

(In)visible cinemas: Reusing archival footage in Latin American cinema

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Since the turn of the millennium, academic interest in Latin American cinemas has grown tremendously and what might be referred to as ‘New Cinemas’ have been identified throughout the continent (see Nagib 2003; Aguilar 2008; Page 2009; Martin-Jones and Montañez 2009; Andermann 2012; Andermann and Fernández Bravo 2013; Barrow 2014). This label has usually referred to films made within the last twenty years, and to signal the presence of lesser-known cinemas in international distribution and exhibition outlets such as film festivals, microcines and cineclubs. It has also been used to refer to an upsurge of production which might share specific contexts and aesthetic quests. Research on this body of work has been extremely important and has contributed to the visibility of films which would have traditionally received little attention. This special issue, however, aims to take a step forward and focus on contemporary films (fiction and documentary) and television series which, through the incorporation of archival footage, give visibility to works previously made in countries without established film industries such as Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay, and some more marginal productions from Argentina. The majority of the productions discussed here have not yet been discussed by English-speaking academia.

In this issue, we are interested in challenging the concepts of ‘old’ and ‘new’ in Latin America and reflect upon the invisibility of the majority of films from this region, thereby also reframing the ideas of rupture and new beginnings. This approach requires having a broad idea of cinema in mind and accepting that although 35mm fiction features are important, they do not exist in large quantities. It is important to acknowledge that the use of cheaper media – such as small-gauge film, and analogue and digital video to make feature, medium and short fictions, animations and documentaries – has prevailed and has been fundamental for the existence of local production activity. The interaction between cinema and television has also been very important, and will be explored in this context. Since the possibility of accessing previously made films lies in public, private, organized or improvised archives, a focus on productions which reuse these images and incorporate them in other narratives allows us both to (re)discover and (re)think the place they have had within their own contexts, as well as to re-evaluate the cultural and political significance of those archives themselves. The analysis of contemporary films and television series that reuse pieces of previously made cinema and video has allowed us to engage with past and present layers of meaning. It also led us to explore diverse production, distribution and preservation policies, along with recent decisions taken on specific archives, all of which have a strong impact on the visibility and invisibility of cinema.

Exploring ideas of newness

The adjective ‘new’ has been attached to Latin American cinema, at least, since the late 1950s and the early 1960s. At that time, European tendencies such as the French

nouvelle vague or Italian neo-realism strongly influenced the film-makers of the continent, many of whom were actually trained in Europe (King 2004: 294–95). During those decades, New Latin American cinema was made of oppositional and revolutionary films, made in diverse countries of the continent, which circulated mostly in their own festivals. Several writings and theories were born out of these practices which had a worldwide impact on film-making (see Martin 1997a, 1997b). Key amongst these were the manifestos of film-maker-critic-scholars Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas ('Towards a Third Cinema', Argentina, [1969] 1997), Julio García Espinosa ('For an Imperfect Cinema', Cuba, 1969) and Glauber Rocha ('An Esthetic of Hunger', Brazil, [1965] 1997).¹ At different stages over the 1970s, the *coup d'états* experienced in most of the countries led this so-called continental project to fade out. Although the idea of the 'new' tends not to be used to analyse the cinema that came straight after, the term did not vanish completely. As John King has pointed out, 'if the term "new" had any currency in the eighties and nineties, it would have to be found in the ways in which film-makers, in financially difficult and political monochrome decades, managed to keep an individual and/or collective vision alive' (2004: 303).² It was during the following decade that the term recovered presence and new cinemas began cropping up.

As Lúcia Nagib has noted, '[i]n the mid-1990s, it was the turn of Latin America, where, after repeated declines and silences, cinema returned with renewed energy, especially in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico' (2007: xviii). This time, instead of talking about a New Latin American cinema, specific national cinemas were to be labelled as 'new'. Some of these, such as Brazilian, Peruvian and Uruguayan, were considered to be new because production became more frequent and showed signs of renewal (see Nagib 2003: xviii–

xix, 2007: xviii; Martin-Jones and Montañez 2009: 334–36; Barrow 2014). In the case of Argentina, its new cinema has tended to be related to the advent of young and independent film-makers who challenged the kind of film that used to be made in the country before (see Andermann 2012: xi–xii; Aguilar 2008: 7–8). As years passed, needless to say, the upper-case ‘New’ became lower-case ‘new’, and the perception of newness has evolved. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the characteristics of each new cinema. Rather, we are interested in pointing out the current visibility that contemporary films are giving to older productions and thinking about the implications this action has to reflect about oldness and newness.

Latin American productions have always found it difficult to achieve local exhibition and international distribution, leading to many films circulating in very few specific venues, and others not even being released (see King 2004: 304; Page 2009: 10–12; Ross 2010: 1–2). In this context, the fact that film-makers themselves decide to incorporate in their films sequences of older productions, as archival footage, gains significance. As the articles that make up this dossier show, most of the productions have incorporated pieces from newsreels, home movies, and/or documentaries which had faced censorship and other kind of film that was not exhibited widely. Most of the sequences come from footage made between the 1930s and the 1980s. These multi-layered productions are making reference and establishing a dialogue with films from the past. In so doing, they extend the life of this footage, which either becomes visible again or finally reaches an audience for the first time, after having been denied exhibition for different reasons, usually associated with censorship. This has the effect of forcing us to reflect upon all the invisible films from the region and the continuities and ruptures which have existed between the old and the new.

Contemporary productions are paradigmatic pieces by which we might explore the incorporation of archival footage. Current technologies have helped to generate access copies which circulate more easily and contribute to the creation of new archival collections, many of which only exist in virtual spaces. These have challenged some concepts of the archive in which, to use Jacques Derrida's terminology, an archon was in control (1995: 10). Although interests will always operate to prioritize and organize materials, even in our own personal archives, nowadays it is easier to find a variety of archives from which to choose, and practitioners have revisited many of them for their own productions. This has been an extensive practice in the making of both fiction and non-fiction cinema and television programmes; however, academia has mostly focused on the incorporation of archival footage in non-fiction productions. These readings have informed many of the following articles, together with groundbreaking research, that has expanded the field and shed light on the implications that the incorporation of archival footage has for a diversity of productions (see Baron 2012, 2014; Bruzzi 2013). It is to this growing body of work that this special issue aims to contribute, focusing on productions and contexts which have tended to be under-researched, revealing new stories about the past and their impact on the present. Each chapter of this special issue concentrates on specific cases which emerge from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay. The contributors have introduced their own theoretical frameworks and analyses; the diversity of approaches presented reflects the variety of contexts of each film's production, exhibition and/or reception that cut across video art, television, cinema and Internet platforms.

For example, the articles by Sarah Barrow, on Peru, and Elizabeth Ramírez Soto, on Chile, take more explicitly political examples of archival works from cinema, video and television with essays that address the impact of remediation. The overlaps between television series, news footage and films that they examine offer fresh perspectives on past regimes and military events in those respective nations, and also suggest new ways of considering the present that have the potential to disrupt the status quo, depending on who is in control of access to the works. Similarly, Beatriz Tadeo Fuica's essay on the case of Uruguay focuses on pieces which have been censored or disappeared from the public eye to take a turn towards the question of access and therefore suggesting that by using archival footage from past films, contemporary film-makers exhibit work which might have otherwise remain out of sight. Two articles are concerned with the use of found footage both in Colombia and Argentina. María Luna and Carolina Sourdis apply a notion of disruption to their study of Colombian found footage as used in cinema, with a threefold enquiry into film as metahistory, film as montage and video recycling as counter-information and examples that critically address the discontinuity and fragmentation of Colombia's history. Meanwhile, Clara Garavelli examines the use of cinema in contemporary Argentine video art that not only cites but also uses cinema as an inter-trans-medial *dispositif* and, thus, as a source of renewal, exploring the postmodern processes of citation and resignification of objects and images taken from the mass media and the Internet, and proposes their impact as one of excess. Fernando Sdrigotti's article also concentrates on Argentina to explore the use of the archive in a documentary which he argues provides us with an incisive critique of the socio-economic situation of Argentina post 2001 that might also be read as a criticism of the Peronist project. In spite of the different case studies, all of the articles that make up this issue concur in terms of the importance of focusing on those current tendencies that

contribute to the wider project of the (re)discovery of archival footage that is being undertaken by several forms of contemporary production.

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Notes

¹ These manifestos have been included in the edited collection by Michael T. Martin (1997a).

² New Cinemas have not only appeared in Latin America. According to Lúcia Nagib, '[f]rom the end of the 1980s onwards, new cinemas started to appear in various parts of

the world, particularly in Asia (Iran, China, Taiwan and Japan), all of them strongly narrative and committed to the recuperation of history' (2007: xviii).