

Memories of Underdevelopment (1968), directed by Tomas Guitierrez Alea
Film Workshop by Caryn Cline

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based on the novel *Inconsolable Memories* by Edmundo Desnoes

Sergio Corrieri (Sergio)
Daisy Granados (Elena)
Eslinda Nunez (Noemi)

The opening scene of the dance establishes several stylistic and thematic motifs. It looks like documentary footage, shot in the midst of the crowd, with a hand-held camera. It is a scene of celebration which is interrupted by violence. The dance scene is repeated later in the film. We see it first from one perspective, then from another. It ends with a **freeze frame** of a young Afro-Cuban woman looking directly at the camera, directly at us.

The second time we see the dance sequence, toward the end of the film, it is presented from a different perspective. This time, the music is **non-diegetic**, and now we see that Sergio is in the crowd. He is in the crowd, definitely, but is he a part of the crowd?

What other examples can you find of Sergio's moving in the opposite direction from other people?

Throughout the film, we experience scenes, characters, situations from more than one perspective. This shift in perspectives is announced in a scene near the beginning of the film, when we see Sergio saying good-bye to his parents and wife at the airport. At first, we see Sergio's impassive face as he says good-bye to them. A little later, we see the same scene, but this time we see the **reverse angle**: his parents' faces, his wife Laura's face. We see their grief and confusion. We've learned something about Sergio in both "takes" of the scene. Another example is the tape recorded conversation with Laura, which we first hear while Sergio goes through the things she left behind when she went to Miami, but which we see later in a flashback, when we witness the effect on Laura. What other examples of this shift in perspective can you identify? What do we see from Sergio's perspective and what do we see of Sergio?

How does the telescope in Sergio's apartment operate as a metaphor for his character?

Another way in which the film plays with shifting perspectives is to "interrupt" the narrative flow with related documentary and historical footage. This happens repeatedly in the film. Apart from the documentary quality of the opening scene, the first real documentary footage is of the fire at "El Encanto," a downtown Havana department store which was firebombed as an act of sabotage in 1961. These documentary sequences tell a different story from the one that Sergio is telling, or the one that is being told about him. There are a variety of types of documentary footage. What are they? [Gutierrez Alea says that some of the street scenes in the "Sergio" narrative were filmed with a hidden camera, in order to catch people in candid moments.] What purpose do you suppose these sequences serve in the film?

The film includes a number of different "chapters," most of them involving someone who has or had a relationship with Sergio: Pablo, Elena, Noemi, Hanna, etc. In each, we learn something about Sergio. What sort of impressions do we begin to accumulate about him?

How do the women function in this film? Hanna? Laura? Elena? Noemi?

There is an extended sequence at Ernest Hemingway's house in Havana. The writer lived there for many years, and after his suicide (in 1964) his wife gave it to the Cuban government. Alea draws both narrative and visual parallels here between Sergio and Hemingway. What are they? He's also making broader social/political comments. What might those be?

The round table discussion on "Literature and Underdevelopment" is another important sequence in the film. One of the participants on the panel is **Edmundo Desnoes**, who wrote the novel on which the film we are seeing is based. Here is another level of "reflexivity" in the film. The camera frames the panel in a wide shot. Pay close attention to what is being said and shown in this shot. There are (at least) two critiques at work here. One visual, the other verbal. What are they?

The title takes on a variety of meanings. Discuss what you think those might be.

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