

**CLIT7801 Creative Cinematic Practice:
Experimental Learning in Museum and Film Festival**

Film Reviews Portfolio

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4th Review

How Cinema Captures the Inconsistency of Memories?

Film review of *Memories of Underdevelopment*

Following Sergio, an affluent Cuban writer, and his encounter with three women, the film *Memories of Underdevelopment* represents Cuba as a contradictory place stuck in the dilemma of the manipulation of US and Soviet forces. The director emphasises the inconsistency of the memories of post-revolutionary Cuba not only through the protagonist's self-reflective narration but also through the thought-provoking cinematography that blurs the boundary between documentary and fiction, constantly challenging audiences' perception of reality.

By combining social commentary, individual experience and imagination, and archival footage of Cuban historical affairs, the film is constructed as a "collage" that resists logical or linear cinematic narration, blending objective reality and subjective memories. For instance, the sequence which Sergio criticises the official at the conference exemplifies the director's attempt to construct a sense of authenticity which is subject to audience's examination. The realistic black and white mise-en-scene centring the talking heads, which is facilitated by the static long take that captures their seemingly unscripted actions, gives the sequence a documentary imprint. On the other hand, the sarcastic voiceover of the fictional character Sergio, unlike the traditional Voice-of-God narration that refrains from offering any personal insight of the on-screen affairs, renders the scene significantly subjective. Moreover, the film's depiction of memories as disjointed moments is further achieved by the creative manipulation of diegetic sound that blurs the line of past and present. For instance, Sergio plays the radio that records the quarrel with his wife several times in the film. In another sequence, the audio of the same argument is played again in the background, nevertheless, instead of revealing the radio as the source of the sound, as the camera slowly lingers in the apartment and reveals the reenacted fight scene, the audience's perception of the contemporary time and space is seamlessly transformed into the past.

Apart from blending archival footage and carefully staged scenes, the notion of "inconsistency" also manifests in the protagonist's conflicted psychology, which generates both identification and alienation for the viewers. The use of the handheld POV shot of Sergio that engages viewers in the characters' interaction, like, the playful chase scene between Sergio and Elena in his apartment, creates a sense of temporality and intimacy. Sergio's often fanaticised imagination about women he met, nevertheless, echos the fragmentation of his memories and his estrangement with the post-revolutionary Cuba. For example, at the first half of the film, when Sergio discusses with the woman about her baptism, the audience is shown an eroticised and surreal baptism scene imagined by Sergio, who baptises the woman with her clothes "cling to" her body. While later, the woman presents the actual baptism photographs to Sergio, which Sergio comments as formal and bland. It can be argued that the film can be considered a "national allegory" of Cuban's embattled situation from the individual destiny of Sergio, as a bewildered and self-contradictory individual, being unable to choose a side nor escape from the situation of underdevelopment.

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