



THE VAMPIRES OF POVERTY (Agarrando pueblo, 1978)

SYNOPSIS

Agarrando pueblo (The Vampires of Poverty) is a parody directed against the vices of this type of “social” and “testimonial” cinema. In the film, two such filmmakers travel around impoverished sectors of the cities of Bogotá and Cali in search of the images of abjection needed to complete a documentary commissioned by German TV. With a brilliant use of black humor, and the concept of the film within the film, a silent B/W camera allows audiences to document the “vampire” filmmakers’ itinerary as they induce, capture, and recount color images of beggars, prostitutes, children who live on the streets, and a whole list of marginal urban characters they must include in their production. These filmmakers are thus equated to vampires who feed off the sweat, misery, and blood of subaltern, marginal subjects.

About THE VAMPIRES OF POVERTY

“Deliberately detached from the accusatory militant left, Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo launch in 1978 what could be called their cinematic-political thesis: *Agarrando Pueblo (The Vampires of Poverty)*, an outrageous protest of national and international documentary models, which at the time – and even today – shamelessly exploited all kinds of third-world suffering (referred to by the directors as “poverty-porn”) and exported it to European television stations and festivals. Counterinformative from beginning to end and in every sense of the word, the film mixes staged and real scenes of a typical film crew commissioned by a Germany television channel to seek out archetypical social horrors, trampling over the basic principles of professional ethics, the meaning of information and – naturally – sociological research.”

Isleni Cruz Carvajal
Documentary in Latin America

“*Oiga, vea*—along with Rodríguez and Silva’s *Chircales*— pioneered the development of short film and documentary Third Cinema in Colombia, opening new possibilities in terms of filmic exploration and expression, and relationship with audiences, besides generating new interest and venues for non-commercial exhibition. But whereas the importance of Ospina and Mayolo’s film in inaugurating the era of militant films is widely acknowledged, their short documentary/fiction film *Agarrando pueblo (The Vampires of Poverty)* is recognized as a film which closed off that entire era—i.e., there is a definite “before” and an “after” *Agarrando pueblo* in the field of social documentary. The decade before this film was made, the sociopolitical and cultural processes initiated in Latin America after the Cuban Revolution had started generating a way of making documentaries which had increasingly called the attention of European critics since the mid-1960s, and their critical support had a direct subsequent incidence



in the foundation of a new Latin American film cannon. Especially after the 1968 Pesaro festival, “Europe was starting to avidly consume anything coming from South America that contained a bit of folklore or ‘revolution’”.”

Felipe Gómez
*Short Film and Documentary Third Cinema
in Colombia: the case of Luis Ospina*

PURE BLOOD **(Pura sangre, 1982)**

SYNOPSIS

The story deals with an old and bedridden sugar tycoon who communicates with the outside world through closed circuit tv and his strange ailment requires constant transfusions of plasma, which must be drawn from white and male youngsters. The sick man’s son blackmails three of his employees into providing a steady supply, which they obtain by the simple expedient of kidnapping and raping children whom they kill withdrawing all their blood: after which they discard the naked bodies of the unwitting donors in the countryside. The disappearance of the young people develops into local panic and the creation of a mythic “Monster of the Valley”.

About PURE BLOOD

“ The Cali Group (Caliwood) gathered around the writer Andrés Caicedo (1951-1977) as its nucleus. The group was educated in cinema clubs and with much creative drive, began by way of underground filmmaking. In the Eighties, when their prophet Caicedo committed suicide, the group began to experiment with commercial full-length features, applying a mix of genre cinema and intellectual parody that did not become popular with the public. Luis Ospina made a sarcastic commentary about Colombian landowners in *Pura sangre*, with excellent technical level and a very chilling approximation”

Luis Alberto Alvarez
Colombian Cinema: Silent and Talking
Entreextremos, No. 2, 1996

“Nurse Florencia is no Florence Nightingale. She travels around with two chauffeurs, nabs young boys off the street, drugs them, drains their blood and throws away the bodies. She gives the blood to her boss’s father, an ailing sugar tycoon who is too cheap to buy transfusions from the local blood bank. Nurse Florencia is the leading character in a new movie *Pura sangre* (*Pure Blood*)...The film looks like a grade-B movie. But



is, in fact, a modern political parable about the rich capitalist who lives off the lifeblood of the defenseless. “The story of the vampire has always been a political one,” says the film’s director, Luis Ospina. “It is a tale of power.”

Newsweek,
June 13, 1983

BREATH OF LIFE (*Soplo de vida*, 1999)

SYNOPSIS

Breath of Life is a Colombian film noir. The story revolves around a young woman (GOLONDRINA), murdered in a cheap hotel in Bogota. By chance, an ex-cop (EMERSON) becomes the private investigator of the crime. Without knowing the true identity of the victim, he reconstructs, in the course of his investigation, fragments of her life. He discovers that she was sentimentally involved with several men: a defeated boxer (MARTILLO), a blind lottery salesman (MAGO), a cowardly bullfighter (JOSE LUIS), and a corrupt politician (MEDARDO). What begins as a casual investigation of a crime of passion ends up involving the private eye when he discovers that he, too, was part of the victim’s life...

About BREATH OF LIFE

“A clever use of noir to provoke a series of meditations about history and violence at the end of the century in Colombia. *Breath of Life* is set in the context of the Armero disaster in 1985 - a volcanic mudslide which, conveniently for the government, buried investigations about a political tragedy that occurred only a few days before (the incident of the Palacio de Justicia). The film in some senses 'unburies' this tragedy although does not, as viewers will see, refer to the Palacio incident. Instead it uncovers structures of machismo, corruption, drug-trafficking (to some extent) and social breakdown that natural discourses of violence often forget. Aesthetically it is quite heterogeneous, and blends noir scenes (marginal locations, nighttime shots, black and white) with images of the post-apocalyptic landscape of Armero. Great performances all round, a wonderful script, and an absolute feast of cinematic references for film buffs out there who are doubtless more knowledgeable than I am. A breath of life (and of fresh air) for Colombian cinema at the end of the millennium.”

Rory O’Bryen
University of Cambridge



**THE SUPREME UNEASINESS: INCESSANT
PORTRAIT OF FERNANDO VALLEJO**
(**La desazón suprema: retrato incesante de Fernando Vallejo, 2003**)

SYNOPSIS

The Supreme Uneasiness: Incessant Portrait of Fernando Vallejo is a feature-length documentary about the controversial Colombian writer exiled in Mexico. Despite having directed three films and written five autobiographical novels, Fernando Vallejo was practically unknown until the publication and later film adaptation of *Our Lady of the Assassins*, directed by Barbet Schroeder. Expressing shamelessly his loves and hates, Vallejo breaks with an ingrained literary tradition: that of the omniscient writer who sees and knows everything. The documentary not only covers his literary output but also his many interests: film, music, science and politics. Made with the full support and participation of the author, *The Supreme Uneasiness* provides a candid and disturbing portrait of one of the best writers of the Spanish language.

About THE SUPREME UNEASINESS

“Finally, a documentary that makes the writing process as fascinating as the profiled writer—in this case Fernando Vallejo, an openly homosexual provocateur who abandoned his native Colombia for Mexico in 1971 but was little known outside Latin America until the publication of his novel *Our Lady of the Assassins*. His conversations with Luis Ospina for this 2003 video range from the death of Colombian society to the intrinsic honesty of the first person to the crime of bringing children into a violent world. A relentless critic, Vallejo spares neither himself nor others, dismissing Gabriel García Márquez as a facile scribbler and fearlessly denouncing statesmen who cooperate with drug cartels.”

Andrea Gronvall
Chicago Reader

“Luis Ospina's *The Supreme Uneasiness: Incessant Portrait of Fernando Vallejo* provides an open forum for the soft-spoken venom of the Colombian writer, a singular scribe who first came to global attention through Barbet Schroeder's cinematic adaptation of his novel *Our Lady of the Assassins*. Tonally somewhere between Celine and Genet, Vallejo eloquently speaks what most people don't even dare think... Vallejo spills his bile equally on the murderous left and murderous right whose decades-long battle has made Colombia a vast political graveyard. His abhorrence of reproduction (he considers bringing new life into this world the worst of crimes) stems from similar roots, though his explanation of why human beings should not procreate is alone worth the price of admission.”



Ronnie Scheib
Variety

A PAPER TIGER **(Un tigre de papel, 2007)**

SYNOPSIS

Pedro Manrique Figueroa, pioneer of collage in Colombia, has never had a biographer. For a very simple reason: his life is like an adventure novel that is both incomplete and contradictory, constantly linked to the sparkling uncertainties of oral tradition. Taking Manrique Figueroa's life and work as a pretext, this mockumentary takes the viewer on a journey through history from the year 1934 up until 1981, when the artist mysteriously disappeared from view. *A Paper Tiger* is itself a collage, where art and politics rub shoulders, where truth and lies are placed side by side, where documentary and fiction intermingle.

About A PAPER TIGER

“ Some critics have rejected classification of *A Paper Tiger* among examples of the fake documentary genre, arguing instead that it is a documentary in the strict sense of the term, even though not one about the proposed subject, the artist Pedro Manrique Figueroa. Because what Ospina's film ends up doing, notwithstanding its initial claim, is opening up an opportunity to retell and re-imagine a crucial period of modern Colombian history, from the undeclared civil war that began around the 1940s to the guerrilla wars and the first emergence in the 1970s of what would later become the powerful drug cartels... When the experts who claim to have met Manrique Figueroa add little fragments of their own personal memory to the portrait of the evanescent artist, they collectively recompose and reevaluate a portrait of a generation which was originally drawn along the ideological, party-based lines of a world starting to drown under the freezing waters of the Cold War...”

Felipe Gómez
*Short Film and Documentary Third Cinema
in Colombia: the case of Luis Ospina*