



## IMAGES TO REMEMBER: Nostalgia and Hegemonic Identities in *Italia 90: The Movie*

### HEROES OF AN EPIC-LESS COUNTRY

Miguel Gómez's portrayal of Costa Rica's first participation in the World Cup final in *Italia 90: The Movie* (2014)<sup>1</sup> can be seen as a fundamentally nostalgic reenactment of the country's past and, as such, it offers a way to understand the identity discourses of this Central American nation.

Using a frequent trope in sports cinema, the movie's climax is preceded by a pep talk. The Costa Rican national football team is minutes away from playing Scotland in its first ever match in a world cup and its coach, Serbia's Velibor "Bora" Milutinovic (played by Luis Montalbert Smith), addresses the players in an accented Spanish:

Remember I asked you to observe the players of Inter [*Internazionale de Milan, a sparring rival in the preparation leading up to the World Cup*] in the tunnel, how they intimidate you. OK, today we are to do that, we are to watch the Scottish players. When they are in the tunnel, you are to see their eyes, but not to make them be afraid. I want you to smile. I want that you shout. I want that you make fun. I want that you point fingers at them. They will not understand the great joy that you have for being here. This will surprise them, and this will give you security and confidence. *I want that you remember when you were children, you played by the sea, on the street, in the neighborhood, and that's where you are. Today you are to be happy. Don't have fear: you already won. You already won.* [emphasis mine].

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1. Translated from Spanish by Gustavo Chaves.

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The actual climax is reached when the two teams meet in the tunnel leading to the playing field: to the astonishment of the Scottish players, the Costa Rican squat laughs, shouts with joy, and makes the floors flicker with the excited kicks of their boots. The players take a step onto the field and then the movie ends—that is, in terms of the movie’s reenactment of the tortuous past that led to that glorious moment. There begins an epilogue that makes for the most heartwarming part of the movie: production credits accompanied by images of the actual Costa Rican delegation to the Italy ‘90 World Cup and snapshots of some of the most recognizable moments of the games played, such as Claudio Jara’s ‘taquito’ (a back-heel pass) and the goals scored by Juan Cayasso, Róger Flores, Hernán Medford, and Rónald González, as well as the goalkeeping feats of Luis Gabelo Conejo.

The ending of *Italia 90* features some of the most salient narrative operations used in movies that deal with the past, from the conflation of reenacted scenes and archive images that constitute the filmic matter to the overtly emotional tone that the music and editing give to the players’ faces and gestures recorded by Costa Rican and Italian television. Miguel Gómez, the director and screenwriter, has often described these players as his childhood heroes, and his own memories may well be what lies beneath coach Bora’s words: “I want that you remember when you were children.” Surely these words will resonate with the members of the movie’s audience who were children or teenagers in 1990. “You already won,” claims Bora. And indeed, these same viewers will think: “yes, they already won.” Almost a quarter of a century before the movie was released, they had all won, and the heroic goals and saves displayed along the movie credits are the evidence of that.

The alleged origin of *Italia 90* is quite telling. According to Gómez, while he was working on the production of a superhero movie (*Iron Man* [2008], by Jon Favreau), he asked himself who were the superheroes of Costa Rica. He immediately thought of the football players who participated in the Italy ‘90 World Cup. It is worth noting how, as María Lourdes Cortés has suggested, Gómez’s movie seems to be replying to Isaac Felipe Azofeifa’s essay “La isla

que somos” (“The Island We Are” [1969]), in which the author claims that Costa Rica is a hero-less and epic-less country. Who then can the heroes of this hero-less country be? What can its history be and how can it be told if it lacks an epic element? *Italia 90* is a sort of answer to these questions as it depicts Costa Rica’s first appearance in the World Cup. The answer, though, is a reenactment of a historical event through the lenses of memory, and this memory is what defines a narrative in which nostalgia and images of national identity take precedence.

#### EVERYDAY HEROES

Back in Costa Rica after working in Hollywood, Gómez began the research and interviews that would lead to the creation of *Italia 90*. Shot in just over a month, the movie was released May 28th, 2014, two weeks before the inauguration the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. It is worth noting that the main sponsors of the movie were Volio, a coffee brand, and Televisora de Costa Rica (Channel 7 or Teletica, one of the most important television channels in the country<sup>2</sup>): two companies whose products rely heavily on a sense of tradition and local identity. The success of Costa Rican football in Brazil 2014, which was as unexpected as that of 1990, had a clear correlative in Gómez’s movie. Just in the month of June 2014, *Italia 90* was seen by over 100,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

The movie begins with Costa Rica’s win against El Salvador on July 16th of 1989, the final step to secure a spot in Italy. This opening passage concentrates on images and sounds from the original TV broadcast in order to recreate the mood in the stands (fans’ jerseys and goal celebrations) as well as the experience of people watching from home. Nationalism and religiosity, two features of the hegemonic discourse of Costa Rican identity, appear in this first sequence through shots of a young woman emotionally singing the national anthem and another one (the mother of one

2. The very name of the channel, Teletica, uses the moniker for which Costa Ricans are known abroad: ‘ticos.’

3. In December of that same year Gómez released another movie that can also be read through the lenses of a national identity discourse: *Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido*, seen by over 600 thousand spectators, making it the biggest commercial success in all Central American cinema.

of the players, Claudio Jara), who clutches the beads of a rosary without taking her eyes off the TV screen.

The excitement brought by qualifying to the finals in Italy is followed by anguish: the Costa Rican team, made up of semi-professional players with no international experience outside of the region, is not prepared for a world championship match. The sports officials, mediocre and petty, do not trust Marvin Rodríguez, the local coach who made it possible to qualify, so they hire “Bora” Milutinovic. This leads to the second conflict in the film: how will a foreigner with no knowledge of the country choose the 22 players who will participate in the tournament. The movie then proceeds to build up suspense as each one of the players awaits the phone call that will confirm their inclusion or, as in the case of household names like Enrique Díaz or Evaristo Coronado, their absence in the final list.

Next, the story shows the more human aspects of the preparations for the World Cup through a series of passages that, according to Gómez, were collected through interviews and a survey of contemporary press articles: jokes between the players, the hardships of training, the painful losses in the preparation matches, and the overall discomfort created by harsh criticism from the press. Although *Italia 90* is mainly a story about the collective team, several of the football players turn into leading characters as their motivations and concerns are more prominently displayed, as is the case with Luis Gabelo Conejo (played by Juan Carlos Pardo), the Jara brothers Claudio (Daniel Ross) and Geovanny (Javier Montenegro), Captain Róger Flores (Fernando Bolaños), Juan Cayasso (Winston Washington) and, to a lesser extent, Mauricio Montero (Ólger González). For example, Conejo is presented as a sweet man who plays ball with the children of his hometown San Ramón, but is also insecure as he fears failing in the World Cup and is incensed by the press’ depictions of his performances. Claudio Jara also worries as his younger brother, Geovanny, neglects the preparation for the tournament by falling in love with a young Italian woman.

Some of the scenes in the movie come from *La gran fiesta*, the account of the World Cup adventure later co-written by player Alexandre Guimaraes and journalist Erwin Knohr. There are scenes

showing Juan Cayasso training alone at dawn in a perfectionist gesture that coincides with Guimaraes' depiction of the player: he calls him the 'John Livingston Seagull' of the group (Guimaraes & Knohr 1990: 51). Another example of scenes derived from Guimaraes' book is when defender Héctor Marchena, one of whose tasks is to stop Brazilian star Careca, asks Guimaraes (who himself is of Brazilian origin), how to say "Calm down, bastard!" in Portuguese in order to use it against his nemesis (Guimaraes & Knohr 1990: 88).

As per Milutinovic's decision, who quickly detected the low confidence of the sports leadership and the Costa Rican press towards the players, the team travels early to Europe. This leads to new problems showcased in the movie: the anguish of the players (most of whom had never been out of the country for that long), their homesickness, the hardships they endured due to the unprofessionalism and inexperience of sports bureaucrats and, again, the poor results in their preparation matches.

*Italia 90* is a sports movie, but of a peculiar kind: there are hardly any scenes showcasing the sport, be it training sessions (a commonplace in sports fiction to depict how a character develops) or preparation meetings (which in *Italia 90* are presented almost metaphorically, in sequences that resemble a music video). The first game against Scotland is not recreated, for example. The narrative seems more interested in the most intimate dimensions of the adventure: the painful longings for home, the performance and personal insecurities of the players and, finally, their courage and joy.

In the case of this movie, the intimate tone (as opposed to a more active or heroic one) does not entirely warrant Azofeifa's claim that Costa Ricans are a people without an epic. It may be that it is a subtler epic, as presented in the singular climax already mentioned with the players raising sparks with their boots, or the fact that the story offers viewers few reasons to explain the success of the team. These reasons remain 'mysterious' as they are not the usual ones in sports films: singular sacrifices, great efforts or tests, or heroic gestures. For all the popular religiosity depicted in the movie, there is an absence of divine intervention in the end results, for example. There is transformation and learning, but these virtues show remarkable simplicity. The ending of *Italia*

90 presents us with a series of everyday heroes who, as their mentor advises, stop worrying (“you already won,” he tells them) and settle for the fun and audacity of perplexing their opponents with their joy in the tunnel. This does confirm, however, another one of Azofeifa’s claims, namely, that Costa Rica is a country without a sense of tragedy.

#### MEMORY DEVICES

All the narrative tension accumulated in *Italia 90* (fear of failure, homesickness) is released at the end, when the images and audio tracks of the original broadcasts of the games confirm to the spectators what they already know: the goals, the saves, the celebration at the stadiums in Italy and on the streets of Costa Rica, all crystallized again on the screen.

*Italia 90* materializes memory in a way that allows us to raise a discussion developed in America and Europe since the 1970s. These debates have led to the multiplication of terms to describe the ways in which individuals and social groups relate to their past—how different types of memory are named, such as personal/individual or collective (Halbwachs), cultural and communicative (Assmann, among others), emblematic (Stern), performative (Winter) and media-driven, among others. The same function is fulfilled by notions such as “milieux de mémoire” (memory devices or environments, another notion introduced by Maurice Halbwachs), “lieux de mémoire” (places of memory) by Pierre Nora, and memory technologies, as described by Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik.

According to Assmann, memory is the ability “that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level” (2008:109). This identity, claims the author, is created in relation to time. From this definition, Assmann distinguishes between individual memory (which he calls “internal” and could also be described as “mental”), social memory, and cultural memory. Social or communicative memory is preserved and transmitted by physical and temporal proximity (family and friends, peers and contemporaries), has a “life span” of two or three generations, and is clearly the main type of memory operating in many spectators of *Italia 90*. Cultural

memory, on the other hand, appears rooted and even institutionalized in social groups—sometimes in relation to an absolute, mythical, and primordial past (Assmann 2008: 117). This type is also present in the film, for example, in the depiction of unprofessional football players as a modern-day, competitive-sports version of the mythical “labriego sencillo” (common peasant) exalted in the Costa Rican national anthem.

Communicative and cultural memory are forms of collective memory. For Halbwachs, collective memory makes explicit the cultural dimension of memory and how it does not necessarily operate immediately (that is, in the individual), “but through objective expressions and institutions” (Saban 2020: 382). *Italia 90* exemplifies this memory as externalized in a cultural and media product. The movie is, on the one hand, the objectification of the memories of the players through their interviews with the scriptwriter. But, on the other hand, the movie also seeks to trigger the memories of an audience who, like Gómez, witnessed the event.

The movie reconstructs the past with images and soundtracks aimed to lead viewers back to the Costa Rica and Europe of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This reenactment makes use of clothes and haircuts, cars, and music from the period to accompany certain sequences. Also, the use of contemporary press headlines, television footage, and radio broadcasts creates a believable background for the scenes of the movie. The soundtrack includes the voices of famous sports commentators of the period such as Leonel Jiménez and Everardo Herrera to accompany not only the archive images, but also the reenactments made by Gómez. The movie’s soundtrack also includes songs that recreate the period: the World Cup’s official song, “Un’estate italiana” (“An Italian Summer”) by Gianna Nannini y Edoardo Bennato, and songs by popular Costa Rican bands of the day such as the ballad “¿Qué vas a hacer esta noche?” by Gaviota, which one of the players is listening to in his walkman, allegedly while thinking of his girlfriend back in Costa Rica.

As a cognitive activity, memory is crucial for this type of audiovisual narration of historical content, since viewers have to remember and associate faces, names, situations, and real spaces, among other types of information. All these elements can (and sometimes, must) create associations outside of the movie to the real events

remembered by the audience. This is a challenge faced by every audiovisual narrative that attempts to reconstruct the past, especially if this past is part of a communicative memory: each viewer has their 'own version' of the characters and events depicted. Regarding this, Gómez claims that physical resemblance was not a criterion to select the actors for each role. Instead, performative competence, along with the data collected during the interviews with the players, were more relevant. Physical resemblance is produced by other means such as hairstyles (in the case of the Jara brothers), or linguistic mannerisms (Milutinovic's Slavic accent and Mauricio Montero's peasant cadence).

In terms of this relationship between the past and its filmic reenactment, it is worth noting that Gómez' movie reveals little of the past to the public, and the few details that can be considered unknown do not significantly alter its communicative potential. The film relies on its emotional charge: it is a reenactment, not an unveiling of the past. As reenactment, it does not seem to aim for documentary realism, and it often verges on the parodic (for example the farcically blond wig used by actor Italo Marengo in his depiction of midfielder Óscar 'Macho' Ramírez). It is not clear whether this was a deliberate director's choice or the mere result of production limitations, or even shortcomings in the writing and acting, but the end result is often candid and this sits well with Costa Rican anti-dramatic attitudes. On several occasions the film juxtaposes realism and reenactment: the real-life Claudio Jara and Mauricio Montero play the role of parents of their filmic counterparts. Róger Flores also makes a cameo when, during a flashback, he appears as the trainer of a teenage Luis Gabelo Conejo. This can be understood as a nod to the spectators, who will recognize the real-life faces, but also as a tribute to the actual football players.

According to Erll, cultural memory is often the product of media outsourcing. This device is as old as culture, since oral communication and writing can also be said to be this type of media. Nowadays, however, media technology such as cinema, radio, television, and the Internet have modified the nature and extended the life span of our temporal and spatial memories through the easy archiving and massive dissemination of writing, photography, film,



and many other kinds of media. More than real events and experiences, what society accumulates is a canon of events remembered transmedially (Erll 2008: 393). That is why authors such as Pierre Nora notice an unprecedented leading role for media in our culture: “ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory” (Nora 1989: 17). Members of society rely on media archives (themselves part of social frameworks and institutions) to remember, which leads Erll to wonder: “what kinds of cultural memory, then, are produced by literature and film?” (Erll 2008: 389). *Italia 90* may offer a kind of answer to this question through its use of graphic, sonic, and visual materials from the late 80s and early 90s.

Echoing Erll, Plate and Smelik claim that “memories are not only shaped by the social context in which they are produced, but also by the material and technological means available to produce and reproduce, store, archive and retrieve them” (Plate & Smelik 2009: 2). Media tend to solidify cultural memory by creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons from the past. These are memory technologies in which the past is evoked according to the interests of the present. As exemplified by *Italia 90*, this dialectic creates memory through mediations, but also mediations through memory.

Gómez’s film makes use of media (journalism, radio, and television archives), but the connection with memory is an even closer one: the aesthetics of the movie recreate the content that shapes this memory, such as familiar sports coverage footage or the recording studio of the variety show *Fantástico*, both of which were products of Televisora de Costa Rica, a co-producer of the film. This type of image and soundtrack materializes itself as a stand-in for the larger memory of Costa Rica’s first ever participation the World Cup. More than seeing reenactments or actual footage of the games, we see and remember through the media coverage of the event. This link between media and memory can be described as ‘premediation,’ a notion introduced by Erll to describe the relationship between memory and media that “draws attention to the fact that existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation. [...] It is the effect of *and* the starting point for mediatized memories” (Erll 2008: 392). It is not only that *Italia 90*, itself a media product,

reconstructs what is remembered, but also that it uses previous conveying elements, many already mediatized, to that effect. The film binds together a set of images produced nearly a quarter of a century before on national television sets and on the Hi 8 video camera that Guimaraes took with him to Italy, and mixes them with the records produced by Gómez himself as interviewer and director.

The use that *Italia 90* makes of multiple materials of different origins, purposes, and technologies makes one think of a palimpsest. This conflation of registers exemplifies what Mariniello has described regarding the audiovisual representation of the past: the materiality of the cinematographic image is, itself, a trace of the past beyond linear models of representation that are simply linguistic or literary (1994: 41). This photographic difference (with images from sports and entertainment programs, recordings of a home camera, and reenactments made by Gómez) is one of the strategies with which the film proposes a dialectic between the past and the present, in order to question the memory of the viewer and conflate the images from 1989 and 1990 with those corresponding to the movie's reenactment of 2014.

In this juxtaposition of the past and the present, *Italia 90* risks conflating the real and its reenactment when, for example, it simultaneously features coach Marvin Rodríguez (played by Rodrigo Durán) lamenting a loss in a friendly match and the front page of a newspaper with a photograph of the real Marvin Rodríguez. Similar devices are the aforementioned meetings of characters Mauricio Montero and Claudio Jara with their parents, played by the real Montero and Jara. This juxtaposition also obviates the passage of time, as when the movie recreates the players' visit to the variety show *Fantástico*. In that scene, the familiar character Mongo Mongo appears in its famous custom of the period (an ape on roller-skates). At some point the character takes off his mask and greets the athletes, and the face that appears is that of José Manuel Masís, who played Mongo Mongo, but as he looked in 2014 when the movie was made; that is, 24 years older than the person who actually met the national team players in 1990. Many times, the mediatic nature of this dialectic between the past and the present, between the real and its reenactment,

is underlined by the fact that these images (the football matches or the opening ceremony of the World Cup) are framed by a TV screen. Clearly, the presence of media allows for a suspension of disbelief in the audience. One after the other, different scenes in the movie attempt to dilute the difference between past reality and present reenactment, as this mostly happens through the juxtaposition of archive images and fictional representation. There is a reenactment of the players shooting the promotional video for “Lo daremos todo” (“We’ll Give It All”), the song that has since become synonymous with every Costa Rican attempt to qualify for the World Cup, and there are newly produced images of the players’ daily lives caught in shaky and poorly lit images to imitate the video recordings made by Alexandre Guimaraes in 1990 (and for which a camera of the same model was used).

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#### THE OBJECT OF MEMORY

*Italia 90* opens with a caption to legitimize the veracity of the story: “based on real life events.” From then on, its connection with the past is twofold: one part deals with historical facts reenacted without excessive documentary fidelity and another part with the myths of Costa Rican origin in connection to a hegemonic identity narrative. The first images of the movie suggest that this second part is the central one: the hands of a woman washing the uniforms that will be used by the national team in its crucial game against El Salvador. The World Cup adventure is thus linked to the daily life of humble and common people, in this case a woman who washes clothes by hand and dries them to the sun in the patio of her house. Then, as the players walk out onto the playing field, fans rise to their feet and sing the national anthem with excitement.

Thus, we are introduced to a story strongly rooted in the institutionalized and hegemonic imagination of Costa Ricans that then pays homage to the country and its heroes. The movie confirms the deep connection (in Costa Rica as in the rest of Latin America) between football and national identity, pointed out by authors such as Sergio Villena and Carlos Sandoval. Incidentally, this is not the only time this happens in Costa Rican cinema: football is also the subject of *Hombre de fe* (‘Man of Faith,’ 2017), by Dinga

Haines, a movie about the goalkeeper Keylor Navas, and is also a key element in *Buscando a Marcos Ramírez* ('Searching for Marcos Ramírez,' 2017) by Ignacio Sánchez, and in *El baile de la gacela* (*The Dance of the Gazelle*, 2018) by Iván Porras.

For Villena, the performance and identity narrative of football “operates like a shattered mirror in which nationalist anxieties and passions are manifested, and axiological coordinates are built at the moral, emotional and intellectual levels” (Villena, “Del fútbol y otros demonios,” 2009–10: 138; translation mine). Villena claims that, in Costa Rica, football (and especially the national football team) has become “one of the symbolic nuclei of a public sphere built around what it means to be (or not to be) a Costa Rican” (Idem; translation mine). This applies particularly to *Italia 90* since, as Villena writes:

As attested by the deeply nostalgic tone with which the press continually recalls that performance, as well as by the ensuing popular celebrations, that event [taking part in the Italy 1990 World Cup] became the greatest event of nationalist-patriotic exaltation in contemporary Costa Rican history. (Villena, “Globalización y fútbol posnacional” 2002: 149; translation mine)

According to Plate and Smelik, memory technologies are implicated in power dynamics: they are constituted by institutionalized discourses and cultural practices that rescue, produce, or erase memories. It is pertinent to mention now Stern's notion of emblematic memory (2000) as a kind of framework that selects which memories are to be remembered and which ones should be “pushed” to the margins. For example, in the case of Costa Rica's participation in the 1990 World Cup, this memory will invite the audience to remember the triumphs and emotions that accompanied the wins against Scotland and Sweden, but not the humiliating defeat against Czechoslovakia or the insults shouted at goalkeeper Hermidio Barrantes when he failed to replicate the heroic performance of Luis Gabelo Conejo in the last game of the tournament. The emblematic memory of the World Cup run is concerned mainly with what Costa Ricans remember, how they remember it, and, very importantly, how they see themselves in those memories. Costa Rica's first participation in the World Cup has generated what Erll calls a culture of remembrance and has become, accord-

ing to Villena, a kind of “myth of origin” which “is continually remembered and updated by mass media with an extra dose of drama, in order to transmit it to the new generations” (Villena, “Golbalización y fútbol posnacional” 2002: 151). *Italia 90* walks the line between communicative memory, which concerns what is experienced by the spectators (themselves witnesses of what is recreated and recovered on screen), and cultural memory, which is institutionalized and includes a symbolic component. The memory of the events of the 1990 World Cup, although rooted in the particular memories of individuals, was appropriated by institutions such as the press, the government, and advertising.

According to Villena, football is a “machine” that produces meaning around the idea of nation (“Fútbol, mass media y nación en la era global” 2006). Gómez’s movie provides a form of continuity for the supposedly descriptive images that have crystallized of Costa Rica and that have constituted an “imagined community,” to use the term coined by Benedict Anderson (2006). *Italia 90* appeals to a sense of belonging in Costa Rican audiences (it is about the selected “national team;” that is, the best in the country) and consolidates its idealization of the past. What is being idealized here is the courage of a group of football players that carry the torch of the common peasants who brought the country “eternal prestige,” according to the lyrics of the national anthem. Naive and provincial, but also well-intentioned, these peasant-players triumph against the odds thanks to their faith and effort. Villena and Sandoval’s research on the subject shows how Gómez’s film echoes the predominant journalistic narrative in the coverage of the 1990 World Cup, one in which “these heroes [the soccer players] embody not only their vocation of patriotic sacrifice but also the “true” peasant virtues, faith in God and the strength of the patriarchal family” (Villena, “Golbalización y fútbol posnacional” 2002: 156).

The making of the characters follows what Alexánder Jiménez (2002) calls a “metaphysical ethnic nationalism” in which the Costa Rican national identity is associated “essentially” with whiteness, the central valley, rural democracy, simplicity and humility of peasant life, and adherence to values of peace. Afro-Costa Rican soccer players such as Hernán Medford and Juan Cayasso

(two of the most prominent figures in the history of Costa Rican soccer) appear in different scenes of *Italia 90*, but their role is rather marginal. The narration focuses on players closer to the imagined identity of the white peasantry such as Flores, Montero, Conejo, and the Jara brothers.

Historically speaking, the 1990 World Cup coincided with the cultural, economic, and social transformations that shook the country in the 1980s as a result of neoliberal reforms, and when the 'exporting vocation' and openness to global trade became the predominant elements of the official discourse regarding national identity (Cuevas & Mora 2013: 5). This context charges the Italian World Cup, and by extension Gómez's movie, with tremendous symbolic force. Sandoval has analyzed the social role of football in the hinge years between the 20th and 21st, and claims that:

[...] The high expectations surrounding the men's football teams have coincided with the weakening of institutions and images that were once considered landmarks for a sense of national identity in Costa Rica. In other words, football has become the quintessential form of national identification, not just because of the successes achieved, but also because other landmarks of national identity have been weakened. (Sandoval 2006: 7; translation mine)

*Italia 90* takes up the figure of the common peasant but also renews it by turning this peasant, who has never left the country or been on a plane, into an international winner. The movie thus confirms the role of football as a source of optimism in a context of deterioration in the social fabric and weakening of political institutions.

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#### THE SUBJECT OF MEMORY

Bora Milutinovic's final speech in the movie offers a significant element: "I want that you remember when you were children." This projection, initially aimed at the players, also appeals to the remembering audience: those who witnessed the matches in 1990, including director Miguel Gómez himself, who was then a seven-year-old boy. It is important to remember that memory does not arise in the past, although it refers to it: memory is generated in the present, and the present of this audience is a movie with reenacted events and recovered images from 1989 and 1990.

It is hard to predict whether *Italia '90* will create new memories or memoirs in later generations, but it surely roused the memories of those who witnessed the actual event in 1990. For that specific audience, the movie is a 'lieu de mémoire,' as described by Pierre Nora: a "place" where "memory crystallizes" (1989: 7) as a byproduct of the interaction (and reciprocal determination) between history and memory. Covered with an aura provided by the imagination, these places (at once material, symbolic, and functional) are recognizable in the simple gesture of "being there;" they are "simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration" (Nora 1989: 19). For that operation to take place, a will to remember is necessary; otherwise, any event will end as a simple and external 'lieu d'histoire' (Nora 1989: 19).

*Italia 90* is an audiovisual story created to flatter memory and desire. It allows for the recovery of the notion of performed memory, which is what operates in a cultural object like a movie that refers to the past in order to renew its memory. Winter explains that when individuals and social groups interpret a story about the past,

[...] they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. These renewed and revamped memories frequently vary from and overlay earlier memories, creating a complex palimpsest about the past each of us carries with us. (Winter 2010: 11)

In the case of *Italia 90*, this performative memory is charged with emotion and affection. Viewers see their own memories turned into images and sounds, recovered by the archive and recreated through moving pictures, music, and editing.

Gómez's movie is full of details aimed at triggering the memory of those viewers who share the circumstances of the director, and that may be incomprehensible to those who do not have direct memories of the event. In this manner, the narration reveals a complicity with the part of the audience that, as the director and screenwriter, 'lived' the World Cup adventure. One clear example of this is the dialogue between Mauricio Montero and Claudio Jara

in which the former asks the latter to be disciplined and not take risks with 'taquitos' (back-heel passes): the movie does not show it, but the target audience already knows that the goal against Scotland came about through an elegant back-heel pass from Jara to Cayasso.

#### THE EPIC OF MEMORY

The full title of *Italia 90: la película* (*Italia 90: The Movie*) contains, in its unassuming brevity and deceptive simplicity, another element to interpret the movie's relationship with the past. A colon in the middle, as if to separate the historical fact of the 1990 World Cup in Italy and the fictionalized account of the memory of that event (the *movie*). Indeed, a Costa Rican audience is not likely to think much of the overall results of the 1990 World Cup; when a Costa Rican reads "Italia 90" they think "Costa Rica in Italy 90." Whatever results came after Costa Rica was eliminated by Czechoslovakia are completely irrelevant in this story. Therefore, the *movie* is about that *Costa Rican* story—and for a country still taking baby steps in movie production (a country hungry to tell its own private epic) *Italia 90: la película* offers a rare occasion for Costa Ricans to see their history reenacted on the big screen.

That separation in the title, with the added clarification that it is a 'movie,' brings back the constitutive dialectic between past and present, between reality and reenactment, that informs the story. It *is* indeed about Italy '90, but the *movie* version. The actual World Cup, as experienced by Gómez, the players, and all the people who were alive at the time, is a different matter. The audiovisual textuality of the movie expresses that much, as when it places the actors and the real football players in the same cinematographic frame, or when at the end it presents (not *re-present*; not *re-create*, but instead *exhibit* through archival material) the heroic moments of this World Cup. There is a gesture of nostalgia in this *modus operandi* and, if you will, of respect towards the event, towards the real players, and towards the children who watched the event.

The title summarizes the devices examined above and used by the director to reconstruct memory and the past. This examination included the narrative, visual, and sonic arrangements



with which the film presents and represents this past and memory. The conflation of materials from different sources, used with different purposes, and created with different technologies (including archives and archive imitations like new footage made with old cameras) shows the palimpsest that characterizes media memory. These cases in which memory shapes the medium exemplify what Erll calls pre-mediation.

The movie is the product of the director's will to remember, and as such takes up as its objective to create that desire in others; namely, the viewers who witnessed the real event. This is a form of performative memory: an act of memory that produces new memories. Milutinovic's phrase "I want that to remember when you were children" materializes not only through the archive material, but also through the use of music (such as Gaviota's songs), and familiar images (haircut styles, cars, the *Fantástico* studio, or the character Mongo Mongo) that lead the audience back to a quarter of a century before when these events were happening.

The movie also displays a technology of memory to unfold the past in accordance with a power structure and an institutionalized discursive system. The protagonists of *Italia 90: la película* are modeled after the common peasant imagined by the Costa Rican ruling class since the end of the 19th century: a white, hard-working, and somewhat mischievous peasant (remember Marchena learning Portuguese to intimidate his rival), with more will than world (experience).

With the exception of the pep talk towards the end, *Italia 90: la película* renounces most tropes of sports cinema and is presented as an adventure of a group, rather than that of an individual. It is largely an exploration of intimate drama, and particularly of the nostalgia and the insecurities of those who face a challenge with more courage than experience. This is confirmed by the climax when the players, the common heroes, are not seen winning, as would be the case in a typical sports narration, but clapping, laughing, raising sparks from the floors, before carefreely heading off to the biggest football match of their lives. There is an epic in that, for sure; but it is an epic of collective remembrance, not of individual achievement. And it is there for all the audience to embrace.

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