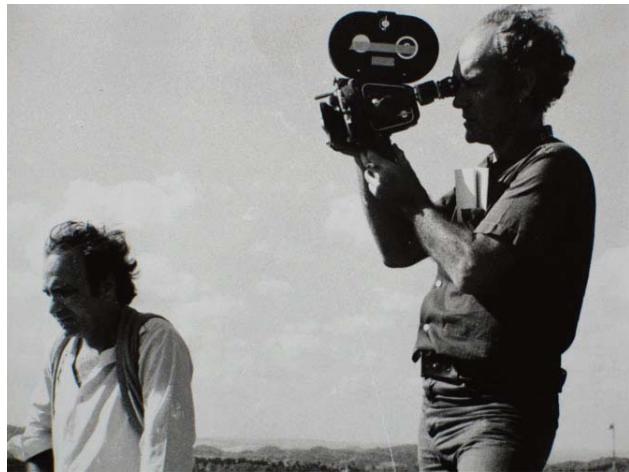


The Twelve Chairs



ambiguous bourgeois intellectual living in Havana in the period between the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The protagonist is unwilling to take a political stance one way or another, yet continues to despise the country around him for being backwards and underdeveloped. His life eventually fades into nothingness, becoming a personality which has no use in this new Cuba.

In a self-reflexive cameo appearance, Gutiérrez calls the film a “collage... with a little bit of everything”. Gutiérrez uses a dizzying array of materials and filmic styles in *Memories*, from documentary-style narrative sequences which use long unbroken shots taken from handheld cameras to agitational montage sequences reminiscent of the films of early Soviet filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein. *Memories* makes use of various types of media including direct documentary footage shot, still photos, archive and newreel footage, clips of Hollywood films, and recorded speeches by Fidel Castro and John F. Kennedy, to create a seemingly disarticulated film

language that is in direct contrast to the straightforward Hollywood style.

Although criticism of the Revolution and Cuban society was at the heart of not only *Memories*, but all of Gutiérrez's works, Gutiérrez continued to be a dedicated supporter of Cuban Socialism. But his works could hardly be described as propaganda either. Gutiérrez described the motivation for his contradictory approach by saying: "... cinema provides an active and mobilizing element, which stimulates participation in the revolutionary process. Then, it is not sufficient to have a moralizing cinema based on harangue and exhortation. We need a cinema that promotes and develops a critical attitude. But how to criticize and at the same time strengthen the reality in which we are immersed?"

Late career

In the following decades, Gutiérrez divided his time between making his own films and mentoring promising young filmmakers through ICAIC.

In 1972 and 1976, respectively, Gutiérrez completed two historical feature films, *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* (A Cuban Fight Against the Demons) and *La última cena* (The Last Supper). Both set in Spanish colonial Cuba, the films study contradictions and hypocrisy in Cuba's past of imperialism, religion, and slavery.

Hasta cierto punto (Up to a Certain Point) (ez's wife, Mirta Ibarra.) The film underwent some censorship and remains to this day considered by Cuban critics one of his lesser works, yet still an enjoyable film. Jokingly the director himself said that the film was only successful "up to a certain point"

In the early 1990s, Gutiérrez fell into ill health, forcing him to co-direct his last two films with his friend Juan Carlos Tabío. The first, *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate) (1993) became the first Cuban film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. The film's story centers on the oft conflictory relationship between a committed Marxist student and a flamboyantly gay artist. Gutiérrez's final film, *Guantanamera*, (1994) uses traditional elements such as an ensemble cast and romantic comedy to take a more subtle approach to Gutiérrez's old targets: underdevelopment and bureaucracy.

Titón, as he was known to his friends, died at age 68 on April 16, 1996. He is buried in the Colon Cemetery, Havana.

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Masterworks of Cuban Cinema

The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin

Cuba | 1967 | 104 minutes

Credits

Director	Julio García Espinosa
Screenplay	Julio García Espinosa Samuel Feijóo (novel)
Photography	Jorge Haydu
Music	Leo Brouwer / Manuel del Castillo / Luis Gómez

Cast

Juan Quin Quin	Júlio Martínez
Jachero	Erdwin Fernández
Teresa	Adelaida Raymat
Der Feind	Enrique Santiesteban

In Brief

A circus performer, tenant farmer, matador, and revolutionary, Juan Quin Quin (Julio Martinez) charges through this arch 1967 allegory and movie parody, but he's an icon with more spunk than substance. Just when it seems that he and his partner may make a go of the bullfighting business in Cuba, the main attraction gets loose, causing chaos in a breakneck action sequence that seems spontaneous, though it must have been carefully planned.

This reflexive farce includes other playful deceptions as well as thought balloons and intertitles containing jokes that are political platitudes and vice versa. It's all very lively, but the cumulative effect is of broadness for its own sake rather than the overhaul of film language that seems intended. The screenplay by director Julio García Espinosa was based on a novel by Samuel Feijoo.

- Lisa Alspector

An enormous compendium of different Cuban cultural elements is brought together in the making of *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin*. The film draws upon literary tradition as well as upon modern mass media conventions. It includes some sequences derived directly from Cuban popular culture, particularly village cultural life prior to the Revolution. Emphasis, however, remains on parodying cinematic representations. The title originally belonged to a novel, *Juan Quin Quin in Pueblo Mocho* by Samuel Feijoo, and the novelistic conventions are among the first to be reproduced and satirized in the film. Floral framing of the written titles separates the film into different sections: "Juan Quin Quin in Peacetime," "How Juan Quin Quin Met Teresa," etc. The character of Juan repeats in yet another version: the centuries-old, rebellious, antihero of Spanish popular culture who came into written literature in the sixteenth century. This picaresque tradition has had a long and vital presence in Hispanic novels and films. In typical picaresque manner, Juan, a man of very modest means, is subject to oppressive masters for whom he must work in order to survive — first, the priest, and later, the landlord and sugarmill manager who cheat him of the fruits of his labor.

Although the film is divided into episodic adventures, it is possible to reconstruct a linear narrative, tracing a series of unjust experiences throughout Juan's life which lead him finally to go to the Sierra and become a guerrilla leader, albeit a bungling one. Although certain sequences tempt the viewer to look for a narrative chronology, changes in setting constantly divert and interrupt narrative continuity.

In typically picaresque style, Juan's adventures in fact turn out to be primarily escapades through different cinematic genres, as one parody follows another. What passes successively across the screen would be most familiar to anyone going to movie theaters and watching television in the forties and fifties in Cuba — or elsewhere, for that matter. Among the series of parodies are these:

- * the introduction and credits, straight out of cinemascope Westerns;
- * Fellini-like, outdoor circus sequences, including one which recalls the lion episode from *Don Quixote*;
- * South-Seas-Esther-Williams-style setups involving exotic women from the circus;
- * Hollywood war films of the fifties;
- * Buster-Keaton-style episodes;
- * Hollywood detective films,
- * James-Bond-style, complete with wealthy oriental villains;
- * Hollywood musical scenes mixed with those where the boss is an oriental despot;
- * gangster-style chase sequences through industrial machinery.

The elaborate inappropriateness of the parodies in *Juan Quin Quin* succeeds in effectively calling attention to the artificiality and formulaic quality of the cinematic codes at work in each case. Several specific kinds of intervention contribute to this process:

- * exaggeration of satirical effects



The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin

- * abrupt changes of pace and setting;,,
- * incongruities between the soundtrack and image;
- * explicit editorial comment, such as, "Here we could insert a scene about the Latin American family or a U.N. meeting";
- * fracturing narrative expectations, as when an old woman, seen pacing and filmed in a neorealist style, exits the frame and is replaced by an exotic circus woman shot in a highly romanticized style;
- * repetition of sequences of the same subject filmed in alternating styles;
- * intervention of characters of one genre into the conventions of another genre, seen when Juan interrupts the boss's Dr.-No- style Zen meditation lesson to protest brutal working conditions;
- * authentic Cuban folk culture juxtaposed against imported or technologized culture.

In one of the sequences when the film comments on its own satirical project, the posture of the landowner in his chair suggests to Juan and his friend Dealer that he's watching television. We as spectators thus are reminded that we are all simultaneously watching strangely transformed reruns of pre-Revolutionary, and to a certain degree, post-Revolutionary films on Cuban TV.

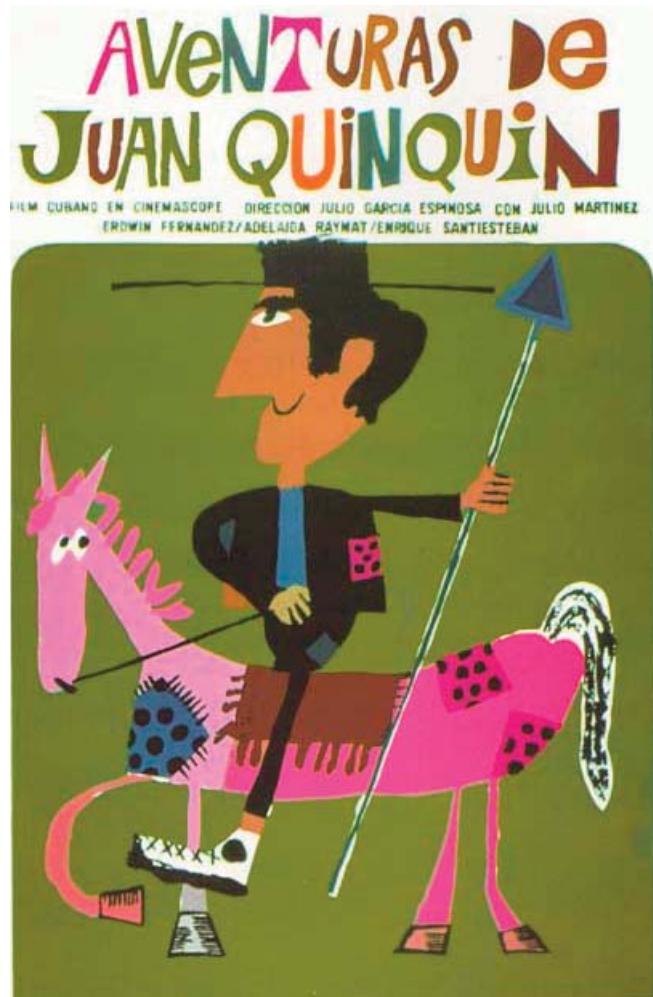
The film also draws upon Cuban popular culture in important ways, specifically in its attempt to use the vitality and lack of inhibition on the part of Cuban rural audiences at popular spectacles such as the cockfights and local circus. Juan's circus trick is to stay buried underground for nine minutes. When the town authorities demand more exciting acts and thus throw off the planned succession of stunts, near disaster occurs. The mayor supports the demand for something better, and the master of ceremonies brings on a scantily clad woman trapeze artist who performs on a hanging rope. Several women in the stands get concerned with Juan's welfare, go into the ring, and proceed to dig up the "grave," saving Juan just in time. Thus, the onlookers turn into participants. The audience participates in other ways: improvised equipment is brought in by a member of the audience for a stunt, and children can be seen sneaking into the tent.

There is some fine religious satire in the circus sequences after Teresa, one of the members of the audience, falls in love with Juan in his role as Christ on the cross. Some of the most humorous incidents in the film occur here, as Juan, still "nailed" to the cross, announces the times of the next show. When Teresa's father objects to her romance, she protests, "But he's God!" While some of these representations are delightfully comic, and reveal the existence of a deep feeling of communality on the part of the audience, the relation between spectacle and audience as participants and creators remains problematic. One can deduce that there is an attempt here to prefigure, by borrowing from Cuban popular culture, that desired kind of non-elite audience participation and elimination of creator-audience dichotomy that García Espinosa describes in "For an Imperfect Cinema." It is clear, however, that despite experiments

here with popular participation, the audience nevertheless still intervenes primarily as spectators. That is, both the film audience and the spectators portrayed within the film inevitably go back to their seats, to a static place as onlookers. There appears to be no way out of this contradiction. Audience participation is "shown" on film and thus becomes another representation seen by yet another passive audience.

Distanciation effects used in the film's long series of adventures require the viewer to be constantly aware of cinematic illusion as patterned convention. In line with García Espinosa's theoretical interest in transforming spectators into participants, the two protagonists, Juan and his companion Dealer, originally two types drawn from popular culture, are used anomalously in the film as actors in different genres. This device serves to demystify a kind of formal unity and illusion of reality, which would be characteristic of each of the various genres and spectacles if any one of these were the single artistic principle shaping the film. When these genres and other cinematic conventions are switched around and juxtaposed in unusual ways, the assumed or desired effect is that the audience, which is ordinarily passive, will actively participate in putting together the pieces. They are to be active in considering the ideological implications of highly encoded cinematic genres from which they as viewers formerly had no critical distance. This should happen if narrative film makes accustomed forms seem "unnatural," thereby breaking the viewers' identification with the characters and flow of events.

Juan Quin Quin's success here is ambiguous. Resourcefulness in creating alienation effects does not necessarily amount to revolutionary cinema. The film itself, in reproducing past types of cultural spectacles, also reproduces that past kind of experience. In the way that it does this, the film almost posits a kind of psychoanalytic method of "reliving" or re-seeing the past as its aesthetic method; it reduplicates the past as it proceeds. García Espinosa seems to need to work through Cuba's cultural



The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin

past, particularly its cinematic legacy, before arriving at a position where a more revolutionary cinema can begin. It is in this sense that Juan Quin Quin contributes most to the trajectory of contemporary Cuban film.

However, the cinematic satire has a contradictory effect, a kind of effect apparently not considered in the making of Juan Quin Quin. A satiric political film about culture paradoxically makes evident how much generic structures maintain themselves intact and resist deconstruction. A repressive Cuban landowner transformed into an oriental cinematic villain, or Juan Quin Quin as a guerrilla à la Howard Hawks, may serve as unexpected representations that interfere with audience expectations and identification but may also result in confusion. If the viewer notes something unusual in the film's use of genre conventions but does not understand the meaning of this new effect, some of the very "processes" that García Espinosa maintains must be exposed have not been conveyed. Satiric political filmmakers face the danger of producing yet another film using the interrelated elements of a genre rather than revealing generic and cinematic processes. Here, the women are still dressed and act as exploited sex objects. García Espinosa's intent to satirize such roles cannot compensate for his more-or-less straight reproduction of these sexist codes. Other important Hollywood elements also remain intact. These include the handsome hero, beautiful heroine, and excitement of adventure, and each element in its own way reiterates macho norms in Cuba that glorify danger, violence, and sexual conquest.

In another essay, García Espinosa claimed that in Juan Quin Quin he wanted to avoid the problems inherent in portraying a "positive," "serious" hero and thus preferred casting Juan in a comic role. But Juan's handsome demeanor and cool, understated, Hollywood-style acting, à la Robert Mitchum, hardly confront, let alone undercut, the fact that audience identification, even with a comic hero, can work strongly to undermine their political, critical response to satire. Furthermore, despite the great number of distanciation techniques at work here, none effectively breaks through the "cult of the sequence shot," a cult that promotes a kind of cinematic "realism" or continuity and that has been the target of much recent writing about political cinema. While no narrative storyline defines the film as a whole, one can nevertheless identify within sequences a gravitation toward narrative closure; and this tendency towards closure frequently sets up a tension that interferes with or overrides the satirical intent.

Juan Quin Quin also fails to keep satire from annexing what were apparently meant to be politically serious sequences. Cases in point are the hanging of Dealer for his political resistance activities and the enactment of the two guerrilla raids, one as an intelligent plan and the other as a cinematic farce. The hanging occurs within the context of a filmic adaptation of notorious foto-novelas, comic-book love stories widely read throughout Latin America. Dealer's death could signify violent political reality intervening in a romantic and socially reactionary genre. Yet distanciation here is carried to such a degree that the viewer does not get sufficient information to work with to be able to engage the film's ideas and formal innovations intellectually and politically. The fast and abrupt pacing of these sections, the uneven shifting back and forth between genre stereotypes and the just-mentioned intervention do combine to produce an impact, but one that is confusing and difficult to digest or assess. A general problem seems to lie with the extremely varied pacing used in the editing. While such differences in tempo can be an important tool for achieving distanciation effects, their overuse in Juan Quin Quin tends to disrupt rather than further the satirical aspect of the film.

by Anna Marie Taylor

— with the collaboration of Julianne Burton, John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, Julia Lesage, and B. Ruby Rich

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