

IN FOCUS: Latin American Film Research in the Twenty-First Century

Introduction

by ANA M. LÓPEZ and DOLORES TIERNEY, editors

It is perhaps timely that the Latino/a Caucus of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) is finalizing a special “In Focus” to speak to the “state of our field” just weeks after two major Latin American media figures were so in evidence at the Eighty-Sixth Academy Awards ceremony: Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón and his seven Oscars for *Gravity* (2013) and Brazilian documentary filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho (1933–2014), who was honored during the ceremony’s “those that have died this year” montage. Cuarón’s Oscar for best director—the first Latin American director to win the award—and for a “British” film no less, points to both the vitality of our field of Latino media and film studies and the transnational mediascapes we increasingly have to negotiate in our scholarship. Coutinho’s inclusion in the academy’s “In Memoriam” evidences not just his individual contribution to the documentary form—*Twenty Years Later* (*Cabra marcado para morrer*, 1984), *The Mighty Spirit* (*Santo forte*, 1999), and *Master Building* (*Edifício master*, 2002), to name just a few of his most important films—but also the lasting significance of the region’s cinema in global terms.

It is with Cuarón’s victory and the sad loss of Coutinho in mind that this “In Focus” takes a metacritical approach to issues of transnationality, research accessibility, corpus building, and history in Latin American media scholarship. The field originally (and lastingly) envisioned as the “scope” of the Latino/a Caucus has expanded beyond the wildest imaginings of those who originally formed the caucus more than twenty years ago. Looking only at *Cinema Journal*, in the five-year period 1990–1994, the journal published only one essay that addressed Latino and/or Latin American issues. In comparison, between 2011 and 2013, inclusive, *Cinema Journal* published six essays addressing issues or films of concern to the caucus. The field now has

specialized journals of its own and others that overlap significantly with (and regularly feature) the work of our membership: for example, *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas* and *Transnational Cinemas*. And, of course, in Latin America itself the field has also blossomed beyond an earlier, primarily historiographical impetus to nurture a significant cadre of scholars producing cutting-edge work. Finally, beyond Latin America itself, the field of Latino studies has also assumed its own maturity and produced works of great importance and lasting significance. Thus it was with no small dose of trepidation that we had to make some difficult choices structuring this “In Focus.” We could not hope to encompass the tremendous scope of the work of the interdisciplinary and international caucus membership and do it justice: we elected to focus (primarily) on English-language scholarship on Latin American film with the hope that a future “In Focus” could be devoted exclusively to Latino film and media studies. In this “In Focus,” then, we bring together a range of scholars from the Latino/a Caucus, including both a founding member (López) and two of its newer members (Poppe and Navitski) to represent the different generations and different constituencies in the United States, Europe, and Latin America that make up our core membership.

Our four feature essays speak broadly to the state of our field as well as challenge some of its standard assumptions and review new avenues of scholarship within Latin(o) American media. Although distinctly different in scope and approach, all the essays present measured assessments of scholarship to date while also pointing toward new directions for research. We hope that this work simultaneously captures the contemporary energy of the field, is useful to others beginning to embark on research in the area, and communicates our excitement and hopes for future scholarship.

The Essays. We have organized the essays in roughly chronological fashion and from the most concrete to the more speculative. Nicolas Poppe’s essay, which begins this “In Focus,” explores how recent critical studies have approximated Argentine, Brazilian, Hollywood, and Mexican films of the early sound period in new ways. Poppe looks at how scholars both inside and outside Latin America sound out understandings of national cinema and transnationalism. Outlining the ways in which national cinema and transnationalism have come to be understood in existing research, Poppe also provides an important metacritical introduction to the early sound period in Latin America, raising important questions for ongoing research into this period.

Rielle Navitski’s essay provides a remarkably useful and concise guide to online resources for historical research on Latin American cinema, from audiovisual material and iconography to digital newspapers and magazines, and she highlights the theoretical and methodological questions raised by digitization in the context of Latin American film historiography. For instance, Navitski explores the opposition between open-access models, favored by Latin American cultural institutions and linked to a rhetoric of cultural patrimony, and access by subscription-only models, whether on an individual or institutional basis, which are favored in the United States, where some of the most comprehensive collections of Latin American periodicals and documents are housed. She also suggests that even though the digitization of archival materials represents an important step forward in our ability to research the cinema and media

of the region, there is much we potentially lose when we “research” from home and office instead of in physical archives.

Dolores Tierney’s essay maps the emerging research area of cult cinemas in Latin America. Seeking to explore how to begin the process of writing a history of cult cinema in the region, Tierney highlights the necessary differences and problems of cult film paradigms established in US and European scholarship in their assignation to Latin American texts. Tierney also looks at the areas the nascent history of cult cinema already being written across the region needs to explore, as well as the potential pitfalls of directly mapping some cult film practices (“talking back to the screen”) onto a Latin American context.

Finally, Ana M. López’s piece is the most speculative. Inspired by work on intermediality and the cinema, media, and arts in Europe in the past couple of decades, she presents an argument for the field to assume an intermedial “lens” with which to understand the complicated contemporary mediascapes in Latin America as well as to posit new historiographical frames through which to illuminate the history of Latin American media at nodal points of intermediality. Thus, she argues that an intermedial approach can help us understand the complex relationship between early sound cinema and radio in the region, for example, and that the 1950s and 1960s are also a possible nodal point (radio, cinema, and television) that bears further exploration from this perspective.

Both in the spirit of Alfonso Cuarón’s acceptance speech for his award for best director at the Academy Awards in early 2013, in which he dedicated the award to his mother, who was sitting in the audience, and in disbelief that it was Eduardo Coutinho’s own son who caused his untimely demise, we dedicate this work to our mothers, Olga López and Theresa Hobden. They have stood beside us, eternal cheerleaders, even when they had no idea what we were doing or trying to achieve, and they deserve all the credit we can muster. And we present this work also as an homage to caucus member and colleague Laura Podalsky, who would have contributed an essay to this “In Focus” section had her own mother not passed away only a few weeks ago. As Cuarón put it, in (untranslated) Spanish, “Esto es gracias a ti, Mamá, si [por] algo... yo estoy aquí es por ti, y esto es para ti. Te amo.” *

Approaching the (Trans)National in Criticism of Early Latin American Sound Film

by NICOLAS POPPE

In the July 1931 issue of *Mensajero Paramount* (Paramount Messenger), an in-house publication dedicated to the interests of Spanish-speaking film exhibitors, an editorial note remarks that “Spanish-speaking audiences now have a spectacle in which they not only find their language, but something as essential in order for one to be able to speak properly of a Latin American and Spanish cinema: the spirit, the feeling, the Latin American and Spanish psychology.”¹ Paradoxically, the mouthpiece of a major studio contends it is able to fulfill its Spanish-speaking markets’ desires for talkies that both literally and figuratively speak to and for local spectators. Though Hollywood would continue to dominate these markets, creative entrepreneurs in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico began building film industries in the 1930s in the shadow of the giant to the north.² The contradictions of this note in *Mensajero Paramount*, as well as the rise of these domestic film industries, express tensions between two fundamental concepts marking criticism of the early sound period in Latin America historically and through to today: national cinema(s) and transnationalism.

In this commentary, I trace the ways in which recent critical studies approximate national and transnational features of Latin American cinema(s) of the early sound period (1931–1943).³ In so doing, I also

1 “Del instante: Nuevos rumbos de la producción cinematográfica,” editorial, *Mensajero Paramount*, July 1931, 3.

2 Measuring spectatorship quantitatively through metrics like box-office and total number of spectators in Latin American markets during the 1930s and early 1940s is notoriously difficult. In his *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984), Jorge Schinitman provides data on how domestic and foreign films were consumed in Latin America, a topic that, unfortunately, frequently lacks detailed documentation. Other studies provide details on premieres and theater runs, such as María Luisa Amador and Jorge Ayala Blanco’s landmark *Cartelera cinematográfica, 1930–1939* (Mexico City: Filmoteca, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), which inspired Violeta Núñez Gorritti’s *Cartelera cinematográfica peruana, 1930–1939* (Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo de Desarrollo Editorial, 1998).

3 I define the early sound period in Latin America as 1931 to 1943, as it bridges the period between the premiere of the first sound film in the region, the Mexican film *Santa* (Antonio Moreno, 1931), and the United States’ cutting off raw film-stock supplies to Argentina because of geopolitical concerns. This move effectively paralyzed the Argentine film industry

aim to touch on how underlying metacritical questions of national cinema and transnationalism in the period have come to be understood. That is, what does it mean to talk about the Argentine national cinema of the 1930s? How do the transnational influences of jazz, for example, shape early Brazilian film musicals? Why are particular transnational features manifested in early Mexican sound film? To be able to approach these kinds of questions, I begin by briefly discussing how scholars both inside and outside Latin America sounded out understandings of national cinemas from the 1950s to the 1990s. This criticism, which situates the early sound period within the framework of the national cinema, continues to be highly influential because of both its documentation and the ways in which it still determines lines of investigation of more recent work exploring diverse transnational elements of the period. Subsequently, I introduce a new, transnationally oriented film criticism of the early sound period that allows for deeper understanding of how Latin American film industries interacted with flows of transnational mass media, particularly those of the United States and Hollywood.

Part of a broader “transnational turn” in film studies, which is particularly evident in scholarship on contemporary Latin American film, this recent criticism also engages other disciplines like economics, geography, history, Latin American cultural studies, musicology, and politics. Keeping in mind Libia Villazana’s assertion that “transnationalism is transdisciplinary because its approaches transcend the borders of conventional disciplines and incorporate the methods of other disciplines to its subject/object of study, while maintaining as much as possible the framework of those disciplines,” recent research into early Latin American sound cinema(s) has indelibly changed what it means to study films of the period.⁴ Contextualizing their subjects/objects of study frequently, though not always, within other disciplinary contexts, as well as within cinema of the time, these critics discuss how early Latin American sound film industries created cinematic interpretations that brought audiences (local and beyond) to theaters by appealing to their anxieties and aspirations. Not only do these recent interventions reshape the way we approach and understand the period, but they also emphasize the importance of studying early Latin American sound film: in many ways, it gives us insights into practices and processes of transnationalism that continue to this day.

Several foundational texts on national cinemas were published in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁵ Situating the early sound period within the territory of national cinema, these studies betray the practical difficulties (e.g., access to films, dearth of documentation, lack of technological resources) of early scholarly film criticism. As a

while helping usher in the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Furthermore, Emilio García Riera calls 1943 “el gran año” (“The Great Year”) in the section dedicated to the year in volume 3 of his *Historia documental del cine mexicano* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1993).

4 Libia Villazana, “Redefining Transnational Cinemas: A Transdisciplinary Perspective,” in *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating the Transnational in Spanish and Latin American Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison (Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis, 2013), 25–46.

5 This new criticism was distanced not only in time but also in perspective from media like fanzines, industry mouthpieces, intellectual journals, and newspapers contemporary to the early sound period. For examples of contemporary debates, see Jason Borge, *Avances de Hollywood: Crítica cinematográfica en Latinoamérica, 1915–1945* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo, 2005), and Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El cine sonoro en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1973).

result of these limitations, it is unsurprising that initial works like Domingo Di Núbila's *Historia del cine argentino* (1959/1960), Emilio García Riera's *El cine mexicano* (1963) and much more ambitious nine-volume *Historia documental del cine mexicano* (1969), and Jorge Ayala Blanco's *La aventura del cine mexicano* (1968) lack the contours of contemporary film scholarship.⁶ In their early work, Di Núbila and García Riera demonstrate evaluative tendencies of a different generation of film criticism. While Ayala Blanco shares the others' proclivity to opine, his analysis of major currents in Mexican cinema from the 1930s to the 1960s is more thorough.⁷ Despite certain deficiencies for the contemporary critic, they represent the first scholarly forays into the early sound period and open critical lines of inquiry still being explored. They are, in this sense, texts that are still very much alive.

Shifting away from the more qualitative tendencies of these models, later studies on Latin America cinema(s) further explored geographies of the early sound period within the delineated borders of the national film industry. In the introduction to a volume of his revised *Historia documental del cine mexicano* (1992–1994), García Riera argues: "If this *Historia* achieves some present or future utility, it will do so primarily by the information that it contributes, by its description of a territory—Mexican cinema—of which it wants to offer a map, and not in terms of the opinion that this territory merits by the one who made it, which is an opinion as questionable as any other."⁸ Favoring a more measured documentary approach, García Riera's description is characteristic of a wave of revisionist works exploring the importance of the emergence and development of national film industries in Argentina and Mexico in the 1930s that also included broader film histories like those of Aurelio de los Reyes and colleagues, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, Jorge Couselo, Claudio España, and Mónica Rugai Bastos, as well as narrower projects on Argentine, Hollywood *en español*, and Mexican cinema in the early sound period.⁹ These works allow for a more detailed survey of the aesthetic, cultural, industrial, and social landscapes of early Latin American sound film productions, particularly in Argentina, Mexico, and the United States. They also anticipated major cinema histories written and edited in English such as those by Carl J.

6 Domingo Di Núbila, *Historia del cine argentino*, vols. I and II (Buenos Aires: Cruz de Malta, 1959/1960); Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969); Ayala Blanco, *La aventura del cine mexicano* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1968).

7 Ayala Blanco provides, however, an intriguing history of film criticism in Mexico from pioneers like Alfonso Reyes and Martín Luis Guzmán to that point in *Aventura del cine mexicano* (291–297).

8 Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992), 1:8.

9 Aurelio de los Reyes et al., *80 años de cine en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977); Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, *Cinema, trajetória no subdesenvolvimento* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra/EMBRAFILME, 1980); Jorge Miguel Couselo, *Historia del cine argentino* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984); Claudio España, *Medio siglo de cine* (Buenos Aires: Abril, 1984); Aurelio de los Reyes, *Medio siglo de cine mexicano (1896–1947)* (Mexico City: Editorial Trillas, 1987); Mónica Rugai Bastos, *Tristeza não pagam dívidas: Cinema e política nos anos da Atlântida* (São Paulo: Olho d'Água, 2001); Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El cine sonoro en México*; Juan Heinink and Robert Dickson, *Cita en Hollywood: Antología de las películas norteamericanas habladas en castellano* (Bilbao, Spain: Mensajero, 1990); Claudio España, ed., *Cine argentino: Industria y clasicismo 1933/1956* (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 2000); Abel Posadas, Mónica Landro, and Marta Speroni, *Cine sonoro argentino 1933–1943*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: El Calafate, 2005); and Abel Posadas, Mónica Landro, Marta Speroni, and Raúl H. Campodónico, *Cine sonoro argentino 1933–1943*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: El Calafate, 2006).

Mora, Tim Barnard, Randal Johnson, John King and Nissa Torrents, Chon Noriega and Steven Ricci, Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw, and Lisa Jarvinen.¹⁰ Studies of national cinemas situate the early sound period within a determined space, which, consequently, limits their ability not only to deeply examine outliers within the national film industry but also to survey the complex ways in which the forces of transnational mass media shaped the terrains of more conventional productions.

Framing early sound cinema within understandings of the national relates films like Argentina's *Los tres berretines* (The Three Whims, Equipo Lumiton, 1933) to subsequent developments within its respective cinema but, in doing so, omits from analysis a wide range of transnational elements. Take, for example, the visual quoting of the Edison studios' comic short *How the Office Boy Saw the Ball Game* (Edwin Porter, 1906) in the denouement of *Los tres berretines*, when the paterfamilias (Luis Arata) climbs a telephone pole to watch a soccer match. A transnational feature such as this is often left to oblivion in studies more concerned with establishing national trajectories. Even more complicated, because of these kinds of indelible marks of outside cultural practices and production, particularly those of the United States and Hollywood but also of Europe, the emergences and divergences of early sound cinemas in Latin America have also been viewed more recently through the lens of transnationalism by numerous scholars. Similar to excellent recent studies—Robert McKee Irwin and Maricruz Castro Ricalde, and Dolores Tierney, among others—of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, scholars of the early sound period examine relations of local film industries and their productions to positionings of cosmopolitanism and modernity in transnational mass media, particularly in Euro-American cinemas but also in design, fashion, and music.¹¹ They also analyze the ways in which local cinemas engage, problematize, and, often, subvert hegemonic cultural influences.

Recent incursions into the early sound period in Latin America typically approach transnational features in three ways: transnationalism from above, transnationalism from below, and transnationalism as already integrated into the community. The first of these tendencies examines the means by which Hollywood studios imposed their transnational visions of Latin America, as well as the reception of those visions in the region. Not limited to the Spanish-language films that its studios produced—originally, most were multilinguals, but studios Fox Films and Paramount came to produce

10 Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Tim Barnard, ed., *Argentine Cinema* (Toronto: Nightwood, 1986); Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil: Culture and the State* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); John King and Nissa Torrents, eds., *The Garden of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1988); Chon A. Noriega and Steven Ricci, eds., *The Mexican Cinema Project* (Los Angeles: UCLA Film and Television Archive, 1994); Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, ed., *Mexican Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), originally published in French as *Cinéma mexicain* (Paris: Éditions Pompidou, 1992); Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil, 1930–2001* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004); Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw, *Brazilian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Lisa Jarvinen, *The Rise of Spanish-Language Filmmaking: Out from Hollywood's Shadow, 1929–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

11 Robert McKee Irwin and Maricruz Castro Ricalde, *Global Mexican Cinema: Its Golden Age* (London: BFI and Palgrave, 2013); Dolores Tierney, *Emilio Fernández: Pictures in the Margins* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007); "Emilio Fernández 'in Hollywood': Mexico's Postwar Inter-American Cinema, *La perla/The Pearl* (1946) and *The Fugitive* (1948)," *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 7, no. 2 (2010): 81–100.

original features *en español* that represent a kind of (non)national cinema—Hollywood’s transnational influences are rhizomatic. In the context of the 1930s and early 1940s in Latin America, nodes include accent(s) in Spanish-language films produced in the United States, foundational Latin American stars like Dolores del Río and Carlos Gardel, intellectuals’ response to the rise of Hollywood cinema, and United Artists Corporation’s film distribution.¹² The foundational work of Ana M. López is often representative of the second of these tendencies. Working within a narrower scope that allows for focusing on the mediation of transnational flows through more local and specific conceptual parameters, López often approaches transnationalism from below.¹³ Her work, which shapes the critical approach(es) used by me and many others, explores particular transnational features through(out) Latin American cinemas.¹⁴ More recently, scholars such as Laura Isabel Serna and Matthew Karush have embarked on ambitious book-length projects that map how transnational influences help reterritorialize the wider expanses of different media cultures. Though focusing on the 1920s (i.e., the period just before the arrival of sound), Serna’s *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age* indicates the possibilities of these more comprehensive approaches by exploring the ways in which urban Mexican moviegoers (both within and crossing the national border) engaged the film culture of their northern neighbor and shaped their own through their own experiences and social practices in the cinema and beyond.¹⁵ Showing the benefits of understanding the national at least partially through transnational elements, Serna’s book suggests the kind of criticism that is needed in early Latin American sound film studies. A study that addresses this need is Karush’s *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946*, which shows the influences of transnational mass

- 12 On accent(s) in US Spanish-language films, see Colin Gunckel, “The War of the Accents: Spanish Language Hollywood Films in Mexican Los Angeles,” *Film History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 325–343. On Dolores del Río, see Carlos Monsiváis, *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1988); Ana M. López, “From Hollywood and Back: Dolores Del Río, a Trans(national) Star,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 17 (1998): 5–32; Joanne Hershfield, *The Invention of Dolores del Río* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Linda Hall, *Dolores del Río: Beauty in Light and Shade* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). On Carlos Gardel, see Marvin D’Lugo, “Gardel, el film hispano y la construcción de la identidad auditiva,” in *Cine, nación y nacionalidades en España*, ed. Nancy Berthier and Jean-Claude Seguin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2007), 147–167, and D’Lugo, “Early Cinematic Tangos: Audiovisual Culture and Transnational Film Aesthetics,” *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 5, no. 1 (2009): 9–23; Rielle Navitski, “The Tango on Broadway: Carlos Gardel’s International Stardom and the Transition to Sound in Argentina,” *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 1 (2011): 26–49; Nicolas Poppe, “Made in Joinville: Transnational Identity Aesthetics in Carlos Gardel’s Early Paramount Films,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 21, no. 4 (2012): 481–495. On intellectuals’ responses, see Jason Borge, *Avances de Hollywood*, and Borge, *Latin American Writers and the Rise of Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Finally, on United Artists, see Gaizka Usabel, *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).
- 13 A few examples of López’s scholarship on transnational features of early Latin American sound film are “Celluloid Tears: Melodrama in the Latin America Cinema,” *Iris* 13 (1991): 38–39, and “Crossing Nations and Genres: Traveling Filmmakers,” in *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 33–50. Her work frequently extends beyond the early sound period into the 1940s and 1950s.
- 14 Nicolas Poppe, “Sounding Out Temporality in the Argentine Film Musical of the 1930s,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2012): 211–226.
- 15 Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

cultural production, primarily Hollywood cinema and North American jazz, in Argentine cultural history.¹⁶

While the early sound period has been contextualized within territories of national cinema(s) to varying degrees, its territorialization is necessarily limiting, something that has led to explorations of the connections between local film industries and disparate aspects of transnational mass media. Despite tracing important connections linking early Latin American sound film and its film cultures to issues beyond national borders, this transnational turn has yet to arrive at a more expansive theorization of the meaning of transnationalism in the period. That is, even though transnational analyses allow us to better understand certain cultural practices or understandings, we are left without a defined idea of what this transnationality means. Let us take an example from Mexico, Juan Bustillo Oro's 1934 Mexican film *Dos monjes* (*Two Monks*), which, as early critics like Ayala Blanco and García Riera note, owes its visual style to German expressionism. While I am currently working on an analysis that teases out how this influence is negotiated within the text's structure, questions persist: What is the best way to approach this kind of transnationalism? What do these transnational influences mean to the viewer's experience of the film? How do transnational features interact with national ones? How does the film's transnationality relate to other articulations not only in Mexico but also throughout Latin America? Ultimately, these questions raise a much more important one: is it even possible to frame a comprehensive theory of transnationalism in the early sound period in Latin America? *

I thank Joshua Finnell for helping to assemble documentation used to write this article, and Rielle Navitski for her insightful remarks on an early draft.

16 Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

Reconsidering the Archive: Digitization and Latin American Film Historiography

by RIELLE NAVITSKI

Over the past decade, the drive toward digitization and online access has created new means of disseminating Latin American cinema and documents relating to its history. From personal blogs on film history that are richly illustrated with period images to new data-based scholarship, especially in the field of early cinema, the scholarly and popular interest generated by digital archives is abundantly clear.¹ Yet digital remediation and access (re)produce methodological challenges that are especially thorny in the case of Latin America, where the scarcity of financial resources and the often vexed relationship between cultural institutions and the state have often rendered archival preservation fragmentary and politically fraught.

Digitization exemplifies a fundamental archival dilemma: the frequent incompatibility of preservation and access. Just as celluloid is a superior preservation medium for moving images, microfilm remains readable longer than digital files, and a digitization-only policy threatens the long-term survival of documents.² Furthermore, by striving to make ubiquitous, on-demand access the norm, digitization can compound the archive's elision of its own gaps and silences—what Jacques Derrida called the anarchive. In his influential *Archive Fever*, in part a reflection on the digital, Derrida argues that the material impermanence of all archival storage makes it impossible to separate the drive for preservation from the “violence of forgetting.”³ Referring to the physical substrate of archives, he writes, “right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than

- 1 For example, Paul S. Moore, “Moving Picture Postcards: Local Views in North American Picture Shows before the Nickelodeon,” and Maria A. Velez-Serna, “Mapping Showmanship Skills and Practices in Scotland,” both papers presented at the Twelfth International Domitor Conference, Brighton, United Kingdom, 2012.
- 2 Archival best practices call for simultaneous preservation on microfilm and access on digital. See Elena García Puente and Lola Rodríguez, “The Hemeroteca Digital of the National Library of Spain,” in *Digital Scholarship*, ed. Marta Mestrovic Deyrup (New York: Routledge, 2008), 49–71; Bernard F. Reilly and James Simon, “Shared Digital Access and Preservation Strategies for Serials at the Center for Research Libraries,” *Serials Librarian* 59 (2010): 271–280.
- 3 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 79.

that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness . . . into the heart of the monument.”⁴

The tensions inherent to archiving are foregrounded by digital obsolescence and the imperative of access. Given the limited resources available to many Latin American institutions, archival material that has not been digitized (and often, never microfilmed or properly stored), or whose digital format is outdated, is threatened with effective erasure from the historical record. When institutions outside the region work to fill this preservation gap, they risk reinforcing a neocolonial dynamic of knowledge production, encouraging the concentration of documents from and scholarship about emerging world regions in Europe and the United States. Obstacles to consulting documents collected elsewhere, often behind institutional paywalls, are compounded by the limited and uneven penetration of Internet access in many Latin American and Caribbean nations.⁵

As these references to the opportunities and challenges of digitization suggest, my purpose in this brief essay is twofold. First, I provide a guide to online resources for historical research on Latin American cinema, from audiovisual material and iconography to digital newspapers and magazines. Second, I highlight theoretical and methodological questions raised by digitization in the context of Latin American film historiography. A key question is the opposition between open-access models, favored by Latin American cultural institutions and linked to a rhetoric of cultural patrimony, and access by subscription only, whether on an individual or an institutional basis.⁶ This model dominates in the United States, where some of the most comprehensive collections of Latin American periodicals and documents are housed.

These divergent approaches stem from differing conceptions of cultural capital. In North America, a legal distinction was drawn between art and commerce in the silent era, and cinema aligned with the latter.⁷ By contrast, in Latin America, despite neoliberal tendencies toward privatization, cinema continues to be viewed as an expression of national identity, simultaneously funded and policed by the state.⁸ Partnerships between cultural institutions and private enterprise have fueled archival digitization in Latin America; however, most collections remain open access.⁹ This approach is

4 Ibid., 12.

5 Barney Warf, “Diverse Spatialities of the Latin American and Caribbean Internet,” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 8, no. 2 (2009): 125–145. The growing popularity of smartphones has altered this situation to some extent, but economic and infrastructural obstacles remain.

6 A useful discussion of cultural patrimony and its construction through discursive and social practices in the Latin American context is found in Lisa Breglia, *Monumental Ambivalence: The Politics of Heritage* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

7 I am referring to the case *Mutual Film Corporation v. Ohio State Censorship Ordinance* (236 U.S. 230, 1915), which ruled that cinema was an industrial product rather than protected speech under the First Amendment. See Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 198–202.

8 Randal Johnson, “In the Belly of the Ogre: Cinema and the State in Latin America,” in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 204–213.

9 Banamex is a sponsor of the Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México, while the semipublic Brazilian oil company Petrobras sponsors the Museu Lasar Segall’s Biblioteca Digital das Artes do Espetáculo and the J. Carlos em Revista project, which I discuss herein.

pragmatic: if Latin American states aim to preserve a (selective) brand of cultural specificity in the face of globalization, it is in their interest to facilitate the online circulation of documents of national history and culture through state institutions. By contrast, US companies such as LexisNexis, ProQuest, and NewsBank demonstrate the profitability of making newspaper and magazine archives digitally accessible for a fee.

While paywalls place clear limits on our access to archives, database and interface design more subtly condition researchers' interactions with historical sources. This tendency is exemplified by the growing dominance of optical character recognition (OCR) software. This now-familiar tool renders the visual content of PDF images as keyword-searchable text, encouraging a language-based mode of interacting with historical artifacts. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the OCR-mediated archive, many national libraries and archives offer online thematic collections that approach the paradigm of the "virtual museum." By presenting an ostensibly representative collection of objects or texts online, thematic collections can spark browsers' interest but also encourage a fetishistic relationship to historical artifacts. The thematic collection deliberately forgoes the impossible fantasy of completeness attached to the archive as a whole.

My attempt to chart the rapidly shifting panorama of online digital archives is also conceived as an inevitably incomplete project, one that will go out of date before its publication, as new collections are added, documents are removed, and websites are revamped or go dark. However, the effort may be valuable, if only to counter approaches to the archive that encourage the hoarding of knowledge, or the leveraging of exclusive access to neglected or newly uncovered collections, as a means of increasing the cultural capital attached to one's scholarly work. Writing from the perspective of media archaeology, Wolfgang Ernst argues that "the notion of the archive in Internet communication tends to move the archive toward an economy of circulation: permanent transformations and updating."¹⁰ By exploring new resources available for research and teaching on a region that has often been underrepresented in the field of film studies, I hope to encourage the further incorporation of Latin American film culture into new economies of intellectual circulation.

In the face of the (unauthorized) sharing of moving images on sites like YouTube and Vimeo, a handful of Latin American film archives have begun to stream audiovisual content, though their efforts are modest compared with institutions like the British Film Institute and the National Film Board of Canada, which monetize access to some video content. As of this writing, the Cineteca Nacional de Chile makes 120 Chilean films, dating from the silent era to the present, freely available for streaming on its website.¹¹ These films can also be accessed through a searchable database on the Cine Chile website. The site gathers together more than seven hundred features, including the collection of the Cineteca de la Universidad de Chile, which have been made

10 Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 99.

11 "Archivo Digital," Cineteca Nacional de Chile, <http://cinetecadigital.ccpim.cl/pel/%C3%ADculas-online>.

available for free streaming.¹² The Banco de Conteúdos Culturais (Bank of Cultural Contents), a project of the Cinemateca Brasileira, boasts almost thirty features from pioneering studios Atlântida and Vera Cruz, active from the 1930s through the 1950s; scores of silent and animated films; news reports and soap operas from the TV Tupi network; and a rich array of film stills and posters.¹³ The Filmoteca de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México streams a more limited selection of films produced and restored by the archive, including silent features.¹⁴

While relatively few Latin American films are available from online archives, digital collections of periodicals from the region have expanded rapidly. These collections are indispensable for film historical research, especially given the discontinuity of film production in the region and the resulting lack of well-kept film studio archives. The two most significant sites are the Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México—the term *hemeroteca* refers to a serials archive—which became freely available online in 2011, and Brazil’s Biblioteca Nacional Digital, launched in 2006 and greatly expanded over the past few years.¹⁵ While the former focuses on public domain material from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the latter includes relatively recent publications, although newspapers that are still active commercially, like the *Estado de São Paulo* and Rio’s *Jornal do Brasil*, are not available on the site.

While no other national libraries currently possess online periodicals archives rivaling these two sites, a number offer thematic collections of rare documents, photographs, and iconography. The Memoria Chilena project of the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile hosts several such collections on cinema, ranging from an exploration of Chilean filmmakers in exile to photographs of historical movie theaters to a section on the nation’s film magazines.¹⁶ This section features issues of *Écran* (1930–1969), along with select numbers of *Séptimo arte* (Seventh Art), *Cine foro* (Cinema Forum), *Primer plano* (Close-Up), and *Enfoque* (Focus), published between the 1950s and the 1980s.

An increasingly rich array of such film magazines is currently being made freely available online. Digitized magazines open new avenues for the study of film culture and the reception of imported cinema in the region, topics that have often been neglected in favor of recuperating national histories of film production. Brazil’s most significant early film magazines, *A cena muda* (The Silent Scene, 1921–1955) and *Cinearte* (1926–1942), can be downloaded in PDF format (unusually, not enabled for OCR) from the Biblioteca Digital das Artes do Espetáculo, a project of the Museu Lasar Segall in São Paulo.¹⁷ The site J. Carlos em Revista, devoted to the work of a well-known

12 See the website Cine Chileno Online, at <http://www.cinechile.cl/cineonline/php>.

13 “Banco de Conteúdos Culturais,” Cinemateca Brasileira, <http://www.bcc.org.br>.

14 “Cine en línea,” Filmoteca de la UNAM, <http://www.filmoteca.unam.mx/cinelinea/>.

15 “Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México,” Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, <http://www.hndm.unam.mx/>; “Biblioteca Nacional Digital,” Biblioteca Nacional—Brasil, <http://bndigital.bn.br>.

16 “Memoria Chilena,” Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-channel.html>.

17 “Biblioteca Digital das Artes do Espetáculo,” Museu Lasar Segall, <http://www.bjksdigital.museusegall.org.br>. Brazil’s Biblioteca Nacional Digital includes a keyword-searchable version of the magazine.

Brazilian caricaturist, contains the 1922–1930 run of the magazine *Para todos*, which contained considerable coverage of both imported and Brazilian cinema.¹⁸

The Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, an initiative of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, offers a rich collection of illustrated magazines, including those published outside Spain.¹⁹ The archive contains the Buenos Aires and Montevideo versions of the magazine *Caras y caretas*, published between 1898 and 1939, an invaluable resource for charting the emergence of mass culture in Argentina and Uruguay. Another website based in Spain, Memoria de Madrid, features issues of *Cinelandia y films*, a Spanish-language magazine published in Los Angeles, dating between 1930 and 1936. The publication is hosted in partnership with the Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid.²⁰ In the United States, the Media History Digital Library made thirty years of *Cine-Mundial*, a Spanish-language magazine printed in New York by the publishers of *Moving Picture World*, available online in November 2013. In their print and digital forms, these publications attest to a Latin American film culture produced and archived outside the region's geographic borders. Their preservation in libraries in the United States and Spain is an index of their global circulation and, by extension, of the transnational character of film culture in Latin America in the face of imported cinema's market dominance.

The Media History Digital Library's addition of *Cine-Mundial* diversifies a collection previously dominated by English-language publications, with few exceptions. A more sweeping change came earlier in 2013 with the debut of Lantern, a keyword search function that spans all its publications.²¹ This implementation of OCR promises to drastically shorten the hours, weeks, or months that researchers previously spent scouring paper and microfilm documents. The keyword searches made possible by OCR alter the linear character of access to historical documents (especially when reproduced on a roll of microfilm through which the researcher must scroll), replacing it with nonlinear, networked access. Yet if OCR seems to sweep away the sheer weight and extension of physical documents, it tends to replace them with another form of accumulation. By allowing the rapid discovery and downloading of image files and PDFs, online digital collections foster the proliferation of personal digital archives in excess of our capacity to review and catalog them, as Laura Isabel Serna has signaled.²² Our knowledge that primary materials are accessible to us on demand, whether online or on our hard drives, can encourage an endlessly deferred encounter with the documents themselves.

Furthermore, beyond the loss of context that can result from nonlinear access to historical sources, OCR tends to reify a researcher's approaches, from auteurist criticism to star studies to the privileging of a single film text, by limiting the field of inquiry to pages in which the keywords appear. Derrida argues that the "technical

18 "O projeto," J. Carlos em Revista, <http://www.jotacarlos.org>.

19 "Hemeroteca Digital," Biblioteca Nacional de España, <http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es>.

20 "Homepage," Memoria de Madrid, <http://www.memoriademadrid.es>.

21 "Lantern," Media History Digital Library, <http://lantern.mediahist.org>.

22 Eric Hoyt, "Q&A with Laura Isabel Serna about 'Cine Mundial' and New Book 'Making Cinelandia,'" November 7, 2013, <http://mediahistoryproject.org/2013/11/07/q-a-with-laura-isabel-serna-about-cine-mundial-and-new-book-making-cinelandia/>.

structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future.²³ The remediation of paper documents with OCR boosts the “archivability” of text over that of image, favoring language-based heuristics and methodologies over approaches from visual studies, with lasting effects on future research.

At the same time, the peculiar temporality of OCR, and digital access in general, can work to foreground the discontinuities inherent in the researcher’s relationship to history. Ernst suggests that, with digitization and online access, “the microtemporality of the data-processing operation is . . . superimposed on the historical archive’s macrotime.”²⁴ For Ernst, the grand narratives of historical discourse intersect with the “fast memory” of digital access, which tends to erase chronological distance: “Due to ultrafast computer and signal-processing clock rates, these timeframes [of processing and access] are experienced as the present.”²⁵

Yet in the case of most online digital collections, data processing time is made (frustratingly) perceptible to the researcher in the lag as individual document pages load or as results from a keyword search are populated. The mediation of the archive through digital processing and search algorithms, rather than the researcher’s subjective and often inconsistent selection criteria (which are applied over an extended period), might foster awareness of the multiple temporalities that inform our encounters with history. Furthermore, OCR introduces a certain inconsistency in our access to the past, Richard Abel observes, noting that repeated keyword searches can turn up different results.²⁶ These inconsistencies call attention to the archive’s exclusions and gaps, from missing issues of a publication to the discourses shut out of mass-circulation periodicals altogether.

Abel’s comments on OCR are based on his extensive research on GenealogyBank, which offers broad coverage of both major newspapers and small-town publications. Published by the NewsBank corporation and targeted to those tracing their ancestry, the site charges a monthly or yearly subscription fee to individuals. GenealogyBank features several Spanish-language newspapers from major US cities and the US-Mexico border region, a rich potential resource for social histories of immigrant and Latino film culture. (NewsBank’s educational division Readex also offers a collection of Hispanic American Newspapers.²⁷) The geographic breadth of GenealogyBank’s database is a sobering contrast to the resources available for regional film histories in Latin America, given fragmentary preservation and the dispersion of relevant documents.

Readex also provides the technological infrastructure for the World Newspaper Archive (WNA), a wide-ranging collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

23 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 17.

24 Ernst, *Digital Memory*, 87.

25 Ibid.

26 Richard Abel, “The Perils and Pleasures of Big Data in Digitized Newspapers,” *Film History* 25, nos. 1–2 (2013): 1–10.

27 “Hispanic American Newspapers,” Readex, <http://www.readex.com/content/hispanic-american-newspapers-1808-1980>.

newspapers coordinated by the Chicago-based not-for-profit Center for Research Libraries (CRL). The database acts as a repository for several US universities' collections of periodicals from Latin America and other "world regions with less robust library and preservation structure."²⁸ Access to the database is through institutional membership. The archive's founding members are US universities, although institutions elsewhere are eligible to join.²⁹ However, as of this writing, CRL's only member outside the United States and Canada was the University of Hong Kong.³⁰ If they lack the finances or inclination to become members of CRL, Latin American institutions are unable to access these documents relating to their nation's history and that of other nations that (arguably) occupy the global periphery.

The WNA's geographic breadth is impressive, spanning newspapers from Latin American capitals and major cities, including Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Lima, Caracas, Havana, Belize City, Guatemala City, San Salvador, Tegucigalpa, and Panama City. Secondary cities like Guayaquil, Valparaíso, Veracruz, Jalapa, and Mérida are also represented. However, as of this writing, the collection lacks newspapers from Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Paraguay. Furthermore, because of CRL's decision to digitize only materials in the public domain for the time being, no newspapers dated after 1922 are currently included.³¹

Another closed-access model of institutional cooperation is represented by the database Classic Mexican Cinema. Libraries can purchase online access to the collection outright from Netherlands-based publisher Brill. Made available in partnership with the Filmoteca de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the database contains some of the only private papers relevant to Latin American cinema available digitally: the scrapbooks of prominent director Fernando de Fuentes. However, most of its collection is composed of film magazines, including *Cinelandia* (1931–1947), *Cine mundial* (1951–1955), and *Cinema repórter* (1943–1965).³²

In contrast to institutional collaborations based on membership and subscription fees, the Digital Library of the Caribbean (DLOC) is an open-access, cooperative project of universities and archives in the United States, South America, and the Caribbean.³³ The DLOC is conceived as a means of grappling with obstacles to preservation posed by the region's colonial history, including linguistic diversity and the dispersion of documents, often in the metropolis.³⁴ Using open-source software developed by the University of Florida rather than a proprietary platform, the DLOC uses a collaborative funding model based on grants and in-kind contributions from

28 Reilly and Simon, "Shared Digital Access," 272.

29 Ibid., 273.

30 "CRL Members," Center for Research Libraries, <http://www.crl.edu/membership/members>.

31 Reilly and Simon, "Shared Digital Access," 276.

32 The *Cine mundial* included in this database is not the New York publication discussed earlier, but rather a Mexican film magazine that debuted after the first *Cine-Mundial* had folded.

33 See the website of the Digital Library of the Caribbean, at <http://www.dloc.com>.

34 Shamin Renwick, "Caribbean Digital Library Initiatives in the Twenty-First Century: The Digital Library of the Caribbean (DLOC)," *Alexandria* 22, no. 1 (2001): 3.

member institutions.³⁵ Resources of interest to the film scholar include the Efraín Barradas Collection, which contains more than 350 Mexican and Cuban film posters, and the Caribbean Digital Newspaper Library. This collection covers publications from the nineteenth century to the present, but extensive runs are few. Two newspapers with comparatively broad chronological coverage are *El diario de la marina* (1899–1909, 1955–1960) and *El mundo* (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1928–1939). It remains to be seen whether the Digital Library of the Caribbean’s cooperative model will allow it to further strengthen its collections while remaining open access to those outside the Caribbean.³⁶

Networks of transnational intellectual exchange and support like those fostered by the Digital Library of the Caribbean have a complex relationship to technologies that, precisely by encouraging access anytime, anywhere, can work to isolate the researcher. As Abel notes, the ability to consult digital archives in one’s own home or office reduces opportunities for community formation and exchange among researchers, librarians, and archivists.³⁷ At a time when governmental funding for the humanities is declining, it is an open question whether the online availability of archival materials will undercut grant and fellowship applications for on-site research. Given that obstacles to cataloging of archival materials have been particularly marked in Latin American institutions, researchers may miss opportunities to uncover uncataloged materials through direct contact with archive staff. Even as digitized collections and institutional collaborations increasingly transcend national borders, we must not confuse digitization with democratization or with frictionless access to the past. Rather, it is imperative that, as scholarship on Latin American cinema in English continues to expand, we continue to think through the geopolitics of archiving in a digital age. *

I thank Laura Isabel Serna and Jonathan Baillehache for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

35 Renwick, “Caribbean Digital Library Initiatives,” 11–12.

36 The DLOC may charge for access to content in the future; however, its mission statement requires that it remain open access for those located in the Caribbean. Renwick, “Caribbean Digital Library Initiatives,” 11.

37 Abel, “Pleasures and Perils,” 9.

Mapping Cult Cinema in Latin American Film Cultures

by DOLORES TIERNEY

In 2011 the Cuban-Spanish coproduction *Juan of the Dead* (*Juan de los muertos*; Alejandro Brugués, 2011) was received by Carlos Eduardo Maristany of *Cuba Art News* as a “cult film hit.”¹ The use of the term *cult* to describe *Juan of the Dead* was genre based, referencing its use of the zombie film rather than any of the other myriad elements that Barry K. Grant and others have suggested define cult cinema (e.g., a “devoted audience” built up over time; some form of “transgression” at the level of subject matter, attitude, or style; an “alternative mode of distribution and exhibition”).² Most tellingly, *Juan of the Dead*’s position within a tradition of cult cinema was determined solely in relation to Anglo zombie films (George A. Romero’s 1968 *Night of the Living Dead* and, more specifically, Edgar Wright’s 2004 British “zom com” *Shaun of the Dead*) and by the political and social commentary that goes with these films rather than in relation to any Cuban, or indeed Latin American, antecedents.³ If Maristany had wished to cite continental antecedents, he could have chosen from a number of contemporary or past Latin American zombie films, including the Argentinean film *Zombie Plague* (*Plaga zombie*; Pablo Parés and Hernán Sáez, 1997), the Mexican film *Santo vs. the Zombies* (*Santo contra los zombies*; Benito Alazraki, 1961), and the larger tradition of Mexican and Argentine horror of which these films are a part. If he had wished to position *Juan of the Dead*—or other recent Latin American films that have also been given this “cult” label, such as *The Silent House* (*La casa muda*; Gustavo Hernández, Uruguay, 2010) and *Cronos* (Guillermo del Toro, Mexico, 1993)—within a continental history of cult film, things would have been a little bit more difficult. This history has, for reasons this essay explores, yet to be written. But he could still have gestured toward a growing body of work in this emerging and other adjacent research areas.

1 Carlos Eduardo Maristany, “‘Juan of the Dead’: The Making of a Cult Film Hit,” *Cuba Art News*, March 8, 2012, http://www.cubanartnews.org/news/juan_of_the_dead_the_making_of_a_cult_film_hit_part_one-995.

2 Barry K. Grant, “Science Fiction Double Feature: Ideology in the Cult Film,” in *The Cult Film Reader*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 77–78.

3 See Robin Wood, *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 85, 91, 114.

In this essay I map recent critical work on Latin American cult cinema, its adjacent research areas, and other non-Latin American scholarship, which bring useful perspectives and address the problems that *cult*, as a term of US and European film scholarship, presents to the very different contexts of Latin America's national filmmaking endeavors. I look at the ways cult cinema clashes with what were the earlier dominant vectors of Latin American film studies—the (prescriptive) paradigms of a realist and engaged “[third] world cinema”—but also point toward how cult cinema fits in with new ways of conceiving the region's cinema.

Although a history of cult cinema in Latin America has yet to be written, the term *cult* is increasingly used in recent English- and Spanish-language scholarship on the region's cinema as a descriptive for a broader spectrum of paracinematic practices (e.g., trash, exploitation, horror). Several essays in the anthology *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America*, edited by myself and Victoria Ruétalo, use the term *cult*.⁴ Kirsten Strayer identifies Mexican filmmaker Juan López Moctezuma's *The Mansion of Madness* (1973) as a “cult object.”⁵ Rosana Díaz-Zambrana, in the introduction to the very useful and timely *Horrorfílmico: Aproximaciones al cine de terror en Latinoamérica y el Caribe*, calls *The Vampire* (*El vampiro*; Fernando Méndez, Mexico, 1957) “*el primer largometraje de culto*” (“the first cult feature”).⁶ The essays in *Latsploitation* in particular are conscious of the necessary reworking of the paradigms of exploitation as established by US scholars Eric Schaefer, Jeffrey Sconce, and others for the varied economic, cultural, social, political, and film industry specificities of filmmaking across the region.⁷ With this (re)definition of cult cinema for Latin America, a more complex reworking becomes necessary, because, as Mark Jancovich and his coeditors have pointed out in *Defining Cult Cinema*, “‘the cult movie’ is an essentially eclectic category” whose most salient element is not a film's institutional position (hence the number of Hollywood films that have subsequently become cult texts) or its textual features (hence the number of classical films that are considered cult texts).⁸ Instead, what confers the quality of “cult” on a film is, as Jancovich and his coeditors suggest in the introduction to the book, a “subcultural ideology” in filmmakers, films, or audiences that exists in opposition to the “mainstream.”⁹

4 Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney, eds., *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinema, and Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

5 Kirsten Strayer, “Art, Horror, and International Identity in 1970s Exploitation Films,” in *Transnational Horror across Visual Media: Fragmented Bodies*, ed. Dana Och and Kirsten Strayer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 109–125.

6 Rosana Díaz-Zambrana and Patricia Tomé, eds., *Horrorfílmico: Aproximaciones al cine de terror en Latinoamérica y el Caribe* (San Juan, PR: Isla Negra Editores, 2012), 31.

7 For instance, as the introduction to *Latsploitation* points out, in countries where no mainstream industry had ever existed, such as Ecuador, exploitation cinema cannot be defined as it has been by Eric Schaefer as an aesthetic, generic, thematic, and exhibition “alternative” to a firmly established mainstream industry (Hollywood): Ruétalo and Tierney, eds., *Latsploitation*, 4; Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Cinema, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Jeffrey Sconce, “Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen* 36, no. 4 (1995): 371–393.

8 Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lázaro Reboli, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis, eds., *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

9 *Ibid.*

Where the initial problem occurs is first in translating the phrase “subcultural ideology” over from the European scholarship of Jancovich and his coeditors to Latin America, and, in particular, in relation to Latin American audiences, because, as Jancovich and his coeditors point out, the term *cult* refers to the ways in which films are classified through consumption.¹⁰ With most Latin American films that have become the object of cult consumption, most English-language scholarship is talking about audiences from *outside* Latin America. The most frequently cited Latin American cult film, Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *El topo* (*The Mole*; Mexico, 1970), draws its cult status and reputation from its New York midnight screenings.¹¹ With *El topo*, this status is predicated on US-based (or indeed, European-based) consumption and/or spectatorship, in which the film’s subcultural value relies on its “otherness” to an Anglo or European mainstream. The cult qualities that are celebrated and admired in *El topo* (and other “world cinema” films labeled “cult”) are those qualities that make them inaccessible or difficult to consume or understand, or, alternatively, those that fit in with preconceived notions of the “other.” The work of Henry Jenkins becomes useful in casting these readings as colonialist (rather than textual) “poachings,” which ignore local readings and contexts in favor of celebrating the seemingly weird and wonderful.¹² Similarly useful is Bhaskar Sarkar’s point about martial arts films turned into “zany and inscrutable objects from a distant and wacky culture” by the “local cine-cognoscenti” in his Los Angeles neighborhood.¹³ These acts of cult colonialist appropriation often include celebrating the technical failures of Latin American films. Here, the operation is the same as other cult appropriations: finding pleasure in a film’s failure to “replicate dominant codes of Hollywood realism.”¹⁴ But in the case of Latin American films consumed by US metropolitan audiences, also present in this viewing protocol is a potentially dominant group that thrills in seeing the cultures of the peripheries failing to copy the culture of the center.

Such a problematic deployment of transnational subcultural capital is evident in the approach of Doyle Greene’s *Mexploitation Cinema: A Critical History of Mexican Vampire, Wrestler, Ape Man, and Similar Films, 1957–1977* to certain Mexican-produced films that are the object of US and/or European cult fandom.¹⁵ Greene cites *The Brainiac* (*El barón del terror*; Chano Urueta, 1961) as a “legendary cult film” (again in US terms) because of its evident textual transgressions of the norms of classical and horror film production: specifically, the unconvincing special effects (the “ugly [*papier-mâché*] head” of its eponymous brain-sucking monster.¹⁶ What is potentially missing

10 Ibid.

11 J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, “*El topo*: Through the Wasteland of the Counterculture,” in *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 77–109.

12 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

13 Bhaskar Sarkar, “Tracking ‘Global Media’ in the Outposts of Globalization,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 34.

14 Sconce, “Trashing the Academy,” 21.

15 Doyle Greene, *Mexploitation Cinema: A Critical History of Mexican Vampire, Wrestler, Ape Man and Similar Films, 1957–1977* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

16 Ibid., 34.

in Greene's approach is some postcolonial awareness of the textual (in)operation at work in *The Brainiac's* (mis)translation across borders—as one of a series of Mexican films recut and dubbed for US television in the early 1960s by US mogul K. Gordon Murray, including *Santa Claus* (René Cardona, 1959), *The Vampire* (*El vampiro*; Fernando Méndez, 1957), and *The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy* (*La momia azteca contra el robot humano*, 1957)—and how the film's cult quality is partially dependent on the disconnect (between location and language) that this translation produces. I have written (with Andrew Syder) about these translations across borders, but more work on the cross-border reception and any resultant cult quality is necessary for the many films that circulated in the United States and Europe.¹⁷ More precisely, the point of intervention needs to shift from a delight in the textual poverty of *The Brainiac* (or other Mexican or Latin American films that circulate in this way) to an exploration of what happens (to the effective operation of subcultural ideology) when a first-world audience delights in the textual failures of a third-world film.

More important, and where additional problems occur, is the idea of subcultural ideology itself. Although the coordinates of Latin American film criticism have shifted away from the obvious militancy of the region's new cinemas (as López and Poppe signal in their contributions to this "In Focus" section) to embrace the resistive possibilities of popular strategies of the commercial classical cinemas, the subcultural ideology still focused on by local arbiters of national culture, as well as by some academics not based in Latin America, is that of an expressly political subculture. In this context films like the Chilean Pablo Larraín's *¿No!* (2012), a realist exploration of the anti-Pinochet advertising campaign, which circulated simultaneously with *Juan of the Dead* on the 2012 festival circuit, is a much more evident vehicle of subcultural ideology than a Cuban-Spanish zombie comedy. This point is not made to undervalue the political potential of cult films, however, or the cultishly political way in which some Latin American film culture has deployed them, but rather to explain why cult itself has a difficult time locating itself in some Latin American criticism.

Yet we can begin the process of mapping a history of cult cinema in Latin America along the lines of Grant's topography of cult. There are instances of cult consumption in the region that, it needs to be noted, are insistently political and ultimately revolutionary; more significant, these instances often reverse the power dynamic of a metropolitan audience consuming the filmic products of the periphery. Take, for instance, Manuel Puig's novel *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (*El beso de la mujer araña*), set during the period of state-sponsored violence that was the precursor to Argentina's Dirty War (1973–1976) (the period in which Juan José Campanella's *The Secret in Their Eyes* [*El secreto de sus ojos*, 2009] is also set).¹⁸ Imprisoned with a Marxist revolutionary, Valentín, the gay prisoner Molina describes for him a number of Hollywood B films, some of which are themselves already the object of cult fandom (Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People*, 1942, and *I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943). What is political about the operation of cult

17 Andrew Syder and Dolores Tierney, "Mexploitation/Exploitation: Or, How a Crime-Fighting, Vampire-Slaying Mexican Wrestler Almost Found Himself in an Italian Sword-and-Sandals Epic," in *Horror International*, ed. Steve Schneider (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 33–55.

18 Manuel Puig, *El beso de la mujer araña* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976).

here is how the dominant (imperialist) culture is reworked to serve the subcultural ideology of both sexual and political revolution.¹⁹ The heterosexual Valentín is seduced by Molina's film stories. And Molina is seduced through his own imaginative re-creation of films, becoming for a moment at the end of the novel a political revolutionary.

In the contemporary moment we find similar instances of the periphery indulging in cult film consumption of the products of the center: a screening of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) advertised at Ochoymedio, a Quito Art Cinema where, as part of a GLBTQ event and as in the United States and Europe, audiences attend in costume and perform a scripted English-language response. We also find straightforward cult nostalgia festivals: a 1980s retrospective at a Montevideo University cinema screening *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985), *Repo Man* (Alex Cox, 1984), *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1985), and *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981). Determining more about the ways in which these last two instances of cult film practice are precisely political (and whether the politics are also regionally or nationally specific to these particular exhibition sites and what the English-language dimension implies for the class status of cult) would involve the kind of audience-based studies—like the recent article by Richard McCulloch—that are a staple of cult film scholarship.²⁰ But this would also involve a reevaluation of what cult film practices might be. Where “talking back to the screen” is a practice that embodies the slavish devotion to texts like *Rocky Horror* or, more recently, *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003), which is considered “emblematic” of cult consumption, in Cuba and perhaps other national contexts in Latin America “talking back” is a commonplace of *all* film consumption, not necessarily a marker of the ironic distance that European and US scholars associate with cult consumption.²¹ The mapping of Latin American cult cinema needs to explore, therefore, the ways in which films from the region that are already the object of continental cult devotion such as Méndez's *The Vampire* were produced and are consumed in their own national and regional contexts.

While thorough, audience-based, institutional and industrial histories of cult cinema have yet to be written, various English- and Spanish-language compendiums establish a corpus of films under a number of different catchall terms that conflate cult with larger paradigms of horror, sex, violence, and/or psychotronic cinema. Michael Weldon's *Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* includes many of the Mexican films imported by Murray (*Santa Claus*, *The Brainiac*, *The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy*) but mainly refers just to these English-language recut and redubbed versions.²² Argentine critic Diego Curubeto's *Cine bizarro: 100 años de películas de terror, sexo y violencia* uses the term *bizarro* (from the English *bizarre*, to mean “strange”) to include a range of horror, fantasy, and exploitation films from all over the continent, spanning from the early sound era (*La*

19 Dolores Tierney, “El terror en *El beso de la mujer araña*,” *Revista iberoamericana* 68, no. 199 (2002): 355–366.

20 Richard McCulloch, “‘Most People Bring Their Own Spoons’: *The Room*'s Participatory Audience as Comedy Mediators,” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011): 189–218.

21 Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 58.

22 Michael Weldon, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983).

Llorona; Ramón Peón, Mexico, 1933) to auteur cinema of the 1980s (*Santa sangre*; Alejandro Jodorowsky, Mexico, 1989).²³

Beyond identifying which texts might belong to a corpus of cult films, a thorough film history of cult cinema in Latin America would need to look, as the introduction to *Defining Cult Movies* does, at the emergence of cult itself, as a category, a viewing protocol, and even an institutional position.²⁴ In *Defining Cult Movies* the editors point out how the decline of the mass audience encouraged exhibitors to cater to (and in part create) niche-marketing opportunities like the art cinema audience. This was followed by the emergence of repertory cinema and the midnight movie, the phenomenon “most associated with cult movie fandom,” which, they argue, was really a response to the nature of specific inner cities and their audiences.²⁵ To determine whether a similar shift happened in Latin America would require research into exhibition in Mexico City and other metropolitan capitals throughout the region. Viviana García Besné’s *Lost (Perdida)*; Mexico, 2009) begins the process of tracing these shifts. Ostensibly a “personal” documentary about the critically disavowed filmmaking history of her own family (the Calderóns), *Perdida* provides an account of the exhibition circuit (Alcázar), distribution company (Azteca Films), production facilities (Estudios Azteca), and production company (Calderón SA) set up by her great-grandfather (José Calderón) in the 1920s and early 1930s. Besné also details the “thrilling/sexy” (“morbo”) films her great-uncles (Memo, Perico, and Pepe) made and gestures toward the exhibition monopoly (of William Jenkins) to which these genres (including cabaret dramas or *cabareteras* of the 1940s and 1950s, and the more risqué versions with full nudity—*ficheras*—of the 1970s) catered. Recent academic research has also begun to excavate this disavowed history. Seraina Rohrer’s excellent doctoral dissertation on Mexican “formula films” situates the production of films by the Calderóns and other filmmaking families (the Agrasánchez and Galindo families) in the supposedly qualitatively poor but extremely quantitative period of the 1960s–1980s—known as *la crisis*—in Mexico’s still predominantly art-cinema-centered film histories.²⁶ Rohrer’s work goes some way toward illuminating the niche-marketing strategies of these different filmmaking dynasties (naked women, action, and violence) and their significance to the Mexican filmmaking industry and Mexican audiences.

In its latter stages this essay has argued and sought to evidence that Latin America’s national filmmaking endeavors do have strong cult traditions, filmmakers, and strategies of consumption, but it also points out that these are rarely referred to as *cult* cinema (*cine de culto*). The essay has also shown how research has begun to excavate

23 Diego Curubeto, *Cine bizarro: 100 años de películas de terror, sexo y violencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1996). See Felipe Gómez Gutiérrez, “La violencia y su sombra: Asomos al género del horror en el cine colombiano: Vallejo, Mayolo, Ospina,” in *Horrorfílmico: Aproximaciones al cine de terror en Latinoamérica y el Caribe*, ed. Rosana Díaz-Zambrana and Patricia Tomé (San Juan, PR: Isla Negra Editores, 2012), 281–299.

24 Jancovich et al., *Defining Cult Movies*, 3.

25 Ibid.

26 Seraina Rohrer, “Mexican Formula Films” (PhD diss., University of Zurich, 2012). See also Seraina Rohrer, “Stereotyping in the Films of La India María,” *Journal of Latino–Latin American Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 54–68.

its history. What remains for scholars of Latin American cinema interested in further work in this area, however, is to determine how this work may progress without reifying the problematic clichés of a peripheral cinema and a peripheral continent. *

A part of this essay was presented at “Cult Film Symposium: Studying Cult Film,” held at Northumbria University on September 12, 2013. I thank Jamie Sexton for the invitation to speak and other symposium attendees (in particular Antonio Lázaro-Reboll and Iain Robert Smith) for their papers and feedback. I also thank Gabriela Alemán for insight into film culture in Quito and Montevideo.

Calling for Intermediality: Latin American Mediascapes

by ANA M. LÓPEZ

The contemporary Latin American mediascape is quickly becoming as complex—or even more so—than that of the United States, Western Europe, and East Asia. Twenty or thirty years ago, merely suggesting that there had to be a relationship between television and the cinema would typically elicit derisive laughter from practitioners and scholars alike. Now, however, almost everywhere in Latin America, there has been, on the side of practitioners, an absolute elision of these formerly impenetrable “borders,” brokered primarily—but not completely—through digital and Internet new technologies and, on the side of scholars, a begrudging acknowledgment that new practices need to be recognized and understood. In that context, this essay argues that different mediascapes in Latin America require a reboot of the critical and theoretical paradigms we deploy to understand Latin American cinema, television, and new media production (and the convergence of the three). Proposing that a framework focused on intermediality can open up new avenues for research on contemporary media practices, I also argue that intermediality can help us better understand the development and evolution of Latin American mediascapes and crucial moments in its historical trajectory.

Intermediality. In the past two decades “intermediality” has emerged as a significant research axis in media and arts theory, particularly in Europe and Canada, where there have been scores of conferences and publications devoted to its explication and application. Curiously,

there has been little interest in the intermedial in US media studies and markedly much less in cinema studies.¹ In general, intermediality refers to the linkages and cross-overs among media and artistic practices, but it also points to the intensification of these relationships with new digital media practices. As Ginette Verstraete explains in the introduction to a special issue of the Romanian journal *Film and Media Studies* dedicated to intermediality, critics have turned to the idea of the intermedial to help reconceptualize their traditional objects of study in relation to digital media: “Seeking out the borders of their disciplines and the crossovers with media studies, they explicitly position themselves in between margin and center, art and media.”² Indeed, much of the work on intermediality has been undertaken outside of media studies proper, in studies of narrative, performance, art, and philosophy.³

Thinking about intermediality is related to but different from discussions of media convergence (the web of interactions among media in increasingly complex contemporary production and consumption landscapes) or remediation (how media absorb other media in their evolution), because intermediality presumes that there is a specificity to different media, even when they are being radically put into question.⁴ As Lars Elleström put it:

If all media were fundamentally different, it would be hard to find any inter-relations at all; if they were fundamentally similar, it would be hard to find something that is not already interrelated. Media, however, are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities.⁵

Intermediality is also related to, but distinct from, transmediality, which refers more specifically to the translation of one medium into another and/or transmedial

- 1 A simple word search of *intermediality* in the *Cinema Journal* archive brought up only a handful of hits, most notably, several citations to André Gaudreault and Phillippe Marion's well-known article (in early cinema studies) “The Cinema as a Model for the Genealogy of Media,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 8, no. 2 (2002): 12–18. A hit also appears in a prescient sidebar comment in an “In Focus” piece by E. Ann Kaplan from 2004, when the Society for Cinema Studies became the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, about the future of the field in which she references the inspirational work of Friedrich Kittler, tracing how “technologies develop out of each other with new ones piggybacking, as it were, out of the old ones, so that traces of the old remain and are carried forward in new modes” (86). E. Ann Kaplan, “The State of the Field: Notes towards an Article,” *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 3 (2004): 85–88; see also Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- 2 Ginette Verstraete, “Introduction—Intermedialities: A Brief Survey of Conceptual Key Issues,” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 2 (2010): 8.
- 3 Already back in the 1980s, Hans Brader inaugurated the Intermedia Center at the University of Iowa that presaged many of the “intermedia” art practices of the 1990s and 2000s (and nurtured the important work of Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta). Even earlier, in 1969, Dick Higgins first used the term *intermedia* as part of his manifesto for the Fluxus group, self-published through his Something Else Press. Dick Higgins, “Intermedia” (New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 11–29.
- 4 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), and Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- 5 Lars Elleström, “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations,” in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 12.

narratives. Transmediality addresses the translation or transposition involved, for example, in the musical version of a novel or the poetic rendering of a painting, as well as narratives that span distinct media.

Rather than a theory per se, intermediality has been most productively utilized as a “research axis” or “research concept” that cuts across several arenas and identifies issues to be explored.⁶ As such, it refers primarily to ways of refocusing on particular research questions so as to encompass the links and overlaps among different media and art forms (and the disciplines within which we talk about them). One of the central motivating factors for the multiplication of intermedial research has undoubtedly been the accelerated proliferation of new media, seeming to demand new analytical frameworks, but another important motivator has been the appeal of its inherent interdisciplinarity and its potential to produce new media historiographies that elucidate the unstable relation of media to each other, and the historicity of these relations.⁷

Scholarship of Latin American Film. The field of English-language Latin American film studies has undergone significant transformations since the 1970s and 1980s. From a practice grounded in immediacy and the political effectivity of the filmic and social practices of the “new Latin American cinema” that accompanied it, we have seen the field evolve in multiple directions that echo the transformations of film studies in general. An initial refocus from the explicitly political to issues of gender and identity politics productively reframed not only the study of contemporary cinema in the 1990s but also significant reassessments of the classical cinemas of the continent and its major generic forms and stars. Very often the focus of this work revolved—explicitly or implicitly—around questions of the nation and of national cinemas. Thus, for example, anthologies like Chon Noriega’s *Visible Nations* and Ann Marie Stock’s *Framing Latin American Cinema* presented a series of important essays that explored, via textual and cultural analysis, the complicated contours of the concept of the national in Latin American cinema, and books like Sergio de La Mora’s *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* and Dolores Tierney’s *Emilio Fernández: Pictures in the Margins* interrogated the construction of Mexican nationhood through gender and textual authorship.⁸ The general “turn to history” in film studies also left its mark in Latin American film scholarship. While historiography and archival research had previously been the domain of scholars based in Latin American nations with easier access to archives and collections, a new generation of English-language scholars (Christine Ehrick and Laura Isabel de la Serna, for example) has proved their historiographical

6 See Jürgen E. Müller, “Intermediality Revisited: Some Reflections about Basic Principles of the *Axe de pertinence*,” in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 237–252.

7 Jürgen E. Müller, “Intermediality and Media Historiography in the Digital Era,” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 2 (2010): 15–38.

8 Chon Noriega, ed., *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Ann Marie Stock, ed., *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Sergio de La Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Dolores Tierney, *Emilio Fernández: Pictures in the Margins* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007).

acuity.⁹ The “affective turn” has also left indelible marks in the scholarship of Latin American cinema, as in Laura Podalsky’s *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico* and Adrián Pérez Melgosa’s *Cinema and Inter-American Relations: Tracking Transnational Affect*. As the most recent of these “turns,” transnationality (as Nicolas Poppe outlines in his contribution to this “In Focus” section and as Kathleen Newman eloquently articulated in her essay “Notes on Transnational Film Theory: Decentered Subjectivity, Decentered Capitalism”) has been particularly important in broadening the scope of many scholars.¹⁰ These scholars, fully embracing the concept, have transformed a field that was for decades bound to the national as a stable frame of reference. This has perhaps been one of the most enduring legacies of English-language Latin American film scholarship: because of our positionality outside of any one Latin American country, it has been English-language scholars who most insistently have shifted the boundaries of the national to trouble the nationalistic frameworks that, to date and with few exceptions, often continue to delimit film scholarship in Latin America.¹¹ These exceptions are telling because they are, for the most part, informed by a comparative perspective rather than a transnational one. Thus, in Brazil, for example, Tunico Amâncio has spearheaded a significant comparative research project with students at the Universidade Federal Fluminense that culminated in the anthology *Brasil-México: Aproximações cinematográficas* in 2011.¹² In Argentina, Ana Laura Lusnich is currently engaged in a similarly structured research project with students at the University of Buenos Aires about classic Argentine and Mexican cinemas.¹³ In both instances, the work has been framed by comparative premises that are productive but still profoundly haunted by nationhood.¹⁴

Reframing the Field. In calling for a reframing of the field across the research axis of intermediality, my goal is to further trouble these and other limits. Taking advantage of our position as “outsiders” once again, I believe that English-language scholarship of Latin American mediascapes can productively explore the in-between spaces among and within media that emerge from the self-conscious, analytical acknowledgment that media do not exist disconnected from each other and that national borders

9 Christine Ehrick, “Beneficent Cinema: State Formation, Elite Reproduction and Silent Film in Uruguay, 1910s–1920s,” *The Americas* 63, no. 2 (2006): 205–224; Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

10 Kathleen Newman, “Notes on Transnational Film Theory: Decentered Subjectivity, Decentered Capitalism,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Kathleen Newman and Nataša Durovicová (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3–12.

11 I would argue that the most significant work has echoed Paul Willemsen’s perceptive dictum that “it is not simply a matter of engaging a ‘dialogue’ with some other culture’s products but of using one’s understanding of another cultural practice to re-perceive and rethink one’s own cultural constellation at the same time.” Paul Willemsen, “The National,” *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, ed. Leslie Deveraux and Roger Hillman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 30.

12 Tunico Amâncio, ed., *Brasil-México: Aproximações cinematográficas* (Niterói, Brazil: Editora da UFF, 2011).

13 Details of this research project are available at the website of Centro de Investigación y Nuevos Estudios sobre Cine, at <http://www.ciyne.com.ar/investigacion>.

14 In both cases, the research projects are strongly influenced by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá’s comparative approach to the cinemas of the region exemplified in *Tradicón y modernidad en el cine de América Latina* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).

have rarely completely bounded the production and circulation of media.¹⁵ I believe that through the intermedial we may begin to shift our perspectives on these mediascapes, reenacting the kind of parallax historiographies that Catherine Russell argued could create new and generative two-way theoretical passages.¹⁶

In what follows I suggest a handful of productive avenues for future research that emerge from an intermedial lens focused on Latin American mediascapes, historical and contemporary.

Early sound cinema and radio. Most of the work to date on the intermedial has been focused on new media, especially on the dissolution of the “cinematic,” or cinematic specificity, into the digital and other domains. We could argue, however, that all media and intermedial relations were once new, too, heavily contested and debated, and culturally significant. Intermediality is not exclusive to the late twentieth century (or to the United States or the “developed” world). The mid-1930s—as radio became a mass medium and the cinema began to speak in Spanish and Portuguese—was a profoundly intermedial moment with broad transformative consequences. Like the category of the transnational, which was discussed not that long ago as a phenomenon that did not seem to apply to the classical cinematic practices of what were held up as exclusivist national cinemas in Latin America, I want to argue that the intermedial is similarly not all that new. The early sound period provides us with a particular fertile space for the exploration of this “inter,” this in-between relationship between two emerging models of mediatic representation. On the one hand, the mass commodification of radio technology and programming (alongside the telephone, records, and the phonograph) generated a revolution in the aural environment: a powerful sense of liveness and renewed sense of orality (and community) that challenged the visual and literate culture of the 1920s. On the other hand, when sound was added to the cinema it too profoundly changed what had once been primarily a visual and literate medium. What traces of the radiophonic can we find in the early sound cinemas of Latin America? How do the asynchronous histories of the growth of radio and sound film production throughout Latin America in the 1930s alter and shift the relations between the media, and how are those relations textually evidenced?¹⁷

The 1950s and the institutionalization of television. Like the eruption of aurality in the 1930s, the growth of commercial television in the 1950s and through the 1960s in Latin America also changed the mediascape. To the degree that radio presaged liveness, television presaged immediacy, accessibility, and new forms of sociality. Families

15 There are already some scholars in Latin America who are pursuing research in this vein, particularly in relation to early cinema. For example, the Argentine film and photography scholar Andrea Cuarterolo has recently published a brilliant intermedial study of photography and early Argentine cinema: *De la foto al fotograma: Relaciones entre cine y fotografía en la Argentina (1840–1933)* (Montevideo: Cdf Ediciones, 2013).

16 Catherine Russell, “Parallax Historiography: The Flaneuse and the Cyberfeminist,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 552–571.

17 I presented on this topic at the conference “Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age,” organized by the International Society for Intermedial Studies and held in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in October 2013. See <http://film.sapientia.ro/en/conferences/rethinking-intermediality-in-the-digital-age>.

(and communities) would now gather around the television set in the living room that gradually displaced radios to other locations (the automobile, the bedroom, the portable set). What are the echoes of cinema to be traced in television? The echoes of radio? And how does television simultaneously interact with the cinematic of the late midcentury? In Brazil, for example, it is a commonplace to argue that the cinema and television followed parallel independent paths, especially in the 1960s, as the national cinema was controlled by the state agency for the cinema, Embrafilme (staffed by many *cinema novo* filmmakers) and television, since 1964, by the ever more powerful TV Globo, closely aligned with the military dictatorship. Yet if we look more closely, especially at the late 1950s, before television was fully institutionalized and nationalized, we can begin to trace a number of crossovers that bear greater scrutiny. What happened to the highly skilled foreign technicians brought to Brazil by the São Paulo-based Vera Cruz studios (1949–1954)? We know that they found work in the then-incipient local TV industry (advertising, marketing, and writing and filming in the new medium).¹⁸ What traces of the Vera Cruz style and of its creative personnel can we find in early Brazilian televisual practices? And of radio's? For example, Amácio Mazzaropi, one of Brazil's most popular comedians, appeared in weekly radio programs (Radio Tupi) from 1946 onward. In 1952 the same program was transferred to TV (TV Tupi) and Mazzaropi was invited to join Vera Cruz, where he starred in the company's most popular film, *Sai da frente* (Get Out of the Way; Tom Payne and Abílio Pereira de Almeida, 1952). More pointedly, to what degree can we begin to unpack televisual performance as a profoundly intermedial practice?

The contemporary mediascape. As Elizabeth Fox and Silvio Waisbord outline in their influential collection *Latin Politics, Global Media*, since the 1990s a combination of local (national) politics and the globalization of media markets has profoundly affected the development of media—traditional and new media—throughout the region.¹⁹ This is not the place to outline those changes, how they vary from nation to nation, or the vast literature on the topic. Throughout Latin America the contemporary mediascape is a complex mix of traditional media and increasingly more visible processes of convergence, transmediality, and intermediality; clearly, this is an area in which a recognition of the mutual permeability of media must be enacted and addressed. I want to end with two illustrative examples from the Brazilian mediascape: the case of the film *Tropa de elite* (*Elite Squad*; José Padilha, 2007) and the TV Globo telenovela *Cheias de charme* (*Full of Charm*, 2012).

Tropa de elite became one of the most commercially successful films in the history of the Brazilian national cinema, not only because of its captivating action narrative, but primarily because a copy of it was leaked to pirates before the film was officially released. Pirated copies circulated widely as DVDs (sold on street corners) and were easily available for Internet download: they were watched by an estimated eleven million to thirteen million viewers throughout the country. Paradoxically, the popularity

18 Ana M. López, "The São Paulo Connection: The Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz and *O Cangaceiro*," *Nuevo texto crítico*, nos. 21–22 (1998–1999): 127–154.

19 Elizabeth Fox and Silvio Waisbord, eds., *Latin Politics, Global Media* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

of the pirated version heightened interest in and awareness of the film, and it did spectacularly well at the box office, topping more than 2.5 million viewers nationally.²⁰

In 2012, the two top telenovelas aired by TV Globo—*Avenida Brasil* and *Cheias de charme*—deployed a complex universe of new social actors into the mainstream: an emerging middle class and starring roles for domestic workers, especially maids. *Cheias de charme*, in particular, circulated new social actors positioned in relationship to a larger cultural network, highlighting the use of the Internet and new technologies as tools for success, both for the characters of the telenovela and for spectators. A Cinderella-like story, the main plot line of *Cheias de charme* revolves around three maids—Cida (Isabelle Drummond), Penha (Taís Araújo), and Rosário (Leandra Leal)—who achieve meteoric success as the singing group As Empreguetes. Deploying the most complex transmedial platform it has used to date, TV Globo successfully narrativized transmediality—among other strategies, a viral video clip is what catapults the three maids to instant stardom—and used it to engage spectators no longer simply as a TV audience but as savvy users of new technologies and digital media and participants in a new dynamic of the social sphere.

Conclusion. I have tried to argue in this essay for the utility of deploying an intermedial framework to help us reframe our understanding of both the contemporary mediascape in Latin America and key moments in its historical developments. I am not suggesting that we use the term *intermediality* simply as a more au courant way of referring to what back in the 1980s and 1990s we referred to as intertextuality. Rather, I am calling for the deployment of an analytic paradigm shift that actually takes into account the potential of considering intermedial relations in our most basic understanding of how media work in the twenty-first century and extrapolating that knowledge to illuminate how media “worked” in earlier interstitial conjunctures. Intermediality is not a grand theory, but as a research focus it can help us reframe how and to what ends we undertake our ongoing research on Latin American film and media. *

20 See Marcelo Cajueiro, “Elite Stirs Controversy, Box Office,” *Variety*, October 19, 2007, <http://variety.com/2007/biz/news/elite-stirs-controversy-box-office-1117974360/>. Henry Jenkins also commented on the piracy of the film as an example of spreadable media in his blog, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, “How Brazil Is Reshaping the Futures of Entertainment,” January 9, 2009, http://henryjenkins.org/2009/01/how_brazil_is_reshaping_the_fu.html.

Contributors

Ana M. López is associate provost for faculty affairs and director of the Cuban and Caribbean Studies Institute at Tulane University. She is full professor in the Department of Communication and teaches film and cultural studies. Her research is focused on Latin American and Latino film and cultural studies. Her most recent publication is the collection of essays *Hollywood, Nuestra América y los Latinos* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2012).

Rielle Navitski is assistant professor in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Georgia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cinema Journal*, *Screen*, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, and a number of edited collections. Her current book project examines sensationalized violence in the visual cultures of early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil.

Nicolas Poppe is assistant professor of Spanish at Ball State University. His recent work examines transnational features of early Latin American sound film and has appeared in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, and *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*.

Dolores Tierney is senior lecturer in film and media studies in the School of Media, Film, and Music at Sussex University. She has published widely on transnational Latin American and Latino film and media, most recently in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas and Film, Fashion and Consumption*. She is the author of *Emilio Fernández* (2007), coeditor of *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America* (2009), and coeditor of the forthcoming *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro* (Palgrave Macmillan).