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¡Viva la comedia musical!:

Dramatizing Genre Porosity in *El fantasma de la opereta* (Carreras, 1955)

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By the early 1950s, the so-called Golden Age of Argentine cinema (1933–55) was exhausting tried and tested methods for commercial success with mixed results.¹ This industrial, studio-led period of film production, which coincided with the rise of fascism, Perón, and World War II, brought into stark relief discordant projections of the national in Argentine film. On the one hand, film adaptations of canonical literary texts exalting rural landscapes and the spirit of their *gaucho* protagonists would present elite audiences with comforting fictions of cohesion and Argentine particularity. On the other, popular comedies and melodramas riffed on working-class experiences of the metropolis, triumphantly celebrating the Argentinization of immigrant forms as emblemized in the music of the *tango*. This description of Golden Age Argentine cinema is perhaps overly schematic, for in reality there were many more shades of nationalism and class (dis)harmony during this turbulent period. What is certain, though, is that film critics and industry journalists, at home and abroad, were actively engaged in disputing the idea of Argentineness, or *argentinidad*, in film, in elevating the idea of national cinema, and in debating the gains and limitations offered by state-sanctioned investment in the sector.²

Juan Domingo Perón first served the presidency of Edelmiro Farrell (1944–46) as Secretary of Labor, War Secretary, and Vice-President before being elected President of Argentina in 1946. Perón's cultural policies during his first and second terms of office (1946–52, 1952–55), abruptly brought to an end in a coup in 1955, have received sustained and multidisciplinary examination, but popular film production during *primer peronismo* has

generally been described as “superficial and lighthearted”³ and derided for its limited ability to enact social critique and innovate the medium.⁴ The production of “cultura dirigida” (directed culture) under Perón’s mandate tended to avoid ambivalent representations of the sociopolitical climate of the time and typically sold the benefits of an improved standard of living, thanks to *peronista* policies.⁵ Further, efforts to incentivize local film production went hand-in-hand with a policing of narrative materials as appropriate for a nationalist film culture. Domingo Di Núbila’s landmark two-volume *Historia del cine argentino*, published in 1959–60, offered a periodization that pointed clearly to the diminishing quality of the films produced during Perón’s first and second terms as President. This, the first comprehensive approach to the history of Argentine cinema at the time, would remain the gold standard of methods until the late 1990s, when scholars Claudio España and Clara Kriger would explore in different terms the connection between cinematic Peronism and film content and narrative. According to España, films that did attempt to convey something of the sociopolitical climate of the time, with its concomitant mass migration to the city and focus on workers’ rights, tended to do so through the conceit of illusion, mapping diegetic context onto another situation temporally, or to one spatially removed, in order to avoid problems with the censors.⁶ For her part, Kriger has challenged the sedimentation of Di Núbila’s approach, inviting scholars to “begin to question why we equate a political period with a filmic one.”⁷

As Kriger meticulously documents in her study of Peronist film policy, measures in the form of the Ley de Cine 12,999 (1947) and subsequently 13,651 (1949) made it difficult both for distributors of foreign films in Argentina and for local filmmakers who produced narratives discordant with Peronist discourse.⁸ The year 1950 would mark a low point for the exhibition of foreign films in the country, with just 131 foreign films being screened, of which only 42 were from the United States, the lowest figure of the decade.⁹ This situation would change two years later with the implementation of Perón’s second five-year plan, or

quinquenal, which, in tune with the recovery of the country's economy from a period of crisis, showed a marked shift toward re-engagement with foreign economies and productions, as the film industry courted the idea of co-productions with European countries.¹⁰ This “cambio de óptica” (change in outlook)¹¹ would be performed publicly in 1954 with the celebration of the inaugural Festival Internacional Cinematográfico in Mar del Plata, where international film stars gathered to witness the emboldening of the government's relationship to foreign film sectors.¹²

It is precisely at the end of this period that the fledgling production company Cinematográfica General Belgrano, founded by the three Carreras brothers, released *El fantasma de la opereta* (Enrique Carreras, 1955). As its title would suggest, this comedy-horror film draws on Gaston Leroux's *Le fantôme de l'Opéra* (1909–10), though in this case the Phantom is not haunting a physical space but a musical genre in decline: the *operetta*. The film, drawing on the conceit of a dream flashback, charts the extreme lengths to which a young musical theater company goes in order to displace the operetta company under contract at the theater. In the protagonist Arnaldo's (Alfredo Barbieri) dream, the performance of *La viuda triste* (The Sorry Widow)—destined to be a flop—is instead reinvigorated by the serendipitous intrusion of gothic characters, including the Phantom of the Opera, on stage. Arnaldo wakes from his dream and convinces his fellow performers and the theater impresarios that the troupe's *comedia musical*, complete with its own gothic characters, would be a more fitting and popular show for the venue. In its knowingly absurd refashioning of imported figures from the Phantom and associated horror characters, *El fantasma de la opereta*, the gothic-infused musical theater show that wins out at the close of the film, makes a compelling case for aesthetic renewal, all the while reaffirming an Argentine film rhetoric that is at once national and unabashedly cosmopolitan. The routes of cultural transfer that determine this version of Leroux's *Fantôme* evidence a complex web of

layered influences—literary, theatrical, musical, and cinematic—which draw from both sides of the Atlantic. This article will demonstrate how *Fantasma*'s mass-mediated foreign influences, rather than undermining the film's Argentine character, are in fact a constitutive part of it.

Nationalism and Argentine Cinema

By the 1950s, this claim to cosmopolitanism had already been at the heart of fierce debates regarding sovereignty, assimilation, modernization, and cultural production for decades in Argentina. Designs of Argentine identity, or *argentinidad*, had undergone several rebirths since the nation's independence efforts began in the Revolución de Mayo in 1810. In the incipient nation-state, political governance increasingly concentrated on producing a sense of nationhood that would satisfy demands to develop the agrarian economy and produce social cohesion across a vast territory and heterogeneous population. If, in the mid-nineteenth century, the *gaucho* outlaw and Indian were the enemies of the civilizing, Europeanizing state—barbaric protagonists of the cultural “desert” of the interior—in the early twentieth century, xenophobic nationalistic tendencies would blame immigrants for putting the *Gaucha-criollo* nexus of *argentinidad* in jeopardy. Between 1880 and 1914, Argentina would see approximately four million Europeans migrate to the country, a large percentage of whom would settle in Buenos Aires.¹³ As Lilia Ana Bertoni's work has shown, however, two different conceptions of Argentine national identity were vying for power at this time: “on the one hand, the idea of nationality as a product of mixture and as racial melting pot took shape; on the other, the idea of an antecedent nationality, established in the past, and based on defined and unchanging characteristics.”¹⁴ Anxiety regarding the intangible nature of national belonging weighed heavily on the oligarchy and political structures. In particular, debates surrounding language and education were at the forefront of wider discussions regarding

immigration; the Spanish language was particularly susceptible to corruption by foreigners who were not adept in its usage,¹⁵ and instruction in the language was considered key to assimilating immigrant enclaves.¹⁶ Immigrants often became scapegoats for criminality, increasing class tensions and labor unrest, in particular the Italian community in Buenos Aires, the largest single immigrant group, where they constituted approximately 20 percent of the city's population by 1914.¹⁷

The early twentieth century was thus characterized by anxiety surrounding immigrant contamination of the nascent purity of Argentineness. In 1910 the Centenary celebrations of the *Revolución de Mayo* offered an apposite vehicle to channel such nationalistic sentiment and reinstate the figure of the noble *gaucho*, who less than a quarter century earlier was categorized as precisely that component of society the elite wished to excise. This nationalistic elevation of the *gaucho* would reach its apogee in the poet Leopoldo Lugones's series of lectures delivered in 1913 at the Teatro Odeon. In a deft gesture of canonization, Lugones would dignify the status of the *gaucho* as encapsulated in José Hernández's nineteenth-century text *Martín Fierro*, by comparison with Homeric epic poetry. In addition to Lugones, Manuel Gálvez and Ricardo Rojas would also elevate the virtue of Argentine identity, under threat from the corrupting influences of cosmopolitanism wrought by immigration. In his essay "The Diary of Gabriel Quiroga" (1910), Gálvez famously referred to the tango—the most iconic and immigrant of musical genres in the country—as "a product of cosmopolitanism" and "symptom of our denationalization."¹⁸ In other words, cosmopolitanism was regarded not as an organic component of society, but rather a foreign import, responsible for the alienation of Argentines from their "true" nature.

Cinema was part and parcel of these discussions regarding external influence and national identity, and the nationalists' "recovery of the rural" would soon find film form.¹⁹ In 1914 the first feature-length Argentine film, *Amalia* (dir. Enrique García Velloso), premiered

at a gala screening at the (new) Teatro Colón. In its adaptation of José Marmol's foundational 1855 novel of the same name, it presents a nostalgic tableaux of pastoral heroism. Like many of the films produced in the decade of the 1910s, it would, in contrast to the urban location of film production, turn its gaze toward the country's rural interior.²⁰ The following year, the international commercial success *Nobleza gaucha* (Gaucho Nobility) (Cairo, Gunche, and Martínez de la Pera, 1915) likewise posits the *gaucho* as a force for good in contrast to the violent oligarchy.²¹

The implementation of optical sound would in some ways challenge this nativist tradition, though it generated other, more lucrative ways to pursue national identification through film. In the early 1930s, Argentina had one of the strongest film markets in the world, and as sound technology became less expensive, domestic sound cinema became a viable way to compete with the monopoly of US import film.²² The Golden Age of Argentine cinema was born at this juncture, coinciding with the rise of the extreme Right and the nationalistic fervor characteristic of the so-called Infamous Decade. The newly established sound studios, Argentina Sono Film and Lumiton, began to chronicle the urban life of the diverse metropolis, equally invested in being Argentine. The first sound film, *¡Tango!* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933), would announce the domestic film industry's intent to forge a distinctly Argentine film culture to the sound of the country's musical signature, the tango. The rival studio Lumiton would release *Los tres berretines* (The Three Whims) (Equipo Lumiton, 1933) the very same year, which, Matthew Karush reminds us, was an adaptation of a hit *sainete* staged the year before.²³ This repurposing of popular culture for sound cinema was not unique in Latin American film industries and stems from the enthusiasm with which sound was welcomed by producers and directors who sought to craft local film vernaculars and compete with Hollywood. Moreover, the local productions would, it was hoped, abate

identification with foreign realities with which audiences were familiar and, by then, enamored.

Buenos Aires during the 1930s thus became the mecca of Spanish-language film production and attracted émigrés filmmakers from Europe and the United States.²⁴ As Matthew Karush notes regarding the vertiginous spread of influences through the radio during the 1930s “this flood of imported mass culture exposed Argentines to foreign attitudes, tastes and lifestyles.”²⁵ To temper this excess cosmopolitanism, foreign films too were repurposed for the heterogeneous film-going public of the time; in 1931, legislation was passed to enforce dubbing of all foreign film productions exhibited in the country. Since a large immigrant population would not necessarily be comfortable reading subtitles in Spanish, non-Spanish productions were dubbed locally. It was hoped that this would perform a vital mechanism to “acculturate audiences to films spoken in an Argentine idiom.”²⁶ Migrant audiences and immigrant stories would palliate discourses of purity in scripts of Argentine identity. In Stites Mor and Richter’s words, “the immigrant stood in for a political cosmopolitanism that occupied a key space as the arbiter of the local and that resisted an *argentinidad* of exclusion and privilege.”²⁷

Tango films would dominate local production throughout the 1930s and would typically elucidate, or overcome, class differences present in the plots. In the films of Manuel Romero—the most well-known popular film director of the period—the working class and fringes of urban society are championed as quintessentially Argentine in comparison with the upwardly mobile or outright elite sectors. The genre would provide a vehicle to enclose musical dance numbers also, often completely detached from the storyline but explicitly related to the episodic structure of review theater.²⁸ The emergence of tango as a by-now quintessential and internationally recognized musical genre would paradoxically also invite cinematic yearnings for the Buenos Aires of the past. A nostalgic current runs through some

of these tango films, in particular in the work of Romero, in what Paladino has termed a “filmic universe that was rigid and anachronistic.”²⁹ In *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (Yesterday’s Boys Didn’t Use Hair Fixers) (Manuel Romero, 1937), tango is revealed to be old hat, an outmoded icon of national pride now being replaced by the corrupting influence of imported US genres, Charleston, and jazz. In this way, Golden Age Argentine cinema, though invested to a greater extent in the integrity of the working poor and emerging middle classes, would paradoxically continue to barter in comforting fictions of national identity that would claim to reject foreign forms. Kelly Hopfenblatt describes the 1930s cinema of class conflict, with popular classes pitted against elites, in the following terms: “the first [popular classes] were positioned as the bearers of authentic Argentineness, in opposition to the foreignization that modernity would imply for the upper classes.”³⁰ Studios hoped to dignify the image of Argentine national cinema by diversifying away from these hallmark signs of popular culture. In 1936 Argentina Sono Films released a new adaptation of the Mármol novel, *Amalia* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1936), hoping to attract a more refined class of audience in its return to the classical nineteenth-century novel. Indeed, though filmgoing was an extremely popular pastime, exhibition circuits distinguished between popular and elite tastes, reflected in the price of the ticket. According to Karush, “for both commercial and aesthetic reasons, filmmakers shared the critics’ dream of a national cinema purged of the traces of disreputable popular culture.”³¹

After 1942, however, when Argentine production hit a high of fifty-six films, the industry would decline for the remainder of the decade, when raw film stock became increasingly rationed in the country owing to a punitive boycott waged by the United States in light of their belief that Argentina was displaying Axis sympathies during World War II.³² With the protectionist screen quotas and targeted funding introduced by Juan Domingo Perón’s administration, the rate of production would ultimately recover to fifty-eight films

again by 1950.³³ But critical disillusionment with national cinema, charged with being overly formulaic and of poor quality, characterizes much literature on the films of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Even the staunchly pro-Peronist publication, *Mundo Peronista*, would bemoan the state of Argentine cinema in an editorial in 1952: “the quality of film production is obviously disheartening. . . . The films on offer are so impoverished spiritually and artistically that they make you wonder if the Banco Industrial should give out these loans at all.”³⁴ This perception of the negative influence of Peronism on film culture has for the most part endured to this day. Though recent research has engaged with the comedic subgenres dubbed *comedia de ingenuas* (fairy-tale comedies) and *comedia alocada* (screwball comedies), the desire to unearth subliminal political dissent and non-conformism in the films released during *primer peronismo* has meant that popular film genres, widely viewed as escapist, have received limited critical attention.³⁵

The Ríoplatense Phantom

Leroux’s *Fantôme* has undergone an impressive number of screen adaptations around the globe since it was first published in serialized form in *Le Gaulois*, as the range of contributions in this special issue shows. It is the decade of the 1950s—long before the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s stage musical—that most clearly demonstrates an interest in screening *Phantom* in Argentina, however. In a study compiling Latin American screen versions of the narrative,³⁶ including the Mexican film *El fantasma de la opereta* (Fernando Cortés, 1960) and the Brazilian mini-series *O Fantasma da Ópera* produced by Rede Manchete in 1991, it is telling how many Phantom mutations across screen and stage cultures have taken place in the Argentine capital.³⁷ Jorge Nielsen’s study of television programming in 1951–52, for instance—when the medium was in its infancy—shows how Phantom was one of the early offerings on the small screen at a time when cross-fertilization between

radio, theater, musical theater, variety performance, film, and the embryonic domestic television industry was the norm.³⁸ From as early as 1952 a television series bearing the name *El fantasma de la ópera* was aired in Argentina, starring the soprano Raissa Bagnardi, directed by Alfredo Laferrière, and transmitted on the only television station operating during the decade, Canal 7; in June 1955, the feature film *El fantasma de la opereta* by Enrique Carreras was premiered; in 1959–60, another mini-series for television, *Obras maestras del terror* (Canal 7: 1959–1960; Canal 9: 1960–1962)—the second season of which features the Phantom of the Opera—was directed by Martha Reguera and aired on the newly created and privately owned Canal 9; and in 1960 a film spin-off of this same series, directed by Enrique Carreras and also called *Obras maestras del terror*, threads together three Edgar Allen Poe stories with the legendary actor Narciso Ibáñez Menta, whose Phantom fame preceded him. In fact, it is likely that the popularity of the Phantom as a story, character, or genre owes much to earlier stage versions of the narrative authored and performed by this same actor. According to personal testimonies and dramatic lore, Narciso Ibáñez Menta, who lived and worked in Buenos Aires for the largest part of his career, had met Lon Chaney during a stint at Long Island Studios and was particularly inspired by Chaney’s performance on the 1925 *Phantom of the Opera*, directed by Rupert Julian and produced by Universal Pictures.³⁹ Ibáñez Menta’s performances harnessed the existing appeal of the Leroux narrative, complete with the Parisian setting of the Palais Garnier, and would nurture and embolden the Argentine public’s sense of their belonging to international operatic and theatrical culture. Paris had long been a cipher of modernity and progress, and interactions between Paris and Buenos Aires were cemented through cinema during the 1930s, when the Paramount Joinville Studios would produce a series of Carlos Gardel’s tango films.⁴⁰ In Narciso Ibáñez Menta’s hands, Leroux’s *Fantôme* would situate Buenos Aires audiences in a triangular relationship, a key

coordinate in a thriving culture that drew not only from the high culture of Paris but also the Hollywood film industry.

Arriving in Buenos Aires c. 1931, this Spanish-born itinerant actor and performer staged the play *El fantasma de la ópera* at the Teatro Féminas in Buenos Aires in 1934.⁴¹ In the same year, he would also stage Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at Teatro Féminas and *Faust* at Luna Park.⁴² His appearance on the 1930s theater circuit of Buenos Aires would cement his association with horror theater, which would later translate into film and television performances from the 1940s.⁴³ Though it is difficult to gauge audience numbers at his plays and pinpoint the precise influence of his works on screen iterations of the Phantom in the 1950s, it seems likely that his legendary performances were responsible for bolstering familiarity with the Phantom of the Opera character, even before he would captivate the nation with the Phantom in the second season of *Obras maestras del terror*, on Channel 9 in 1960. Moreover, his theatrical performances, alongside his work on radio during the 1930s, reveal the actor's interest and enthusiasm for gothic European adaptations and would go on to consolidate the actor's reputation as the harbinger of horror in Argentine performing arts.⁴⁴ Some critics even claim that with the retreat of Narcisín, as he was fondly known, "the most glorious chapters of horror cinema appear to come to an end."⁴⁵ This brings us to the 1955 film version, the focus of this article, for if the antecedent versions of Phantom on the *porteño* stage seem consonant with the central tenets of the horror genre—seeking to elicit fear, disgust, and amazement at illusion—the Carreras film represents an entirely different mutation of the narrative.

El fantasma de la opereta

The second—and only surviving—screen adaptation of Leroux's *Fantôme* in Argentina, the 1955 *El fantasma de la opereta* is a *comedia de terror* (horror comedy) directed by Enrique

Carreras. As the title of the film suggests, the narrative pays homage to its putative source work, dramatizing the battle for artistic legitimacy on the stage with the help of not one, but two, Phantoms, while playfully mocking international film cultures. The dispute over the corruption of the entertainment industry, the illusory nature of the Phantom himself, references to his eyes of fire, the character of the Persian, a love triangle, threatening letters to the owners of the venue, and the key dramatic location of a prestigious theater complete with basement lair are all borrowings from Leroux, albeit in adapted form. In Carreras's version, however, the young theater troupe, pitted against a rival operetta company and the prospect of a ten-story pizzeria, go to absurd lengths to convince the theater impresarios that only a musical comedy can save the venue from ruin.

The central storyline is bookended in structure by a prelude and a coda. Following the titles, accompanied by a still backdrop of the Phantom disguise used in the film and complete with gothic typeface, the opening sequence locates the action in downtown Buenos Aires. This brief introduction to the bright lights of the metropolis and its Lavalle theater district then segues to the first scene proper: a young, newlywed couple, Arnaldo (Alfredo Barbieri) and Amalia (Amelita Vargas), prepare for a good night's sleep before an important meeting with Más (Mario Baroffio) and Max (Alfonso Pisano), two theater impresarios, the first of whom is the father of their fellow performer, Bettina (Inés Fernández). The theater troupe wish to persuade Más and Max that instead of the operetta under contract, *La viuda triste* (The Sorry Widow), they should produce and stage their musical-comedy show. The conceit of Arnaldo's dream then provides the central action, interspersed with musical numbers, rehearsals, and performances of the operetta. To scare off the operetta performers and director, Arnaldo rents a Phantom of the Opera costume from Don Gaspar, a mad scientist who has assembled other monster characters in his gothic-inspired mansion. What Arnaldo doesn't know, however, is that impresario Max has also rented a Phantom costume in order to

frighten off both the operetta company and the musical-comedy performers: his desire is to turn the theater into a far more profitable multistory pizzeria. When Don Gaspar and his monsters go to the theater to collect their overdue payment from Arnaldo, their intrusion on stage during the operetta performance, contrary to everyone's expectation, produces what promises to be a successful blend of musical-comedy horror. Upon waking up to reality, Arnaldo understands that the only way to convince Más and Max to contract their company to perform is by introducing some of these same alien elements into their show. The musical comedy they stage, reinvigorated with the introduction of pirouetting monsters and ghosts from Arnaldo's dream and performed in the triumphant closing number, is to be called *El fantasma de la opereta*.

In its very structure, the film both underscores the fantasy of the Phantom (he is, to labor the point, literally "dreamed up") and offers metafilmic commentary on the kinds of genre hybridizations required to make a musical comedy, or by extraction, a film, successful.⁴⁶ The threat of the Phantom, the frightening character who inhabits the theater basement, is never really presented as real but as a ruse: to advance certain corporate interests in the case of the pizzeria project, and to protect the interests of mass entertainment and the work of the young actors in the form of the staged musical comedy. The monetary value and dignity that come with the work of performance are highlighted at several moments in the film, chiming with the sociopolitical climate of the time, which sought to celebrate the triumph of a work ethic, the improved labor conditions touted by Perón, and the opportunities available to migrants who were arriving to Buenos Aires in search of work.⁴⁷ Like these migrants, the popular performers in the film arrive at the theater looking to earn a living (though Bettina proves rather well connected; one wonders if they needed the Phantom ruse at all!). Moreover, in casting an Italo-Argentine comic actor, Alfredo Barbieri, and a Cuban dance queen, Amelita Vargas, the migrant narrative gains traction; Argentinian stage and

screen arts are seen as simultaneously welcoming of migrant and international traditions, while celebrating the distinctly Argentine identities particular to the country's experience of mass European migration. In early waves of immigration from Europe, though there was an active policy of naturalization, very few immigrants became Argentine citizens, principally because they believed they would return to their countries of origin. However, by the 1950s the demographic had changed and the second-generation was now embracing its Argentine nationality. This emphasis on the Argentinization of immigrant identities acts as a riposte to discourses of national identity that sanitize the national of all foreign elements. In fact, as Currie K. Thompson writes, "movies from this period—many of which were directed by or featured artists who had emigrated from Europe—usually portrayed immigrants in a positive light and praise Argentina as a mecca of opportunity."⁴⁸ This opportunity and "positive light" on Buenos Aires are clearly reflected in the stellar cast in the film—both Barbieri and Vargas, already an established screen partnership, are given star billing in the titles to the film, and the comic actors Toto and Gogó Andreu were also widely recognized.

Carreras's *Fantasma* begins by clearly emphasizing Buenos Aires as a modern and exciting capital city. The opening montage splices together this discourse from images of iconic buildings in the capital: the dome of the Palacio de Congreso building; the Automóvil Club Argentino; the Ministerio de Obras Públicas, among others.⁴⁹ All of these sites locate the viewer in the heart of the Argentine capital—Plaza de Mayo, Palermo, Avenida 9 de Julio—and celebrate some of the achievements of the city's architecture, during a period of huge urban transformation.⁵⁰ The musical score here too, composed by Jewish Austrian émigré composer Víctor Schlichter (originally Victor Sclicher), emphasizes a triumphant and energetic tone as its chirpy motif propels us toward the theater district where the film action takes place.⁵¹ This montage is reminiscent of the triumphalist tone of European city symphony films of the 1920s, such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walther Ruttmann,

1928) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1927). These films, via immigrant entrepreneurial and filmmaking circuits, had already produced a spin-off in São Paulo in 1929: the Hungarian filmmakers Adalberto Kemeny and Rodolfo Lustig's *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metr pole* (S o Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony).

The remainder of the plot development takes place in the theatrical spaces; the only other locations used for the film diegesis are the bedroom of the newlyweds, who are preparing their audition for the theater the next day, and the house of Don Gaspar, the mad scientist-cum-make-up artist. Arnaldo learns of Don Gaspar by way of an advertisement in the newspaper, and in this way a plethora of horror characters are introduced to the film: "make-up artist and theater costume designer offers his services and an authentic collection of famous characters particularly suited to shows, parties and dances."⁵² In other words, the opening montage is the only time the spectator witnesses the streetlife of the Argentine capital. The diegetic space of the theater determines, however, the structure of the musical interludes and the closing spectacle.

Phantom as Vernacular Cosmopolitanism

Carreras's film illuminates the process by which performance modes and different audiovisual media converge to produce hybrid forms of cultural production that index transmediality and transnationality. Commentary on the film industry is inserted through wordplay and visual puns, knowingly positioning *El fantasma*'s medley of gothic characters in the film in relation to the "Monster mash" compilation films emblematic of Universal horror. *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (Roy William Neill, 1943), *House of Frankenstein* (Erle C. Kenton, 1944), *House of Dracula* (Erle C. Kenton, 1945), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Charles Barton, 1948), for instance, all turned to the accumulative benefits of casting monsters from different franchises alongside each other. These spoof

films, recognizing the waning appeal of the original Universal monsters, knowingly incorporated aspects of comedy. In a nod to the Universal Monsters, *El fantasma de la opereta* also draws on a full gamut of horror characters: the Phantom of the Opera, the Wolf Man, the Invisible Man, Dracula, and Frankenstein. Moreover, the links established between Lon Chaney and Narciso Ibáñez Menta, alongside a direct reference to the “Grupo Universal” in the film, illustrate a conscious effort to position this Argentinian horror comedy in relation to earlier inspirations. The invasion of Don Gaspar’s monsters during the performance of the operetta, *La viuda triste*, prompts Don Gaspar to ask one of his inventions: “¿Te gusta, Drácula? Viejo vampiro. Tiene buena sangre, es dadora universal” (Do you like her, Dracula? You old vampire. She has good blood, she’s a universal donor). To which Dracula replies, “¿Sangre? ¿Grupo Universal? Eso es otra cosa” (Blood? Universal Group? That’s another thing entirely). The compilation monsters here combine with the overarching struggle for the musical stage, conferring a degree of exoticism to the show the young troupe hope to perform, and by extension the film.

This incorporation of ingredients common to other filmographies, including an explicit pun on the Italian diva Silvana Mangano and her role as *la loba* (the she-wolf) in *Il lupo della Sila* (*The Wolf of the Sila*, Duilio Coletti, 1949), is also in step with the shift in approach to foreign influences in film culture, embraced by Perón’s second term in office. Yet even before his second administration, Argentine remakes were in fact relatively common. Lon Chaney plays in the 1924 film *He Who Gets Slapped* (Victor Sjöström), and in 1947 an Argentine remake of the film was released, *El que recibe bofetadas* (Boris H. Hardy), with the lead played by Narciso Ibáñez Menta. This would suggest a conscious refashioning of Lon Chaney’s mastery by the Spanish actor. The 1953 Argentine film *El vampiro negro* (Román Viñoly Barreto, 1953) is likewise based on *M* (Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou, 1930). Thus, the incorporation of earlier musical, dramatic, and film sources in

El fantasma demonstrates how the work capitalizes upon the preexisting iconography of horror.⁵³

El fantasma not only draws on the Universal repertoire of film characters, in their own way drawn from so-called universal literature, but also cannibalizes musical numbers. *El Fantasma de la opereta* draws on local performance modes such as the *teatro de revista* (revue theater), *sainete*, and the *zarzuela* while appropriating parts of Leroux's work and other filmic antecedents to fashion a distinctly national *and* cosmopolitan product. These forms of musical stage performance were incorporated into the Buenos Aires circuit a century prior, but had undergone specific mutations at the end of the nineteenth century that attest to the mass immigration the country experienced during this time. The *revista criolla* and the *sainete criollo*, as their names suggest, are local variants of these popular dramatic modes, originally borrowed from French and Spanish performance traditions, respectively. The farcical, brief *sainete criollo* would become the dramatic art *par excellence* for parodying and honoring immigrant ways until the late 1920s, and would present an episodic and humorous sketch structure with stock characters that would transpose conveniently on to cinematic narrative. Likewise, the *zarzuela*, a Spanish variety of light comic opera, would reach its peak during the late nineteenth century, precisely when debates regarding foreignness and the national would come to the fore. These modes of performance were hugely popular and, perhaps not surprisingly, attracted large audiences of Spanish and Italian nationals living in the Argentine capital at the time. The troupes and companies, however, were still largely composed of foreign actors, which by the late nineteenth century was cause for concern in light of debates surrounding the authenticity of Argentine national identity. It is in this context that the homegrown *revista criolla* and *sainete criollo* emerged, seeking to chronicle the changes taking place in the country as immigrants would arrive.⁵⁴

Lisa Shaw's work on the 1920 Rio de Janeiro *revista* is instructive here, owing to its foregrounding of different cities of staging and reception that disrupt a simplistic center-periphery interpretation of the circuitry of performance.⁵⁵ Several of the "transnational metonyms of modernity and cosmopolitanism" she studies are equally present in *Fantasma de la opereta*.⁵⁶ These include the references to Paris, alongside other metonyms, such as the Folies Bergère, Maurice Chevalier, Madame Rasimi's Bat-ta-clan, and the French language itself.⁵⁷ Madame Rasimi's famous troupe of dancers, the "Ba-Ta-Clan de Paris," visited Buenos Aires in 1922, 1923, and 1938 and would leave a mark on the variety performance scene in the Argentine capital. The word *bataclana* entered the local repertoire and even spawned a musical-comedy film *Yo quiero ser bataclana* (I Want to Be a Chorus Girl) (Manuel Romero, 1941), starring Niní Marshall. Shaw also notes that Rassimi's Ba-Ta-Clan visits brought the *féerie* format, "in which fantasy elements predominate," across the Atlantic.⁵⁸

These allusions to popular forms of stage performance allow for an eclectic mix of numbers and present a platform on which to capitalize upon the star appeal of the protagonist couple. In contrast to Leroux's text, there is no Christine or Carlotta in their conventional roles of *ingénue* and diva. Rather, the female characters Amalia and Bettina provide humorous counterpoint to the amorous overtures of the other male cast members in their theater troupe, and in the case of Amalia—played by the well-known Cuban-born "Queen of Mambo" Amelita Vargas—supply dancing performances in a range of styles.⁵⁹ Amelita Vargas, who had been resident in Buenos Aires since the late 1940s, would make a series of films with Enrique Carreras as director, also featuring her co-star Alfredo Barbieri: *La mano que aprieta* (The Hand that Grips) (1952), *Romeo y Julita* (Romeo and Juliet) (1953), *Los tres mosqueteros* (The Three Musketeers) (1953) and *Ritmo, amor y picardía* (Rhythm, Love and Sassiness) (1954).

The musical comedy that the troupe wishes to stage provides three numbers in the film, where Amelita Vargas's dancing in particular comes to the fore. These numbers would of course not be possible were it not for the failure of the operetta paradigm within the film narrative. *La viuda triste*—a clear nod to *The Merry Widow* operetta by Franz Léhar—is, on several occasions, shown to be a flop. This failure is only remedied with revamped staging when the gothic characters felicitously enter the scene. It is reported that Franz Léhar's 1905 operetta was a huge and instant success in Buenos Aires, premiering in 1907 in no less than five different languages, presumably catering to varied immigrant audiences.⁶⁰ Its parodic inclusion in *El fantasma*, however, seems more likely to pass comment on the 1934 film adaptation of the production directed by Ernst Lubitsch, which also, crucially, starred Maurice Chevalier. The decision to pit a newer operetta by an émigré composer against the musical comedy troupe and not an older Italian work may also betray a resistance to send up a business that had been largely dominated by the Italian community in Buenos Aires. As John Rosselli notes, by the 1930s Italian hegemony in the field of opera in Buenos Aires was in crisis, and the genre's relationship to the idea of an immigrant elite rather uncomfortable. The contribution of this elite art form to the cultural life of Buenos Aires was even downplayed by the Italian community, in order to avoid class conflicts that might undermine their second generation, and by then, working-class allegiances.⁶¹ The resignification of the original Léhar operetta is therefore produced as palimpsest; the operetta as it is aped in *El fantasma* produces meaning by way of its citation of the stage original and of the Lubitsch film adaptation. In this way, its inclusion invites audiences to perform belonging in relation to both pseudo-elite musical culture and the best of US import film, mediating the taste hierarchies that divided Argentine society along class lines.

In an early discussion between Más and Max, Max is firmly convinced that the operetta is not financially viable: while Más protects the genre, claiming that “las operetas no

son cursis” (operettas are not tacky), Max is convinced “a la ruina vamos a ir si seguimos con la opereta” (we’ll end up going to ruin if we continue with the operetta). The company contracted at the theater is then shown at curtain call to be performing to a very small audience. However, when later the mob of monsters unexpectedly enters stage to intimidate Arnaldo, who has not yet paid Don Gaspar for the rental of the Phantom costume, the elite theater critics applaud from the circle, exaggeratedly proclaiming the originality and pizzazz of the work: “¡Qué bueno, ché! Macanudos los cambios del director, ¡lo felicito!” (Hey, it’s great! The changes the director has made are wonderful. Congratulations!).

Interestingly, the genre dispute that takes place replaces the operetta, with its connotations of frivolity but also of social satire, with the more populist genre of musical comedy, inflected by gothic horror in the lighting and characters, and foreign musical numbers in the choreography. In this regard, the film clearly attempts to dignify the work of the musical comedy. There are other references to operetta in the production, at Don Gaspar’s House of Horrors, where he animates model ballerinas from Jacques Offenbach’s *La belle Hélène* (1864), but on the whole the film seems to argue that it is necessary to update this outmoded genre of dramatic musical performance. In place of operetta, then, we witness the introduction of other preexisting music in the film.

Two well-known songs are used in the film; the first, “La Bota,” from the US film *The Strip* (Leslie Kardós, 1951); the second, “Les folies Bergère,” from the eponymous 1935 film starring Maurice Chevalier. As Matthew Karush has compellingly argued, the adoption of in-vogue musical and dance styles, unlike the homegrown tango, would insert Argentina, particularly its capital city, into a complex network of traveling performers and recorded performances in transit.⁶² In fact, this network replicated that established between Italy, New York, and Buenos Aires to facilitate the very same internationalization of opera a century earlier. Yet though “La bota”—the song taken from *The Strip* (famous for Louis Armstrong’s

live film performance)—and “Les folies Bergère” are evidently compositions brought in from abroad, perhaps in their reconfiguration as part of the *porteño* musical comedy scene they could be seen as equally Argentine; this is certainly suggested by the substitution of later verses of the Chevalier song, lip-synched by Arnaldo, in a Spanish pastiche, and actually sung by Amalia.

The counterpoint to these international performances is offered by way of recurrent references to local, acculturated versions of immigrant culture: food (pizza and *fainá*, a flatbread made with chickpea flour); gags about Buenos Aires’s rival football teams, Boca Juniors and River Plate; and slapstick humor that draws heavily on local *revista* traditions. Tellingly, the quintessential culinary fare on offer in the proposed multistory pizzeria includes references to the incorporation of Italian words into Argentine Spanish. The deployment of the poster of *La loba* might also be a way to connect with the communities of Italians and Italo-Argentines who use access to mass media—including the press, radio, and the cinema—to connect with their homelands, or with their ancestors. At one point, Más and Max even joke about the fact that they are clearly not in Paris (“aquí no estamos en París”); the characters are shown as competent interpreters of the Phantom of the Opera narrative, yet nonetheless reaffirm that the context for this film is clearly Buenos Aires. This use of humor chimes with Melgosa’s description of “comedic devaluations of cosmopolitan aspirations.”⁶³ The references to Paris and the Folies Bergère, moreover, depend on their signification metonymically as emblems of cosmopolitan sophistication. In this regard, they necessarily demand to be treated as foreign components within the film narrative, despite the audience’s potential familiarity with Maurice Chevalier and the City of Light.

The young performers triumph over the operetta company but also crucially over the owning classes—here performing artistry wins over patronage to trump the pizzeria, even though the pizzeria, with its floors designated per quintessential Argentine ingredient, might

otherwise be deemed more Argentine than the Folies Bergère number performed at the end of the film. Crucially, this highlights a key point regarding the disputes of degrees of *argentinidad*, or Argentineness, and the place of foreign signs and works in a national cinematic culture compelled to define its identity. The film invites us to consider its treatment of genre conflict, Argentine language, the Argentinization of immigrant cultures, and transnational artistic communities in ways that privilege the mutually constitutive fields of the local and the cosmopolitan. In using borrowed conventions of musical stage performance from antecedent and foreign films, the characters in *El fantasma* are able to defeat the power of the corporate elite (the theater owners), thus upholding the social norms governed by Peronist discourse at the time. Yet by enabling audiences access to international genres and forms through parodic cannibalization, there is a suggestion that only by harnessing international influence on Argentine terms can the country truly reach *argentinidad* through cinema.

Belonging to the low-budget and quickly produced set of films that typified the commercial brand of cinema produced by General Belgrano, Carreras's *Fantasma* channels commentary on the status of different art forms and the transnational transactions taking place between them—musical theater, comedy, operetta, film, and variety performance. The discursive framing of the Phantom plot and incursion of gothic tropes are permitted through the dream flashback, which constitutes most of the film. Arnaldo's dream allows the narrative to toy with disorder and monstrosity without it ever being considered a real threat. Instead, the Phantoms that populate his dream, and by extension the diegesis, herald a new kind of *comedia de terror musical*, one that materializes on stage in the final dance number. Put simply, Leroux's novel, the two Phantom characters in the film, their Universal Monster allies from Don Gaspar's House of Horrors, and the repurposing of foreign repertory all serve

to make a case for genre hybridization, affirming the cosmopolitan nature of Argentine film at the same time as it reaffirms the local context for the work.

In this regard, the words of the most canonical of Argentine authors, Jorge Luis Borges, from 1951, might be instructive: “we must believe that the universe is our birthright and try out every subject; we cannot confine ourselves to what is Argentine in order to be Argentine because either it is our inevitable destiny to be Argentine, in which case we will be Argentine whatever we do, or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask.”⁶⁴ Though I am certain that Borges was not specifically referring to a musical comedy populated by *Phantoms*, clearly what the *Phantom of the Opera* shows in its new home in Buenos Aires is that these international references, which entered the mediascape during the rise of mass media during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, are equally Argentine. The redeployment of Leroux’s *Phantom* mobilizes powerful connections between Buenos Aires, the French capital, and the United States in order to model local forms of genre hybridity that drink from foreign influences on both sides of the Atlantic. By troubling the stark center-periphery dynamic of cultural export and appropriation, Carreras’s *Fantasma de la opereta* dramatizes the act of making the foreign one’s own.⁶⁵

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Latin America.

1. Claudio España, “Emergencia y tensiones en el cine argentino de los años cincuenta,” *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 11/21–22 (1998): 45–73.
2. These debates were taking place across Latin America, as Avila’s contribution to this issue demonstrates in the case of Mexico.
3. Original text: “superficial o liviano.” See Alejandro Kelly Hopfenblatt, “Argentina era una fiesta: ocio, modernidad y presente constante en la comedia sofisticada durante el primer peronismo,” *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas* 13/2 (2016): 195–211: 196.
4. Juan Domingo Perón was democratically elected President three times in the history of Argentina: 1946–52; 1952–55; and 1973–74. He was removed from power in 1955 during his second term by a military coup, the so-called Revolución Libertadora, and he died during his third term, leaving his presidency to his successor, his third wife, Isabel Perón. The period known as *primer peronismo* (First Peronism), however, often includes his political rise from the early 1940s.
5. España, “Emergencia y tensiones”; Clara Kriger, *Cine y peronismo: el Estado en escena* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2009).
6. España, “Emergencia y tensiones.”
7. Original text: “es necesario que nos preguntemos en principio por qué homologamos un período político con un período cinematográfico.” Kriger, *Cine y peronismo*, 137.
8. *Ibid.*, 43–50.
9. *Ibid.*, 69–70.
10. *Ibid.*, 79–82.
11. *Ibid.*, 82.
12. The same city had also staged the First Festival of Argentine Cinema in 1948 under Perón’s directive. Kriger, *Cine y peronismo*, 79.

13. This courting of European immigration would simultaneously act to “whiten” the population, part and parcel of the persecution of indigenous tribes during the late 1870s in the so-called Conquest of the Desert led by General Roca.

14. Original text: “por un lado, se delineó una idea de nacionalidad concebida como producto de la mezcla, del crisol de razas. . . . Por otro lado, la idea de una nacionalidad ya existente, establecida en el pasado, de rasgos definidos y permanentes.” See Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 171.

15. Jean H. Delaney, “Imagining ‘El Ser Argentino’: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34/3 (2002): 625–58: 639–40; Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas*, 204.

16. Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas*, 190; Ronald C. Newton, “*Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti*: Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922–1945,” *The Americas* 51.1 (1994): 41–66: 62.

17. Samuel L. Baily, “The Adjustment of Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and New York, 1870–1914,” *American Historical Review* 88/2 (1983): 281–305: 302.

18. Original text: “producto del cosmopolitismo” y “síntoma de nuestra desnacionalización.” See Manuel Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga: Opiniones sobre la vida argentina* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, [1910] 2001).

19. Matt Losada, “Allegories of Authenticity in the Argentine Cinema of the 1910s,” *Hispanic Review* 80/3 (2012): 485–506, 489.

20. *Ibid.*, 492. For Losada, the *gaucho* films of the silent period, though glaringly nationalistic in some respects, enjoyed a “prelapsarian window of autonomy in comparison with the sound cinema of the 1930s, which would instrumentalize directors, wittingly or not,

as part of state-sanctioned discourses with nationalist sentiment.” Losada, “Allegories of Authenticity,” 488.

21. *Ibid.*, 495–97.

22. The US studio Paramount foresaw this loss of the Spanish-speaking market during the transition to sound films and began to produce foreign-language films in their Joinville studios on the outskirts of Paris. Poppe reports that their first films in this vein were not popular with the Argentine public, since the Spanish that the studio used did not resemble the River Plate vernacular. With the signing of the Argentine performer Carlos Gardel to Paramount, however, a powerful cinematic link between Buenos Aires, the *tango*, and Paris would be forged. The first of these four films was *Las luces de Buenos Aires* (Adelqui Millar, 1931) and would bolster Carlos Gardel’s fame as transnational Hispanic star. See Nicolas Poppe, “Sitieseeing Buenos Aires in the Early Argentine Sound Film *Los tres berretines*,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 26/1 (2009): 49–69: 51.

23. Matthew B. Karush, “The Melodramatic Nation: Integration and Polarization in the Argentine Cinema of the 1930s,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87/2 (2007): 293–326, 302.

24. Adrián Pérez Melgosa, “Cosmopolitan Nationalisms: Transnational Aesthetic Negotiations in Early Latin American Sound Cinema,” in *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema*, ed. Marvin D’Lugo, Ana M. López, and Laura Podalsky (New York: Routledge, 2018), 136–50, 144.

25. Matthew Karush, “Blackness in Argentina: Jazz, Tango and Race before Perón,” *Past and Present* 216 (2012): 215–45, 228.

26. Jessica Stites Mor and Daniel Alex Richter, “Immigrant Cosmopolitanism: The Political Culture of Argentine Early Sound Cinema of the 1930s,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 9/1 (2014): 65–88, 69.

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27. Ibid., 66.
28. Diana Paladino, “El cine en dos por cuatro (en la primera mitad del siglo xx),” *Revista de Estudios Históricos sobre la Imagen* 41 (2002): 56–69, 62–63.
29. Original text: “un verosímil cinematógrafo rígido y anacrónico.” Paladino, “El cine en dos por cuatro,” 65–67.
30. Original text: “se ubicaba a los primeros como portadores de la verdadera argentinidad, opuesta a la extranjerización que suponía la modernidad en que se movían las clases altas.” Kelly Hopfenblatt, “Argentina era una fiesta,” 198.
31. Karush, “The Melodramatic Nation,” 305.
32. Tamara Falicov, *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 15–16.
33. These figures are taken from Octavio Getino, *Cine argentino: entre lo posible y lo deseable* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CICCUS, 2005), 177.
34. Original text: “la calidad de la producción cinematográfica es, a todas luces, desalentadora. . . . Se ofrecen unas películas de una baratura espiritual y artística que hacen pensar que el Banco Industrial no otorgue más créditos sin discriminación.” Cited in Valeria Manzano, “Cine argentino y peronismo: cultura, política y propaganda, 1946–1955,” *Filmhistoria* 11/3 (2001),
<<http://www.publicacions.ub.edu/bibliotecaDigital/cinema/filmhistoria/2001/Cineargentino.htm>> [accessed December 4, 2017].
35. See Kelly Hopfenblatt, “Argentina era una fiesta”; and Kelly Hopfenblatt, “Hasta que la muerte nos separó: amor y matrimonio en la comedia clásica sobrenatural argentina,” *Brumal* 4/1 (2016): 209–24, 210.
36. Timothée Picard, *La civilisation de l’opéra* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2016).

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37. For discussion of the Mexican film with the same title, *El fantasma de la opereta*, see Jacqueline Avila, “*El fantasma* and Tin Tan: Genre Hybridity and Musical Nostalgia in Fernando Cortés’s *El fantasma de la opereta* (1959),” in this issue.
38. Jorge Nielsen, *La magia de la televisión argentina: cierta historia documentada. Tomo I: 1951–60* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 2004), 39–56.
39. Antonio Lázaro-Reboll, “Screening ‘Chicho’: The Horror Ventures of Narciso Ibáñez Serrador,” in *Spanish Popular Cinema*, ed. Antonio Lázaro Reboll and Andrew Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 152–68, 154; and Ana Torres, “Entrevista: Narciso Ibáñez Serrador,” in *Cine fantástico y de terror español 1900–1983*, ed. Carlos Aguilar (San Sebastián: Semana de Cine Fantástico y de Terror, 1999), 223–56, 232.
40. The 1937 musical-comedy film *Tres anclados en París* (Three Argentines in Paris) (Manuel Romero) would continue these cinematic transactions between the two cities.
41. Nielsen, *La magia*, 42; Carina Rodríguez, *El cine de terror en Argentina: producción, distribución, exhibición y mercado, 2000–2010* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2014), 81.
42. Rodríguez, *El cine de terror*, 81.
43. Several sources date the birth of Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, Narciso Ibáñez Menta’s son, as 1935 in Montevideo, Uruguay, suggesting that performances on the other side of the River Plate were also likely.
44. The 1942 film in which he acted, *Una luz en la ventana* (A Light in the Window) (Manuel Romero, 1942), toying with both *noir* and horror conventions, is tentatively considered the beginning of the horror genre in film in Argentina. María José Moore and Paula Wolkowicz, “Sobre monstruos, dobles y otras anormalidades: El terror en el cine argentino en las décadas de 1940 y 1950,” in *Civilización y barbarie en el cine argentino y latinoamericano*, ed. Ana Laura Lusnich (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005), 61–83, 61.

45. Original text: “Los capítulos más gloriosos del cine de terror parecen haberse acabado.”

Rodríguez, *El cine de terror*, 76.

46. It is worth noting that the dream is a device used in other Argentine films of the early 1950s, notably *La vendedora de fantasías* (Daniel Tinayre, 1950) and *El crimen de Oribe* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and Leopoldo Torres Ríos, 1950). In both examples, discussed by Thompson, the waking up sequence occurs toward the beginning of the film, and the dream acts as a mechanism by which the films consider “the relationship between consciousness and illusion.” See Currie K. Thompson, *Picturing Argentina: Myths, Movies and the Peronist Vision* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2014), xii. In *El extraño caso de la mujer asesinada* (Boris H. Hardy, 1949) the dream is not revealed to be an illusion until the very end, “conduciendo al espectador durante todo este tiempo a creer en su estatuto de realidad dentro de la diégesis narrativa” (leading the spectator to believe it as real during the entirety of the narrative diegesis). See Kelly Hopfenblatt, “Hasta que la muerte,” 214.

47. Thompson, *Picturing Argentina*.

48. *Ibid.*, xvii.

49. My thanks to James Scorer for helping me to identify these buildings in the film.

50. See Laura Podalsky, “Cityscapes and Alienation: Buenos Aires in the Argentine Cinema, 1950–1960,” *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 11/21–22 (1998): 77–92, 77.

51. In the *Heraldo* review, it is also made clear that the film screened at the same theater, Normandie, featured in the city prologue. Other, less central venues included: Roca, Cuyo, Edison, Sol de Mayo, Majestic, and Güemes. See “*El fantasma de la opereta*,” *El Herald del Cinematografista* 1244 (1955): 131.

52. Original: “artista del maquillaje y creador de ropajes teatrales ofrece sus servicios y una auténtica galería de célebres personajes especialmente útiles para representaciones, fiestas y bailes.”

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53. Moore and Wolkowicz, “Sobre monstruos,” 74.
54. Kristen McCleary, “Nation, Identity and Performance: The Spanish Zarzuela in Argentina, 1890–1900,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 44/1 (2017): 28–53.
55. Lisa Shaw, “The *teatro de revista* in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s: Transnational Dialogues and Popular Cosmopolitanism,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 52/2 (2015): 73–98, 77.
56. *Ibid.*, 74.
57. *Ibid.*, 84.
58. *Ibid.*, 77.
59. By 1955, mambo was a proven musical commodity, pan-Latin in scope and disseminated principally through the raging success of Mexican films that flaunted the genre. It is worth noting, however, that Vargas deviates from her usual repertoire of Cuban rhythms in *El fantasma*. This fact was picked up on in the review in *Heraldo del Cinematografista* and might be one of the reasons for its lukewarm critique in the industry periodical—the film only achieved a slightly above average ranking of “3” for its commercial appeal. Notwithstanding, Amelita Vargas’s fame as a *rumbera* would undoubtedly guarantee interest in the film from audiences who followed the Barbieri-Vargas partnership. See *Heraldo*.
60. Marlis Schweitzer, “‘Darn that Merry Widow Hat’: The On- and Offstage Life of a Theatrical Commodity, circa 1907–1908,” *Theater Survey* 50/2 (2009): 189–221.
61. John Rosselli, “The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America 1820–1930: The Example of Buenos Aires,” *Past and Present* 127 (1990): 155–82, 159.
62. For an in-depth study of how mambo entered Latin American and US film production, see Jason Borge, “Bad Neighbors: Pérez Prado, Cinema, and the Politics of Mambo,” in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896–1960*, ed. Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 269–93.

63. Melgosa, “Cosmopolitan Nationalisms,” 147.

64. Original text: “debemos pensar que nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara.” Jorge Luis Borges, “El escritor argentino y la tradición,”

Discusiones (Buenos Aires: EMECÉ, 1957), 151–62, 162. This publication is a transcript of a speech delivered in 1951, and the translation offered is Esther Allen’s, anthologized in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 2000), 420–27, 427.

65. Gonzalo Aguilar, “Cosmopolitismo en la era de la globalización,” *Mardulce* 6 (2014): <<http://www.mardulceeditora.com.ar/magazine/articulo.php?id=36&n=6>> [accessed December 4, 2017].