. 15

¹³ Joan Meller, *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

In telescoping the whole revolution into one dramatic episode, the movie distorts certain events and characters, some grossly; but it quickly and vividly develops a portrayal of Zapata, the villages, and the nature of their relations and movement that I find still subtle, powerful, and true ... (the screenplay including in its) simplification some factual details that complicated the superhumanly heroic image of Zapata that then prevailed -like his marriage to the daughter of a hostile local rancher, his difficulties with her, etc.-details which were then practically unknown...

and which made the character more true to life and interesting.¹⁴ A question which arises in light of Womack's commentary is whether the fictional documentary should be judged as factual history (i.e., "fact" versus "fiction") or moral history (i.e., "right" versus "wrong"). Bearing this question in mind, let us examine the essence of *State of Siege*.

Cinemalore Applied: The Essence of *State of Siege*

In a fictional documentary like *State of Siege*, where the viewer is beset by a complex network of themes, a methodological framework is needed to "deconstruct" the film and to identify its core, its substructural development. Here, the methodological framework is cinemalore, and the film's substructure hinges upon the function of the individual. The key in identifying this substructural element is to locate patterns in Costa-Gavras's thematic development, his film language, and his expressed and unexpressed intentions-in short, his lore.

The core element in Costa-Gavras's lore is the apparent contradiction between content and form that characterizes his films. He presents his material as factually based: yet the film itself is developed in fictional formal. To analyze this lore is to identify the filmmaker's use of technical devices, genre, and expressed intentions.

That *State of Siege* develops the roles of several characters is misleading. The individuals with whom we identify-Philip Michael Santore (in real life Dan A. Mitrione), a "communications technician" for the Agency for International Development (AID); Hugo, the Tupamaro leader, and Carlos Ducas, the veteran journalist-are merely extensions of their respective groups. They function as auxiliaries to much larger systems. And, as the film reveals, individuals are expendable; the system is not. Even the leaders-Hugo (the Tupamaros) and Santore (AID)-are quickly replaced.

We should be careful, however, not to equate "individual" with person and "system" with non-person. Indeed, Costa-Gavras has identified this same structural relationship between individual and system among non-person

¹⁴ Quoted in Robert E. Morsberger, *Viva Zapata! The Original Screenplay by John Steinbeck* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 137 and 139. The Screenplay was based upon Steinbeck's own innovative research.

entities. In *State of Siege*, for example, the Pacheco government (individual) is almost toppled because of its inability to subvert the activities of the Tupamaros. Accordingly, it is the oligarchy (system) which is called "into session" in order to remedy the situation. This same structure is identified by Santore, who, at the International Policy Academy, to his "students" forthrightly proclaims: "Governments [individual] come and go. The police [system] remain."¹⁵

The film's depiction of the two competing entities-the government and the Tupamaros-does not reflect the reality of their respective comparative powers. The Tupamaros, though defeated by 1972,¹⁶ are portrayed in 1973 as being the stronger of the two. The government seems to be a second-rate power, a lackey of the military. This, in fact, is exactly how Costa-Gavras intended these groups to be interpreted. In terms of his structural relationship, the Tupamaros constitute a system, the government-an individual.

To carry out this analogy in accordance with the auteur theory, let us examine two other films by Costa-Gavras, *Z* and *The Confession*. In *Z* the military again represents a "systemized" entity. We are initially appalled that a constitutional figure (Lambrakis) can be eliminated by a governmental auxiliary. the army. We are left dumbfounded at the film's end when this "auxiliary" usurps the nation's constitutional powers. For Costa-Gavras all political conflicts can ultimately be analyzed as uncompromised struggles between two competing systems. The colonel in *Z*, for example, metaphorically characterized the struggle in which he was involved as a revolutionary "disease" being fought by: counter-insurgent "anti-bodies." In *State of Siege*, the U.S. agent Philip Santore (Mitrione) conveys the same idea in more precise terms: "You are subversives, Communists. You want to destroy the foundations of society, the fundamental values of our Christian civilization.... You are an enemy who must be fought in every possible way."¹⁷ "When Hugo responds to this polemic with "I don't think we have anything more to say to each other." Costa-Gavras is indicating that there is no room

¹⁵ Franco Solinas and Constantin Costa-Gavras, *State of Siege* (New York: Ballantine. 1973), p.73.

¹⁶ In the November 1971 presidential election more than 80 percent of the voters cast their ballots for the traditional *colorado* and *blanco* parties against the Tupamaro-oriented Broad Leftist Front, which won only 18.4 percent of the votes; see Kenneth Ruddle and Philip D. S. Gillette, eds., *Latin American Political Statistics* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications. 1972), pp. 98 and 114. This electoral defeat, to which the Tupamaros reacted with a campaign of terror, was followed by crushing losses to the Uruguayan security forces, several thousand Tupamaro suspects being jailed and several hundred hideouts being discovered. Thus in mid-1973 even the Tupamaros admitted that they had been completely defeated by the crackdown that began in April 1972-see the *Miami Herald*, August 4, 1973, for discussion of this Tupamaro communique which blames defeat on "our deficiencies and our treasons" and "millionaire assistance given by North Americans."

¹⁷ Solinas and Costa-Gavras, *State of Siege*, p. 100.

