

## **Introduction: Contemporary Uruguayan Cinemas**

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### **Abstract:**

This introduction to the special issue on Uruguayan Cinema outlines the unifying thematic (of exploring contemporary Uruguayan cinemas) and the manner of exploration (from outside the country looking in, and, from inside looking out – a ‘hermeneutic circle’ [Dabashi 2008. 240]). It also situates the issue with respect to the field of scholarly work on Uruguayan cinema (exploring reasons behind the relative lack of scholarly interest in Uruguayan filmmaking), and Latin American cinema more broadly, before briefly discussing the articles in turn.

### **NEED KEYWORDS**

This special issue is the first collective work in English to address Uruguayan cinema. It explores both contemporary film production (in its national and international dimensions) and its place within the national film culture. Bringing together a number of scholars to consider Uruguayan cinema is necessary at this juncture for two closely inter-related reasons: the proliferation and diversity of Uruguayan filmmaking in recent decades, and the growth in understanding of Uruguayan film culture (including the reception of Uruguayan films by critics and audiences in relation both to their production contexts and the critical traditions that relate to other Uruguayan cultural forms such as literature).

After the end of the civic-military dictatorship in 1985 Uruguayan filmmaking saw a slow growth in terms of domestic output in the 1990s, but has achieved both international recognition and growing national interest since the 2000s. While space prevents us from listing the full range of Uruguayan films produced during this period, it nonetheless includes domestic successes (e.g. *Reus*, Fernández and Pi, 2010), prize winners on the international film festival circuit (*Whisky*, Rebella and Stoll, 2004), genre films (*La casa muda/The Silent House*, Hernández, 2010), art films (*El baño del Papa/The Pope's Toilet*, Charlone and Fernández, 2007), documentaries (*Maracaná*, Bednarik and Varela, 2014), feature-length animations (*Selkirk, el verdadero Robinson Crusoe/Sea Pirates*, Tournier, 2012), and digital shorts with millions of views on YouTube (*¡Ataque de pánico!/Panic Attack!*, Álvarez, 2009). Uruguayan cinema thus demands our attention due to the impact that it achieves with productions that are often *ad hoc* and made with limited funding – be that from private monies, international schemes (e.g. Ibermedia), film festivals (e.g. the Hubert Bals Fund at the International Film Festival Rotterdam), co-production agreements with other countries (e.g. indirectly tapping into funding from Argentina's INCAA, or *Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales*), or state sources (FONA, or the *Fondo para el Fomento y Desarrollo de la Produccion Audiovisual Nacional*, which was established in 1995).

This attention is also justified by the gradual groundswell that has emerged since the early 2000s of scholarship on contemporary Uruguayan cinema. We discuss this in more detail below, but it is worth emphasising here how this groundswell reflects the second reason for our intervention: the growing understanding of Uruguayan film culture. As Beatriz Tadeo Fuica has outlined, the recent interest in Uruguayan cinema in Anglophone Film Studies arrives in the wake of a history of Uruguayan film appreciation and criticism (for example, histories told from the perspective of critics, cinephiles and practitioners), along with various works that have been written following the recent and gradual emergence of

Film Studies as an academic discipline there (2014, 7-9). This is very much a growing concern in Uruguay, as is evidenced – for example – by the various activities of Grupo de Estudios Audiovisuales (see GEStA Publicaciones 2016, and further below), and the final two contributions to this special issue (respectively by Mariana Amieva and Rosario Radakovich) directly reflect such growth, which has otherwise been invisible outside of Uruguay.

For these reasons, Uruguayan cinema deserves more attention than it has received to date. In line with the increasing understanding, within Anglophone Film Studies at least, of a world of cinemas that is an inclusive totality without privileged centre or dominant history (Nagib 2006), the use of the plural in our title indicates how this special issue explores not only the cinemas of Uruguay that have emerged in the wake of new national and transnational opportunities for funding and distribution, but also the plurality of approaches which are deployed to study those cinemas and their critical reception.

### **From Uruguayan Cinema to Uruguayan Cinemas**

As mentioned, academic coverage of Uruguayan cinema has slowly grown since the 2000s with David Martin-Jones and María Soledad Montañez positing in 2009 that a ‘New Uruguayan Cinema’ had emerged since the dictatorship in which different generations of filmmakers were exploring different aspects of Uruguayan history (see Martin-Jones and Montañez 2009; see also Richards 2005). The striking cover image for this special issue, for example, is taken from Guillermo Casanova’s *Otra historia del mundo/Another Story of the World* (2017), a film which epitomizes much of this growth. Casanova was one of the first generation of filmmakers to emerge post-dictatorship, and the film itself reflects upon the changes to Uruguayan society since that period – even if this is itself (as this special issue sets out to showcase) only one ‘story’ of how Uruguay cinema continues to develop (see

further below, in particular with respect to the interviews with Casanova and others which concludes the issue). In fact, the ‘New Cinema’ label, at that time, perhaps only provided a handle for critics and scholars that was familiar from considerations of the French *nouvelle vague* onwards. Since the expansion of research on this topic, along with Uruguayan cinema’s greater international visibility, the term ‘New Uruguayan Cinema’ is now increasingly less useful than it was. Both the films and the research suggest that it would be falsely homogenising to continue to refer to a ‘New Cinema’ (singular), even if doing so satisfies a compelling desire to understand the generational development of Uruguayan filmmaking in the aftermath of the dictatorship.

Instead, the plural, ‘contemporary Uruguayan *cinemas*’, is today more helpful in examining the complexity of film culture in that country. This is true both in terms of the diversity of films that are made (popular genres and art films, fiction films and documentaries, shorts and features, ‘small gauge’ and 35mm, animation and live action, digital and celluloid, national and transnational productions and so on) and in relation to the various histories of Uruguayan cinema that have emerged.

Arising in part out of a symposium entitled ‘Revisiting Contemporary Uruguayan Culture and Politics’, which was convened by Montañez at London’s Senate House in 2013, this special issue offers insights into how our understanding of contemporary Uruguayan filmmaking has ramifications not only for how we view Uruguayan cinema as a form of contemporary cultural expression (addressing how various films emerge at a meeting point of nation, region and globe), but also for our understanding of this national cinema’s past, a topic that engages with the challenge of historiography in relation to all small nations (see also Tadeo Fuica 2017, 5-18). For this reason, the special issue brings together scholars from both the UK and Uruguay to examine Uruguayan national film production as that of a small nation that is seeking in various ways (industrially, financially, aesthetically and politically)

to negotiate its place transnationally, both within the Latin American region and in relation to broader international flows of finance and distribution (like the internet and the film festival circuit). However, the special issue also places the international success of Uruguayan filmmakers in perspective by focusing on how Uruguayan filmmaking since the dictatorship (1973-1985) relates specifically to Uruguayan culture. It does so by exploring the reaction to Uruguayan films by critics and audiences alike. As the special issue thus situates its exploratory essays at the intersection of the national and the transnational, it is structured accordingly, creating what Hamid Dabashi (writing on Iranian cinema) might term a ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Dabashi 2008, 240) or what Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (writing on Chinese cinemas) call ‘an environment of transnational scholarly exchange and discussion’ (Berry & Farquhar 2006, 15), which incorporates voices not only from outside but also from within the nation in question. It is at precisely this meeting point, of views from the ‘outside in’ and the ‘inside out’, that the special issue established itself.

The timing of this special issue is not coincidental. The past several years have seen increasing concern over the sustainability of the Uruguayan film industry, and indeed, over what kind(s) of film(s) might constitute such a national cinema. Some exploration of statistics surrounding production can help illuminate why.<sup>1</sup> For example, according to the *Asociación de Productores y Realizadores de Cine del Uruguay* (ASOPROD, or the Uruguayan Association of Film Producers and Directors), Uruguay produced 119 feature films between 2000 and 2015 (at an average of seven-eight films per year), with peak years being 2012 (17 in total, of which eight were fiction and nine documentaries) and 2014 (18 in total, seven fiction, 11 documentary). Meanwhile, the website Cinedata.uy reckons that 153 feature films were made during the same period (2000-2015), with a further 28 being made since then – although the list is almost certainly incomplete since the website does not list details of Uruguayan productions like *Dios local/Local God* (Hernández, 2014) and the afore-

mentioned *Selkirk*. Nonetheless, going by the Cinedata.uy figures, the period 2000-2004 saw only 24 films made at a rate of between four and six films a year. That said, this was a strong period for fiction filmmaking (16 fiction features, eight documentaries). Twelve films were made in 2005 (eight fiction, four documentary), while production dipped back to five (three fiction, two documentary) in 2006. The following year, 2007, saw 10 films completed, with 2008 and 2009 having an impressive 15 features each. There was notably during this second half of the 2000s a shift towards documentary production, with 25 of the 40 films made between 2007 and 2009 being documentaries (with the remaining 15 being fiction features). Production has since fluctuated between eight feature films per year (in 2016; five documentary, three fiction) and 16 feature films (in 2017; nine documentary, seven fiction), with 2011 and 2013 both seeing 14 feature films (respectively 10 documentary and four fiction, and seven documentary and seven fiction). Meanwhile, 2014 enjoyed 15 feature films (eight documentary, seven fiction). It seems likely that the rising trend in numbers – from four to six films per year in the early 2000s to regularly over 10 films per year since 2005 – as well as the shift from fiction to documentary both are a result of digital technologies, which make film production in general, and documentary production in particular, cheaper and easier to carry out.

Nonetheless, these figures do not necessarily indicate the growth of an infrastructure designed to support filmmaking in Uruguay. Indeed, they could indicate quite the contrary, as film production does take off but only in a piecemeal and independent fashion – not least because the government does not feel any need to support filmmakers who clearly can produce work cheaply and via independent means. While it is hard to obtain overall box office figures, which might determine whether cinema is a growing, shrinking or a steady industry in Uruguay, we can nonetheless cross-reference the film productions listed on Cinedata.uy in order to determine how well those films did at the domestic box office – the

point of this investigation being to see how much Uruguayan audiences go to watch Uruguayan films, which in turn might function as evidence to demonstrate to what extent Uruguayan film production might be a lucrative investment, or at the very least to what extent it could be incentivized as such.

Alas, however, the statistics are not good for Uruguayan cinema. For, year on year, Uruguayan films barely make a dent in the Uruguayan box office. Since BoxOfficeMojo began its statistics for Uruguay in 2008, the largest number of Uruguayan films to have been in the Top 100 of box office returns is five (in 2008), with 2009 and 2015 being years in which only one Uruguayan film featured in the Top 100. As production has remained relatively steady over this period, it does not seem, therefore, that Uruguayan cinema has particularly prospered – at least from an economic perspective. Indeed, since 2008 only 11 Uruguayan films have made more than US\$100,000 at the box office, with the biggest movies being *Mi Mundial/Home Team* (Morelli, 2017), with US\$232,688 and *Reus*, with US\$170,271. Even with these returns, though, the films only came in at 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> on their respective annual box office charts – with the highest-ranking Uruguayan film during this period being the music documentary *Hit* (Abend and Loeff, 2008), which came 19<sup>th</sup> in the box office chart of 2008.

Year	<i>Film Title</i>	Position	Box office return
2008	<i>Hit</i>	19 <sup>th</sup>	US\$129,589
2008	<i>Polvo nuestro que estás en los cielos</i>	41 <sup>st</sup>	US\$82,150
2008	<i>Acné</i>	61 <sup>st</sup>	US\$44,158

2008	<i>El círculo</i>	76 <sup>th</sup>	US\$34,322
2008	<i>Destino final</i>	85 <sup>th</sup>	US\$28,571
2009	<i>Gigante</i>	55 <sup>th</sup>	US\$51,325
2010	<i>La Despedida</i>	42 <sup>nd</sup>	US\$102,717
2010	<i>Miss Tacuarembó</i>	43 <sup>rd</sup>	US\$102,687
2010	<i>Mundialito</i>	82 <sup>nd</sup>	US\$42,172
2011	<i>Reus</i>	30 <sup>th</sup>	US\$170,271
2011	<i>3 Millones</i>	33 <sup>rd</sup>	US\$146,238
2011	<i>Manyas La Película</i>	37 <sup>th</sup>	US\$134,960
2011	<i>La Casa Muda</i>	44 <sup>th</sup>	US\$112,616
2012	<i>Selkirk</i>	48 <sup>th</sup>	US\$97,994
2012	<i>Selkirk</i>	64 <sup>th</sup>	US\$68,641
2012	<i>Vacas flacas</i>	85 <sup>th</sup>	US\$44,719
2013	<i>Relocos y repasados</i>	58 <sup>th</sup>	US\$89,085
2013	<i>Rincón de Darwin</i>	92 <sup>nd</sup>	US\$44,555
2014	<i>Maracaná</i>	47 <sup>th</sup>	US\$128,027
2014	<i>Mr Kaplan</i>	55 <sup>th</sup>	US\$112,176
2015	<i>Dios local</i>	89 <sup>th</sup>	US\$36,982

2016	<i>Los modernos</i>	69 <sup>th</sup>	US\$51,088
2016	<i>Migas de pan</i>	70 <sup>th</sup>	US\$46,339
2016	<i>El candidato</i>	100 <sup>th</sup>	US\$21,849
2017	<i>Mi Mundial</i>	25 <sup>th</sup>	US\$232,688
2017	<i>Wilson</i>	34 <sup>th</sup>	US\$141,932
2017	<i>Misión no oficial</i>	89 <sup>th</sup>	US\$33,630

Source: BoxOfficeMojo<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, despite what might be considered an impressive cinematic output for a small nation (over 10 films per year), ASOPROD suggested in 2015 that Uruguayan cinema is in crisis. Indeed, the Association took the view that Uruguay has quickly transformed from an ‘emergent cinema’ to a ‘cinema in emergency’ (‘cine en estado de emergencia’) as a result of insufficient state support (see ASOPROD 2015).

This might seem strange, given that in 2014 the government created an integral programme designed to provide support in all aspects of film culture, including production, distribution, exhibition, education and audience formation, known as the *Compromiso audiovisual 2014-2020*. However, the ASOPROD paper argues that the earlier 2008 *Ley de Cine Audiovisual*, which established a fixed but provisional budget for the industry, has not been adjusted according to inflation and fluctuations in the consumer price index, meaning that in spite of the government’s professed good will, state funding has become scarce. Indeed, although 2014 was, as mentioned, a peak year in terms of film production, only one of the 18 films that ASOPROD says were produced that year was backed by the state, with only two films backed by the state in 2015 (ASOPROD 2015, 12). We do not have any figures for

subsequent years, but while Uruguay's is a growing small national cinema, then, it does not seem to enjoy anything like the state support, or resulting productivity, of other nations (such as New Zealand or Argentina, as the ASOPROD survey also demonstrates [13-15], and as Federico Veiroj affirms in the interview included in this special issue).

As a result of this minimal state support, Uruguayan cinema is – with some exceptions, like Control Z Films (see Martin-Jones and Montañez 2013a), which has now transformed into Mutante Cine – regularly an against-the-odds operation that survives on coproduction deals with other countries and shoestring production budgets. These changes in the industry mean that the optimistic pronouncement of a 'New Uruguayan Cinema' in 2009 is now tempered by the harsh realities of the funding climate.

Around this recent moment of crisis, Martin Scorsese appeared in a video online asking for the protection of Montevideo's *Cinemateca Uruguaya* (see Anon 2015). It should not be left to such interventions to save Uruguay's film industry or culture. Nonetheless, this special issue intends to echo the thoughts of Scorsese and Uruguay's filmmakers in protesting for a better 'billing' for Uruguayan cinema. The articles gathered here illustrate the need not only to further examine contemporary Uruguayan cinemas, but also to recognize the global impact that Uruguayan cinema has achieved with minimal means. As a representative national product, the international value of Uruguayan cinema is surely far beyond that of its cost, extremely low as it currently is.

The aim here, then, is to make Uruguayan cinema more visible within the academy – in the hope that this in turn will influence how well-educated future film critics and consumers are about Uruguayan cinema. In this way, the special issue also reverses the absence, or disappearance, of Uruguayan cinema from existing scholarly debates – as we shall see presently. Making contemporary Uruguayan cinemas more visible can, especially via the

completion of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ that this special issue provides, enhance our understanding of a world of cinemas more generally.

### **Locating an invisible cinema**

In contrast to various other South American nations, Uruguayan cinema has traditionally been marginalized or entirely left out of Anglophone academic discussions. Interviews with two Uruguayan directors (Mario Handler and Walter Achugar) were included in Julianne Burton’s *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* (1986). Admittedly, at this time there was not much available on any Latin American cinema. Yet even as we reached the millennium, when more books had begun to emerge on other Latin American cinemas, not much seemed to change for Uruguay.

The second edition of John King’s *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (2000), for example, contains only four pages (out of three hundred) on Uruguayan cinema – with most of this based upon the two interviews in Burton’s collection (Paraguay fares even worse, with only one and a half pages). Furthermore, King’s history effectively ends with the beginning of military rule in the 1970s, when the government cracked down on cinematic expression. In Michael T. Martin’s *New Latin American Cinema: Volume Two Studies of National Cinemas* (1997), there is no mention of Uruguay, although smaller and economically marginal film producing countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Puerto Rico are considered alongside the established nations of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba and Mexico. The same is true of Chon A. Noriega’s anthology, *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video* (2000), which includes Colombia and Venezuela. Furthermore, in the three survey books that appeared in the early 2000s and which collectively dedicate their chapters to over fifty classic or influential Latin American films, there is not a single

Uruguayan movie (see Shaw 2003; Elena and Díaz López 2004; Hart 2004). This despite the inclusion of dedicated chapters on films from Peru, Bolivia, etc.

Given the slow development of the post-dictatorship film industry in Uruguay (together with the glacial pace of academic publishing), this absence might be understandable. Indeed, to be clear, it is not our intention to critique such works, which are extremely influential and constructive for the field, in any way other than their lack of recognition for Uruguay.

However, following the afore-mentioned growth of the film industry, and especially after the international success of *Whisky*, which won the FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes in 2004, the invisibility of Uruguay in academic film studies becomes not only palpable, but also extremely puzzling. Indeed, the same marginalisation or absence of Uruguayan cinema continues in such recent publications as Deborah Shaw's *Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2007), Darlene J. Sadlier's *Latin American Melodrama* (2009), Nayibe Bermúdez Barrios's *Latin American Cinemas* (2011), Adrián Pérez Melgosa's *Cinema and Inter-American Relations* (2012), Stephanie Dennison's *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema* (2013), David William Foster's *Latin American Documentary Filmmaking: Major Works* (2013), Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez's *New Documentaries in Latin America* (2014), Ana M. López and Dolores Tierney's 'In Focus' section of *Cinema Journal* dedicated to 'Latin American Film Research in the Twenty-First Century' (2014) (although on this, see also below), Stephen M. Hart's *Latin American Cinema* (2015), Gustavo Subero's *Embodiments of Evil: Gender and Sexuality in Latin American Horror Cinema* (2016) and so on. We might add that, with three books to emerge in the 2010s that specifically combine analysis of Argentine and Brazilian cinema (Rêgo and Rocha 2011; Andermann and Bravo 2013; Pinazza 2014), it is striking that there has not been one on Argentine and Uruguayan cinema (or Argentine, Uruguayan and Brazilian cinemas), despite the close coproduction links (e.g. Uruguay's Control Z Films works regularly with Rizoma Films in Argentina) and

artistic crossover (e.g. César Charlone, the Uruguayan cinematographer who shot *Cidade de Deus/City of God* [Meirelles and Lund, 2002] in Brazil, and who then returned to Uruguay to direct *El baño del Papa* [2007] and *La Redota – Una Historia de Artigas* [2011]). We might say much the same for the specific national combinations chosen by various authors: Miriam Ross' *South American Cinematic Culture* (2010) (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru); Laura Podalsky's *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2011) (Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico); Cynthia Tompkins *Experimental Latin American Cinema* (2013) (Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru); Dolores Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (2018) (Peru, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina); Sophia A. McClennan's *Globalization and Latin American Cinema* (2018) (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico); Claudia Sandberg and Carolina Rocha's (2018) *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Resisting Neoliberalism?* (2018) (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru). Again, these works all contain invaluable research on other Latin American cinemas. Nonetheless, the absence of Uruguay requires further investigation.

There are a number of identifiable reasons for this absence of material on Uruguayan cinema. The most obvious is the relative lack of film production from Uruguay throughout the twentieth century, when filmmakers struggled to produce films in a context marred by a lack of available funding, state support, training, or industrial infrastructure, at least in comparison to Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay's larger neighbours. In fact, Uruguay's lack of state support for film production is in striking contrast to many South American countries where laws have existed, or now exist, earmarking funds for this very purpose. After all, it was only in 2008 that the *Ley del Cine* was passed, thereby providing state funding and tax breaks for Uruguayan productions and coproductions (this included the establishment of the ICAU, or

the *Instituto del Cine y del Audiovisual del Uruguay*/Uruguayan Film Institute). As discussed, however, the *Ley* remains controversial.

As Michael Chanan (1996, 428) points out, it was predominantly Latin American countries with large internal markets, like Argentina and Brazil, which developed prosperous national cinemas in the twentieth century. Accordingly, in *Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History* (2016), Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez situates Uruguay amongst a third tier of ‘intermittent’ film producing countries in the region, at least in terms of his focus on narrative feature films, thus justifying Uruguayan cinema’s seemingly inevitable absence from the book’s key discussion points (2-3). With a population of around three million, Uruguay could not by contrast grow or sustain a national film industry by virtue of an insufficient internal market, which is not to mention the difficulty caused by the military dictatorship. Uruguayan films only really began to emerge with regularity in the late 1990s, a factor which explains Chanan’s (1996, 427) statement that ‘[i]n the smallest countries, like Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, and those of Central America, there is still no significant production of feature length films today’. The lack of academic acknowledgement of Uruguayan cinema in academic works of the 1990s and 2000s thus seems at least appropriate to the amount of cinema produced.

Other factors include the cultural context. Keith Richards (2005, 140) argues that Uruguay is a particularly cine-literate nation, not least because of ‘the relatively high standard of education achieved under [José] Batlle [y Ordoñez, who was twice president, from 1903 to 1907 and from 1911 to 1915, and who introduced the first welfare state to South America] and the effect of creating what was considered a society of “culturosos”, with a keen interest in aesthetic questions’. However, Uruguay perhaps failed to convert this cine-literacy into film production as a result of the role that Uruguay played in the distribution and exhibition of Latin American cinema. As Uruguayan documentary filmmaker Mario Handler (1986, 15)

has it, film festivals in Uruguay, in particular in the 1950s and 1960s, ensured that the country became ‘a kind of crossroads for members of the New Latin American Cinema movement and their works’). Similarly, Peter H. Rist (2014, 577) foregrounds the role played by the *Cinemateca Uruguaya* (an institution that features heavily in the final two articles of this special issue) in creating audiences – but not films – since its founding in 1952. In other words, Uruguay was to some degree a nation through which cinema moved, but in which it was not made.

Admittedly, had the social and economic crises of that time, and indeed the repressive acts of the dictatorship that followed, not driven many filmmakers into exile, things may have been different. However, Richards (2005) argues, the nation’s cine-literacy itself had an arguably negative effect on Uruguayan film production, since the knowledgeable Uruguayan society, fuelled by the national press, often reacted negatively to Uruguayan films. Thus, in the context of a country with an international reputation for aesthetic production in other fields (especially literature) that at times outstripped Uruguay’s economic status in South America, a lack of critical leniency towards aspiring filmmakers making necessarily low-budget films may have put off many others from entering the field.

Equally as important are factors beyond the nation. For example, until the 2000s, Uruguayan cinema had never managed to maintain a sustained presence on the international festival circuit. It was only then that the (admittedly, homogenising) label of a New Uruguayan Cinema could be introduced. This lack of international profile amongst the global high-brow must be at least in part due to the fact that Uruguay has yet to produce an internationally recognized auteur of the stature of, say, Brazil’s Glauber Rocha and Walter Salles, or Argentina’s Fernando E. Solanas and María Luisa Bemberg. Such figureheads enable the coalescence of an international perception of a new national cinema, no matter how problematic (and Eurocentric) such a codifying process often is. For this reason, when

Uruguayan films did emerge – including in the 2000s – their arrival was frequently and deliberately touted as the first feature ever to appear from this small nation (Richards 2005, 137). This ‘first Uruguayan film’ strategy was less the result of faulty memory on the part of Uruguayan film distributors, and more a result of the failure of previous films to sustain international recognition (Martin-Jones and Montañez 2009, 344).

There are, of course, much simpler reasons for the absence of writing on Uruguayan cinema. Without a significant heritage of feature length films to discuss, there were, unsurprisingly, not many scholars writing on the topic. Few scholars can sustain a career on such a small national cinema, and those who did write on it in the 2000s (e.g. Richards) did so whilst maintaining interests elsewhere. Moreover, it is perhaps unfair to critique a collection like Sadlier’s *Latin American Melodrama* for not including a Uruguayan example, when Uruguay does not provide many or any obvious examples, even to those researching Uruguayan cinema. For example, if *Otario* (Arsuaga, 1997) is arguably too *noir*-ish to qualify as a melodrama, might *En la puta vida/This Tricky Life* (Flores Silva, 2001) and *El último tren/The Last Train* (Arsuaga, 2002) fit the bill? It is not necessarily so easy to say.

That said, Uruguayan road movies like *El último tren* or *El viaje hacia el mar/Seawards Journey* (Casanova, 2003) enjoy dedicated discussion in neither Verónica Garibotto and Jorge Pérez’s *The Latin American Road Movie* (2016) nor Nadia Lie’s *The Latin American (Counter) Road Movie and Ambivalent Modernity* (2017). Similarly, the child-centred film *Paisito/Small Country* (Diez, 2008) is absent from Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet’s *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema* (2014) and Rachel Randall’s *Childhood on the Threshold in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2017). The affective approach to young womanhood seen in *La casa muda* and *Tanta Agua/So Much Water* (Guevara and Jorge, 2013) fails to feature in Geoffrey Maguire and Rachel Randall’s *New Visions of Adolescence in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2018). Meanwhile, a documentary like *Al pie del*

*árbol blanco/At the Foot of the White Tree* (Neme, 2007) does not feature in Cynthia Tompkins' *Experimental Latin American Cinema* (2013), even though it is a film laden with what Gilles Deleuze termed time-images, which are the central concept of Tompkins' book (for a Deleuzian consideration of that film, see Martin-Jones 2018, 151-178; for a critical reflection on the use of Deleuze's concepts in a Latin American context, see Martin-Jones 2011). As two of the editors of this special issue have elsewhere been criticized for not including Latin American cinema in what purported to be a global approach to Deleuzian film-philosophy (see Galindo 2015, 139; see also Martin-Jones and Brown 2012), so might we also criticize these authors for excluding Uruguay from their surveys of Latin American cinema. More thinking, then, is necessary.

The sparseness of examples from the past may provide a further insight into why Uruguayan cinema receives less coverage than other cinemas from small nations in scholarly anthologies. For example, due to the manner in which the genocidal extermination of Uruguay's indigenous peoples was undertaken so thoroughly, in particular in the early nineteenth century, Uruguay has never produced the kinds of indigenous 'fourth cinema' filmmaking that certain other small nations do (e.g. video making collectives in Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia (et al.), or Inuit filmmaking from Canada), and which may interest scholars in disciplines cognate to Film Studies (e.g. Visual Anthropology). This might explain, perhaps, the absence of discussion of Uruguayan filmmaking in Constanza Burucúa and Carolina Sitnisky's *The Precarious in the Cinemas of the Americas* (2018).

Ultimately, the view of Uruguay held by some Latin Americans – a smaller, less interesting version of Argentina (albeit with much nicer beaches) – may also hold for its cinema. As Hernandez-Rodriguez (2010, 167) puts it: 'the cultural and geographical proximity [of Argentina] made it "unnecessary" for Uruguayans to develop a film industry', as the talent simply crossed the border to work in Buenos Aires. Ironically, in an era where scholarship on

cinema increasingly emphasizes the transnational, the fact that many Uruguayan films are coproductions with Argentina may mean that the comparative wealth of scholarship on this much larger industry serves to eclipse Uruguayan films, seemingly negating the need for analysis of what may mistakenly seem a regional variant, easily ignored. Indeed, scholars working on Uruguayan cinema are often asked by anonymous peer reviewers to justify why anyone would consider Uruguayan cinema. As they say: *quod erat demonstrandum!*

This attitude – Uruguayan cinema is too small for scholarly consideration (witness the massive volume of works on Mexico, Argentina and Brazil in comparison) – begs a question: does size of industry alone determine global interest? Recent advances in thinking about what it means to research a world of cinemas, without privileged centre or dominant history, would suggest not (see Nagib 2006; Brown 2018). With this special issue, then, we are playing our part in turning things around, planting the seeds for a more celebratory narrative of the growth of interest in Uruguayan (and other small) cinemas.

In this pursuit we are not alone, and so it is apt for us briefly to survey what has been written in order to emphasize how the field is slowly growing. In this way, the Anglophone dimension of the emerging ‘transnational scholarly exchange’ or ‘hermeneutic circle’ can begin to come into focus. In 2002, Tamara L. Falicov’s article on Film Policy under the *Mercado Común del Sur/Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR)* used Uruguayan film production as a case study. Three years later, Richards’ (2005, 137) ‘Born at Last?’ explored the body of feature films to emerge post-dictatorship in terms of their construction of a ‘social imaginary’. Beyond this, the majority of work has increasingly looked to Uruguay’s position as a small national cinema in a global market – at the nexus of the national and the transnational. Indicative of this are three articles by Martin-Jones and Montañez (2007, 2009, 2013b), the last of which discusses a turn towards auto-erasure of the nation in various Uruguayan productions that look to reach out beyond the nation, with the

films of Control Z providing the case study. Here an alternative is offered to existing ideas of auto-ethnography as found in Chinese (Chow 1995) and other cinemas. That is, the Control Z films downplay as opposed to deliberately package the nation in the exotic terms expected by international audiences.

For their part, Christine Ehrick (2006) studies silent cinema and audience formation in Uruguay in the 1910s and 1920s, while Tadeo Fuica and Sarah Barrow include an essay (by the former) on film archiving in Uruguay as part of their recent special issue of *New Cinemas* exploring '(In)visible' Latin American cinemas (Tadeo Fuica 2015b). Furthermore, there are (minimal) entries on Uruguayan cinema in R. Hernandez-Rodriguez's *Splendors of Latin Cinema* (2010) and Peter H. Rist's *Historical Dictionary of South American Cinema* (2014). In addition, a reader with an eagle eye will find brief references to Uruguayan cinema peppering Marvin D'Lugo, Ana M. López, and Laura Podalsky's *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema* (2018), indicative of its (often disjointed) history, from early silent cinema (288) through to the birth of sound (321), new Latin American cinema (110; 189) and on to the present day (159) – welcome recognition, if only in passing, that this history also exists amongst all the others discussed in a volume dedicated to considering the very process of historiography surrounding Latin American cinema. Finally, Richards and Falicov write respectively on *En la puta vida* and *Whisky* in Richards' *Themes in Latin American Cinema* (2011), and in Carlos Gutierrez's *Ten Best Latin American Films of the Decade* (2010).

Others have explored Uruguayan cinema amidst the giddy circulation of world cinemas more generally. Tom Whittaker, for example, analyses the rhythms and sounds in Control Z's *Whisky* alongside the Mexican film *Párpados azules/Blue Eyelids* (Contreras, 2007). What this trend demonstrates is the similarity between aesthetic practices developing in Uruguay and those emerging globally due to the international production and circulation of a world of cinemas. From this perspective, Uruguayan cinema can be understood as a meeting of

national and transnational concerns. Here is the benefit of the ‘hermeneutic circle’, and in particular of the view on to Uruguayan cinema from the outside, looking in.

Indeed, in Ana M. López and Dolores Tierney’s (2014) ‘In Focus’ overview of Latin American film studies for *Cinema Journal*, there is evidence of a shift in approach more akin to that of Lúcia Nagib’s ‘positive’ take on how we define a world of cinemas. No one national cinema gets top billing in that special issue’s exploration of Latin American filmmaking, in spite of the mention of bigger players like Brazil and Mexico. Furthermore, López’s (2014) discussion of ‘the contemporary mediascape’ speaks directly to the issues that concern scholars of Uruguayan cinema, such as the complexities of address to both international festivals and domestic audiences. A greater sense of shared concerns, rather than geographical separations, comes through as ‘Latin American cinema’ is increasingly recognisable as a (variously defined) transnational entity – as opposed to being just a collection of national cinemas. In this spirit, the inclusion of an interview with Spanish-based Uruguayan director Álvaro Brechner in Maria M. Delgado, Stephen M. Hart and Randal Johnson’s *A Companion to Latin American Cinema* (2017), which otherwise does not discuss Uruguay significantly, is welcome indeed (and is supplemented herein by interviews with Uruguayan directors based in Uruguay, to provide a complementary – this time from the inwards-outwards – perspective on many of the same transnational issues).

With the notion of the ‘mediascape’ in mind, it is worth noting that there have been several pieces on Uruguayan documentary (Martin-Jones and Montañez 2013c; Ruffinelli 2013; Tadeo Fuica 2015), while Tadeo Fuica has also analyzed film archiving in Uruguay (as mentioned), as well as Uruguayan video production in the 1980s (Tadeo Fuica and Ramírez Soto 2015). This work indicates a wider issue at stake when exploring contemporary Uruguayan cinemas, namely the diversity of filmmaking practices, especially in a context where, unusually, feature films have not been the dominant mode. As Tadeo Fuica

demonstrates in *Uruguayan Cinema, 1960-2010* (2017) – the first book in English on the subject – how we uncover the history of Uruguayan national cinema, and how we thus conduct the historiography of small national cinemas more generally, requires of us an exploration of various modes (feature films, documentaries, shorts, animation, and institutional films and videos), gauges (35mm, 16mm, Super-8mm) and formats (analogue, digital) (10-18). A case could be made that it is in fact documentary that has provided the most consistent historical evidence of the existence of a national cinema in Uruguay, as indeed in other small countries.

In any case, emerging from Tadeo Fuica's emphasis on the diversity of filmmaking traditions in Uruguay is a crucial point with regard to the historical absence of Uruguayan cinema from scholarly debates. Namely, its outputs simply did not fit the accepted models of discursive framing. Acknowledging this, further examination of contemporary Uruguayan cinemas can help to inform existing debates surrounding both national cinemas in general (which takes its lead from work by Andrew Higson and others) and small national cinemas in particular (the debate consolidated by Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie in *The Cinema of Small Nations* [2007]).

Yet, while these works help to create a more inclusive 'hermeneutic circle' in which to explore contemporary Uruguayan cinemas at home and abroad, these English-language contributions only complement the scholarship being undertaken in Uruguay, and which is reflected in this special issue by the presence of three Uruguayan scholars (two of whom live and work in Uruguay). Although much of the Spanish-language work remains untranslated and thus hard to access for English-only readers, Tadeo Fuica has outlined what is being done. This includes work by Georgina Torello (on Uruguay's silent cinema), Isabel Wschebor (on ICUR, or the *Instituto Cinematográfico de la Universidad de la República*), Mariana Amieva (on film festivals), Aldo Marchesi (on film policies under the dictatorship),

Julieta Keldjián (on Super-8 filmmaking), Mariel Balás, Lucía Secco and Ruy Ramírez (on the archive of the *Centro de Medios Audiovisuales*, or CEMA), Rosario Radakovich (on the post-2000 ‘boom’ in production), and more. Many of these scholars are working collaboratively in Uruguay as part of GEstA (the *Grupo de estudios del audiovisual*), an interdisciplinary research cluster on cinema and the audiovisual (see GEstA, n.d.). This is in addition to the various histories of Uruguayan cinema produced previously by various critics, cinephiles and practitioners (see Tadeo Fuica 2014, 7-12).

In particular, the journal *33 Cines* (2009-2015), which provided ‘a space for the discussion of national cinema, and cinema more broadly, in which academic and non-academic writings coexist’ (Tadeo Fuica 2014, 7), and the anthology, *Industrias creativas innovadoras: El cine nacional de la década* (2014), mark the consolidation, or what Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) might call the ‘recentering’ of Uruguayan film scholarship. (Notably Mariana Amieva and Rosario Radakovich, the respective editors of *33 Cines* and *Industrias creativas innovadoras*, are both contributors here.) Following their lead, there has since been an evident increase in webzines and resources dedicated to the discussion of Uruguayan cinema, including *Guía 50*, *Al ver verás*, and the online reappearance of *Revista Film*, originally published in the 1950s by Cine Universitario, and which dedicates a special section to Uruguayan cinema in every issue.

There are a range of foci and methods being deployed in Uruguay to explore its domestic film culture, and to include some of those here, such as Radakovich’s use of audience response, lends to this special issue a richness not otherwise found in most Anglophone explorations of Latin American cinemas. Clearly, then, there is now a field led by Uruguayan film scholars, energized by those (whether Uruguayan or not) working both inside and outside of Uruguay.

### **Contemporary Uruguayan cinemas**

As noted at the start, film production in Uruguay has reached the point where listing all its features, and noting their respective international successes, is no longer practical. Suffice to say that Uruguayan films have won prizes at Cannes (*Whisky*), Berlin (*Gigante*, Biniez, 2009), San Sebastián (*Gigante*), Rotterdam (*25 Watts* (Rebella and Stoll, 2001)), and a Goya for Best Spanish-Language Foreign Film (*El último tren*). Even if an American Academy Award has as yet proven elusive, Uruguayan directors such as Fede Álvarez have made the transition to Hollywood, as William Brown discusses in this special issue. International distribution has been achieved by a good number of films, while others have been remade in Hollywood (*La casa muda* was, for example, remade as *Silent House* (Kentis and Lau, 2011)).

For the outside view, the shop window is now well dressed. Cinematically, Uruguayan cinema has become known on the world stage for being a nation of visionary artists and skilled craftsmen who can make their way in the creative industries. *La casa muda*, a film made for just US\$8,000, which Martin-Jones and Montañez explore here, received a two-page spread in the middle-brow British film magazine *Empire* exploring how the blocking worked in terms of acting and cinematography. For its part, the film's Hollywood remake demonstrated Latin American cinema's increasing challenge to Asia as the preferred location for the major studio's outsourced research and development (Xu 2008).

In this respect, as an indicator of what the nation can achieve, Uruguayan cinema provides a correlative to certain images of the nation that circulate in the international press. For example, it is the opposite of the hysterical return to colonial stereotyping that occurred when the talented contemporary footballer Luis Suárez was branded a savage animal or cannibal by numerous Western newspapers after various ill-considered acts of cheating in successive football World Cup tournaments (handball on the goal-line in 2010, biting an opponent in 2014). Rather, the fame surrounding Uruguayan cinema can be more usefully conceived of in

relation to the longer history of the Uruguayan national football team as a likeable David killing Goliath in two odds-defying World Cup final victories over neighbours Argentina (1930) and Brazil (1950). Indeed, Uruguayan cinema's contemporary prestige functions similarly to that surrounding the former president, José 'Pepe' Mujica (2010-2015), who has been lauded internationally for being a politician with long-held values, dignity, courage, humility and a history of serving his country. These characteristics all contrast favourably with the spin and superficial time-serving of the increasingly normalized neoliberal career politician in power across much of the USA and Europe, if not the world. This is a national cinema, its success internationally suggests, that can work wonders on peanuts (winning international prizes in the absence of a fully developed film industry), thus providing the expected mix of giant-killing excitement along with 'authenticity' and humility.

Yet we have now reached the point where we need to consider a much more rounded picture than this fairytale version of events. We also need a greater awareness of Uruguay's film industry, the domestic hits that don't travel well, the critical reception of Uruguayan movies of all stripes at home as well as abroad, and its film culture more broadly. This is not simply because of the marginalized position in which scholarship on Uruguayan cinema finds itself. It is not solely so that the answer to 'why Uruguayan cinema?' can be answered. Such a question is rarely if ever asked of work on more mainstream cinemas, in spite of it actually being a relevant challenge to *all* research and not solely to research into filmmaking that does not immediately penetrate the consciousness of those with more narrow interests, viewing habits or world views. It is a question that in reality indicates the economic value placed on knowledge by neoliberalism, a global system within which products of small national cinemas like that of Uruguay find themselves on the margins. The more rounded picture is needed because an idea like that of auto-erasure, applicable as it is to so many films designed to depart home territory for international markets, needs to be rebalanced by

acknowledgement of the auto-construction of the nation in and through cinema, and of national film culture more generally. We need views from both the ‘outside in’ and the ‘inside out’ in order to complete the hermeneutic circle.

The articles that follow demonstrate that this is a complex terrain to negotiate critically. Martin-Jones/Montañez and Brown, respectively, demonstrate how, with the paratext in mind, the international viewer’s awareness of Uruguay’s presence in films that seek to auto-erase is, in fact, quite well honed. Here the focus is respectively on horror movie *La casa muda* and action short *¡Ataque de pánico!*. Martin-Jones/Montañez and Brown thus offer views from the ‘outside in’. The second half of the special issue then offers an alternative view, from ‘inside out’, with two articles exploring the at-times enigmatic reactions of Uruguayan audiences and critics to the diverse body of films that emerge from Uruguay’s piecemeal film industry. Mariana Amieva outlines critical and analytical writing on cinema and audiovisual production since the return of democracy in Uruguay. Considering the reception of Uruguayan films, Amieva explains how the publications of *Cinemateca Uruguaya* and the cultural section of *El País* have, during this period, focused on the relationship between film culture in Uruguay and the public sector, while also considering the continuities and ruptures of these publications with important precursors in film criticism (rooted in the key figures of the Uruguayan literary ‘Generation of ’45’). Amieva’s writing style evokes both this tradition and the heritage of the French academic system, which was so influential in the founding of the Uruguayan academy. For her part, Rosario Radakovich examines how the international success surrounding Uruguayan cinema’s recent ‘boom’ has not at all changed the relationship between Uruguayan audiences and local production. Here, analysis of how the national cinema is viewed by critics, cinephiles and moviegoers (using qualitative data analysis) shows the classic dichotomies of differentiation and (after Pierre

Bourdieu) cultural distinction between the Hollywood film industry and independent production.

Taking the last two works out of the Uruguayan context will perhaps provide a challenge for some readers, in particular those who will not necessarily realize the extent to which the pieces are immersed in ongoing debates in Uruguay, or simply may not know all the films discussed. This, along with the challenge of encountering works from different academic systems, written in a second language. Nevertheless, they also provide an opportunity to begin to engage with the work going on in Uruguay, to see how, along with its intrinsic value, it also throws into relief the methods that may be considered normal in Anglophones studies, not to mention the normalized nature of the conclusions drawn from such approaches.

Reading works from ‘elsewhere’ always has the potential to throw into relief the expectations of the field, and indeed, how the history of the field has created expectations of what seems normal – Film Studies in the West being the product of a series of ‘turns’, interdisciplinary intersections, and ongoing tensions such as those between history and theory. To collect these pieces alongside the others, then, is in this respect intended as a decolonizing action, actively to deny what anthropologist Johannes Fabian famously called ‘the denial of coevalness’ (1983), in this case between academic systems.

The special issue concludes with interviews with three directors currently working in the Uruguayan film industry: Guillermo Casanova (*El viaje hacia el mar; Otra historia del mundo* et al.), Federico Veiroj (*La vida útil/A Useful Life* [2010]; *Belmonte* [2018] et al.) and Silvana Camors (*Equisse* [2016], *Día 16* [2016] and *Desde aquí* [2017], et al.). Each responds to the same questions concerning the current state of the Uruguayan film industry – examining internal conditions (e.g. available finance, technology, the role of television, the role of the archive) and external opportunities (e.g. international coproductions, the festival circuit, online distribution). What comes across from their responses is that whilst all three

interviewees agree that there is a Uruguayan cinema, due to the different generations and the different types of filmmaking in which each is involved, how this cinema is understood to exist is slightly different for each practitioner. Hence: contemporary Uruguayan cinemas.

Taken together, the articles and interviews in this special issue reveal that contemporary Uruguayan cinemas spring from various places: low budget genre filmmaking, the lure of Hollywood, the promise of the international festival circuit, the innovative use of the internet for promotion, the emerging shape of Uruguayan film culture in the last twenty years (and its relationship to the troubled emergence of the industry), contemporary Uruguayan cinemas' relationship to the patchwork histories of film production (especially the consistent production of documentaries and the importance of the television industry), digital filmmaking, a broader film culture (audiences and critics alike), and more particularly the historical presence of the *Cinemateca Uruguaya* and the emergence of new journals like the short-lived, state-funded *33 Cines*, its predecessors and successors.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures regarding film production in Uruguay are not necessarily accurate and the variations in terms of numbers of films made may depend, for example, on how those doing the measuring considered what constitutes a feature film (especially in terms of duration, site of exhibition and so on), as well as what constitutes an Uruguayan film (how much did the film need to be associated with Uruguay in order to be classified as Uruguayan?), which is not mention issues surrounding whether a film is dated according to year of production or year of release, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Naturally, these statistics only apply to the theatrical box office – and they may also be incomplete and/or carry inaccuracies (for example BoxOfficeMojo puts *Selkirk* twice in the top 100 in 2012 – in 48<sup>th</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> position respectively – and with no explanation as to why, although we suspect that it is to do with slight variations in the film’s full title). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the *Wilson* listed here is the American comedy starring Woody Harrelson or Mateo Gutiérrez’s documentary about Wilson Ferreira Aldunate, or a conflation of the two (since both films share the same name and came out in the same year). Finally, since the website for ASOPROD no longer functions, it is hard to double check its own statistics.