CHAPTER SEVEN

RECASTING CUBAN SLAVERY

THE OTHER FRANCISCO AND *THE LAST SUPPER*

JOHN MRAZ*

El Otro Francisco *(1975),* or The Other Francisco; *produced by the Institute Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematogrdficos; directed by Sergio Ciral; written by Sergio Giralfrom the novel* Francisco *(1880) by Anselmo Suárez* v *Romero; black & white; 100 minutes; Institute Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos. The liberal, humanitarian, and romanticized version of slavery from the nineteenth-century novel on which the film is based is contrasted with modern historians' views of slavery. The film also demonstrates how the novelist's social position led him to adopt this particular stance.*

La Ultima Cena *(1976), or* The Last Supper; *produced by Santiago Llapur and Camilo Vives; directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; written by Tomds González, Maria Eugenia Haya, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; color; 125 minutes; Institute Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematogrdficos. In 1790 a Cuban slaveowner decides to reenact the Last Supper and wash the feet oft\velve of his slaves in an attempt to teach them the Christian values of obedience and endurance. His lesson fails; the slaves rebel and are brutally repressed.*

Filmic revisions of Cuba's history have been a major genre of ICAIC (Institute Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) since the institute was established shortly after the triumph of the revolution in 1959. Slavery is an integral part of that past and has been represented in several films. Sergio Giral is the cineaste who has demonstrated the most interest in this theme. One of the few black directors in ICAIC, Giral began to explore aspects of slavery in 1967 with a documentary short, *Cimarron,* and then went on to make a trilogy: *El Otro Francisco (The Other Francisco), Rancheador* (1976), and *Maluala* (1979). At about the same time that Giral was directing *The Other Francisco,* Tomas Gutierrez Alea, the dean of Cuban cineastes, was making *The Last Supper* (1976). Analyzing and comparing these two films will tell us much about the representation of slavery on screen.

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a much earlier version.

The Other Francisco is the best of Giral's films on slavery, historically as well as cinematographically. It is set in the past but goes beyond being a simple period reconstruction by reflecting on how history is written: who writes it, from what perspective, and in light of which interests. *The Other Francisco* is a radical reworking *of Francisco, o, Las delicias del campo (Francisco, or The Pleasures of the Country),* the first abolitionist novel of the Americas, which provided the starting point for the film. The movie begins as a cinematic reproduction of the idealized, romanticized, and individualized image of slavery found in the novel. But, in its course, the movie develops a critique of this portrayal by showing the "real" history of slavery.

The novel *Francisco* was written by Anselmo Suarez y Romero in 1839. This son of slaveholding sugar planters wrote his book, which was to remain unpublished for the better part of a century, for a literary salon composed of progressive colonial intellectuals. His conception of slavery was a product of their concrete historical situation, determined by their class interests and their avid embrace of European Romanticism. The first part of *The Other Francisco* presents us with a filmic re-creation of the novel's Arcadian vision. Francisco is an urban slave who lives in the house of Senora Mendizabal and works as her coachman. There, he falls deeply in love with Dorotea, the slave seamstress of the household. Unfortunately, Ricardo, the senora's depraved and sadistic son, is possessed by an "offensive lust" for the same young woman. Dorotea later becomes pregnant by Francisco, and they are punished. Refused the right to marry, Dorotea is sent to a French laundry, and Francisco is given to Ricardo to be used as a field laborer on the family's sugar plantation. There, he is viciously and wantonly abused by Ricardo and ends by hanging himself because his "genuine and sensitive" love for Dorotea has been thwarted by Ricardo's evil designs.

The precredit sequence initiates the romantic vision of Suarez y Romero, but criticism of the slave society portrayed in the novel quickly gets under way, creating the juxtaposition of two alternating discourses. On the one hand, portions of the nineteenth-century novel are heard while the visual style and action reproduce that of classic Hollywood films such as *Gone with the Wind*. On the other hand, documentary form increasingly imposes itself as the film advances, with a voice-over narration that provides historical information. For example, shortly after the first romantic interlude of Francisco and Dorotea, the film cuts to a "documentary" rape by a river, while the "omniscient historian" talks about the reality of sexual relations under slavery in counterpoint to the novel's idealized version. The gross imbalance of power between men and women makes a romance such as that of Francisco and Dorotea highly improbable. The rape to which black women were constantly subjected casts serious doubts on Ricardo's obsession with Dorotea. The historical practice of self-induced abortion to keep from bringing more children into slavery indicates that the cherished child of the slave couple may never have seen the light of day.

In general, the main criticisms offered of the novel are developed in the second part of the film. Here, we are told a truer or more probable story of slavery—of the "other Francisco" and the "other Ricardo." We see Ricardo's dispassionate rape of Dorotea and his equally unemotional decision to have Francisco beaten to death as an example for the other slaves when the new machine is broken. We learn that even suicides were part of black resistance to slavery and that its roots are part of an undying African heritage. We discover the relationship between the moral concern of the British for ending slavery and their economic interest in reducing the competition for West Indian cane growers employing free labor while creating markets for new machines that can transform the manufacture of sugar.

The film's functioning on a broader, epistemological level is an interesting example of dialectical materialism. The simultaneous re-creation/critique that takes place in *The Other Francisco* is part of a process characterized by an incessant critical reflection on what we know and how we know it. The way in which people experience the world is seen to be a function of their concrete historical situation; the forms in which they represent their experiences are understood to be expressions of particular class interests.

The Other Francisco most effectively conveys the dialectics of perceptual/presentational categories through visual style—mainly by filming those parts that represent the viewpoint of Suarez y Romero's novel in a form characteristic of classic Hollywood cinema. Long, smooth tracks, zooms, and pans sweep in on the protagonists. Focus extrapolates the actors from their background in close-ups, and lighting is carefully balanced to highlight the features of the attractive actors cast as Francisco and Dorotea. The romantic musical score composed by Leo Brouwer augments the sentimentalism of the imagery. The documentary technique

utilized for the "other" view of Cuban slavery criticizes such romanticism through the use of realist aesthetics. The hand-held camera replicates the style of newsreel photography, as does the harsh and unbalanced lighting. Long takes of productive activities, such as cutting or grinding cane, replace close-ups of individuals. Further, the musical score becomes more African, and rhythm instruments provide the emotional force formerly offered through strings. At the same time, the language used by the slaves becomes less refined and reflects differences in their geographical origins.

Through the juxtaposition of the two cinematic forms, Giral points to the intimate relationship between consciousness and perception, a familiar procedure in Cuban cinema from 1965 through 1975. For example, Gutierrez Alea employed this strategy to portray the different points of view embodied by the protagonist, Sergio, and the Cuban revolutionaries in *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968). Humberto Solas used three different film styles to convey the distinct consciousnesses of the three historical periods (1895, 1932, 1960s) depicted in *Lucia* (1968). A year later, Manuel Octavio Gomez released *The First Charge of the Machete,* in which the modern television documentary form of cinema verite is juxtaposed with a high-contrast film that resembles primitive newsreel footage. *Giron* (1973) was the last of the historical films to utilize this particular formal structure; director Manuel Herrera contrasted footage from U.S. war movies with interviews and documentary recreation of events by participants in the Bay of Pigs battle. In *The Last Supper,* Gutierrez Alea indicated that this particular form of experimentation had ended by making a film that was a completely closed narrative, offering a Hollywoodian window onto the world of the past.

In *The Other Francisco,* although the two film forms are different, they are not dramatically so. To render the two worldviews in drastically dissimilar styles would be too predictable in setting up the "subjectivity" of Suarez y Romero's portrayal (and that of classical cinematic form) against the "objectivity" of contemporary reinterpretation. Instead, the subtlety of Giral's stylistic resonance insists at a formal level that, while no mode of presentation/ perception is fully objective, some provide for greater clarity than others. Most important, it demonstrates that, though perception is relative, the relativity exists in and is determined by a dialectical relationship with material reality. Thus, Giral's effective use of subtle stylistic differences in the two parts conveys both the context-bound nature of Suarez y Romero's portrayal of slavery in particular and the more general notion that all perception occurs within contexts that are being changed by the transformation of material reality.

Critical reflection on classic historical portrayal in cinema also takes place in relation to various elemental issues: the relative importance of individuals and classes, of the sexual and the economic, of religion and law in specific historical circumstances. Thus, one example of resonance between the film's two parts can be seen in the analysis of the priority assigned to individuals as opposed to groups. Those sections that represent Suarez y Romero's portrayal emphasize the characters' individuality and their psychological motivation. Here, the focus is on Francisco and Ricardo as persons: the slave whose humble nobility is equaled only by the villainy of his master. The system of slavery, in reality part of a productive mode that conditioned the everyday lives of those caught in it, is here reduced to a simple backdrop of historical trappings against which to play out the timeless psychodrama of eternal human passion. Ricardo is as obsessed with Francisco as he is with Dorotea, and his singling out of this individual for the wreaking of a terrible vengeance is motivated entirely by unrequited love. This familiar narrative structure is found, for example, in television dramas about high-minded policemen concerned only with the pursuit of a single criminal, or about warm-hearted doctors whose practices seem to revolve around one patient.

The Other Francisco breaks with the classical narrative model, in which action is impelled through individual crises, and replaces it with historical analysis. Thus, we are never shown another "Francisco," for Giral's interest is in critiquing the book's ideology and not in fomenting identification with a different fictional hero. The director wants to create another *Francisco,* a new narrative, a film to replace the book, rather than invent a "Superman stood on his head." Certainly, we are confronted with individual slaves, such as Crispin and Lucumi. However, we understand these characters not as the "exception" that Suarez y Romero explicitly portrays Francisco to be but as representatives of the slave class. Similarly, Ricardo is portrayed as acting within his general class interests rather than as a deranged individual. Thus, the martyrdom of Francisco is of no personal concern to Ricardo; the new sugar press had been broken, and Francisco served as a convenient scapegoat.

The same sort of critique is carried out in regard to the relative importance assigned the sexual and economic bases of human motivation in the two discourses. Sex is the motor force of human activity in the film's representation of the novel. This central position of sex is seen primarily in the "offensive lust" of Ricardo for Dorotea, a lasciviousness so strong that he offers to free her if she will consent to sexual relations: the 600 pesos she is worth are nothing compared to his desire for her. Francisco's fate is also determined by love: he feels compelled to commit suicide once his

beloved has been "soiled." The determining power of sexual drive is emphasized at the visual level, particularly in the portrayal of Antonio, the *mayoral* (overseer). Phallic symbolism is apparent in Antonio's lighting of his cigar, as well as in his grabbing of his crotch while relating the punishments he has dealt out to various slaves. This imagery suggests that, in the novel, the humiliations of slavery are, above all, sexual.

The documentary's critical revision of Suarez y Romero's narrative emphasizes economic, rather than sexual, relations as the central source of motivation for human activity. Ricardo unfeelingly rapes Dorotea in a way that suggests she is no more than an object to him. The absence of personal interest is reinforced by intercutting the rape scene with the slaves' destruction of the sugar press; as Ricardo forces himself onto Dorotea, the slaves jam a blade into the machine's rollers. The visual metaphor underlines Ricardo's perception of Dorotea as an

element of the productive process rather than as a human being, as is made clear in his response to his mother's complaints about her: "Forget about the stupid slave, look at the account books!"

Giral's depiction of black resistance to the slave system is perhaps the most crucial area of resonance between the film's parts. Here the principal device is the presentation and re-presentation of a slave dance. The first time we are shown the dance, the slaves are photographed in a typically picturesque long shot. Antonio takes advantage of the occasion to humiliate Francisco by forcing him to kiss an old woman, who is portrayed as a stage prop and complacent accomplice in his debasement. In the critical revision, the dance is shot with close-ups that differentiate the various blacks, and the hand-held camera swirls among the dancers, reinforcing the flurry of their activity. The old woman, before a collaborator, is now presented as a figure whose importance is recognized by the others. The dance takes on a more African quality, with drums dominating the sound track, and it becomes an effort of resistance, for the slaves burn the bagasse shed at the sugar mill while several blacks make their escape into the mountains.

To Giral, the overlooking of slave resistance by Suarez y Romero is the novel's greatest shortcoming:

> At the same time that Suarez y Romero was writing the novel, there was a movement of slave conspiracies and uprisings throughout the island. It is extremely significant that Suarez y Romero at no time as much as alludes to these uprisings, though as a slaveholder himself he certainly must have been aware of them. . . . The simple fact that a wave of uprising and conspiracies existed which Suarez y Romero omits from his novel was what moved me to treat the novel as I did in the film.1

Giral not only portrays slave resistance in escape and vandalism, but he also ends the movie with a montage of a rebellion and the official reaction to it. Slaves are seen burning cane fields and killing the *mayoral* and *contramayoral* (assistant overseer), while the omniscient voice-over recounts the long tradition of slave revolt in nineteenth-century Cuba. For Giral, the history of this struggle contains the seeds of Cuban nationalism, and it is for that reason crucial that the islanders become aware of the fact that such resistance was frequent in Cuban slave society, as well as of its systematic exclusion from much of Cuban historiography prior to the revolution.

In *The Other Francisco,* historical transformation is visually conveyed through the evolution of the slave-capitalist colonial

mode of production and its effect on the slaves. In the beginning of the film, the sugar press is run by oxen. Later, we are introduced to a representative of Fawcett and Pearson, a British company that is producing and distributing cane-pressing machines run by steam. We come to understand in the course of the film that such mechanization not only increases productivity but also adds pressure on the slaves by making them work at machine time, thus reducing them even further than did the traditional system in their status as units of the productive mode. Mechanization, however, also sets into motion the very forces that will lead to the abolition of slavery and the institution of wage labor. This point is the core of an argument that takes place between a young progressive planter and an older and more conservative member of the sugar aristocracy, sardonically filmed at an elegantly appointed dinner table where the foreground is dominated by the carcass of a roast pig.

History is shown to be the determining context for the functioning of law and religion, in contradiction to the liberal notion that these are abstract and independently operating principles. The laws that ostensibly limit flogging and regulate work hours are nonfunctional in a situation in which the need for labor is great, as it was in the 1840s. A priest works assiduously for the ruling class, endeavoring to persuade the slaves that their lot is tolerable and just, while they stand formed beneath a cross.

Religion is a central element in *The Last Supper*. This film lacks the formal complexity of *The Other Francisco*, but it too uses a historical document as its catalyst. *The Last Supper* is based on an anecdote about a slaveholder who in 1790 decided to replicate Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet. Gutierrez Alea found the account in a work by one of Cuba's most eminent historians, Manuel Moreno Fraginals:

> His Excellency the Count de Casa Bayona decided in an act of deep Christian fervor to humble himself before the slaves. One Holy Thursday he washed twelve Negroes' feet, sat them at his table, and served them food in imitation of Christ. But their theology was somewhat shallow and, instead of behaving like the Apostles, they took advantage of the prestige they thus acquired in their fellow-slaves1 eyes to organize a mutiny and burn down the mill. The Christian performance ended with *rancheadores* [hunters of escaped slaves] hunting down the fugitives and sticking on twelve pikes the heads of the slaves before whom His Excellency had prostrated himself.[2]

This historical fragment was fleshed out by Gutierrez Alea, who added several elements absent from the original description. For example, a slave is selected from each of the distinct African cultures found on the plantation, underlining the continuing influence of their origins. One of the twelve slaves chosen is the movie's "hero," Sebastian, a persistent fugitive whose ear is cut off in the very beginning of the film for having run away once again. The cultural variety among the slaves allows for much interaction between them and the count during the dinner scene. Another important aspect deals with the dilemma posed for the characters of the priest and the overseer. The priest's obligation to instruct the blacks in Christian doctrine is portrayed as being constantly in conflict with the overseer's duties to maximize production. Thus, in broad strokes, *The Last Supper* provides an insightful glance into the functioning of paternalism and religion in slave society.

Gutierrez Alea has written of the historical analysis and reconstruction that went into the making of *The Last Supper.*

> The storyline was constructed beginning with a very simple paragraph that appears in *The Siigarmill* by Moreno Fraginals. Fortunately, the book offered a suggestive vision, rich in data, and superbly elaborated in relation to the moment which the anecdote recounts. We then had to engage in a more detailed investigation of the epoch, that is, provide ourselves with sufficient details and documentary information in order to arrive at a more concrete image of the reality we wished to depict. In this aspect we counted on the help of Maria Eugenia Haya, who also collaborated on the script. She efficiently researched documents and organized a file which was most useful not only in constructing the script, but in the later phases of production too (wardrobe, machinery and work tools, scenery, characters, working with the actors, etc.). Moreover, Moreno Fraginals provided us with much additional information and was always available for consultation. It was a collective work, undertaken with great rigor.
>
> The most difficult aspect to research was the world of the slaves since, obviously, there aren't many firsthand accounts. Nonetheless, we undertook an exhaustive and rigorous study here as well, so that our imaginations would be sufficiently motivated without overflowing. In this particular aspect we were aided by Rogelio Martinez Pure, whose research continually makes valuable contributions to understanding our culture's African component.3

Sergio Giral also has asserted that he carried out extensive historical research for his films on slavery. In preparing the ground for his adaptations, Giral studied chroniclers of the epoch, such as Suarez y Romero and Cirilo Villaverde, as well as a wide range of both pre- and postrevolutionary historians: Jose Antonio Saco, Fernando Ortiz, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Jose Luciano Franco, Elfas Entralgo, Grinan Peralta, Rogelio Martinez Pure, Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Romulo Lachatanere, and others. He also relied on nineteenth-century engravings in order to re-create a rural village.

Robert Rosenstone has argued that, "to be considered 'historical,' rather than simply a costume drama that uses the past as an exotic setting for romance and adventure, a film must engage, directly or obliquely, the issues, ideas, data, and arguments of the ongoing discourse of history."[4] Given the apparent concern of Giral and Gutierrez Alea with attempting to construct credible historical accounts, it is important to compare their films with some written histories of Cuban slavery.

It is very clear in both movies that the events presented occur in a period of transition. The "intimacy and patriarchy"[5] that were characteristic of earlier generations are here embodied as irrelevant vestiges in the count and in Suarez y Romero. These values are no longer appropriate; they are replaced, as can be seen in *The Other Francisco*, by "intensive exploitation of the Negro."[6] The films are particularly effective in presenting the technological transformations that will influence master-slave relations: the vertical sugar press is replaced by a new horizontal *trapiche* (sugar mill) in *The Last Supper*, the ox-driven machinery by steam power in *The Other Francisco*. In the latter, we see the effects of such transformations on the lives of the slaves: "The machines were a curse to the slave. ... In their first stage they magnified slavery in an exploitation process that was progressively more bestial. . . . This partial mechanization increased the traditional barbarism of the mill by demanding synchronization of manual work with mechanical processes."[7]

Historical transformation is shown to be not only technological but environmental as well. Ducle, the French sugar master, is using bagasse as fuel to fire the sugar trains because of the tremendous deforestation.[8] The count marvels at his initiative and likes the idea in *The Last Supper*. The new order of slaveholders no longer subscribed to the religious obligations of yore. Pressured by the necessity to produce increasing amounts of sugar, as was Ricardo in *The Other Francisco*, and influenced by Enlightenment thought, "few of the slaveowners knew what those traditional relations were."[9] Ricardo's mother, as a representative of the older

generation, attempts to convince her son to give the slaves a day off at Christmas, reminiscing about how things used to be easier. But Ricardo replies that the day makes little difference to the slaves, and all must continue to work in order to meet the demand. In the other film, although the count's behavior would seem to indicate the continued existence of religious belief, the reactions of those around him indicate that his attitudes are completely out of touch with the times. His retainers try to dissuade him from such a foolhardy act, and the slaves think he is crazy. Religion had become a handmaiden of the slave regime,[10] and the distrust of the priest manifested by the slaves in both films can be seen in the *desconfianza* they demonstrate in front of the cleric."

In both of the films, law is conspicuous by its absence. For example, in *The Other Francisco,* although we are told that the law limits whipping to twenty-nine lashes, Francisco is whipped to death: the count of *Tlw Im Sww* encounters nn legal obstaetefi to having his twelve "disciples" cruelly executed. In general, historians are in agreement with this image, Fernando Ortiz stating, that "with great frequency, the slave laws were a dead letter among us, ... which were not complied with, but ridiculed."[12] As it is portrayed in these movies, local power was absolute, even to the extent that the *mayoral* in *The Last Supper could* ignore the count's freeing of a slave and force him to remain in bondage.[13]

While some scholars, such as Herbert Klein, attempt to salvage the worth of law by arguing for the power of the Church in upholding it,[14] the great majority concur with Franklin Knight: "It was not the efficiency or laxity of the administrative bureaucracy (or, as some writers would have it, the Roman Catholic Church), which most weightily affected the conditions of the slaves. Rather, these conditions were determined by whether or not the slave found himself on the plantation or in the city, and by the unwritten laws of the individual, often very powerful, owner."[15]


the travails of life.

The life of a city slave was eminently preferable, and that of a *calesero* (carriage driver), Francisco's position, was "the most desirable."[16] Thus, "the most dreadful threat" and the worst punishment was to send disobedient slaves to the countryside, Francisco's end.[17] There, "the most common punishment was flogging," in many cases with the slave tied to a ladder; called the *escalera,* the name came to describe the fierce repression that took place in the 1840s.[18] Runaways were hunted with dogs and forced to wear bells when captured, just as is Crispin in *The Other Francisco,* and his castration was not uncommon as a final solution to this problem.[19] In Giral's film, slaves sleep no more than four hours, which seems to have been the general rule.[20] It was particularly hard on children, such as "that little boy who fell asleep walking and died, trampled by the oxen."[21] As the exploitation of slave labor became increasingly intense, the *conucos* (small plots of land), which had served

as the source of much nourishment, were eliminated.[22] For that reason, we hear slaves bemoan their absence in *The Other Francisco* while they wait in the dinner line.

The characterizations of the social roles of the rulers in these films are in accord with what is generally accepted in written history. The owners were usually absent, the *mayorales* were commonly white and sadistic, and the *contramayorales* were black. *The Last Supper* adds a nice historical detail in the French sugar master. Men such as Ducle had come to Cuba fleeing the

Haitian revolt, which began in 1789.[23]

The portrayal of the slaves in these movies is also relatively accurate. One of the most important elements is the insistence on their varied origins, something rarely done in film or other forms of popular history. Dancing was not only one of the few recreational activities available, but slaves also were often forced to dance, as is Francisco by the *mayoral,* Antonio.[24] The presence of the *mayoral* at the dances was evidently common, perhaps to deter the drums from communicating conspiracies among the slaves.[25] The voiceover assertion in *The Other Francisco* that sexual relations among the slaves were unusual due to the "tremendous imbalance" and "great disequilibrium between the sexes" is undoubtedly correct.[26] Also, there appears to be no question that women very frequently aborted rather than bring children into slavery.[27] Orlando Patterson quoted a 1790 witness of Jamaican slavery as saying that he had often heard women "wish their own children dead, or that they had not bourne them, rather than be obliged to witness their daily punishment."[28]

Abortion, then, was one form of "passive" resistance against slavery; suicide was another. Ortiz recounts that, during the period portrayed in *The Other Francisco,* suicide—"the supreme recourse of the impotent oppressed"—reached epidemic figures, almost double that of homicides."[29] Runaways were a constant problem for Cuban slaveholders.[30] However, there is little doubt that the owners of slaves far preferred the less-active opposition of abortion, suicide, or flight to violent rebellion.

Both of the films end in lengthy montages celebrating slave uprisings. In *The Other Francisco,* we see the burning of the cane fields, the killing of the *contramayoral* with machetes, and the garroting of Antonio, while the omniscient voice recounts the list of nineteenth-century rebellions: 1802, 1824, 1830, 1835, 1837, 1842, and 1843. Then we see soldiers arrive to restore order, beheading and cutting off the hands of slaves, and hanging them with hooks thrust through their ribs, an image probably inspired by William Blake's well-known lithograph. At the end of the film, bands of blacks gather in the mountains overlooking the valleys below; the historical voice talks of the years that would pass before Maximo Gomez would gather blacks for the movement against the Spanish. In *The Last Supper,* the escaped slaves are hunted down and killed one by one; their heads are displayed on pikes. However, one head is missing: that of Sebastian. The film concludes with a montage of Sebastian running through the forest; cinematographically, we are given to understand that he has been transformed into other forms: a hawk, water, rocks, a horse. One intriguing possibility is that Sebastian represents the figure of

Baldomero, *asantero* (witch doctor) who took to the hills with followers and avoided capture by changing "himself into a serpent, or a stone, or a tree."[31]

While the conclusions of these films extend the metaphor of rebellion to a degree that incorporates other struggles in Cuban history, it is nonetheless clear that such uprisings were a constant feature of slavery on the island. In some areas during the 1840s, cane fields were set on fire daily and machinery was often destroyed, probably much in the way presented in *The Other Francisco*.*[2]Further, the *bagaceras,* the sheds where the bagasse was stored, were one of the "easiest targets for firebug saboteurs."" It is just such an arson that covers Crispin's escape. The Haitian revolution had left Cuban slaveholders trembling in fear, and the comments of the French sugar master in *The Last Supper* attest to this constant preoccupation.[34] By the period represented in *The Other Francisco,* "black rebellions had created a climate of terror."[35] Thus, while we might be tempted to argue that the filmmakers overstate their case for slave rebellion, in fact the list that Giral provides at the end of his film is a good deal shorter than that of Fernando Ortiz.[36]

In summary, it could be argued that both of these films meet many of our expectations about what history ought to be. There are, of course, minor objections: usually only second-generation slaves could occupy Francisco's post of *calesero,* although this job is attributable more to Suarez y Romero's interest in making him exceptional than to a decision on Giral's part.[37] And there is one or another absence: Where, for instance, are the backs bent from working in cane fields?[38] But, in general, the films are good history and very good cinema, and that is an irresistible combination.

In the end, however, it is *The Other Francisco* that makes the

more important contribution to historical knowledge. *The Last Supper* follows the classic model of both written and filmed history in insisting on the reality of the world that it has in fact created, however much this universe has resulted from research. The major convention of such history is that it has opened a window onto the past rather than constructed a particular version of it. *The Other Francisco* is a different kind of history—a history filmed as a struggle against both much of prerevolutionary historiography as well as the codes of representation typical of Hollywood movies.

Film is an analogical language that can only say "no" by first showing what it wishes to criticize. Giral reproduces the classic style and the identification it creates with individual dramas, only to cut back against it with a critique at the level of both content and form. It could be argued with some justification that he then constructs another closed narrative, the dialectical materialist world of the omniscient historian's voice that excludes all but economic motivations. Nonetheless, in focusing on how history gets written, he has taught us not only about the past but also has explored different ways of re-creating it. *The Other Francisco* may not give all the correct answers, but it raises the right questions—questions as pertinent to historians who work with words as they are useful for those of us who prefer to depict history in visual images.

Suggested Readings

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