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Distribution, the forgotten element in transnational cinema

ABSTRACT

1. *This article addresses the circulation of Latin American film in the United States.*
2. *The background to this research is our concern that activists, journalists, academics,*
3. *film-makers and policy-makers who seek a diverse film sector tend to focus on*
4. *production to the exclusion of distribution and exhibition. An absence of publicly*
5. *available data adds to the problem. In addition to examining the wider political*
6. *economy of Latin American cinema in the United States, we offer case studies of*
7. *success and failure.*

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10. When discussing options for creating an inclusive film sector, it is conceptually
11. easy and publicly palatable to support production as opposed to other sectors
12. of the industry. Why is this? Because *making* movies is easily articulated to the
13. idea of building local, national and regional culture through the work of art, and
14. because small firms and large corporations like the idea of what they call ‘free
15. money’ from the state to subsidize their productions. By contrast, other parts
16. of the cycle – circulating, promoting and showing movies – lack glamour and
17. artistry even as they are extremely profitable. However, their role is vital, and the
18. corporations that want subsidies to produce films work assiduously to keep these
19. more profitable sectors separate from government enterprise (Miller et al. 2005).
20.

KEYWORDS

film distribution
Latin America
United States
Amores Perros
Y Tu Mamá También
Cinema Tropical
Latin American Video
Archives

The result is a remarkable concentration of power in a few hands. Consider the US domestic market share among film distributors for the first half of 2010:

1 January–12 August 2010 overall gross: \$7.007 billion

Rank	Distributor	Market share (%)	Total gross (millions)	Movies tracked	2010 movies
1	Paramount	17.2	\$1,202.8	13	9
2	20th Century Fox	16.2	\$1,136.9	12	9
3	Warner Bros.	16.2	\$1,131.9	23	14
4	Buena Vista	15.0	\$1,051.5	12	9
5	Sony/Columbia	10.4	\$727.7	13	8
6	Universal	8.9	\$626.7	12	9
7	Summit Entertainment	6.0	\$418.1	9	6
8	Lionsgate	3.4	\$240.9	8	6
9	Fox Searchlight	1.3	\$92.0	6	4
10	Overture Films	1.0	\$67.3	4	2
11	MGM/UA	0.7	\$50.3	1	1
12	CBS Films	0.7	\$49.6	2	2

Source: boxofficemojo.com

These rankings paint a familiar picture: the major Hollywood studios may not produce many pictures any more, but they dominate where the real money is made and the key decisions taken: distribution and its revenue sources and outlets, be they theatrical exhibition, television, DVDs or the Internet. Such textual power is of particular significance in determining screen diversity.

Our specific concern here is the availability of Spanish-language cinema in the United States, in the belly of the Hollywood beast. The part played by Latin America in US culture is indubitable. However, the availability of its movies has long been an issue.

Below are the most successful films from Latin America exported to the United States from 2000 to 2007:

Title	Country, director	United States	Distributor	Gross US\$
<i>Amores Perros</i>	Mexico, Alejandro González Iñárritu	2001	Lionsgate, Nu Vision	5,383,834
<i>Y tu mamá también</i>	Mexico, Alfonso Cuarón	2002	IFC, Fox	13,622,333
<i>Nueve Reinas</i>	Argentina, Fabián Belinsky	2002	Sony, BVI	1,221,261
<i>El Hijo de la Novia</i>	Argentina, Juan José Campanella	2002	Columbia, Argentina VH	624,153
<i>Cidade de Deus</i>	Brazil, Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund	2003–2004	Miramax, BVI	7,563,397

(Continued)

1.	<i>Carándiru</i>	Brazil, Hector Barbenco	2004	Sony, Columbia	213,954
2.					
3.	<i>María, Llena Eres de Gracia</i>	United States/ Colombia, Joshua Marston	2004	Fine Line	6,517,198
4.					
5.	<i>Diarios de Motocicleta</i>	Argentina, etc., Walter Salles	2004	Focus, BVI	16,756,372
6.					
7.	<i>El Crimen del Padre Amaro</i>	Mexico, Carlos Carrera	2002–2003	Sony, Samuel G	5,709,616
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12. Source: Alvaray (2008)

13.
14. Most of the titles are art house films, with limited theatrical releases. Some
15. pictures attained extraordinary success.
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18. **Case studies:** *Amores perros* (*AP*) and *Y tu mamá también* (*YTMT*) were the
19. most successful Mexican film exports of the last ten years. Their appeal
20. across ethnicity inside the United States suggested a 'golden' opportunity
21. for Latin American cinema, the latest of several false dawns for the indus-
22. try's export trade. Independent distributors and sales agents such as Strand
23. Releasing, IFC Films, Lionsgate, Cowboy Booking, Sony Pictures Classics
24. and Good Machine Internantional invested in Latin American imports as a
25. consequence of the popularity of these two films.

26. Numerous US critics listed *AP* amongst their favourite films of 2001. It
27. was nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars (the first time a Mexican
28. movie had been selected in a quarter of a century) and the Golden Globes,
29. and won the American Film Institute's Audience Award, the Boston Society
30. of Film Critics and Chicago Film Critics Association Best Foreign Language
31. Film Awards, the National Board of Review Best Foreign Language Film,
32. the Chicago International Film Festival's Audience Choice Award, an MTV
33. Movie Award, and Outstanding Foreign Film in the American Latino Media
34. Arts Awards. The film grossed US \$5.4 million in the United States and
35. was on 187 screens, where over a million people saw it – very good figures
36. for an import (a Hollywood hit may reach 3000 screens). The distributor,
37. Lionsgate, attributed this success to genre and the film's rejection of indexi-
38. cal Mexican locales. Guillermo del Toro suggests that this was important
39. domestically, not just abroad: 'The foreign market that Mexican cinema has
40. conquered is Mexico'. This was in keeping with director Alejandro González
41. Iñárritu's wish to make an international story about city living, and producer
42. Marta Sosa's dictum that film-makers must focus on audiences. At the same
43. time, *AP* was criticized by key figures in Mexican popular culture, notably
44. Televisa's vice president of programming, Luis de Llano, who derided 'street
45. language that directors think makes the movie more hip and modern',
46. which he regarded as ill-advised mimicry of the United States. For other
47. observers, this was a welcome by-product of the era's neo-liberalism, part
48. of 'a certain Free Trade Area of the Americas [...] sensibility' (Schwartzman
49. 2002; Castellanos 2001; Sama 2002; Constance 2001; Hernandez 2002; Beale
50. 2001: 31; Tegel 2001; Fuguet 2001; 'México cosmopolita' 2002).

51. *YTMT* debuted in the United States at *¡Acción!: cine mexicano actual*,
52. organized by New York's Guggenheim Museum, the Mexican Cultural

1. Latin@ is the non-sexist terminology used by progressive scholars in Latin America and the United States.

Institute and Cinema Tropical (CT). There were concerns that its unrated status due to sexual content, which meant no one under 18 could attend, would diminish its theatrical appeal. However, IFC Films, a subsidiary of Cablevision that started in 2000 and was connected to Bravo and the Independent Film Channel, bought the rights in what may have been its last effort to stay in business. Initially, *YTMT* was distributed to art houses and areas with high proportions of Mexicans. In the United States \$3 million was spent on marketing via radio and TV commercials and a grass-roots campaign of stickers, postcards and posters, initially targeting Spanish-language TV (SLTV) and patrons of Mexican restaurants then expanding to Anglo venues via cross-promotion with IFC's affiliated art-cinema cable stations. IFC used Salma Hayek, a fantasy-object in the film, to promote *YTMT* in the United States along with director Alfonso Cuarón and male stars. IFC spokesperson Bob Berney says, '[t]he film broke away from the foreign-language market and showed that a Spanish-language film is not a foreign-language [movie] in the US. The film became a crossover mainstream film with all the major theatre chains wanting to play it'. *YTMT* brought in \$13.62 million within the United States and was nominated for an Oscar for Best Screenplay, a Grammy for the soundtrack and a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film. It won prizes at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival, Santa Fe Film Festival, the Independent Spirit Awards, and the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and Glitter Awards, as well as the Best Foreign Language or Foreign Film Awards of the Las Vegas Film Critics Society, Boston Society of Film Critics, Dallas-Fort Worth Film Critics Association, Seattle Film Critics, South-Eastern Film Critics Association, Los Angeles Film Critics Association, Broadcast Film Critics Association, San Francisco Film Critics Circle, Satellite, National Society of Film Critics, Online Film Critics Society, Political Film Society, New York Film Critics Circle and Florida Film Critics Circle (Waxman 2002; Rodriguez 2002; Thomson 2002; Bloom 2002; Muñoz 2002; Ayuso 2002; Fonseca 2002: 27; Variety Box Office 2002).

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THE AUDIENCE

The Latin@¹ population grew by nearly twelve million people (33% between 2000 and 2007). If this rate is sustained, there will be nearly 133 million Latin@s by 2050, close to a third of the projected US population (Yúdice 2009). They comprise 15% of the US cinema audience, and the average Latin@ goes to films 9.9 times each year, as opposed to 8.1 times for white, non-Hispanic Americans and 7.6 times for African Americans. Latin@s are the fastest-growing group of cinemagoers in the United States, spend the most at concession stands and watch the most television. They are six times more likely to watch films with Latin@ themes and stars. Nevertheless, Latin@s have just 5% of roles in Hollywood cinema. This is especially problematic given the hidden value of Central American and Mexican labour in the service industries that support Hollywood production and daily life in southern California (Ayuso 2002; Fonseca 2002; Univision.com 2002; Gonzalez 1998; Nielsen Media Research 2002; Madigan 1999; Motion Picture Association of America 2000; Noriega 2002; Fresneda 2002; Rich 2001).

Latin@s have historically been neglected in the psychographic research that US marketers generate about spectators, such as preferred days and times of theatrical attendance and correlations between gender, genre and popcorn

1. consumption. The traditional assumption is that recent arrivals in the United
 2. States watch imported films and later generations prefer Hollywood. Some
 3. analysts suggest that new residents from the *campesino* or working class had
 4. not frequented movie theatres at home because they could not afford to do
 5. so. In addition, much new cinema (consider *AP* and *YTMT*) is aimed at the
 6. cosmopolitan urban middle class. It resonates with international youth culture
 7. rather than the traditional Arcadian utopias of official Mexican culture (*Latino*
 8. *Media News* 2000; Pande 2001; Llano 1995; Beale 2001).

9. There is no unitary Latin@ audience. Latin@s come from various sover-
 10. eign states and have diverse attitudes to language. Their high aggregate
 11. numbers are complicated once the term 'Latin@' is broken down by dominant
 12. language, region of origin and domicile, nationality, race and class.

13. The United States has over 80 Latin@ advertising agencies and branches
 14. of multinationals dedicated to deciphering and managing this audience. Yet,
 15. the size of Mexico's domestic market and its production capacity are dominant
 16. factors in exports to the United States, especially on SLTV. Because Mexico is
 17. the dominant provider of SLTV in the United States, it is the 'natural' Latin@
 18. source of drama and news and the dominant visual and linguistic influence.
 19. Arlene Dávila quotes the common complaint that 'English TV takes you all
 20. around the world, but Spanish TV keeps you in Mexico' (2001). Other Latin@s
 21. express annoyance that Mexicans stand in for them in much advertising, and
 22. some expatriate Mexicans fear that images of Mexicanness on Yanqui² televi-
 23. sion promote stereotypes amongst both *hispano hablantes* and *anglo parlan-*
 24. *tes* (Cable TV Ad Bureau Multicultural Resource Center 2002b; Dávila 2001;
 25. Sinclair 1999: 92, 97, 116; Perez 2002).

26. Meanwhile, 'Hollywood just doesn't know how to address itself to this
 27. bilingual audience' (Ayuso 2001). Disney's 2000 Spanish-language version
 28. of *The Emperor's New Groove* (Mark Dindal) failed with Spanish-speakers in
 29. the United States; they went to see the English original. Director Gregory
 30. Nava is sceptical of Hollywood producers' commitment to Latin@s: 'one
 31. thing fails and they think the audience isn't there [...] Nobody is willing
 32. to make a long-term commitment' (Fonseca 2002: 27). In the words of the
 33. Univisión TV network, 'Hollywood is still looking for the key to the Hispanic
 34. market, a lucrative goal since this community is, proportionally, the largest
 35. film audience in the country' (Fresneda 2002). A Mexico-US committee
 36. to promote the film industry examined copyright protection, co-production and
 37. the availability of Mexican cinema in the United States (Vargas 2000, 2001),
 38. but the code for making and selling Spanish-language cinema there has not
 39. been broken.

40. DISTRIBUTION

41. Distributors advertise, promote and dispatch films, as well as negotiating
 42. theatrical runs. US studios operate vertically integrated networks of distribu-
 43. tion to control access to audiences, and utilize a massive domestic TV market to
 44. ensure returns on investment, even from unpopular texts. They charge exhibi-
 45. tors a percentage of box office profits – often as much as 40%, in addition to
 46. 25% in fees for sales to TV networks, and 30–40% to cable – and use 'creative
 47. accounting' to conceal profits from foreign organizations due a share of revenue
 48. (http://web.me.com/tobymiller69/CulturalStudiespodcast/Bill_Grantham.html;
 49. Hoskins et al. 1997: 57; Daniels et al. 1998: 86, 104; Goldberg 1991: 5; [http://](http://web.me.com/tobymiller69/CulturalStudiespodcast/Lloyd_Segan.html)
 50. web.me.com/tobymiller69/CulturalStudiespodcast/Lloyd_Segan.html).

2. *Yanqui* is the form used by progressive scholars in Latin America and the United States as an adjective for the United States. The word 'American' applies to dozens of countries.

3. Art house cinema in the United States generally refers to non-Hollywood, often foreign films, mostly shown at independently owned theaters or in universities, with a focus on narrative rather than action, sometimes linked to the avant-garde, frequently not in English, and historically appealing to a highly educated white audience.

In addition, the major studios ensure that co-productions elsewhere remain under their financial control – so when Columbia TriStar co-produced *Sin Ton ni Sonia* (Carlos Sama, 2003) by committing 20 per cent of funding, it also secured local and international distribution. The majors are equally assiduous in the pursuit and maintenance of archival intellectual property. Time Warner owns the rights to much historic Mexican film, which it has acquired by purchasing properties from local copyright holders, while Columbia Pictures controls *Cantinflas' oeuvre*. The risks for outsiders are added to by the informal duplication industry. One California company was discovered in 2002 illegally distributing Mexican films. It took between US \$30,000 and US \$45,000 in revenue per month (Ayuso 2002; Estacion Central 2002; McIntosh n.d.: 10; James 2002).

US distributors evaluate art house/non-English-language films in terms of cast,³ reviews – principally from the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter* – and festival success – notably Sundance, Cannes, Berlin, Venice, New York and Toronto. Promotional options include saturation marketing via 'four-walling', where theatres in regions populated by Latin@s are rented out for the release of Spanish-language films. Specialty distributors mostly use 'platforming' – releasing prints in three to five key theatres in Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco to build awareness via reviews prior to release in other cities. This has been the traditional conduit for Latin American cinema, relying on English-language advertising and word-of-mouth in both languages. Foreign-film distributors must also decide what to emphasize in trailers – usually the only publicity they can afford apart from small notices in newspapers. Miramax, for example, tended to hide the fact when its movies were not in English, even in art house circuits, while Fox TV in Los Angeles refused to air commercials for *Cronos* (Guillermo del Toro, 1993) because they were in Spanish. Barriers to the distribution of foreign films in the United States also include subtitling or dubbing costs (Henné 2001; Puente 2001; Sánchez-Ruiz 2001: 107; Lukk 1997: 118–19, 138–39; Daniels et al. 1998: 94, 91; Brunella 2001; Pande 2001).

The principal site for selling movies in the United States is the annual American Film Market (AFM), founded in 1981 by the Independent Film and Television Association (IFTA), which represents production and distribution companies. AFM is a meeting place for independent film-makers, producers, distributors, media experts, lawyers, screenwriters, festival commissioners, agents and so on from over 70 countries. According to the organizers, it is the most important global market for 'decision-makers and trendsetters' in Hollywood. More than 8000 contracts are signed in just over a week, both for films that are ready to be shown and newer projects. The value was more than US \$800 million in 2007 (<http://www.ifta-online.org/afm/home.asp>).

AFM directors and employees say they have no information by country on attendance or contracts. The data we have show that in 2007, 430 companies showed their products, including 900 trailers of 537 films in 34 different languages. The price for launching productions in 2008 was US \$795–895 for eight days and US \$295–345 for half that time (http://www.ifta-online.org/afm/att_how_att.asp). When added to travel and lodging, such tolls militate against artists and deal makers from the Global South. At the same time, the market's rhetoric emphasizes opportunity for new entrants and opposition to the majors' domination. It seeks state intervention to ameliorate the situation, notably on television (<http://www.fightforindependents.org>).

1. AFM's website includes a catalogue of films in pre- and post-production as
 2. well as those already produced in the major global film markets, but does not
 3. classify by country. Correlating information on films in Spanish and Portuguese,
 4. and taking away those produced in Spain and Portugal, a catalogue covering
 5. 2005–2007 offered 52 Latin American movies, from Argentina, Mexico, Cuba,
 6. Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and
 7. Guatemala. Many were co-produced across the continent or with Germany,
 8. Sweden, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, the United States or Portugal. A
 9. few were made in both Spanish and English: *Dragones* (Eduardo Schuldt, 2006,
 10. Peru), *Súper Amigos* (Arturo Perez Torres, 2007, Mexico) and co-productions
 11. from Argentina/Poland (*El Viaje de Ana*, Alain E Jais, 2007), Colombia-USA
 12. (*Gringo Wedding*, Tas Salini, 2006) and Argentina/Spain (*El Niño de Barro*, Jorge
 13. Algora, 2007) (<http://www.thefilmcatalogue.com/catalog>).

16. EXHIBITION

17. There were Spanish-language exhibition circuits from the first major expan-
 18. sion of US film theatres in 1910. By the advent of sound cinema in the late
 19. 1920s, several million Mexicans were living in the south-west of the United
 20. States, from Texas to California. Hollywood briefly experimented with foreign-
 21. language versions of Anglo features, which stimulated Spanish-language film
 22. theatres in San Francisco, Denver, Dallas, Laredo, Los Angeles, San Antonio
 23. and small towns throughout Texas. In major cities, art house theatres also
 24. opened at this time, frequently showing Spanish-language material. During the
 25. *golden age*, they showcased Latin American art and life to US-based Latin@s,
 26. keeping cultures of origin, language and values visible and audible at a time
 27. when pressures to assimilate were high. But when Latin American cinema
 28. appeared on US screens, it was generally mediated through Hollywood. For
 29. example, when *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936) was
 30. released in the United States with English subtitles, the majority of its revenue
 31. went to United Artists. Hollywood did not represent multicultural experiences
 32. with any great care or respect. For example, in 1922 several Latin American
 33. countries, Canada, France and Spain placed embargoes on imports from the
 34. United States because of the repugnant 'greaser' genre (Gomery 1992: 171,
 35. 177, 179; Miller et al. 2005; López 1994: 8).

36. The influx of Puerto Ricans to the United States in the 1940s and 1950s
 37. stimulated a significant market for Latin American film in New York City. By
 38. 1950, 300 theatres nationwide were devoted to Spanish-language films. A 100
 39. more featured them once or twice a week. It has been suggested that 700
 40. screens showed Spanish-language films between the 1940s and the 1960s.
 41. Columbia Pictures maintained a Spanish theatrical division into the late 1970s,
 42. when 450 US theatres showed Spanish-language films, with annual revenue
 43. of US \$45 million, though precise figures are difficult to ascertain. Most of
 44. the 100 or so Mexican films released each year were screened in the United
 45. States, and Mexico actually had a favourable balance of world film trade in the
 46. late 1970s. After the decline of the *golden age* and the fully fledged emergence
 47. of SLTV, the number of US theatres dedicated to Latin American cinema
 48. decreased. Films circulated on rented, sold and illegal videos, on television and
 49. in art houses. During the early 1980s, the key exhibitor Pacific Metropolitan
 50. switched from screening Spanish-language to English-language films. By
 51. 1987, US audiences for Mexican cinema were 50 per cent of their highest
 52. point. Ten years later, Mexico only exported US \$100,000-worth of features

4. Tortilla chips (or nachos) and *horchata* (a natural juice made out of rice) are consumed in the United States by the population of Mexican descent, and also often offered in restaurants that specialize in Tex-Mex cuisine.

to the United States. Places like the Mission District in San Francisco saw Latin@ audiences turn towards Hollywood and multiplex luxury. The remaining Spanish-language theatres were boarded up and then renovated as clubs or parking structures with the late 1990s dot-com boom, when many Latin@ families left the area due to gentrification (Mora 1982: 245, 140; MacGregor 1999; Maciel 1996; Gomery 2002; Sánchez-Ruiz 2001: 94, 101; Puente 2001; Torrents 1993: 224; Logan 1995).

The art house circuit has been a crucial outlet since the loss of dedicated exhibition. For instance, *Como agua para chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1992) took nearly US \$20 million in seven months in theatres. Its distributor, Miramax, built from an initial release in just two cinemas to target the art house audience's familiarity with magical realism, while convincing Mexican restaurants to recreate the film's cuisine as a prelude to wider exposure (Noriega 1994: 3; Hernandez 1998; Wu 1997; Muñoz 2000; Henné 2001).

The noted producer Moctezuma Esparza announced his intention in 1999 to start a Maya Cinema chain of ten to twenty mostly Spanish-language theatres featuring imported films, nachos and *horchata*,⁴ but by the end of 2005, few were open. Cine Acción in San Francisco launched a Latin cinema space at the Brava Theatre and 2002 marked LA's first multiplexes dedicated to Spanish-language cinema – which nearly shut down in 2005 due to financial difficulties (MacGregor 1999; Schwartzman 2002; Fresneda 2002; Sisk 2002).

In the context of these commercial complexities, the academic market has been vital for Latin American cinema. Each year, thousands of films and *telenovelas* (soap operas) are screened in universities across the United States. Some college libraries have programmes of systematic acquisition; others respond to faculty demand. As per the AFM, there are no transparent data. The seminar on the Acquisition of Latin America Library Material holds statistics on books but not audio-visual material, as these are not catalogued with the same consistency. Few universities contribute data on films or the numbers who watch them (<http://library.lib.binghamton.edu/salalm/resources/costdata.html>; Neugebauer 2008).

FESTIVALS

Alongside commercial and academic outlets, film festivals remain important:

- The Latino Cinema International Festival in Los Angeles (LALIFF) began in 1996. It was set up as a charity to support and promote Latin American film-makers in the name of cultural diversity. LALIFF attracts an audience of some 30,000 (60 per cent Latin@) to more than a hundred films. For a week in August it offers Latin American films, panels with members of the industry and programmes for the young. Major sponsors include Farmers Insurance, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Hoy*, who are interested in emerging markets and civic groups. Minor sponsors include the majors, Hollywood unions and Mexican universities. The festival includes an *opera prima* competition, music, documentaries and an exhibition focused on the production of one of the various countries (Parera 2006).
- 100 per cent Venezuela is a New York University festival, jointly organized by several Venezuelan and US enterprises. It focuses on politics. In 2008, films shown included *Secuestro Express* (Jonathan Jakubowicz, 2005), *Postales de Leningrado* (Mariana Rondón, 2007) and *Francisco de Miranda* (Diego Rísquez, 2006).

1. • Cine Las Américas started in 1997 at the Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin,
2. Texas as a retrospective. It features local productions and work from Latin
3. America. Initial sponsors included the Austin Independent School District.
4. Today it has commercial underwriters, such as American Airlines, and
5. is also supported by universities. Over the past three years, more than
6. 300 films have been shown. Also in Austin, the Festival Internacional del
7. Cine de las Américas started in 1997 to show films not easily accessible to
8. US residents.
9. • Cine Enterarte is a Miami-based festival that shows Chilean art in the
10. United States with sponsorship from Lan Chile.
11. • LatAmcinema.com has a Global Film Initiative that supports Global Lens,
12. promoting new directors.
13. • The San Diego Cine Latino Festival started as a student film festival in
14. 1993. It includes Cinema en Tu Idioma, showing Latin American films
15. from some international festivals. State Farm Insurance is a sponsor along
16. with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Case study: CT provides an interesting variation on conventional distribution and festival practice. It has received support from the New York State Council on the Arts, the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York, the US/Mexico Fund for Culture, Latin American Video Archives (LAVA), the New York Consulates of Argentina and Chile, and an alcohol company. CT has weekly screenings at Two Boots Pioneer Theatre, an art house independent linked to a small downtown New York pizza chain, and the Americas Society, while its summer programmes revolve around Cine Móvil in various parks across the city. There are other collaborations with the New York International Latino Film Festival, Queens Theatre in the Park and El Museo del Barrio. Similar seasons exist in San Diego via the Media Arts Centre's four-month Mexican film programme (Schwartzman 2002). LaCinemaFe began in 2001 as another showcase for Latin American film in New York. Again, the identity of its sponsors is important. They include Hoy, a hotel, the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York, Continental Airlines, alcoholic beverages, Univisión, a hair salon and various others – a combination of Latin@-oriented companies and firms that market to the entire US population. This signifies the presence of both direct and indirect commercial links to the community, and the potential for non-Latin@ audiences, as well. By 2005, CT had expanded to cover Miami, Boston, Hartford, Stamford, Columbus, Portland, Chicago and Tucson. It offered a special feature: 'Mexican Films Made by Gringos' (LaCinemaFe 2001; Armendáriz 2005; García 2003; Gutierrez 2002).

TELEVISION

The commercial broadcast media have targeted Latin@s since the 1920s and the halcyon days of ethnic radio and relays from Mexico. The first Spanish-language television network began in 1961. Today there are more than 90 SLTV networks in the United States (Coffey 2007), but Univisión has 70 per cent of the advertising income of the Latin TV market: US \$2,072.8 million in 2007. It has 1800 stations and cable channels, plus subsidiary chains TeleFutura and Galavisión, 50 high-power stations and twenty low-power ones. According to

Nielsen, Univisión can reach 98 per cent of Latin@ homes. Coming a distant second financially on SLTV is Telemundo, with coverage in 140 markets, via more than 50 stations and 700 cable channels. It also operates the cable chain mun2, oriented towards anglophone and bilingual Latin@s, and Telemundo Puerto Rico. In 2007, its income was US \$101.7 million. Like Univisión, Telemundo is owned by non-Latin@ interests (Yúdice 2009).

In 1992, A. C. Nielsen created a Hispanic-American Television Index to measure the SLTV audience, funded by Telemundo and Univisión. It revealed that approximately 69% of Latin@s watched English-language television *only*, with the audience for SLTV hence representing 4% of all US viewers. National advertisers have not historically supported SLTV in great numbers, allocating just 1.7% of their total expenditure to SLTV. Nevertheless, since the 2000 Census, both Nielsen and other leading commercial research firms, such as Arbitron, have focused on new instruments for measuring Latin@ tastes and practices. The two networks have amassed commercial sales of close to a billion dollars annually, a much higher rate of increase than the major English-language networks (Noriega 2000: 169; Paredes 2001: 124; Sinclair 1999: 92, 94, 96; Raymond 2002; Elliott 2002).

When Spanish-language networks were finally measured alongside Anglo ones, the results shocked Anglo executives: Univisión won the ratings amongst advertising's most desired age group, 18–49, no fewer than fourteen times in 2008 because Latin@s were not departing network TV for cable or the Internet, due to their economic situation (Bauder 2008; Goodwin 2009). This prompted one more tedious but nasty turn in a national debate over assimilation that made ludicrous accusations to the effect that young Latin@s were not learning English and patriotic identification as a consequence of watching shows in another tongue (Arnoldy 2007). However, empirical studies of minority groups using TV to solidify their culture and remain in touch with places of origin counter the notion that this precludes integration. Latin@s move between languages as they use both Anglo and Spanish television channels (Madianou 2005: 55; Rizkallah and Razzouk 2006; Center for Media Research 2009). The belated recognition of Univisión's importance also emphasized the limitations of ratings. Measurement of bilingual audiences for Anglo networks was so incompetent that it was wrongly used to downplay the appeal of ethnically inclusive English-language material, misreading viewers' desires and hence diminishing work prospects for minority talent. Numerous such shows were prematurely cancelled, such as *Greetings from Tucson* (2002–2003), *Kingpin* (2003) and *Luis* (2003), because their audiences were underestimated – in every sense. What else were Spanish speakers to do but turn to Univisión, when Anglo networks systematically ignored, distorted and/or misunderstood them, as decades of content analysis in the *Network Brownout Report* has illustrated (National Association of Hispanic Journalists 2006; Rincón & Associates 2004; James 2007)?

Nevertheless, the success of Univisión has not led to geographical or conceptual diversity of film on SLTV. Ana M. López suggests that the SLTV networks 'have sustained a certain retrograde vision of the Mexican cinema', with films from *la época de oro* displayed as 'frozen icons' of an industry no longer worth supporting. US Latin@ audiences are said to interpret these texts as 'chic kitsch', while the exploitation cinema of the 1980s and 1990s (*lucha libre* and *vaqueros*) (cowboy films) is regarded as 'fodder for the *recien llegados* [recent arrivals]' until they learn English. Univisión rarely screens recent Mexican movies, nor does its subsidiary TeleFutura, although Univisión has a

1. contract with Televisa to buy films that lasts until 2017. Univisión's website on
 2. cinema is almost entirely dedicated to Hollywood. TV Azteca's Azteca America
 3. created a US network in 2001, which emphasizes Mexican *telenovelas* in its
 4. programming. The Hispanic Television Network, which began operations in
 5. 1999, has fourteen owned or affiliated stations and focuses on Mexican mater-
 6. rial, including 400 movies. HBO Latino/en Español is a subsidiary of the most
 7. successful cable network in the United States. It is expensive for audiences
 8. to receive, as it is a premium service, and mostly offers subtitled Hollywood
 9. films, with an occasional Latin American feature in Spanish. Showtime,
 10. another premium cable channel, held a Latino Film-maker Showcase in 2000.
 11. The Sundance cable TV channel dedicates August each year to Arte Latino,
 12. which is articulated with the Sundance Institute's showcase of Latin cinema at
 13. its annual festival, but among the popular stations, *telenovelas* usually account
 14. for fifteen of the twenty most popular programmes (López 1994: 11; Beale
 15. 2001: 32; Univision 2002; *Houston Chronicle* 2001; *Broadcasting & Cable* 2002;
 16. Castellanos 2001; del Olmo 2002; Cable TV Ad Bureau Multicultural Resource
 17. Center 2002a; Webster 2000; Aguila 1999; HBO Latino, 2002; Chase 2002;
 18. *Latino Media News* 2000; *La Voz de Colorado* 2000; Fresneda 2002; Beck 2010;
 19. Pinon 2011).

22. VIDEO/DVD

23. Most Hollywood films are now released in Spanish on DVD. In the TV market,
 24. Paramount makes Spanish-language videos of its Nickelodeon children's
 25. series, and Buena Vista Home Entertainment promotes Disney texts in
 26. Spanish-language versions. Disney sold its first Spanish-language interactive
 27. video games in 2001. Meanwhile, Ground Zero Entertainment developed a
 28. Latin film division with the express purpose of making and releasing movies
 29. direct-to-video. In terms of sales to individual customers via video and DVD,
 30. about 33% of Latin@s select equal numbers of Anglo and Spanish-language
 31. titles, while 63% select English-language movies only. This is important
 32. because even though a film's profitability should really be measured through
 33. each site of screening, theatrical revenue is dominant when decisions are
 34. made in Hollywood about further production and distribution. After its first
 35. month in theatres, *Selena* (Gregory Nava, 1997) had taken US \$30 million at
 36. the box office, with 85% of the audience Latin@, but the second month gener-
 37. ated only an additional US \$3.8 million. In a promotional letter to the Latin@
 38. community, the producer and director appealed for support of the film in
 39. theatres, noting that '[v]ideo sales don't count on the most important bottom
 40. line – box office receipts' (Bennett 2001; Madigan 1999; Avila 1997; Villa 2002;
 41. *Video Business* 2001; Netherby 2001).

42. Of course, video and DVD are also important as alternative and archival
 43. venues. The National Latino Communications Centre (NLCC) is a media arts
 44. and production non-profit concern. Its Educational Media wing has a video-
 45. distribution service whose NLCC Video Collection serves both domestic and
 46. educational audiences with documentaries, independents, classic films and
 47. short subjects, though its main work is public broadcasting (<http://cnet.ucla.edu/community/nlcc>). Other enterprises, such as New York's Videoteca del Sur, are motivated less by historical archivism or profit than by the desire to correct political inequalities and unequal cultural exchange. Latin American films from the past are available on video from a variety of sources, including the Atrasánchez Archives, a for-profit system that archives and transfers

to video hundreds of Mexican films and sells memorabilia. Similar businesses that cater to film buffs of Latin American cinema in search of video material for US-based audiences have included Laguna Films, Compañía Oxxo, the JPR Record Club, Spanish Multimedia, PicPal, Meridian Video, Son Cubano, Facets Video, Alfa Films, One World Films and Libros Sin Fronteras. Companies may also specialize in kitsch genres that have become cults, such as Mexican horror films of the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Aztec Pit of Blood, Creepy Classics Video, Trash Palace and Video Screams), while Blackboard Entertainment in California offers Spanish-language educational video (Noriega 2000: 182–83; ‘Ciclorama Cultural’ 2000; Agrasánchez Film Archives 2002; Aguila 2001; Bennett 2001).

Netflix is a US lending service of film and TV. It sends DVDs by post and also streams online, which is becoming central to its business. Its holdings allow title searches by country, including Argentina (55), Brazil (45) and Mexico (55). The ‘Latin America’ category lists 107 films of 923 in Spanish, comprising large amounts of horror B-movies and some erotic cinema. In 2011, Netflix announced plans to open in Mexico, which may increase the diversity of supply in the United States as well.

Case study: The LAVA was an online database and ordering service that enabled professors and others to locate rare films in video form, in addition to maintaining its own archive of several thousand titles and a film distribution and subtitling service. In keeping with its non-profit, educational mission, LAVA received funding from charitable foundations and local governments, notably the Rockefeller and MacArthur Foundations, which began to support Latin American screen in 1991. It was crucial, as was the US-Mexico Fund. LAVA used expensive subtitling equipment as a service rather than to gain revenue, and relied on academic labour for translation. Most of its sales were to academic institutions through libraries or departments of anthropology, history, or Spanish and Portuguese. LAVA closed its actual and virtual doors at the end of 2005 – one more story in the history of small-scale distribution (Latin American Video Archives 2002; *Update* 1998; Chase 2002).

INTERNET

We are often told that the Internet has broken down barriers to new and economically marginal entrants to the screen, whether via YouTube or YouPorn, to the point where traditional media and corporations are losing audiences and power. These unproven, utopic predictions prove vulnerable when they are examined empirically (Miller 2009). The Internet does not provide an answer to the factors impeding distribution of Latin American cinema in the United States because it is structured in dominance in terms of language, wealth and power.

About 64% of Latin@s ages 18 and older go online, compared with 78% of non-Latin@s. About 76% of Latin@s use a cellphone, compared with 86% of non-Latin@s. Some 95% of non-Hispanics aged 16 and 17 go online, as do 96% of those aged 18–25; for Hispanics aged 16–25, the Internet use rate is 77%. About 84% of Latin@s aged 16–19 report that they e-mail or use the Internet. This number drops to 74% for Latin@s aged 20–25. Only 61% of Latin@s aged 26 and above use the Internet at all. About 51% of foreign-born Latin@s

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1. go online, while 85% of Latin@s born in the United States do so. About 87%
 2. of English-dominant Latin@s aged 16 and older go online, compared with
 3. 77% of Latin@s who are bilingual. This share drops to only 35% for Spanish-
 4. dominant Latin@s. Within age groups, Spanish-dominant Latin@s are much
 5. less likely to go online than their English-dominant counterparts aged 20 and
 6. up (Livingston 2010). Just 12% of Latin@s prefer Spanish-language to English-
 7. language sites, with 25% favouring bilingual services – similar proportions to
 8. other media – while 73% of English-speaking Latin@s are online (Cable TV
 9. Ad Bureau Multicultural Resource Center 2002b; Brink 2001; Pew Internet &
 10. American Life Project 2001 and 2006; Vuong 2001).

11. Catalan research discloses that 68 per cent of the world's websites were
 12. in English and 3 per cent in Spanish in 2000. Latin-oriented Internet media
 13. services doubled in 1999, at the high point of the dot-com boom. Several large
 14. US concerns targeted both US and Latin American-based audiences through
 15. Spanish-language subsidiaries, such as Yahoo! En Español, Time Warner's Latin
 16. America and Microsoft's MSN T1. Proctor and Gamble, the consumer company
 17. that produces many US TV soap operas, formerly put out *Avanzado*, a bilingual
 18. online magazine and search engine, through the yupi.com portal, which was
 19. targeted at Latin@s. Owned by TELMEX and Microsoft, the YupiMSN site was
 20. localized to cover different segments of the Latin audience across the west-
 21. ern hemisphere as yupimsn.com, alongside Latin@smsn.com, which focused
 22. on Hollywood, although its TV section was more cosmopolitan. Twentieth
 23. Century Fox Entertainment FoxHomeEnEspanol, the first Hollywood studio
 24. site in the US designed for Spanish-language spectators, began in 2002 but
 25. was short-lived (Brink 2001; Paredes 2001: 121, 129; Fitzgerald 2002; Yupi.com,
 26. 2002; Hollywood.com 2002; Howard and Wagner 2002).

27. YouTube was founded in 2005 and is the most important Internet website
 28. in the world for the exchange of videos. In August 2008 it cited some 300,000
 29. videos under the key word 'Argentina'; 267,000 for Chile; 611,000 for Brazil
 30. with an English spelling and 441,000 with a Spanish and Portuguese spell-
 31. ing; 727,000 for Mexico; 246,000 for Colombia; 415,000 for Peru; 137,000 for
 32. Cuba; and 200,000 for Venezuela. Such videos include commercial produc-
 33. tions, pirate videos, touristic and personal videos and trailers. For instance,
 34. the Mexican picture *El Violin* (Francisco Vargas, 2006) is shown with two trail-
 35. ers, one lasting 1:55 minutes and the other 1:48 minutes, with five different
 36. clips of between twelve seconds and 2:13 minutes. Conversely, the Peruvian
 37. film *Días de Santiago* (Josué Mendez 2004) can be found in its entirety, divided
 38. into ten parts.

40. CONCLUSION

41.
 42. The story we have outlined is a patchy one, in two senses. First, it lacks
 43. consistent data. This is in keeping with the proprietary nature of knowl-
 44. edge about numbers in the US media industries and the absence of publicly
 45. collected, openly available statistics. Second, the story is patchy in that what
 46. it describes is patchy, because there is no overarching system for circulating
 47. Latin American films in the United States.

48. There is great opportunity, with the vast numbers of *hispano hablantes*,
 49. the possibilities of the Internet, diminished costs of production and so on.
 50. However, the transaction costs of bringing movies to the attention of the public
 51. and marketers and everyone else in the chain we have described remain high.
 52. This is where we should devote our resources. But how? The numbers on

Spanish-dominant Latin@ use of the Internet are discouraging, while persuading TV to experiment beyond its daily diet is difficult.

Numerous strategies suggest themselves. For younger, bilingual Latin@s the cellphone and streaming may be the major areas for promotion and distribution. For older members of the public, a dedicated cable TV station that is national and funded by the largest film-making countries seems appropriate. Yet, whichever way we go must involve the least glamorous side of film-making. Let production take care of itself; do not leave distribution to chance. This is the lesson for cultural policy, from film school curricula to state stimulus.

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