

***COSMOPOLITAN FILM CULTURES IN LATIN AMERICA: 1896–1960,*  
RIELLE NAVITSKI AND NICOLAS POPPE (EDS) (2017)**

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*Reviewed by Mónica García Blizzard, Emory University*

*Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America (1896–1960)*, edited by Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe, offers an innovative reconsideration of a period of Latin American cinema that has overwhelmingly been approached from the perspective of national cinema and with an emphasis on film production. While the transnational focus has been used to explore other moments in the region's history of representation on film, including the present moment, this volume takes up the notion of the transnational in order to illuminate relationships, flows, influences and negotiations taking place throughout different aspects of film and film culture during the first half of the twentieth century. Emphasizing exchanges characterized by unevenness and mobility, the volume examines key figures, print publications, films and film-going practices whose geneses and evolutions require the consideration of extranational forces, processes and mediations that cannot be accounted for through either a national or a global approach.

The volume's various case studies touching on cinematic and cinephilic experiences in multiple (trans)national contexts including Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil and the United States/Mexico borderlands are helpfully presented within a historical framework. However, the fact that its lines of investigation are interwoven throughout different historically demarcated sections lends it an enjoyable cohesion and allows for an evaluation of the text from this perspective. For instance, in their discussions of transnational mediations, several studies focus on specific figures whose contributions to cinema and its appreciation in Latin America have not been foregrounded from a strictly production-oriented approach. Aurelio de los Reyes' chapter highlights the role of Gabriel Veyre and Fernand Bon Bernard, representatives of the Lumière brothers in Mexico, in the arrival of cinema to the country. The chapter's inclusion of rich historical detail surrounding the initial projections and recordings to take place in the country suggest the importance that political figures, national celebrations and public events would have in Mexican actualities, as well as the ways in which the new technology generated a different public experience of spectatorship. In another study that foregrounds an intermediary, Andrea Cuarterolo focuses on Argentine Horacio Coppola's introduction of visual modernism to photography and cinema in his native country. With both an intermedial and transnational perspective, her chapter points to how Coppola's photography was influenced by his exposure to and experimentation with the filmic avant-garde during his sojourn in Germany in the early twentieth century. Also studying transnational flows in the Argentine context, Nicolas Poppe's study brings to light the work of US cinematographer John Alton while he worked in Argentina during the 1930s. Through detailed analysis of several films on which Alton collaborated, Poppe argues that Alton's cinematography is significant for understanding the aesthetics of early sound cinema in Argentina, and also constitutes an overlooked body of work within the genealogy of film noir. Considering a mediator's impact

on film culture, Irene Rozsa's chapter reveals the importance of a key figure, José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, whose activities as a film critic, archivist and educator generated an institutional context for the study and appreciation of film history in Cuba prior to the revolution. Rozsa's discussion of how Valdés-Rodríguez procured international films, created the first cinema course of its kind in Latin America, and impacted cinephiles who would go on to work within the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), illuminates for the reader the landscape of Cuban film culture in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Another recurring theme throughout the chapters in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures* is the way in which the transnational cinematic reality of the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by cultural negotiations taking place around and within film. Juan Sebastián Ospina León's contribution to the volume discusses how in Colombia during the late 1910s, local film-related publications sought to dictate standards of taste and decorum to local filmgoing audiences. Of particular interest is the author's exploration of ways in which the publication *Películas: Revista de Arte y Variedades* (1916–20), linked to the Italian-born Di Domenico family and their distribution and exhibition empire, upheld Italian cinema as a higher form of artistic expression and more desirable influence on local modernization than films from the United States. Similarly concerned with how local print culture registers attitudes towards cinema and its personalities, Giorgio Bertellini discusses the 'unassimilability' of Rudolph Valentino in 1920s Argentina. The author illuminates how the star's persona and roles were irrelevant regarding how Italians were being included in the landscape of local popular cultural production, the way in which Argentines represented the gaucho tradition on-screen, and how Italian immigrant communities in Argentina preferred to promote Italian culture. Looking at how films themselves convey cultural negotiations at work, Jason Borge's study identifies how the culturally ambiguous nature of mambo allowed it to function as a subversive spectacle in midcentury Mexican films, and later, how its presence in US film and media point to a loosening of Good Neighbour-era restraints on the representation of Latin Americans. Also approaching film text as revelatory of transnational flows, Colin Gunckel's study approaches midcentury low-budget exploitation films made in Mexico as sites that illustrate the circulation of ideas about indigenous Mexico in and between the United States and Mexico. Particularly fascinating in his contribution is the author's discussion of the transnational origins of the films' content and circulation, as well as their subsequent recuperation and repurposing by artists and filmmakers commenting on Chicano/a identity.

An additional unifying line of investigation throughout the volume is the role of film and film culture in mediating Latin American perceptions and participation in capitalist modernity. Rielle Navitski's chapter examines two US-based Spanish-language film publications from the 1920s, illustrating how in their showcasing of North American cinema to Spanish-speaking spectators, they promoted their readers' participation in a cosmopolitan, Hollywood-centric film culture. A fascinating counterpoint to Navitski's study is Sarah Ann Wells' exploration of the first reception of Soviet cinema in Latin America. Wells discusses the perception in the region of Soviet cinema as an 'alternative to the cinematic modernities they encountered in western Europe and the United States' (169), whether or not spectators had direct access to Soviet films themselves. Ignacio Sánchez Prado similarly contemplates the presence of cosmopolitan influences through his re-evaluation of a period of Mexican

cinema that has been upheld as a cultural site of national identity formation. Through his examination of the actual heterogeneity of film offerings during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, and the ways in which its Mexican actors most associated with the cinematic dissemination of Mexican types were equally involved in projects that engaged cosmopolitan literary and filmic points of reference, the author puts forth a compelling and more complex understanding of the period.

Beyond the nuanced studies and their clear thematic interconnectedness of *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures*, one of the volume's points of brilliance is that it ingeniously includes several primary texts translated into English that are explicitly connected with specific studies. This inclusion greatly enhances the reader's appreciation of the contributors' analyses, and can serve as an excellent example to researchers at any level of how to incorporate primary texts into film-related scholarship. Because the volumes' chapters largely aim to qualify broader arguments about Latin American Cinema and do so by attending to narrow scopes, its contributions are best appreciated by those who already have an understanding of Latin American film history and trends, or those who are acquiring this background alongside their reading of *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures*. Nonetheless, the volume is clearly an excellent candidate for incorporation into undergraduate and graduate courses on Latin American cinema and Latin American cultural studies.

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**PANTALLAS TRANSNACIONALES: EL CINE ARGENTINO Y MEXICANO DEL PERÍODO CLÁSICO, ANA LAURA LUSNICH, ALICIA AISEMBERG AND ANDREA CUARTEROLO (EDS) (2017)**

Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 480 pp., ISBN 9-789-50793-256-4, \$420 ARS

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*Pantallas transnacionales* is an essential book for understanding the transnational horizons of Latin American cinema in the so-called classical period, often referred to as the *Época de oro* or Golden Age. The collection rises out of a research group consisting largely of scholars associated with the Centro de Investigación y Nuevos Estudios sobre Cine (CIyNE) at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and financed by its Secretaría de Ciencia y Técnica and Argentina's Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica, highlighting the vital importance of institutions in the promotion and study of popular cultural heritage, something particularly notable as efforts are currently being made by the ruling *macrista* government to slash public support of these important institutions. *Pantallas transnacionales* contains twenty-three essays and an appendix that study various aspects of the relationship between Latin America's most important Spanish-language film industries. Focusing