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Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil by Rielle Navitski (review)

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Por ello, el estudioso aborda detalladamente estas dimensiones complementarias: “Intimidad y discurso” primeros (cap. 2), la aparición de un programa de pedagogía nacional en *Platero y yo* (cap. 3), la segunda época poética en torno a *Belleza* (cap. 4), los *Romances de Coral Gables* y la poesía del primer exilio (cap. 5), o el ya comentado cronotopo de Einstein en *Tiempo y Espacio* (cap. 6).

Finalmente, se acota la reflexión con un acertado y extenso capítulo, apropiada y bellamente titulado “El ondear del aire”, sobre las trazas juanramonianas en poetas españoles de posguerra a los que Lanz pasa revista, algo que corroboraría el cotejo de la biblioteca juanramoniana, y que certifica la impactante presencia del poeta de Moguer en tantos cantores: Gabriel Celaya, Blas de Otero, José Hierro, José Ángel Valente, Francisco Brines, Ángel González o Antonio Gamoneda, Claudio Rodríguez, etc. Itinerario a través de las lecturas iniciales de Jiménez y la de los “primeros poemas y libros” de aquellos (192). En este apartado, quizás se hubiera beneficiado el estudio con la adopción de una nomenclatura, inclusive como *interxilio*, para mejor asumir la sutilidad de dicha intertextualidad. Mientras, el autor cierra el volumen a través del comentario de trece poemas de *Belleza* y *Romances de Coral Gables*, una suerte de aplicación concreta de lo ya hallado entre los cimientos formales.

En resumen, una serie de estudios acumulativos, en los que la idiosincrasia y recovecos de la propia *Obra* juanramoniana obligan a algunas repeticiones y reiteraciones en la demostración. Pero esta valiosa y sistemática lectura entregará a estudiosos e interesados renovadas motivaciones para comprobar la perenne modernidad de la estética ética del moguerense más universal.

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NAVITSKI, RIELLE. *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil*. Duke UP, 2017. 325 pp.

Rielle Navitski's book offers a productive and well-researched discussion of the interrelationship between journalism and early cinema in Mexico and Brazil. The author clearly elucidates the contexts in question, situating the relevant forms of cultural production within processes of modernity in both countries. The book offers an in-depth study of the impact of visual culture, and of the intricacies of media dissemination within specific contexts, which are compared and contrasted throughout. The larger contextualization resonates with both local and global

preoccupations, reflecting a solid investigation on the place of Mexican and Brazilian cinemas and journalism within a global framework. Among the multiple methodologies applied, the author offers archival media history of the period within national and regional debates, film, image and discourse analyses, and discussions of particular means of production, distribution, and reception.

Evoking Guy Debord's society of the spectacle and the notion that public spectacles mediate violence, Navitski examines the commodification of violence through the illustrated press and early cinema, approaching a nascent consumer mass culture intrinsically linked with modernization and global markets. The book discusses how public narratives are framed and ostensibly mediated through the information and entertainment industries, and how interconnected those industries are to national economies, political climate, and quotidian experiences in Brazil and Mexico. Further, the study attests to how violence operates as an index of modernity. On the one hand, Navitski examines how violence was exploited, criticized, and moralized as spectacle in both print media and cinema. On the other, violence is presented as an indication of the urban growth under way in early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil. In general, the research presents a clear relationship between violence and industrialized urbanity. But this is not its sole purpose: the author also explores the nuances of violence and the role violence plays within a larger imaginary beyond processes of modernization. The duality of urban/rural is also evoked, particularly as it is represented in early cinema. Other factors present in Navitski's discussion of modernity are foreign interest and investments in Latin America; dialogues with Hollywood and European cinema; and dialogues with established parameters of journalism and literary and filmic genres from Europe and the United States.

The book is organized around two main approaches the author calls "violent actualities" and "sensational fictions." The terminology alludes to the author's methodologies for examining films and journalism that often incorporated crime reenactments and documentary techniques; other times they applied sensational melodrama in the shape of explicit violence and special effects; and sometimes they offered simultaneous applications of both documentation and melodramatic sensationalism. One of the goals of the book is to show how "emerging forms of popular culture simultaneously documented and dramatized quotidian experience" (13). The author explores "sensationalism as a structuring category of public discourse in modernizing, stratified societies" (16), aligning her criticism with affect studies and intersubjectivity vis-à-vis the public sphere.

The book is organized in two clear sections and five cohesive chapters. The first part, "Sensationalizing Violence in Mexico," has two chapters discussing the particular historical impact of the Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution, indicating the specificity of context and its implications for the culture industry and

cultural projects. Chapter 1, “Staging Public Violence in Porfirian and Revolutionary Mexico, 1896–1922,” examines “films of actuality” of the period, “which blurred the distinction between the spontaneous recording and the reenactment of topical events” (32). “Films of actuality” is an early cinematic genre that preceded the documentary but used footage of real events. The chapter examines films such as Enrique Rosas’s *El automóvil gris* (1919) and Ernesto Vollrath’s *La banda del automóvil* (1919), among others. Given the ramifications and effects of the (then) new medium of cinema, Navitski points out how “Mexican cinema’s development shaped historically specific understandings of the ontology of the moving image, leading to unique configurations of documentation and fictionalization” (34–35). The main aspects of the chapter highlight police collaboration in the making of films about real crimes, and the fascination with technology and machines such as cars. Navitski links the violence represented and dramatized in films with the context of state violence in Mexico at the time, where cinema packaged “violence for public consumption” (35), within the context of the regulation of public space. Ultimately, the chapter elucidates how the press, magazines, newspapers, photography and cinema reenacted “experiences of the present” (37), linking the present and violence with experiences of modernity.

Chapter 2, “On Location, Adventure Melodramas in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920–1927,” discusses how the dramatization of quotidian Mexico takes place in the specific genre of melodramatic adventures. By then, the author tells us, “film-making itself” had become a “newsworthy activity,” and cinematic production is linked to “displays of bodily violence” (86). As film culture continues to circulate in Mexico, cinema is consolidated as a sensational spectacle that serves as a platform to define and question national identity, authenticity, and masculinity. Navitski examines the influence of the western genre in several films, in “forging viable models for domestic film production” (90). The chapter also includes a discussion of race and ethnicity, of film criticism in the 1920s, and of Gabriel García Moreno’s crime serial productions. The author establishes links with railroad construction and trains—in further alignment with the context of modernity and spectacles of technology.

The second part, “Staging Spectacles of Modernity in Brazil,” has three chapters that elucidate the particularities of Brazilian early cinema and illustrated press, both in major urban centers and in the regional, geographic peripheries of the country. Chapter 3, “Reconstructing Crime in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1906–1913,” offers a glimpse of the processes of urbanization in Rio and São Paulo, within a discussion of dramatized crime. The specificity of the Brazilian context in relation to social inequalities is clear and well-developed, as is the context of local film productions. The films examined in this chapter point to the inevitable relationship of crime with technology, particularly photography and the police blotter,

and “the threat of criminality and technological breakdown” present in urban settings (126). Journalistic applications of technologies (e.g., printing and photography) are examined at length, as is the “permeability of public spaces” in relation to crime and urbanity (131). The chapter explores João do Rio’s newspaper chronicles as yet another form of spectacularizing the everyday. Also, the author includes the role of illustrations in print media in a country where the majority of the population was illiterate at the time. Other crime reenactments are examined, such as Francisco Marzullo’s *Os estranguladores* (1908), and two of Antonio Serra’s films that discuss violence and female honor, *Noivado de sangue* (1909) and *Um drama na Tijuca* (1909).

Chapter 4, “The Serial Craze in Rio de Janeiro, 1915–1924: Reception, Production, Paraliterature,” explores serialized crime stories in magazines and cinema, and changes in the industry, particularly with Hollywood studios’ investments and branches in Rio. Navitski discusses the popularity of the cinema *truc*, a French borrowing that means “cinematic displays of physical prowess, special effects, and thrilling plot developments” (171). While discussing serialized cinema, this chapter also covers the history of exhibition and reception. The importance of cinema to the artistic and literary period of early 1920s Brazil—a period known as Modernismo—becomes evident in this chapter through Navitski’s examination of several magazines such as *Klaxon*. The chapter highlights urban development and rapid changes in the largest metropolises of Brazil at the time.

Chapter 5, “Regional Modernities: Sensational Cinema Outside Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1923–1930,” explores cinema produced outside of the major urban axis of Rio and São Paulo. The discussion offers a selective sample of productions from Recife, in the state of Pernambuco; Campinas, in the state of São Paulo; and Belo Horizonte and Cataguases, in the state of Minas Gerais, among other locations. The chapter contextualizes the nuances of film productions that were not necessarily associated with the image of urbanity and development projected by films from Rio and São Paulo. Navitski examines the importance of location, and of the uneven economic and cultural distribution of the country. Film criticism, exhibitions, and a variety of film genres are also discussed, as well as the positionality of regional cinema in relation to the construction of a national cinema in Brazil.

Overall, the book examines how the spectacle of violence reveals the complexities of cinema and the illustrated press in multifaceted circuits of production, distribution, and reception in two large, complex countries. The study also reveals the intricacies of social dynamics pertaining to race, class, and gender. As such, the book offers effective discussions on how early cinema and journalism served as platforms to document, imagine, legitimize, and contest social boundaries and stratifications. Considering the current levels of violence and crime in both Mexico and Brazil (Brazil has currently reached staggering murder rates, with 62,000

people killed in 2016), this study is relevant to the current state of affairs, and to how violence continues to be a spectacle in media and cinema. The book's conclusion establishes important links with contemporary Mexico and Brazil, and with contemporary forms of social media. Navitski's study offers original perspectives that go further than other recent studies on early cinema and print media because of its specificity and focus on violence. The book would be of interest to anyone interested in the history of cinema and the press in Mexico and Brazil, and the history of technology and media in general.

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