

## Walkout (2006): Moctesuma Esparza's Retrospective outlook on the Chicano Movement

ELYETTE BENJAMIN-LABARTHE

### RESUMEN

*Walkout (Marcha en Protesta 2005) de Moctesuma Esparza, una mirada retrospectiva sobre el Movimiento. Después del poder de la negación por parte de Sergio Arau para demostrar la fuerza potencial y participatoria en Un Día Sin Mexicanos (2004), Walkout (Marcha en Protesta), una obra sociológicamente pertinente de Moctesuma Esparza, dirigida por el actor Edward James Olmos, expresa la mentalidad de una minoría por medio del uso de una modalidad negativa. El simulacro lingüístico de una mente seccionista con un gesto político imitador ya no encierra una supuesta minoría que pueda descartarse, sino que se le invita y corteja. En un momento dado la comunidad chicana, con una entidad latina más abarcadora, ahora puede rehusar el modelo integracionista y pronunciar un NO amenazador, reminiscente del Grito mexicano de antes ya que puede controlar sus representaciones celuloideas e inscribir sus historias individuales a la Historia. Analizaremos la reciente producción cinematográfica independiente que le da homenaje a una rebelión de una escuela secundaria de Los Angeles, conllevando así un reconocimiento forzado por los anglo-americanos de las súplicas estudiantiles de origen mexicano involucradas en un ejercicio de pedagogía nacional dirigida a varias audiencias. En un contraste total con los avatares “grasosos” contemporáneos, Moctesuma Esparza crea un buen arquetipo chicano que contrarresta los malévolos estereotipos cinematográficos para así participar positivamente en la historia social como en los avances emancipatorios de un país en que las minorías se enfrentan a un descontento, consiguiendo así acceso a una equidad de oportunidades después de carearse con firmeza ante las estructuras sociales oficiales.*

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Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe is a Professor at the Department of Anglophone Studies at the University Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3, France.

*Walkout*, the newly released HBO television film, half sociohistory and elegy to the Chicano social justicialist struggle of the Seventies, smoothly asserts and positions the legacy of a Mexican ancestry within today's complex latino configuration. For this happens at a time when the aggregation of Spanish-speaking citizens into a "Latino" nebulae would easily smother the old rallying cry of resistance, "Chicano Power", which emerges in the film, as a historic milestone, like Gettysburg, Seguin, or Selma, a catalyst for the justicialist movements which punctuate the history of struggles for minorities' rights against ostracizing majorities<sup>1</sup>. Producer Moctesuma Esparza had already written and made *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988) with co-director Robert Redford, a morally uplifting rendering of a justicialist crusade. Actor and director Edward James Olmos has always championed the Chicano cause, while progressing, as a cinematic icon, from typecast roles as a villain or half-beast, towards self-ascribed humanistic impersonations such as those of a judge or a local, elected official<sup>2</sup>.

With no hint of cultural separatism, quite in keeping with the director's usual statements about a necessary pluralist vision of society, the film documents with the reliable expertise of real-life participant, that of producer Moctesuma Esparza, the "blowout" or walking out of as many as 15 000 students in East LA schools, in 1968, an event which has been amply analysed by as many chroniclers as poet organizer Rodolfo Corky Gonzales in *I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín* (New York, Bantam Books, 1967-1972), analyst Stan Steiner, in *La Raza* (New York, harper Torchbooks, 1970), Brown beret militant Abelardo Delgado in *The Chicano Movement, some not too objective Observations* (Denver, CO, Totinem publications, 1971), academics such as Mario Barrera in *Race and Class in the South West* (Notre Dame, Ind, ND U Press, 1979) or Carlos Muñoz in *Youth, Identity, Power* (New York, Verso, 1989), only to mention a few opus dedicated to the Chicano sociopolitical movement of the Seventies.

## 1. A FILMIC ACHIEVEMENT VINDICATED BY FIGURES : TOWARDS ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The representation of latinos on film certainly foreshadowed, or even may have influenced the vast movement or rebellion against immigration laws which took place in the wake of the film's HBO programming<sup>3</sup> in February and April of 2006. Socio-economic realities, above all, assess the importance of the vast community of current or past immigrants sustained by a common, aggregative, strong culture. If this had to be proved through recent census figures, a chapter of the non-partisan Pew

Research Center's publication would come to the rescue. Presented as "Trends 2005", it describes how the current growing wave of immigration has turned Latinos into the United States' largest alleged "minority" group, to the point that the whole cultural make-up of the country has already been and promises to be, definitively changed. No wonder then that HBO should have accepted Moctesuma Esparza's project consisting in turning a student walkout into a film, and consequently, turning a brief episode of the Mexican-American students' fight for more educational justice and relatively obscure Chicano Civil Rights activism into a docudrama which bears the hallmark of history, as it enters the home of a nation-wide audience of medley ethnic identities.

The film has a wide potential public. Particularly, no doubt, among the people adhering to a Latino identity or more restrictively linked to a "Mexican ancestry", who account for 64 % are of the "latino population", be they of first, second and third generation, regardless of their mastery of the Spanish language, which has a tendency to be on the wane and then wax again with the third generation. They are, according to the recent survey, described as having "birth rates generally twice as high as those of the rest of the U.S. population", even "foretelling a sharp increase ahead, in the percentage of Latinos who will be soon in schools and on the work place". For between now and 2020, Latinos are expected, according to census figures, "to account for about half the growth of the U.S. labor force, particularly due to the next decades' increase in the second generation, as half of the offspring of latino immigrants are today 11 years or younger". Their youth, coupled with an expected increase in their numbers therefore signals the growing importance of educational issues in the years to come, as well as the existence of a huge market for entertainment, particularly through teen movies, or contents movies with a sectorial social message. That of a commitment to the welfare of such an important portion of the United States potential voters, who are strongly attached to family values and the work ethics, as the figures of employment clearly show. Quite contrary to the stereotype of the greaser and lazy Mexican syndrome or primitive Hollywood representations.

Catering to this public or mastering self-representation may not have been an easy task, provided that an inspired director wants to stay away from stereotypes and counter-stereotype as well, in order to represent his community according to a universalist model, without depriving the individuals or the group of their cultural exceptions. No wonder then that Edward James Olmos should have revived his concern for the education of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States, no longer as Jaime Escalante the maths teacher of Garfield High, but as an older and stouter school board member, Mr Nava, a cinematic tribute to fellow director Gregory

Nava no doubt. For the educational shortcomings of the system encountered by the youth decried in Ramon Menendez's *Stand and Deliver* (1988) will be partially taken up again in the recently released *Walkout*, an HBO endeavor which revitalizes the Chicano concept which here regains its emotional and ideological charge. The new film therefore stands out, as a rejuvenator of the term "chicano" and standard bearer of the forceful word "out", both an assertive and excluding symbol as the film adequately demonstrates it.

In the wake of Sergio Arau's *A Day Without a Mexican* (2004) which already contains the exhortation, for alleged immigrants, to leave the country of adoption by external decree, *Walkout* rhymes with the old ostracism, the injunction to a so-called foreigner to get out of a country he is not welcomed into. The dialectics in/out point to the infamous "*tortilla curtain*" that was pushed open when the economic conjuncture agreed with an *inflow* of migrant workers, and pushed *out* towards Mexico when labour was no longer needed. A subtle power game has ensued, when the population of new residents signals it will one day *outnumber* the former insiders. The term of the opprobrium, "out", as in "Out with Mexicans", resounds here and partakes of one more forceful phrase besides *A Day Without a Mexican* (Alfonso Arau, 2004) which already warned of a possible secessionist mood with empowered Mexicans now masters of an economic power game reminiscent of the best Marxist analyses. For in this same rationale, Marx had already predicted the enslavement of the bourgeoisie to its proletariat, the bourgeoisie "digging its own grave" by being dependent on the work of those it economically oppresses.

The rallying formulae are no longer the romantic *Strangers in our Own Land*<sup>4</sup>, or the ethnicist *Occupied America*<sup>5</sup>, which sound like counterdiscourses indicative of frontal opposition, but a cold, institutionalized injunction, an independent, non-participative attitude meant at destabilizing the system that only a collective, unitary formation can achieve. We can read, in the Employment section of the latest census report, that "Hispanics account for a *disproportionate* share of new jobs", that "despite their success, they are concentrated in low skill occupations", as "Hispanic households own less than ten cents for every dollar in wealth owned by white households", and that "63 per cent are said to be of Mexican origin", and moreover, "they score lower on national assessment and college entrance". It is then statistically proved that they are exploited and continue to lag behind at all key milestones of their educational journey. To corroborate this it is stated that in high school, Hispanic youths still complete a less rigorous curriculum, and on average, score lower on national assessment, even though the situation has improved tremendously.

The figures, according to a comparison between 1972 and 1992 -a twenty-year distance-, show a 70 per cent of Latinos in the high school class of 1992 who moved on to college, significantly higher than the 50% in the class of 1972. Because the Hispanic population is young, it has a tremendous impact on the educational system, with the number of Hispanic children that has doubled since the 1980s, the 5 to 19 population is expected to grow from 11 million in 2005 to 16 million in 2020. One more reason to justify Moctesuma Esparza and Edward James Olmos' indirect projection of an ever-expanding Latino cinema public interested in sharing an American middle-class status with their Anglo counterparts.

## 2. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF *WALKOUT* : EDUCATIONAL ANXIETIES RENEWED

To this day, the student unrest which nurtured a burgeoning self-awareness and militancy, while humiliating an arrogant Anglocentric teaching community and provoking the ire of a stubborn establishment, followed by a violent handling of the demonstrations by the LA police in as many as five high schools, has been declared by Edward James Olmos, the director of the film, to have been the biggest ever in the history of school unrest, with the exception, one should add, of the recent French walkouts of March 2006, the latter conducive to a total paralysis of the educational system at a national level.

It is quite telling that the American film should have been released on the same day a French student walkout was on its way, and one may regret the Chicano film could not be released in France at such a comparatively symbolic moment. For both periods reflect the dissatisfaction of young adults, the bitter, gnawing resentment at the establishment, fed into their hearts through the silent, suppressed resentment of working parents so busy earning their lives that they have become, according to a Marxist interpretation, the often described *lumpen proletariat*, blind to their condition of oppressed workers within "the system" ("Teach them the system", as one of the characters in the film shrewdly suggests). As a corroboration of this, Paula Chrisostomo, the strike's instigator, suddenly exclaims, in an outburst of restrained but angry rejection of her father: "I don't want to be like you", thus refusing a life of drudgery because of a lack of education, also at a deeper level, refusing the implicit laws of social reproduction, projecting her hopes on the chances of education as the sole means to improve her lot.

The film also comes at a time when most countries are concerned about the relevance of school systems and the quality of education, their efficacy in providing

the equality of chances and suitable outlets for young people, with the suspected uselessness of diploma and the mythic quality of an alleged social ladder. The faith in education exemplified by the film emphasizes the importance of the issue of education for contemporary families, pinpointing a scorching issue in every American family's secret anxieties. The white establishment, paternalistic, then interprets on screen the outburst of violence as a mere "acting out", by adolescent immature flower-people who may have ties with the Communist party, "radical youths who take the law into their own hands", when on the contrary, these youths take the lawful means into their hands, which makes all the difference, as it proposes a mature violence, a civil rights claim and not a shallow skin-deep rebellion of petty-bourgeois rebels without a cause.

Democracy appears here to have become more democratic, when a participative mood pervades a film which reverberates contemporary problematics even more than the complex political and ideological configuration of the year 1968. For the film is a clear disapproval of the truism expressed by an Anglo participant who exclaims "you don't have to go to college to be successful", a populist saying which has a true ring today, considering the prevalent pessimistic outlook on educational systems, whereas in the 1970ies, in an era of massive enrollment in universities and with the advent of Special Opportunities Programs, in the wake of progressive measures, optimism was allowed for students of minorities and first generation immigrants, which may well not be the case today, regardless of the limited correctives due to Affirmative Action or other remedial policies. The populist anathema towards the value of education, familiar to the sector dubbed the "poor whites" who mostly oppose ethnic diversity, pinpoints their socio-economic proximity with first generation immigrants, a great rivalry and peer pressure in any democracy today. Totally refuted by all sociologists and educational pundits, as untenable in any democratic sane political system in the world, the above-mentioned populist formula strikes a true note in the politically conscious screenplay, as it may well represent the deepest concern with a film made to refer to the past, but actually dealing with or subterraneously addressing the shortcomings of the present.

### 3. POSITIVE CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION: THE BUILDING OF SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY

Produced for Home Box Office television by independent movie-maker Moctesuma Esparza, launcher of the Maya production and distribution company, a daring business venture already operative in many locations of the United States, the recent film has many uplifting messages to deliver to a powerful community. It

implies the refusal of the labels “Purple Tio”<sup>6</sup>, “Tío Tomás” or other “Uncle Tom” epithets, and also the refusal to be instrumentalized by a trendy, exhibitionist if not theatrical *latinidad*, as the puritanism of radical chic does not seem to fit into the middle class esthetics which characterizes the ground-breaking film. We can therefore venture to say that *Walkout* vindicates the possibility for being a progressive, an adept of participative democracy without wanting to blow it to pieces. Imposing such a sedate view of the Chicano generation of the 70s was a challenge, as it implies the recreation of a community which holds a mirror to the present generation rather than represents the older one.

One of the main characters, Sal Castro, the chicano teacher who serves as a mentor to the students, actual instigator of the student’s rebellion who, in person this time, so movingly expresses himself just before the credits at the end of the film, acknowledges the indispensable visibility of any movement that wants to gain access to social and political legitimacy today, or even launch a justicialist crusade, when he wistfully or cynically declares: “if the news wasn’t there, it didn’t happen”. For in order to call attention, a group “has to build support” and become visible. But visibility must in turn be accompanied by parameters of acceptability. If this criterion is not satisfied, the visibility will become offensive and entail rejection by the viewers, a resulting reactive fear conducive to ultimate ostracization.

The Chicano Movement may have suffered from the visibility of a cinema playing on ethnic negative types systematically associated for a mass audience with *hispanidad*, *latinidad*, where the underworld and the ghettos were wrongly associated with the *barrios*, consequently turning *loci* of poverty, hope and intense belief in the American dream into *loci* of poverty, criminality and ingrained despair. Such has been the effect on the masses of petrified viewers and armchair sociologists, of such a number of ghetto movies cashing in on the theme of systematic ethnic delinquency, targeting latino and Black populations, a genre that Chicano cinema has often been denouncing to the limit of its artistic and ethic possibilities. Its positive, reconstructionist counterdiscourse, retaliatory moralizing message, soon became detrimental to the reception of a genre cinema destined for educational purposes, consequently unable to broaden its viewer base or extend its public beyond the most educated part of the insiders. Chicanos could be so moral on screen, that the genre itself was in danger of losing its clout by dint of its repetitive angelism and predictability. In this respect, *Walkout* sheds the old skin of miserabilist violent ghetto films, when characters exclaim in self-derogatory but humorous terms, “chingón vato loco”, or “this was before we became vatos locos”, subtly referring to a the pre-

anglocized past of the United States, while avoiding to refer to a nationalist claim, while at the same time denouncing the negative stereotypes invented by cinema from as early as the first heavily mustachioed Mexican bandits of the frontier in *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin Porter, 1903).

The new chicano approach to representation of Chicanismo Revised is also leaving behind the old negative portrayals destined to accuse and vilify the former Anglo enemies. The style had turned into a genre: it is today left to other directors of many nationalities. For even French directors, after their American counterparts, are trying to carve a niche for themselves in the jungle of the US celluloid market. Celebrated by the LA Latino Film Festival, seizing the opportunity of depicting latino life in the ghetto, such is independently produced (Yannick Bernard 2004) *All-night Bodega*, directed by Felix Olivier, a film about good/bad chicanos and Puerto-Ricans, a genre Chicano cinema had mastered with a flair, but seems to have abandoned in order to provide a positive image of the community both to the insiders and the outsiders alike. This new ideological chicano bend has triggered a series of morally uplifting films, such as previous *A Day Without a Mexican*, which by their audience, scope and success, strenghten the community, facilitate integration, ban social and ethnic separatism, promoting assimilation by going half-way towards the former oppressors, certainly not playing up to their whims, but assuaging their fears by a subtle sense of cinematic diplomacy. *Walkout* avoids being aggressive, in as much as it has eliminated the oft-seen placard displayed during the actual walkout, "Our children do not have blue eyes". It does not show the death of a demonstrator at the hands of the LA police either, does not show the link between the blowout and the visit of Robert Kennedy to the students in their LA school, therefore avoiding an empathic move towards the Democratic party, while only using the authentic picture of the archive footage of the actual walkout in the final credits, to go back to the real events with the adequate nostalgia and pretend it reverberates the past, when it actually mimics the present.

The end-result is a film which triggers a intense emotional response of a universalist nature, when skin colour, ethnic difference, class disparities, and specific, eruptive political context are obliterated, as it should be within the realm of the dream factory when a film implies a budget, a return on investment and the badge of financial success so that creativity and artistic expression can continue. As we have already mentioned, Chicanos have suffered, on screen, through a high dose of social determinism, of a disproportionate representation as token victims, thugs and "banditos", lascivious fools of the *gallant caballero* and *latin lover* types, to excess. A universalist

approach appears remedial, as it comes in to reassure the diverse and sectorial public, that individuals aggregated under the self-ascribed label “Chicano”, claiming the title or epithet as a form of historic homage or landmark in the saga of US immigration, can be morally committed and lead ordinary lives, away from the frenzy which is too often associated with them on screen, ever since the negative stereotypes were invented to please an arch nationalistic, ethnocentric public adverse to immigration or more generally any type of outsiders.

Chicano could have turned into a bad word, as it had acquired a counter-cultural, rebellious, extremist connotation too far removed from the serious ideological purpose encapsulated in the necessary wish, with every human group, to participate in the general welfare of a country. The humanitarian, cohesive, positive feeling, is well expressed in the film by the following statement : “You’re all so smart : start your own country”, a phrase which upholds a strong identity linked to a place of origin, a common past, attachment to a language, a wealth of traditions and an ingrained sense of solidarity linked to the predominant catholic religion. The film carefully avoids cultural separatism, as religion, for instance, is underplayed, as if not to alienate believers in the Protestant faith or other religious denominations, when we know that the Catholic religion, as an undercurrent theme, used to be part and parcel of the traditional Chicano ideology. Chicano culture here seems to be divested of one of its spiritual elements. “Chicano”, reduced here, or so it seems to the present critic, to its hybrid feeling of Americanness combined to an attachment to the Spanish language, therefore divested of its strong cultural folklore, seems to say: we are capable of adapting to the modern world, and refuse to be categorized as folklorists romantically attached to a culture you call kitschy and love to placate on us in order better to criticize us.

#### 4. POLITICAL PACHUQUISMO ASSUAGED : THE INTEGRATIONIST MOOD

We see no sarapes in the movie, no *curandera*, no tortillas, no nopal, no frijoles, in an attempt to reach towards a stark, stylized ethnicity quite alien to the nostalgic models of representation the Anglo viewer was so comfortable with. Universalism becomes the great asset of a movie which then transcends ethnicity, escapes the cocoon of the old folklore, even if it runs the risk, at times, of turning the Chicano shout, not into the *grito*<sup>7</sup> of old Mexican history, the cry of liberation from oppression, but into a neutralized cry for social justice which may turn the Chicano movement into a grand, noble, but blander pursuit. For one may perceive of it here as

a decomplexified movement, more of a class struggle aiming at social justice and integration, less of a personalist movement animated by forceful rebellious leaders almost devoid here of the nationalistic implications it has been associated with.

The claim here seems to vindicate too readily a highly anglocized model of development, leading to an implicit acknowledgment of the massive integration of the Chicano participants into the middle class, which today, in retrospect, remains problematic in view of the social situation as it has been assessed to have been like, in 1970, even though it is statistically true today, in 2006, of most of the second generation immigrants of Mexican descent. The discrepancy that can be perceived here, between the social reality of the 1970s, as historical and sociological studies tend to represent it -beyond the possible discrepancies between different historical schools-, leads us to put forward the idea that *Walkout*, in keeping with many adaptations to the screen of known or relatively unknown episodes of social history, warps reality, as most artistic medium do, in that it delivers a message intentionally or unintentionally palatable to the global public it intends to reach, targeted mainly on socio-economic lines, for the different sections of the diverse middle class publics it is destined for.

Chicano in the process of cinematic reconstruction of history, loses its political charge as a cultural weapon or anti-assimilationist tool of subversion, but it gains a wider public, endears Chicanos to a wide, nondescript public, pandering to their timid tastes and bland recipes. To the great benefit of the community itself, which becomes aggrandized in the process, and leaves the niche it would have been confined to, had it pictured realistically, in total mimicry, the violence and highly politicized context or *rascuache*<sup>8</sup> ambiance of the *Movimiento*, as it descended on the educational system. If the link here between the pioneers of the movement is not made explicit enough in the film, it is strongly and esthetically underscored by the archive footage of the film which signs and ends the film, with a strong rallying but discrete empathy with the pioneering generation of the 70s. Therefore the euphemisms in the film, the historical accuracy of the final, descriptive credits, with their successful efforts to represent a strongly vindicative, politicized struggle for social rights. The political pachuquismo of the seventies has been assuaged in order to fit into a neutered militancy, shifted onto the private sphere, in which the hatred for the “blue-eyed children” has disappeared, where the counter-discourse and public show of rebellion, with allegedly politicized street activists, supposedly devoted to militancy -therefore private abnegation and social aggressiveness, such as the stylized, esthetic violence of the militant gangs of *vatos-*, has disappeared from the streets even though it was actually a political accompaniment of the educational claims of the 1968 school boycotts.

The actual, historic, sociologically accurate collective uproar of the 70s has lost its political charge of secession and dormant anger and exasperation, and shifted, in its cinematic representation, towards a more family-oriented, more individualistic pursuit, with toned down ideological overtones, as the placards brandished by the militant school-children do not have the same counter-culture content or hatred of the Anglo others. Analysed in this perspective, positioning a vision of history in fitting with the ideals of the present, and without accusing the film of being a sell-out to middle-class optimism, the film assesses and pays homage to the actual integration and rise of a strong, powerful, educated middle-class of Mexican origins which has turned into a sizeable portion of the Hollywood market.

How can a Chicano director orientate the representation of a rebellion which could have endangered the social *status quo* which does not smack of an unbearable provocation to the sedate, well-fed, self-satisfied or easily scared parents who more and more control their siblings' TV consumption? The strategy must be one of prudence and compromise, when rendering history, at the same time being faithful to the past and in tune with the present. It seems that the representation of history is one of past events as they are reconstructed, with a view to the tastes or unconscious motivations and dreams of the current contemporary viewers. Here, the public has changed, be they Chicano themselves, Hispanic Americans, or Latinos, or conversely the Anglos so often adverse to the promotion of their non-Anglo neighbours, and even, considering the diversity of immigrant groups and their socio-economic hierarchy, other groups of former immigrants well-integrated economically or even assimilated but still intense about the specific common legacy of their ancestors. Difference, a separatist concept, divisive and intense, if not conflict-prone, has given way to diversity, a more subdued concept, a form of soft tolerance which was absent in the general consensus some thirty years ago, at the beginning of the Chicano pride movement, in the wake of the Black pride movements, as the similitude between the African-American Black Berets and the Mexican-American Brown Berets<sup>9</sup> would easily testify.

The arrogant, self-defeating pride of the 1970s which betrayed more insecurity than confidence, has been the soil for the current open, more subdued and quiet diversity claim, a collective feeling experienced by 14% of the overall population, among Spanish-speaking citizens whose productivity, eagerness for work, industry and achievement have become the pride of the nation if not, quite surprisingly but effectively, the satisfaction of the recent 2005 census formal comments, which do not hesitate to state, clearly, in a dispassionate mode, that the employment figures of

“Latinos” are higher than those of any other ethnic groups in the whole country, superior to the so-called “White” or “Black” segments of the population. Parents do not feel so insecure either, when college attendance has sky-rocketed during the recent years, as the 2005 Pew Review figures will show it. The achievements of Latinos and Mexican-born elites educated thanks to the Special Opportunities programs have led to the strengthening of an elite, when the Hispanic business and artistic magazines, political leaders of Mexican origin, contribute to a more generalized acceptance of the Mexican heritage, a sign of rapid hard-won social ascension due to expertise and dedication to work, which is more and more respected nation-wide. For legitimate pride and industriousness have led to success, with the help of lawful means such as strikes, and the rebellious terrain of the 60s and 70s now considered as a civil rights precedent.

So much for society in the real. Hollywood cinematic representations have often concentrated on passe visions and mostly always evaded the complexity of the national heritage, even though they have regularly taken into account the different waves of immigration which make up the current aggregation of groups and the state of diplomatic relations of the United States with the countries of origin. But either the hegemonic group had the edge or it was melodramatically pitied, the newcomer or the stranger was ostracized or exaggerately praised, though often despised or demonized, so that cinema presented a well-organized strata of ethnic achievement, very often under the guise of a well orchestrated lachrymose plot. Such was the case of the paradigmatic first talkie *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), which showed the different waves of integration and resulting acceptance, as it subrepticiously favoured White Anglo-Americans over Jews and Blacks. At a very early stage, quite concomittantly, celluloid representations were concentrating on the fear generated by dark outsiders who disrupted the relative peace of angelic individuals eager to throw them out. To a budding national imagination, these outcasts were soon typed into the greasers, lewd vaqueros with heavy discheveled mustaches that were soon to become the mark of Mexicanness on screen.

The mustache remained, for decades, the sign of moral opprobrium, when Humphrey Bogart has to wear a fake one in *The Petrified Forest* (Frank Borzage, 1937) so that he can pass for an allegedly “Mexican” bandit... Incidentally, Gary Cooper always refused to grow one, and Anthony Quinn is said to have lost an Oscar to a mustache. Thinning the mustache, in Isaac Arntenstein’s *Break of Dawn* (1998), allows the radio announcer from Mexico to signal his desire to blend into US society in order to gain acceptance. But neither Edward James Olmos or any of the male

protagonists of *Walkout* wear a mustache. Nor do they wear the clothes representative of the 70s, or the long hair and *rascuache* look prevalent among the visible participants of the Chicano Movement of social and cultural rebellion. We are transported from the historical period of the 70s into the sociological atmosphere of the year 2005, even though the film affirms it is “based on the East LA student protest of 1968”. *Walkout* has managed a feat, through a subtle strategy: it has conciliated the reasonable expectations of a television prime time mass public of home-owners, on HBO channel, with the necessity for Chicano militant directors to write the history of their rebellious movement on screen, in order to move and educate, moralize and unite, motivate through a sense of proximity. For identification works perfectly, thanks to this shift in context and displacement in time, to give the film a direct appeal, without the remoteness that the counterculture era would have produced on the viewers, if not a sense of weirdness or estrangement. Here we have a contemporary public directly in tune with events that are thirty years removed in the past and are recreated with an urgent contemporaneity.

We can say that this film is closely associated with the society that produces it, and as such, it is a consumer product and responds to the viewer’s needs. The film tells them about the new acceptance of diversity and globalisation in US society, about the end of a rebellious cultural nationalism, of a revised and more mature *chicanismo* which claims the revival of a talisman word, “Chicano”, outside the ideological frame of the class struggle, with no visible desire to perform a “revolution”, in a consumer society the former immigrant is not ashamed to live in, or not made to feel ashamed to live in by any disturbing collective representation. The tradition of the “vendido”, the sell out to the host country, is not demonized here, the way he had been in a Marxist-dominated elitist milieu, through the revolutionary pamphlets of the leading intellectuals. *Walkout* could therefore be seen as a legitimizing and distancing construct, a recreation of history according to artistic and ideological principles alien to a previous secessionist ideology, as today, the original model is almost extinct and has proved its relative, long-run inefficacy. Consequently, the film portrays economic liberalism and individual success in a favorable light, as long as work is rewarded adequately, as long as education and the social ladder can function for residents of Mexican ancestry in a country that owes its economic survival to ever-renewed immigration.

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- Wolfen*. By Whitley Strieber. Dir. Michael Wadleigh, Perf. Albert Finney, Diane Venora and Edward James Olmos. Film Capital Assoc. Orion, 1981. DVD.
- Zootsuit*, Gregorio Cortez (no tiene que ver la película con Gregorio Cortez)
- Zootsuit*, By Luis Valdez. Dir. Luis Valdez. Perf. Daniel Valdez, Edward James Olmos and Tyne Daly. 1981. Peter Burrell, Universal Pictures, DVD.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this respect, I shall only mention two attempts at recreating parts of the Mexican-American social movement or historical armed conflicts. If the LE Walkout was never filmed before Moctesuma esparza could get the adequate funding, *Requiem 29*, a short documentary was shot in 1970 by David Garcia, documenting the Chicano Moratorium March that took place Aug. 29, 1970, in East Los Angeles. This event was organized by Chicano students and community activists to protest the disproportionate number of Mexican-American soldiers killed in the Vietnam War. The event was marred by the killing of three march participants including noted journalist Ruben Salazar. Conversely, if Jesus Treviño could make the beautiful epic film *Seguín*, in 16mm on a 21-day schedule at a cost of \$500,000 in Bracketville, Texas, on the sets John Wayne had used to film *The Alamo* in 1960, he could never shoot the entire saga he had planned, as the film was only meant to be part of a proposed PBS series called *La Historia*, which never received proper funding.

<sup>2</sup> After starting a career in Luis Valdez's *Zootsuit* (1981) and nearly concomitantly in the anglo horror movie *Wolfen* (Michael Wadleigh, 1981) impersonating the evil half-human creature, he has successively represented the emblematic Pachuco of the Sleepy Lagoon Case beautifully portrayed in *Zootsuit*, Gregorio Cortez (*The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, Robert Young, 1982), the victimized cattle rancher with a broken English, as well as the archetypal, good, token cop of cross-cultural television serial Miami Vice. Exposure to a national public triggered a series of highly acclaimed films in which he portrays historical characters such as famed chicano community maths teacher Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* (1987), then judge Mendoza in NBC series *The West Wing*, the DA, and here, in *Walkout*, Mr Nava, an influential member of the School Board of LA, a tribute to Gregory Nava, one of his fellow chicano directors.

<sup>3</sup> The anchor for Univision's evening news, Jorge Ramos, could state: "La identidad y fuerza de Estados

Unidos está basada en su diversidad y en su apertura hacia los nuevos inmigrantes. Eso ha quedado demostrado en la gran marcha de Los Angeles –donde participaron mas de medio millón de personas– y en las constantes protestas de jóvenes latinos de highschool en todo el país que se rehúsan a quedarse callados ante la forma en que se quiere criminalizar a los inmigrantes”. For an assessment of the April 10<sup>th</sup> 2006, one can read “Latinos’ Rally, Hopes for a Movement”, by N.C. Aizenman, Washington Post Staff Writer, Sunday, April 9: “On the eve of demonstrations by Latinos in dozens of cities across the country, protest organizers said they would strive to transform momentum over the immigration controversy into a lasting civil rights movement that unifies the nation’s largest minority population”.

<sup>4</sup> Title of Alberto Prago’s *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican-Americans*. New York :Four Winds Press, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> The emblematic title of Rodolfo Acuña’s opus, *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation*. San Francisco: Caulfield, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Phrase used by Stan Steiner in *La Raza, the Mexican-Americans*, referring to Mexican immigrants who behave like Uncle Toms once they have emigrated to the United States. NY Harper Torchbooks, (1972) : 236.

<sup>7</sup> In 1810, while Napoleon’s troops were occupying Spain and King Ferdinand VII was still in captivity – priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a priest from an old family of *criollos* (Mexican-born Spaniards) harangued his parishoners in the small town of Dolore, “seducing them” to rise up in arms – even with stones, slings, sticks or spears – in order to defend their religion against the “French heretics” who had occupied Spain since 1808 and now threatened to come over to the Americas. He launched his flock against the hated *gachupines* (Spaniards born in Spain and living in Mexico) shouting with them “¡Mueran los gachupines! Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe”. A few months later, he was tried by the Inquisition, condemned and executed. But his rebellion would inspire and serve as a rallying, ritual cry for the Mexican War of Independence, and remains today, as a symbol of Mexican affirmation.

<sup>8</sup> A word of Indian, náhuatl origin, meaning poor, run down. See poet Tino Villanueva’s poem “Dejar de recordar no puedo”, which alludes to the Chicano “rascuache condición, in *Crónicas de mis años peores*, La Jolla, California: Lalo Press, (1987): 43.

<sup>9</sup> See Stan Steiner in *La Raza, the Mexican-Americans*, op cit.