

***La ultima cena (The Last Supper, 1977)*, directed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea  
Film Workshop by Caryn Cline**

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In this film, there is a stark contrast between the way most of the film story is photographed and the way the central scene of “the last supper” is photographed. What can you say about this difference, considering the “look” of the film, the color palette, the lighting, the camera movement, the acting, the use of music?

The central characters: the count, the priest, the overseer (Don Manual), the sugar-refinery technician (Don Gaspar), and Sebastian, the slave, are constantly being juxtaposed in the film. Discuss these juxtapositions and how they help deepen our understanding of the themes of the film.

How is Alea’s handling of the film, particularly his characterizations of the slaves, different from the way Hollywood would have approached a film like this? [Note: one account of the film I read said that the black actors are mostly non-professionals, and that Alea worked with them in a series of improvisational rehearsals to develop their characters.]

There is a clear and obvious hierarchy on the plantation. How does the casting of the actors playing Don Gaspar, Don Manual and the count help underscore this hierarchy?

The scene in the sugar mill, in which Don Gaspar discusses the refining process and his innovations, serves as a metaphor for the film. Why?

Think about the music and how it works. Leo Brower uses both traditional Western and Afro-Cuban musical motifs in the film. Under what circumstances is each motif employed?

Discuss what you think is Alea’s central thesis in this film.

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