

Devorational cinema: spectacle, ritual, and the senses in Cold War Latin American and Spanish experimental film

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Resumo:

This dissertation revisits a neglected archive of avant-garde Cold War-era Latin American and Spanish films which use baroque, excessive aesthetic strategies inspired by popular religious ritual: the experimental documentaries and expanded cinema inventions of Spanish filmmaker-mystic José Val del Omar; the Mexican psychedelic exploitation epics of Chilean polymath Alejandro Jodorowsky; and the Cuban revolutionary films of Manuel Octavio Gómez. This corpus of filmmakers grappled with the problem of cinema's role within the global system of capitalist media spectacle. Drawing on Guy Debord's 1967 theorization of spectacle as the culmination of the West's privileging of vision above all other senses, I contend that the ultimate end of capitalist spectacle's offer of seemingly limitless pleasure is sensorial numbing. My project tracks a growing recognition during the 1960s that the ubiquity of imported Western media images within the global south doomed subjects to passive consumerism and worse, to the extinction of older epistemologies based in the non-visual senses like touch, hearing, taste, and smell. The films I examine counter ocular centric rationalism with the sensorial immersion of ecstatic experience. By contrast to the better-known militant anti-colonial films of the period that depict armed struggle, these films experiment with forms of ritual in order to reconstitute the body's senses as a major ground for decolonial epistemic resistance where the rationality of political discourse fails. In doing so, these filmmakers reconstitute the cinema as a key site for immersive, collective experience.

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