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A Documentary Shines a New Light

From the early days of film, documentaries have established dialogues with social situations. This is why a nexus exists between the documentary and the world and history, since it sends the gaze of the filmmaker to a specific time and space. That is, it turns his/her eye to interests, concerns, and interpretations of events.¹

It also tends to become part of the collective memory of a group. This is the case of the documentaries that have attempted to reconstruct the '68 student movement and its terrible outcome. Without a doubt, 50 years later, these materials have become an invaluable tool of memory. From the very first moment, cinema contributed to keeping events alive, resisting the censorship of the time, and holding back oblivion. In the manner of a puzzle, each documentary has contributed pieces for understanding the events.

One example is the emblematic documentary *El grito* (The Shout) (1968), by Leobardo López Arretche, filmed during the movement. *Historia de un documento* (History of a Document) (1970), by Óscar Menéndez, includes shots of the political prisoners filmed clandestinely in Lecumberri Jail. The documentary series *Memorial del 68* (Memorial of '68) (2008), by Nicolás Echevarría, brings together recollections of different movement participants.

These are invaluable pieces, which have replaced the investigative work that the government never did. The Canal 6 de Julio production company contributions and their director, documentary-maker Carlos Mendoza, stand out. In the 1990s, Mendoza began researching about the military/police operation staged during the student demonstration in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. This work concluded with the documentary *Tlatelolco: Las claves de la masacre* (Tlatelolco, the Keys to the Massacre) (2002).

However, another very important but little-cited piece interprets the student movement in a broader context:

the documentary *1968 Conexión americana* (1968, the American Connection) (2008). This work, shelved for many years, situates the events on the international stage and presents revealing data. In the first place, it points out that any reading must begin in the framework of the Cold War and the ideological-political opposition between the capitalist bloc, headed by the United States, and the communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union. In the second place, it must be understood in the context of U.S. interventionist policies and its support for the Latin American military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s. In that scenario, Mexico emerges as a strategic territory for U.S. interests.

Hand-in-hand with its documentary research, the film collects evidence that shores up the hypothesis of Central Intelligence Agency intervention in the student movement, possible thanks to the consent and collaboration of high government officials and the Mexican army, including then-President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

In order to protect economic interests, the government mounted a scenario that encouraged the movement's radicalization. To create fear among the populace, U.S. and Mexican media added to this by emphasizing a series of fake news reports about communist and terrorist group activities, linking them with the students and presenting them as a threat to public order and safety. The aim was to effect a political turn toward the right and strict protection of large corporate interests.

Besides being the only documentary that deals with this issue, the film is valuable because it looks into its complexities and revitalizes the memory of the movement. Fundamentally, it contributes to maintaining a critical view of U.S. interventionist policy through history. ▀

Notes

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¹ Bill Nichols, *La representación de la realidad* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2007), pp. 13, 33, and 47.