

Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds

Cynthia Vich and Sarah Barrow, eds.

reseñado por

Nayibe Bermúdez

University of Calgary

Vich, Cynthia, and Sarah Barrow, eds. *Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2020. 356 pp. ISBN 978-3030525118.

The vibrancy of Peruvian cinema of recent years has produced energetic waves that are slowly but gradually changing the national film scene on several fronts. Peruvian film has seen an increase in the sheer variety of narrative content and places of enunciation, numerous cinematic forms and formats, and wider alternative spheres of circulation, distribution, and consumption. Moreover, in the consecration of “Peruvian regional cinema,” which has started to disrupt the Lima bubble as arbiter of film and cultural production in the country, Peruvian cinema is making large strides towards a healthier positioning in the national and global imaginations. These vibrant waves splash also onto the academic field as reflected in Cynthia Vich and Sarah Barrow’s anthology, *Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds*, which succeeds in its goal to frame the country’s cinematic landscape with rapport to the social, economic, and political context of neoliberal Peru.

There is no need to rehearse here the dearth of research leading to wide-ranging anthological analyses of the cinemas of Peru. Suffice it to say that along articles disseminated in journals, magazines, chapters in global film books, online and in other media, only a nascent history of specialized research in English has scratched the surface of the field, as exemplified in Jeffrey Middents’ *Writing National Cinema: Film Journals and Film Culture in Peru* (2009) and Sarah Barrow’s monograph, *Contemporary Peruvian Cinema: History, Identity and Violence on Screen* (2018). For those conversant in Spanish, Vich and Barrow’s book complements and is complemented by the writings of leading experts such as Ricardo Bedoya and Emilio Bustamante, whose most recent books, *El cine peruano en tiempos digitales*, 2015 and *Las miradas múltiples: el cine regional peruano*, 2017, respectively, attest

to the achievements of film criticism in Peru and the new heights of Peruvian cinemas. As the first English-language compilation, and through its focus on the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Vich and Barrow's *Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds* comes as a fresh breath of air into Northern scholarship on Peruvian cinema and global analyses of the cinemas of Latin America.

In the introduction to their edited compilation, Vich and Barrow tie the significant upsurge in Peruvian film production to the end of the war (1980-2000) between the Peruvian State and the guerrilla forces of Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso). As one of the book's stated goals, they pinpoint the showcasing of "films that, highlighting the wide spectrum of contemporary experience, lie at opposite ends of the ideological positioning toward the realities of the Peruvian nation as reinvented through neoliberalism" (6). Indeed, the editors frame their approach through a national lens that connects cinema to the diversity of Peruvian voices coming through from different cultural, gender, and socio-economic identities, to developments in the film sector, and to political and economic trends. This framework allows for the conceptualization of the cinemas of Peru as cultural artifacts that participate in and promote decentralization, diversification, and the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages into national dynamics. Towards this end, the collection seeks to address the relationship of production and target audience with market dynamics, while also identifying the myriad of accomplishments and the levels of precariousness that continue to plague Peruvian cinema in all areas.

Under such parameters, *Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds* is organized in two overarching categories, the first of which, "The Market Dynamics of Peruvian Cinema," comprises three sections: 'Big budget production for local entertainment,' comprising 2 articles; 'Regional low budget drama,' consisting in 3 articles; and 'Art film for festival circuits,' which constitutes the bulk of the discussion with 8 articles. What connects these pieces is the study of films whose production and consumption modes depend on market forces; while, what differentiates the contributions are the production structures, means of circulation and exhibition, and variety of targeted audiences. The persistent structures of power at play in the film sector account for the lack of balance in terms of the number of articles devoted to representative art films and is no fault of the editors.

What requires comment, perhaps, is the position of the section on 'Big budget production for local entertainment' which heads the category. Is this a sort of doorway via entertainment and financial success to attract the attention of students and non-specialists towards Peruvian cinema? This rhetorical question does not intend to detract from the rigorous and organic way in which the articles are set up. In fact, one article leads to the next creating a fluidity based on the gradual introduction of new information about the films and the context of production and consumption. Although only one of the articles bridges the gap between the national and the global through similar work by other Latin American filmmakers, the book does not lose sight of the interconnectedness of our present world.

The second overarching category, "Outside the Dynamics of the Market," is composed of three articles, each studying, respectively the work of Eduardo Quispe Alarcón, The Escuela de Cine Amazónico and, the contributions of women filmmakers

and film technicians. This part of the book also reflects the power imbalances in the film sector in Peru, which despite its recent height in productivity and its opening of paths for alternative representations, circulation channels, and publics continues to engage in the unequal distribution of precariousness by such factors as lack of education in screen cultures, ethnicity, geography, and gender. As in the first part, the pieces in the second portion are comparable in depth of research, clarity of writing, and attainment of goals. In spite of the compactness and amount of information packed into the compilation, the book is a very enjoyable, easy read. The information is delivered enthusiastically and succeeds in creating the idea of an exhilarating scene for regional cinema and for the formation of national audiences.

The limited space for this review does not allow me to address the striking breath of the book which addresses relevant post-conflict themes such as violence and memory; topoi, characters, plots, genres, aesthetics of commercial film; counter-aesthetics of short experimental films and insights into regional Andean filmmaking; socio-economic, political, and environmental contexts; and the affects that endear these films to multiple national audiences. *Peruvian Cinema of the Twenty-First Century: Dynamic and Unstable Grounds* offers ground-breaking scholarship than can be used as a template to map the development of the cinemas of other Latin American countries. The book is suited to the undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, cinephiles, and general public.