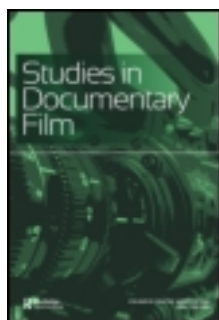


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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Studies in Documentary Film

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsdf20>

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Published online: 15 May 2014.

To cite this article: Margaret Gates Frohlich (2014): Reimagining Puerto Rican history in Seva Vive, *Studies in Documentary Film*, DOI: [10.1080/17503280.2014.908496](https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.908496)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.908496>

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Reimagining Puerto Rican history in *Seva Vive*

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Luis López Nieves' short story *Seva* published in the newspaper *Claridad* in 1983 narrates the discovery of a hidden truth of the Spanish-American War of 1898: the inhabitants of the town Seva fought bravely against the invading American forces and were subsequently slaughtered. Taken as fact by some of the newspaper's readers, the story engaged the polemic intersection of popular memory, historical record, and colonial power. Released in 2008, Francisco Serrano's internationally acclaimed film *Seva Vive* uses digital technology to recast the interpretive practice of history undergirding *Seva*. This article combines an analysis of the film's use of documentary footage, photographs, digital technology, interviews, and literary text. It relies on current theorizations of adaptation, archive and authenticity to understand how the film's visual aesthetic of play denaturalizes the process by which history appears to us as true. The film visualizes the selective processes that produce historical accounts of colonizer and colonized, thus decoupling authenticity and the colonized subject.

*Un país que no tiene cine documental
es como una familia sin álbum de fotografías
(A country without documentary cinema
is like a family without photos)¹
(Patricio Guzmán 2014)*

In 1983 in the newspaper *Claridad*, Puerto Ricans read the proclamation of a secret truth found in evidentiary documents that had been hidden from Puerto Rican history: the US invasion during the Spanish-American War (1898) had occurred on the fifth of May in the town of Seva, not on the twenty-fifth of July in Guánica. Furthermore, the invasion was met with fearsome resistance, not passivity. According to this new version of historical events, heroic Puerto Ricans of Seva proved the brave character of the nation before being slaughtered (men, women, and children alike) by American troops that had collaborated with local Puerto Rican officials who held little faith in their island's ability to triumph. To cover up the evidence of the slaughter, the article continued, the victorious American troops built a naval base over the town Seva and renamed it 'Ceiba'. The article had immediate effects: campaigns for the collection of funds to help the only living survivor of the massacre, letters to government officials, and social gatherings full of strong patriotic sentiment (Ramos 2007, 55–84). The fact that *Seva* was published in a newspaper, together with its epistolary form and accompanying images (photos, a copy of an affidavit, etc.), contributed to readers' perception that the story was factual even

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though it appeared in *Claridad*'s cultural supplement, 'En Rojo'. The enthusiastic response of readers turned to threats made against the author, Luis López Nieves, when the newspaper revealed shortly thereafter that *Seva: Historia de la primera invasión norteamericana de la isla de Puerto Rico ocurrida en mayo de 1898* (*Seva: History of the First North American Invasion of the Island of Puerto Rico in May 1898*), was not a normal newspaper article, but an Orwellian *War of the Worlds*-like short story (Ramos 2007, 60). The angry response of some readers indicates the political and ethical implications of treating official history, especially when it deals with sensitive issues such as colonization and national identity, as a source text that can be appropriated or adapted.²

Released in Puerto Rico in 2008, more than two decades after the story's original publication, Francisco Serrano's digital film *Seva Vive* became the number-one selling film for two weeks in Hato Rey's local art-house theater, Fine Arts Café, and went on to earn international acclaim (*Seva Vive Fact Sheet* 2014). In 2010, the film won the Identity/Cultural Diversity Award at the Ourense International Film Festival and was an official selection of the International Film Festival in Guadalajara for the best Ibero-American documentary. Perhaps owing to its commentary on Latin American history, Cuba, Mexico and Spain demonstrated particular enthusiasm for *Seva Vive*, and Serrano noted with some surprise the interest that French distributors expressed in the film (Serrano 2010). In 2011, the same year that the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences decided to exclude Puerto Rican films from the category of Best Foreign Language Film, Cinema Tropical, the Puerto Rico Film Society, and Flahtery NYC presented a screening of *Seva Vive* at New York's Anthology Film Archives. The film's success signals continued fascination with *Seva*'s convincing visual and narrative strategies and opens questions about the role of documentary film and new media and technologies in the construction of national histories and the boundaries that sustain them. Serrano explains his motivation for making the film after reading the book version of *Seva*, which was first published in 1984, one year after the story first appeared in *Claridad*:

I made *Seva Vive* simply as a desire to bring the experience of reading *Seva*, the book, to the big screen. I specify "the book" because I also mean the experience of reading the essays found in the book. I suspect everyone who reads *Seva* goes through the same motions I did: incredulity, discovery, realization, and amazement. At first, you're thinking "this can't be true ... no way." Then you finish the story and the abundance of realistic "documentation" in it makes you feel like you have discovered something new. Nobody told you about this – *Seva* is certainly not in the history books; you must tell everyone. But when you turn the page and read the essays, you find out you fell for it like everyone else did in 1984. Amazing. How did Luis Lopez Nieves do that? I hoped that by using the documentary format to tell the story and by including the historians' discussion of the story's impact, I could recreate that experience for audiences.³

Although *Seva Vive* certainly has not had the same galvanizing effect as *Seva*, both works produce a sense of discovery about the complex intertwining of Puerto Rican identity and the interpretive practice of history. Recent theoretical work that posits adaptation as an ongoing process of intertextuality, interaction, and change, rather than the faithful repetition of an intact original source into another form,⁴ is useful for understanding the linking of images and narrative structures in *Seva* and *Seva Vive*.

In considering the visual and textual elements of both the short story and the film, we find the power of the press and the referential quality of images to confer legitimacy on historical narrative in conversation with an explicit questioning of the limits of documentary strategies of authenticity. Both works creatively address the way history is (re)presented to us in historiophoty (Hayden White's term) and historiography; that is, they address 'the representation of history and our thoughts about it in visual images and filmic discourse' and 'the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse' (White 1988, 1193). *Seva* and *Seva Vive* call our attention to how historiophoty and historiography include processes of selection, framing, and emphasis that keep them from being strictly objective; if the historian transforms information into "facts" of a specific kind (political facts, social facts, cultural facts, psychological facts), [...] imagistic discourse can do the same' (White 1988, 1196–1197). For Robert Rosenstone, even though written texts engage history differently from film, 'film-makers can be historians' and films that engage with the meaning of the past can influence how we understand history (2012, 8–9). While both *Seva* and *Seva Vive* highlight how historical narratives appear to us as true, the cinematic text of *Seva Vive* brings to the fore the potential of documentary film to illustrate and denaturalize that process. Serrano's film opposes the temporality of nostalgia that holds the past as inalterable and only perceptible through longing.

Though we might assume that the majority of viewers will be skeptical of the events depicted in *Seva Vive*, for reasons that I will develop later, the film does not necessarily lose all ties to credibility and authenticity. Reflecting on documentaries post cinema *vérité*, Stella Bruzzi suggests a move away from lamenting failed objectivity and toward recognition of 'a new definition of authenticity' based on documentary as 'a performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators'; this new authenticity is paradoxically strengthened by clear references to subjectivity within the documentary process (2000, 6–7).⁵ Bruzzi's understanding of documentary truth as 'tread[ing] the line between intention and execution, between reality and the image' (7) speaks to a problematic in representation that existed long before digital imaging. Still, for William J. Mitchell, 'ontological distinctions between the imaginary and the real' (1992, 225) are dramatically disrupted by the digital construction of images, which make it hard to distinguish artistic intent from algorithm (31). Even if we are unable to determine objective truths about reality through images, digital or analog, visual images certainly can communicate something about our world to us. *Seva Vive* harnesses the potential of digital film to dramatize the editing, selecting, rewriting, and revisualizing at work in the process of filming itself and in the construction of history, converting us into witnesses of both processes that appear in movement before our eyes. In doing so, the film presents a credible argument for the emotions, aesthetics, beliefs, traditions, and technologies that shape the contested realm of authentic accounts of history. Given the popular emphasis of many documentary films on bringing marginalized subjects into focus and the implication that this visualization is credible and unproblematic, *Seva Vive* makes a unique contribution to our understanding of history and archive: it visualizes the selective and partial processes that produce accounts of colonizer and colonized, subjects of official history and popular memory.

Although publicized as 'the first Puerto Rican documentary feature that has been digitally released in a commercial theater in Puerto Rico', *Seva Vive* quickly disrupts

any tie to the genre's classic claim for an unmediated representation of the world (*Seva Vive Fact Sheet* 2014). In the opening credits, the camera pans from various angles across pages of the short story *Seva* that appear to have been torn out from their original (con)text due to their rough edges. A line of text unfurls that reads, 'inspirado por el cuento de Luis López Nieves' (inspired by Luis Lopez Nieves' story). With the label of 'documentary', this film animated by a short story pertains to a muddled mixture of image and fiction, archive and absence, already at work in historical narratives of the Spanish-American War, from yellow journalism and the sinking of the Maine to staged documentary footage of the conflict.⁶

Fakes, fictions, and absences surrounding the Spanish-American War are also linked to the first film footage of Puerto Rico. In his 1984 work, *Breve historia del cine puertorriqueño* (Brief History of Puerto Rican Cinema), Joaquín (Kino) García explains that Alicia Dávila of the Historical Archive of Puerto Rico was trying to obtain copies from the Library of Congress of the United States of footage that shows the arrival of American troops to the island (1984, 13, note 2, 95). This unverified possibility interests him insofar as it may signal 'la primera experiencia cinematográfica en nuestro país' (the first cinematic experience of our country) (1984, 13).⁷ Ten years later, Ramón Almodóvar Ronda claims that '[j]ust a few years after the invention of motion pictures, the first cameramen to put the island on film were those who landed with the United States armed forces' [...] 'This footage was later used in the documentary *The Spanish-American War*, produced by BlackHawk Films, an American company' (1994, 82). The work of Rose Marie Bernier-Rodriguez (forthcoming), however, challenges the veracity of this claim and investigates moving images taken in Puerto Rico from 1901 to 1902 by Frenchman Édouard Hervet, who brought the Lumiere Cinematograph to the island.⁸ The Library of Congress holds Edison Manufacturing Company and the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company's 'actualities' filmed in the US, Cuba and the Philippines, but documentary footage of Puerto Rico during the war stays out of view even in films like Sigmund Lubin's *Capture of Porto Rico* (1899) or *Washing the Streets of Porto Rico* (1898), which were likely staged and do not appear listed as surviving silent films held in International Federation of Film Archives.⁹ If Puerto Rico is 'a nation on the move', it would appear from these examples that so too are claims for the first documentary footage of the island (Duany 2002, 4).

Although *Seva*, the town, never existed and was therefore never erased by the throws of history, Lopez Nieves' tale of (re)covered destruction does evoke historical erasure and archival absence. Speaking of the relation of *Seva* the short story to 'la invasión yanqui' (the Yankee invasion), poet José Manuel Torres Santiago says, '*Seva* somos nosotros: un pueblo verdadero sobre el cual vive uno falso' (We are *Seva*: a true nation that a false one covers up) (Ramos 2007, 73). Here, by way of metaphor, *Seva* is cultural authenticity; it is what is hidden, covered over, ignored, or erased in the violence of colonialism. Hence, Torres Santiago's poetic claim places value on the capacity of textual and visual fictions to reveal authenticity in opposition to the false histories of official power. I am reluctant, however, to view *Seva* as an adaptation of history as source text that 'voice[s] the silenced and marginalized', for such an assertion too quickly implies that those voices are not themselves riddled through with fiction (Sanders 2007, 19). Rather, *Seva*'s textual and visual fictions are woven into the production of what we might come to understand as 'authentic' (Figure 1).

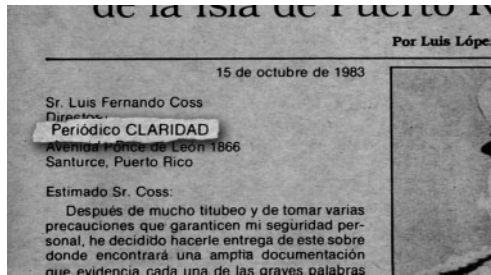


Figure 1. Visualizing history as intertext.

In addition to focusing on the reception of the short story *Seva* and its implications for popular memory and the discipline of history, *Seva Vive* adds a new layer to the myth with its explicitly marked fiction. Although not as subtle a reference to its own fictional nature as *Seva*'s appearance in the cultural supplement of a newspaper, *Seva Vive*'s preface solidifies its constructed nature when we hear the director saying '¡Pues, dale, acción, dale!' (Ok, let's go, action, let's go!). This audible command (not visible in the subtitles) by the director to start the action runs counter to documentary as the direct capture of actuality by drawing our attention to the temporal framing of the film's content. As with *Seva*, in which Luis López Nieves enters into his own fiction when he writes to the editor of *Claridad*, the author/director Francisco Serrano enters into the plot from the beginning of the film. The pursuant documentary within a documentary features hand-held footage that suggests the immediacy and spontaneity of the action and draws attention to the apparatus of the camera. This footage combines with an obviously digitally enhanced dirt road, strangely grainy, blurred, and given a surreal yellow color. The clearly manipulated appearance of the road signals the presence of the film editor and the unclear path to the buried past. From the vantage point of the back seat of a car, the camera directs our gaze to the passengers in the front who disagree over the prior location of a golf course and then over whether ammunition from a tank has been discovered or something else entirely (Figure 2). Against these ambiguities, the authoritative text of an intertitle reveals the film crew's location: 'Abandoned U.S. Naval Base/ Ceiba, Puerto Rico THREE YEARS AGO'. The film cuts back and forth between this explicitly performed documentary about a film



Figure 2. Staged authenticity.

crew that is recording the cleanup of the US Naval base Roosevelt Roads and a second documentary about the cultural impact and reception of López Nieves' story. In this second documentary, which envelops the first, we find several aspects of the expository mode of representation in documentary: photos, historical footage, and talking heads. The film's disruption of aesthetics of authenticity via references to its constructed nature has not, however, prevented some viewers from contacting the director in hopes that he might confirm the veracity of events in the film.¹⁰

Francisco Serrano's return to *Seva* through archival images in *Seva Vive* brings the story's critique of US military presence in Puerto Rico to bear on historical events since its publication in 1983.¹¹ In 2008, the year of the film's release, cleanup and transfer of land in the closed naval base of Roosevelt Roads in Ceiba was still taking place. Following the documentary in Ceiba at the start of the film, an intertitle appears that reads 'Vieques, Puerto Rico/ FIVE YEARS AGO', proceeded by documentary footage of protests in Vieques against US Naval practice. Given their temporal proximity in the film and connections via intertitles, the fictional documentary of Ceiba and the archival footage of protests in Vieques are made to occupy the same historical line. We find a certain kind of fiction in the film's next clip from an announcement by President Bill Clinton regarding the bombing accident of April 1999 and subsequent death of Puerto Rican civilian David Sanes. The president's statement that the accident 'led to a strong view in the Commonwealth that the Navy should end its training on Vieques' could erroneously suggest that strong sentiment against US naval practices and mobilization against it had not already taken place on the island. This opening sequence closes with digitally manipulated documentary footage of the USS Yorktown marine boat: the original graffiti spray painted by poet Tito de Jesús that read 'Bieke o muerte' (Bieke or Death) appears digitally manipulated in the film as 'Seva Vive' (Figure 3). This image establishes continuity in anti-American military sentiment through a



Figure 3. Altering the archive.

palimpsest of archival rupture and manipulation that ties the past of the Spanish-American War to the present through the location of Vieques.

Seva already initiated the challenge to positivism within archival epistemology continued in *Seva Vive*. Against the absence of the disappeared historian in *Seva*, Víctor Cabañas, are the presence of documents that López Nieves encloses along with his letter to the director of the newspaper *Claridad*, Luis Fernando Coss, asking that they be published in order to hasten the discovery of his friend's whereabouts. The visual reproduction in the newspaper of Cabañas' documents lends credence to the typed copies of his letters. Yet, the text's absences are as legitimizing as its documentary evidence; Cabañas' absence solidifies his existence. The mere reference to absent documentation of the only witness to survive the *Seva* massacre, Ignacio Martínez, has the same effect. Photos of Martínez and a sound recording of his testimony accompany López Nieves' letter to Coss but are not visible to the reader. At López Nieves' request that these photos remain unpublished, *Claridad* publishes instead an empty box with the explanation that it is being held in case one day Ignacio, 'temiendo aún represalias por parte de las fuerzas invasoras norteamericanas' (still fearing reprisals by the invading North American forces), is able to show his face (López Nieves [1984] 2007, 50). The 'indexical trace of the real' in the photograph appears here as a trace marked by absence (Douglas and Eamon 2009, 6). Visual documentation combines with the absence of witnesses in *Seva's* rewriting of history.

Seva Vive converts us into the faceless witnesses in the dark of the film crew's discovery of something buried in Ceiba. Against the absence of any evidence of the cassette tapes of Martínez's oral testimony in *Seva*, in the 'Extras' menu of the DVD of *Seva Vive*, we can see a still image of one of them. Given that General Nelson A. Miles led the invasion of Puerto Rico and directed a massacre of the Sioux in the Indian Wars, the inclusion of his military portrait in *Seva* lends credence to the story's account that he directed a massacre in Puerto Rico. In *Seva Vive's* treatment of the General, talking head historians discuss his actions against a backdrop of pages from *Seva*. This traditional mode of documentary representation that establishes authority through interviews is subverted, as it is in several moments of the film, by a bloopers section in the DVD Extras menu, which draws attention to the performative aspect of the experts' presence on screen. Their discussion is followed by the extradiegetic sound of lamenting violins as photographs of Native Americans appear in the foreground and disappear into a background mosaic, which fades to black in echo of their disappearance. Rather than signifying the visual presence in the archive of victims of massacre, these photos, which include some of Edward Curtis' staged photographs of Native Americans to make them look more authentically native¹², become part of the film's continuous play with the construction of history and historical subjects. If the film *Forrest Gump* 'presents itself not as a reconstruction of the past but as the archived past remade', then *Seva* creates an archive to reconstruct the past and *Seva Vive* opens up further room for play with the conditions of the archive (Hughes-Warrington 2007, 134). Particularly playful is the digital manipulation of a black and white photo to include Luis López Nieves and Francisco Serrano amongst the inexperienced Puerto Rican volunteer soldiers depicted who, according to professor of history Fernando Picó's accompanying narration, were 'kids thrown into adventure'. As spectators, we are invited to extend *Seva Vive's* game of opposing traditional practices in the formation of archives and

the authorization of history beyond the cinematic screen. For example, as of 15 February 2014, *SevaVive.com* hosts a free version of the film and states, ‘Compártela. Pásala pa’lante. Piratéala’ (Share it. Pass it along. Pirate it). The site also encourages us to respond on Facebook to the question ‘¿Cuál de éstas es realidad?’ (Which of these is reality) by clicking on the words ‘Yo creo en Seva’ (I believe in Seva) or ‘Seva es mentira’ (Seva is a lie). This invitation to belief or disbelief asks us to decide for ourselves whether we will join the ranks of suckers or defiant rebels and to decipher which side, official history or fiction, each group is on. Posing this question within a context of fiction and intertextuality that engages the archival tendency at work in social media such as Facebook, however, blurs the limits that uphold dichotomies such as believer/non-believer, historian/creator, historical archive/fiction and original/copy.

The debate over history versus fiction is taken up by the talking heads of the film that discuss the extent to which history’s construction compromises its truth and the faith that we might otherwise place in popular memory. By waiting until the end of the film to tell us the identity of some of the historians and writers that are interviewed (although some will recognize the more public figures), spectators are left to weigh the strength of their arguments, not their professional titles, or to be convinced merely by their presence in a documentary. We are reminded as viewers about the limits of our knowledge and the manipulation of our gaze when we see a black and white photo of men, women, and children with the word ‘zoquete’ (sucker) plastered over their eyes. The photo appears after novelist, lawyer, and political analyst, Juan Manuel García Passalacqua, says that the residents of Ponce were ‘zoquetes’ (suckers) when they believed that the Americans would merely help them get rid of the Spanish. The manipulation of the photograph that the camera pans over from various angles provides a visual representation of how historical interpretations shift our perspective on history. García Passalacqua’s ability to alter the archive via his interpretation is a power that is also undermined. Authorizing his own account of history because of what his grandfather said he had witnessed, García Passalacqua makes the claim that the fierce battles of the Puerto Rican people against the invading US military prove that were it not for Spain’s surrender, Puerto Rico would have defeated the American troops. Fluctuating between the military-like staccato beat of flutes and drums and a suspenseful rhythm of high-pitched flutes, the musical score of the film that plays in the background while García Passalacqua is speaking suddenly stops. This dramatic silence both punctuates his claim and ridiculizes it by imposing the film director’s incredulous response over the documentary subject’s expert account. *Seva Vive*’s shots that switch between talking head experts, putting them into debate and direct contradiction, create a humorous disruption of the authority and objectivity that the expert testimony might otherwise convey. Though we might be tempted to see the authority of the film director reinforced at the expense of the historian,¹³ Serrano’s introduction of himself as a moveable and anachronic figure within the film’s narrative is a part of a laugh that implicates spectator, director, and documentary subject alike as participants in the game of history. If López Nieves’ approach through the fiction of *Seva* was to write, as he states in his words, history ‘como debió ser, como pudo ser o como yo quiero que sea’ (as it ought to have been, as it was able to be or as I want it to be), Francisco Serrano’s approach in *Seva Vive* seems less concerned with recreating the semblance of desirable history than in

showing how histories are made and desired (Ramos 2007, 80). In this sense, *Seva Vive* responds to what Walter Benjamin referred to as a needed shift in film from semblance to an ‘aesthetics of play (*Spiel*)’ (Hansen 2004, 393).

One way that the film plays with history is by dramatizing how our access to it is bound to temporal and spatial representation, thus opening up questions about how, and if, we can distinguish between the ‘the thing represented and its representation’ (White 1999). An intertitle in white lettering against a black screen presents what appears to be a statement of fact: ‘En julio de 1898 las tropas norteamericanas invadieron a Puerto Rico’ (In July of 1898, North American troops invaded Puerto Rico). This statement is then quickly destabilized by cuts back and forth between footage of García Passalacqua saying that the Spanish-American War in Puerto Rico is very poorly documented, Picó saying that the war is well documented but poorly interpreted, and finally to García Passalacqua who says that it is all a lie. In response, the film performs an anachronic rewinding of itself (replete with rewind sound effect) back to the previous intertitle that is then edited before our eyes: ‘July’ is scratched out and replaced with the word ‘May’. In a similar fashion, images of maps are altered depending on what the talking heads say: a red blood stain imposed over a map grows or diminishes according to whose description of a battle we are listening to. This capacity to rewrite the textual and visual record is reinforced further when we see the screen of a computer built for the film on which email exchanges between Serrano and López Nieves appear. After Serrano types the word ‘evidence’ in an email to López Nieves about his film crew’s supposed discovery at Roosevelt Roads, he holds down the delete key to rewrite (or rewind) his own communication. If evidence can be erased it can also be visually distorted; after the camera closes in on the headlines of newspaper articles, it moves through a series of progressive close-ups of the word ‘invasión’, until the final syllable is framed and appears to read ‘seva’. Making *Seva* visible where it once did not exist is a gesture that also appears in the maps that accompany the short story published in 1984. The book, which includes visual images and critical essays not published in *Claridad*, incorporates two images of a map found by Víctor Cabañas. *Seva* is not legible in the very small and blurry print of the first reproduced image of the map nor is it visible in the close-up detail of it on the following page. Instead, *Seva* becomes intelligible to us only if we believe the caption of the close-up image, which says that the arrow is pointing to it. *Seva Vive*’s construction and deconstruction of texts and images in the representational present, in addition to its epistolary exchanges that form part of the film’s action, must be viewed in their contrast to the completed translations and interpretations of evidence offered to readers in the unidirectional letters from Víctor Cabañas to López Nieves in *Seva*. By adding moving images to *Seva*’s revision of history, *Seva Vive* converts the screen into an alterable map of temporal and spatial histories. As the above examples indicate, it is not the past that speaks from the archive to us in the future, but rather the present process of making history that informs the evidentiary weight of the archive.

This temporal configuration that understands the influence of the present on the past runs counter to the crisp unifying timeline of history that determinism, positivist claims of inevitable progress, and in many instances documentary film, drive forward. Cinema, especially documentary, is often heavily invested in the temporal future of the screen. Take for example Teshome H. Gabriel’s claim that the cinema of the Third World, ‘serves not only to rescue memories, but rather, and more

significantly, to give history a push and popular memory a future' (1989, 64). Describing cinematic works in the early 1970s by Puerto Ricans born and raised in the United States, Ana María García finds the cinematic screen figured as a (space of historic memory that might rescue and document the collective and individual battles of the people in Puerto Rico) 'espacio de memoria histórica que rescatara y documentara las luchas individuales y colectivas del pueblo en Puerto Rico'; a space that would later expand to include the experiences of Puerto Ricans living in the United States (2011, 303). As it is described by García, even in the absence of sovereign nation-state boundaries, the temporal future of the screen was invested with preserving national memory, not questioning how cinema also shapes the past, such as occurs so vividly in *Seva Vive*.

Moving from *Seva* to *Seva Vive*, from the printed page to the screen, we find that *Seva* reproduces a temporal logic of nostalgia that maintains the past as irrecoverable once its historical account is revealed as semblance, while *Seva Vive* opposes a temporality of nostalgia through a visual aesthetic of play. The film reconfigures historical time through its explicit depiction of the past being inextricably bound to present processes of making history. The difference between the two works' approximation to history is also reflected in how *Seva* was received; the work cleaved history into two tracks that the Puerto Rican people began to distinguish as a time 'antes de *Seva* y después de *Seva*' (before *Seva* and after *Seva*) (Ramos 2007, 84). *Seva* presents us with a skillfully constructed history that López Nieves wrote to address his 'nostalgia' for literature that reflects Puerto Ricans' heroic past and proves that they are not a docile people (Ramos 2007, 80). Although nostalgia can be felt in the present, it references the present absence of the past that can be reached only through longing. For Ximena Berecochea,

Seva constituyó la posibilidad de reconstruir una identidad nacional volviendo la vista al pasado. Si esto no fue posible, si *Seva* sólo sirvió como remedio temporal a la nostalgia, es necesario —como señala José Luis González— reconstruir hacia adelante, apuntar hacia el futuro. Solamente de esta manera se podrá rescatar, fuera de la ficción, la caribeñidad de la isla.

(*Seva* constituted the possibility of reconstructing a national identity by looking toward the past. If this were not possible, if *Seva* only served as a temporary remedy for nostalgia, it is necessary —as Jose Luis Gonzales indicates—to construct toward the future, point toward the future. Only in this way can the caribbeaness of the island, outside of fiction, be saved). (2009–2010, 224)

In *Seva Vive*, there is nothing to rescue or save, nothing to reconstruct, nothing to be presented that would not also be subject to the problematic of representation.

At the end of the film when the interviewees identify their names and titles, professor of history Carlos Pabón says that footnotes are what distinguishes history from fiction because they supposedly refer to documents that are themselves pieces of history. If footnotes make history, *Seva Vive*'s ending credits make fiction. The sole survivor of the massacre of *Seva*, Ignacio Martínez, is given credit for singing the anonymously composed copla 'Los americanos llegaron en mayo' (The Americans arrived in May) and the missing historian of *Seva*, Víctor Cabañas, is thanked for having started the investigation. We can only read the film's last caption ironically: 'Algunos personajes e incidentes presentados y sus nombres utilizados son

ficticios. Cualquier similitud al nombre, personalidad o historia de cualquier persona, viva o muerta, es completamente coincidental y sin intención' (Some people and events presented and their names that are used are fictitious. Any similarity in the name, personality or history of any person, alive or dead, is completely coincidental and without intention). For all of its play, *Seva Vive* demonstrates critical engagement with given modes of establishing national history and identity as well as with discursive formations of the archive and documentary practice. *Seva Vive's* stance encourages us to interpret with care historical documents, such as the ballot of Puerto Rico's last referendum, as we consider the representational implications of the many votes cast in favor of statehood and the numerous absent votes in the portions of the ballot that so many people left blank.

Funding

This work was generously supported by Dickinson College's pre-tenure sabbatical funds.

Notes

1. Translations in parentheses are mine unless otherwise noted.
2. For a related example, see Fordham's (2011) critical analysis of the process of adaptation (from historical event, to novel, to film) of the shooting of two Indigenous youths in Port Victoria.
3. Francisco Serrano, e-mail message to the author, November 26, 2012.
4. See, for example, Hopton et al. (2011) and Hutcheon (2013).
5. Susanka (2012) notes a similar occurrence over time in war photography that has come to privilege subjectivity and references to mediality as indicators of authentic experience instead of the traditional use of distance to imply objectivity.
6. See Bottomore (2007) and Musser (1990) for reference to the production of such films during the Spanish-American war. See also Smith (1952).
7. Marisel Flores Corrión (2014) also cites these as Puerto Ricans' first experience with the medium, but acknowledges the polemic surrounding their veracity.
8. Juan Ortiz Jiménez (2007, 14) cites Juan Emilio Viguí as the first Puerto Rican to film the island.
9. Reference Librarian at the Library of Congress Rosemary Hanes, e-mail message to the author October 26, 2012.
10. Francisco Serrano, e-mail message to the author, November 26, 2012.
11. Also carried forward in this return to *Seva* are the background events of Cerro Maravilla. The time period of the story's central plot coincides with this national scandal, and the story itself was published only a few years afterward. The murder of two pro-independence youth, subsequent cover up, and preceding trials of government officials set the stage for readers to question official history and thus helped to make *Seva* convincing (Irizarry 2007, 126).
12. I thank Flannon Jackson for this observation.
13. Marquis' (2013, 50) investigation of non-fiction performance examines the ways in which the camera's presence and the director's editorial choices can 'reduce the performer's semiotic independence'.

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