

## INTRODUCTION

### **Political documentary cinema in Latin America**

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Political documentary cinema in Latin America has a long history of tracing social injustice and suffering, depicting political unrest, intervening in periods of crisis and upheaval, and reflecting upon questions regarding such pressing subjects as ideology, cultural identity, genocide and traumatic memory.<sup>1</sup> As this collection shows, in the genre's socially committed orientation, the aspirations and struggles of militant collectives, ethnic and sexual minorities, the victims of state violence, and workers' and women's movements, among other disenfranchised groups, often find artistic expression.

While documentary film in Latin America has traditionally been regarded as fiction cinema's younger cousin, as it is for that matter around the world, perhaps it is in this region especially that the work of documentarians—consistently urgent, committed and explorative—has contributed to the development of Latin American narrative film's recognizable international character as a spontaneously raw, artistically innovative, and politically engaged cinema. The essays collected in this volume show, in varied ways, the important role that political documentary cinema has played in the emergence and development of a socially engaged film culture—

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films, filmmakers, film institutions, publics, and scholarship—in the Latin American region since the 1950s. This is an aspect that clearly manifests in contemporary films by Latin American directors that time and again figure as award-winners in international film festivals. The practice of socially engaged documentary cinema has sometimes served as a blunt and confrontational form of training in filmmaking. Young directors and those in other creative roles have frequently learned and perfected their skills in the midst of documenting social and political upheaval before moving on to fiction cinema. Jacqueline Mouesca, a Chilean cinema historian, states that during the Unidad Popular government in the early 1970s, the state-owned production company Chile Films served as a learning space for emergent filmmakers who devoted themselves largely to documentary production; among these were the now legendary epic documentary projects of Patricio Guzmán and Miguel Littin (2005: 76). While Littin is a remarkable example of a filmmaker who moves effortlessly between documentary and fiction film, to many on the Latin American continent, documentary filmmaking was never a waiting room or a means to gaining access to fiction cinema. According to Alicia Vega, another historian of Chilean cinema, the work of two key documentarians of the 1960s,

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Rafael Sánchez and Sergio Bravo, suggested that documentary film would have its own specific function and, as a result, “they didn’t engage in documentary filmmaking as a learning school to move on to fiction film later, but they approached it as a form in its own right” (Vega 2006: 16). Such a commitment clearly reverberates in the practice of politically engaged documentarians across the continent, as the essays collected herein attest. With only one “regrettable”—in his own words—incurSION into fiction (see Ricciarelli 2011: 155), Patricio Guzmán, indisputably one of the most influential Latin American documentary directors, has dedicated his entire filmmaking career to exploring, expanding and promoting the documentary genre. According to Guzmán:

[D]ocumentary cinema is complex, slow to produce, hard to finance, and ... few get to see it, although those few never forget it. It’s a different kind of genre, with a limited public ... that occupies a rather important and influential space. The documentary is like a civil right.  
(Ruffinelli 2008: 241)<sup>2</sup>

Documentary filmmaking opens up spaces for formal experimentation often not permitted to sponsor-constrained narrative film directors (as demonstrated in essays by Erin Aldana, Kristi Wilson, and Amy Sara Carroll in this collection). Broadly speaking, one could argue that political documentary cinema in Latin America has constituted itself as a prime esthetic and ideological referent for all cinematic forms and practices in the region. Such an inclination to radical and critical forms of social realism certainly inspired the movement of revolutionary filmmaking that shook the world’s screens during the second half of the twentieth century.

As an area of interest in film studies in English, Latin American cinema is more often than not associated with, or even sometimes perceived as equivalent to, the militant film culture that emerged and thrived in the region between the 1950s and 1970s, which is generally encountered in literature under the banner of New Latin

American Cinema (NLAC).<sup>3</sup> Students of world cinema learn that as an explosive film movement, the NLAC was born out of the historical urgency of equally explosive social and political circumstances, such as social unrest, revolutions, military dictatorships, foreign invasions, and internal and external wars. They are required to study the origin and main substance of this movement through a series of remarkable cinematic experiences taking place in a handful of Latin American countries at the time. The list includes Argentina's Fernando Birri and his Santa Fé Documentary School (Isis Sadek's essay in this collection discusses a ground-breaking film of 1958, *Tire dié/Throw a Dime*, the best-accomplished outcome of Birri's work with his Santa Fé students). Also from Argentina is the collaboration of Fernando Solanas with Santiago Getino through the film collective Cine Liberación, which produced not only one of the world's greatest works of militant cinema, the lengthy 1968 agit-prop film *La hora de los hornos/The Hour of the Furnaces* (discussed in this collection by Mariano Mestman), but also one of the key political film manifestos of the period, the 1969 essay 'Hacia un tercer cine'/'Towards a Third Cinema.' Furthermore, the list includes Bolivia's Jorge Sanjinés and his collaboration with highland indigenous communities of the Andes region through his work with the film collective Grupo Ukamau; and Brazil's Glauber Rocha and his cinematic experiments articulating a radical film philosophy, as expressed in his 1965 essay 'Eztetyka da fome'/'An Esthetic of Hunger,' another of the period's list of film manifestos, which gave ideological substance to the *Cinema Novo* movement. In

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addition, invariably found on the list are Chile's Miguel Littin's and Raúl Ruiz's early film experiments with generic hybridization in the late 1960s, as well as the socially orientated, neo-realist work of Aldo Francia, who was the organizer of the first festival of the NLAC in Viña del Mar, Chile, in 1967, where the expression "Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano" was coined and a common ideological commitment was identified by film practitioners from countries across the continent.

The final case on our essential study list is Cuba, the then pan-American spiritual patron of revolutionary art and the only country up to the late 1960s—until Chile joined it after the presidential electoral victory of socialist Salvador Allende in 1970—where the efforts towards a new revolutionary cinema were articulated from the government's superstructure. In Cuba this was achieved through the ICAIC, the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, whereby state-funded, industry-standard resources were put to the service of the development of a new film industry, culture and public. In studying the Cuban contribution to the NLAC, the names that are often highlighted are those of film directors Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Santiago Alvarez (Kristi Wilson's essay in this collection discusses his experimental agit-prop cinema), and Julio García Espinosa, the author of another film manifesto of 1969: 'Por un cine imperfecto'/'For an imperfect cinema.'<sup>4</sup> While the preceding list is not encompassing of this movement, it can safely be regarded as the essential canon. In all these cases, the paradigmatic films normally studied are documentaries, fiction-documentary hybrids, or narrative works with strong stylistic and methodological definitions towards forms of documentary social realism.

Yet, despite the unmistakable influence that this movement has had on contemporary Latin American filmmaking, this influence is neither absolute nor did cinema in Latin America start with the NLAC. Despite what the activist filmmakers

of the NLAC purported, not all films produced in Latin American countries prior to the late 1950s were alienated and colonized second-hand versions of Hollywood or European *auteurism*. This is particularly so in regards to documentary film, a genre that is thematically, esthetically and methodologically diverse, and which possesses a long, heterogeneous history.

Furthermore, while contemporary documentary films in Latin America often share the NLAC's enhanced social commitment, many respond to formal strategies and traditions that have little to do with that movement. In fact, some contemporary Latin American documentaries seem to respond less to the NLAC than to such diverse influences as literature and the social sciences. In the case of the former, the literary genres of the confession, the auto-biography and the testimony have clearly informed the boom of subjective, self-reflexive memory documentaries that followed the periods of dictatorship in countries such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay (in this collection, Paola Margulis discusses one of such films). And in the case of the latter, social science methodologies have informed investigative documentarians who work along with forensic professionals in the task of resolving cases of political disappearance and other extreme human rights violations effected by governmental intelligence agencies (Tomás Crowder-Taraborrelli's essay in this volume offers an analysis of a "forensic" documentary). Thus, documentary precedes, cohabits with, embodies and then continues after the NLAC movement. Indeed, the documentary genre in Latin America possesses its own independent trajectory while nurturing political film movements technically, esthetically and ideologically.

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The essays in this collection bear witness to this multiplicity, discussing documentaries with topics as diverse as national political contingency, such as workers' strikes, riots, and military coups against elected governments; crime, poverty, homelessness, prostitution, children's work, and violence against women; urban development, progress, (under)development, capitalism, and neoliberalism; exile, diaspora and border cultures; trauma and (post)memory. Additionally, the films debated here include methodological and stylistic definitions as varied as agit-prop, collage, film essay, direct or observational, voice-over, docudrama, media reportage, investigative, forensic, interview-based, and self-reflexive.

While scholarship in English about Latin American narrative cinema—both historical and contemporary—is abundant, the same cannot be said about studies of the region's social and political documentary cinema. In 1990 Julianne Burton wrote that '[d]espite the thematic, stylistic and “generic” variety of Latin American documentary [...] and its broad social and cultural impact, the existing literature on Latin American documentary practices is sparse indeed' (1990: ix). Over two decades later, despite an explosion of documentary practice in the continent during the 1990s and 2000s, the paucity of scholarship in English on the subject continues. In fact, despite growing numbers of papers read at Latin American studies conferences that focus specifically on documentary films and increasing numbers of articles on the topic published in academic journals, Burton's 1990 essential anthology continues to be the only book-length source in English that systematically and specifically draws a picture of the state of affairs of the social documentary in the region. In an attempt to expand this still emergent area of study, the essays in this anthology engage with historical, stylistic and theoretical issues of political documentary in Latin America, contributing in this way to key theoretical debates in global documentary film theory

through analysis of specific films. The collected essays theorize political documentary cinema in Latin America from a national, regional and continental perspective, and focus on films, filmmakers and film movements, and the historical and political contexts from which they emerge, since the 1950s to recent years.

The main publication in Spanish on this topic to date, Paulo Antonio Paranaguá's 2003 anthology *Cine documental en América Latina*, is equivalent to Burton's collection, in the sense that it is one of the few sources in Spanish that offers a systematic view of documentary cinema across the whole Latin American region. However, the shortage of literature found in English is not replicated in film and cultural studies from Latin American countries, where the number of publications in Spanish, and Portuguese in the case of Brazilian cinema studies, is on the increase.<sup>5</sup> In some cases, authors may focus on documentaries from a specific sub-region, as with the 2012 collection on political documentaries from the Southern Cone countries—Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay—edited by Antonio Traverso and Tomás Crowder-Taraborrelli; an individual documentary director, as is the case of the already cited titles about the cinema of Chilean documentarian Patricio Guzmán; or even a particular film, as with the numerous publications on Argentina's Albertina Carri's polemical 2003 documentary *Los rubios* (Noriega 2009; Carri 2007).<sup>6</sup> With the relatively recent approval of cinema laws in many Latin American countries, which has led to the creation of funds for film production and film culture, film archives, national cinematheques and film schools, particularly from the 1990s onwards, new generations of technically skilled and

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theoretically savvy filmmakers as well as film researchers have appeared onto the scene. Recent tendencies in scholarly research in cinema studies within Latin American countries seem to be pointing in the direction of recovering and reinterpreting culturally significant cinematic histories, experiences and proposals, whereby many of them focus on their respective national documentary cinemas (for example, on Argentina's documentary see Campo & Dodaro 2007, and the two volumes by Lusnich & Piedras 2009; on Chilean documentary, see Corro et al 2007, Vega 2006, and Mouesca 2005).

Thus, the authors collected in this anthology reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of current Latin American film scholarship, with some of them writing in Spanish and Portuguese from Argentina and Brazil (with their original works especially translated for this anthology), and others writing in English from Australia, Europe, and the USA. One of this collection's most significant contributions is the sense in which it bridges the traditional gap between Latin American historical, social, and cultural studies written either in English or Spanish/Portuguese.

While some of the collected essays focus on documentaries made in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela, others focus on the work of US Latino and diasporic Latin American political documentarians. The collection also includes a visual essay reflecting a work-in-progress memory documentary from Chile and an original interview with a Jamaican independent documentary filmmaker.

The first four essays of this collection discuss films from Argentina, a country in which the production of political documentaries has been not only prolific but, in its original, explorative and activist nature, highly influential for politically committed documentarians across Latin America. The historical range covered by these essays is

broad as they look at classic social and revolutionary documentaries of the late 1950s (Isis Sadek) and 1960s (Mariano Mestman), the political memory documentaries of an expatriate returning home in the immediate post-dictatorship in the 1980s (Paola Margulis), and the more recent film work of a documentary filmmaker exploring cultural politics in contemporary Argentine society in the 1990s and 2000s (Antonio Gómez).

Sadek's 'Contesting fictions of (under)development: *Tire dié* and the emergence of independent documentary cinema in Argentina, ca. 1958' considers Fernando Birri and the Santa Fe Documentary School's ground-breaking film *Tire dié* (*Throw a Dime*, 1958) against the backdrop of theories of underdevelopment that were initially advanced in the US and later taken up by, and adapted to, Argentine political discourse. Sadek suggests that, with its focus on impoverished children, *Tire dié* accords with the premises and symbols of such theories of underdevelopment. However, according to Sadek, the Santa Fe School's particular documentary gaze on this community subverts and condemns the rhetoric of capitalist development as the preferred solution to such economic marginality.

Moving ahead from the late 1950s, the next essay in the collection considers documentary films made between the late 1960s and mid 1970s. Mestman's 'The worker's voice in post-1968 Argentine political documentary' demonstrates the important role of emerging popular voices in militant cinema. The essay starts with a discussion of the abovementioned *La hora de los hornos*, one of the most influential and paradigmatic examples in world militant cinema, made by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in 1968, and continues with analyses of *Ya es*

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*tiempo de violencia* ([Now Is the Time for Violence] 1969) by Enrique Juárez; *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* ([The Road to Old Reales's Death] 1971) by Gerardo Vallejo; *Operación masacre* ([Operation Massacre] 1972) by Jorge Cedrón, and Solanas's *Los hijos de Fierro* ([The Sons of Fierro] 1975). Mestman's essay illustrates how, in their search for a form of documentary cinema that would intervene politically in social reality, Argentine filmmakers of the late 1960s and the 1970s experimented with one of the long-held trademarks of documentary filmmaking—the omnipresent voice-over—by featuring the testimonies and voices of factory and farm workers, as well as members of the resistance, in dialogue with ideas about revolution, class identity and social protest that circulated at the time.

In an effort to expand the emerging body of critical work on post-dictatorship Argentine political documentaries, Margulis's 'Documentaries and politics in post-dictatorship Argentina: *Cuarentena: Exilio y regreso* and *Juan, como si nada hubiera sucedido* by Carlos Echeverría' picks up chronologically in the 1980s, where Mestman's essay leaves off. Margulis argues that Echeverría's *Cuarentena: Exilio y regreso* ([Quarantine: Exile and Return] 1983) and *Juan, como si nada hubiera sucedido* ([Juan, As If Nothing Had Happened] 1987) address the trauma of the dictatorship period after Argentina's return to democracy. In particular, she focuses on the roles of exile and forced disappearance in these films. Margulis points out that *Juan, como si nada hubiera sucedido*, unlike other Argentine documentaries, features interviews with high-level Argentine military officials that assess their roles in forced disappearances of political detainees.

Gómez's essay, 'Argentine multiculturalism and the ethnographic shift in documentary cinema: Martín Rejtman's *Copacabana*,' brings the topic of Argentine political documentary up to date with an analysis of this 2006 television film that

challenges notions of multiculturalism in contemporary Buenos Aires. Rejtman's film focuses on the Festival of Our Lady of Copacabana and the community of Bolivian immigrants in Buenos Aires who celebrate it. In his essay Gómez discusses Rejtman's particularly minimalist documentary poetics, namely, its lack of voice-over or commentary, absence of interviews, and an absence of visual information—such as maps and graphics—that would help viewers to identify the historical context of the story.

In the second group of essays, Erin Aldana and Marina Cavalcanti Tedesco discuss documentaries from another of Latin American cinema's giants, Brazil, a country that has produced some of the most influential and inspirational films of all time in the region. Despite the importance of this cinematic tradition, Brazilian documentary is hardly ever discussed, with scholarship on it languishing in the face of the overwhelming interest given to Brazil's narrative cinema worldwide. Aldana and Tedesco contribute to redressing the balance with their respective discussions of, firstly, a significant yet possibly unclassifiable film, *Iracema, uma transa amazônica* ([Iracema, An Amazonian Shag] 1974) by Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, that boldly explores social reality from the boundary between fiction and documentary; and, secondly, contemporary grassroots activist video documentary made in rural Brazil between 2005 and 2008.

Aldana's 'The land, the road, and the freedom to move on: the tension between documentary and fiction in *Iracema, uma transa amazônica*' discusses Bodanzky and Senna's film about an indigenous teenage girl who becomes a prostitute and rides with truck driver Tião Brasil Grande (Big Brazil Sebastian) along the Transamazonian Highway. Although actors play these principal roles, Aldana suggests that the

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documentary-style interviews with the Amazon's inhabitants inserted in the film provide strong criticism of the Brazilian government's Amazon development projects, while simultaneously challenging the truth claims of the documentary genre.

Meanwhile, Tedesco's essay 'Grassroots activist video documentary in Brazil and the construction of new cultural identities: the case of the Homeless Workers Movement' discusses documentaries created around 2005 by and about São Paulo's Homeless Workers Movement. Engaging with the creative possibilities provided by a diversity of mediums, such as theater, music, poetry and filmmaking, the Brigada de Guerrilha Cultural (Cultural Guerrilla Brigade) helped to produce the Movement's political culture and, in so doing, as argues Tedesco, articulated new forms of cultural identity.

The next two essays constitute the third group of works in this collection that address documentary films from a single Latin American nation. Firstly, Tomás Crowder-Taraborrelli and, secondly, Antonio Traverso and Enrique Azúa focus on films from Chile. While documentary filmmaking with a social or political orientation is an established tradition in this southernmost country, it has only arisen to international attention as an effect of the work of Chilean documentarians produced in response to the military dictatorship (1973-1990). In different ways, both essays focus on documentary engagements with the traumatic experience of the relatives of missing political detainees: while Crowder-Taraborrelli discusses Silvio Caiozzi's award-winning film *Fernando ha vuelto* (*Fernando Is Back*, 1998) and the companion follow-up interview *¿Fernando ha vuelto a desaparecer?* ([Has Fernando disappeared again?] 2006), Traverso and Azúa's visual essay is a creative arrangement of still images and text taken from the co-authors' work-in-progress video documentary about memory sites in Chile.

Crowder-Taraborrelli's essay 'Exhumations and the macabre phenomenon of the double disappearance: Silvio Caiozzi's *Fernando ha vuelto* and *¿Fernando ha vuelto a desaparecer?*' explores the potential capacity of documentary cinema to contribute to knowledge about forced disappearance and genocide occurred during the Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s. Caiozzi's documentaries exemplify the tensions at play when post-dictatorship politics and the complex webs of (mis)information about forced disappearance meet forensic science, documentary film, and the subjective experience of the families of missing detainees. In *Fernando ha vuelto*, Caiozzi documents the journey of one man's remains back to his family and the unnatural sense of mourning and (lack of) closure that this process entails. Caiozzi's film, which highlights in detail the work of forensic investigators in this notorious Chilean case, won several international awards before a damning Spanish forensic report denounced the Chilean forensics team for several misidentifications. Caiozzi's follow-up interview with Fernando's widow addresses the fragile nature of the relationship between truth, documentation, and forensic science in cases of what Crowder-Taraborrelli terms as 'double disappearance.'

In 'Paine memorial: a visual essay,' Traverso and Azúa document and reflect on a collective memory project in the locality of Paine, Chile. Paine is a small agricultural community near the city of Santiago in which 70 local men were disappeared under the dictatorial regime that overtook the country in September of 1973. Traverso and Azúa emphasize the role of art in understanding traumatic memory (either constructed or lacking completely) in second and third generation

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victims of extreme forms of political violence, such as torture, summary executions and disappearance.

In the next section, Kristi Wilson and Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky focus on two iconic examples of documentary work from Cuba, a country in which cinema was given a highly prominent place after the 1959 revolution, and where numerous filmmakers have engaged in cinematic explorations of great significance for Latin American and world cinemas. Two of such cases are the radical, experimental work of Santiago Alvarez, one of the precursors of the project of a new cinema for Cuba and Latin America in the 1960s, as debated in Wilson's essay; and the film *Suite Habana* by Fernando Pérez (2003), which realizes a sustained observation of contemporary Cuban society using conventions from the city symphony film genre, as discussed by Skvirsky.

Wilson's essay 'Ecce homo novus: snapshots of the "new man" and iconic montage in the works of Santiago Alvarez' ruptures the notion of a homogenous form of Latin American documentary by exploring two works—*Now!* and *L.B.J.*—by a Cuban filmmaker who challenged the status quo by mounting cinematic attacks on international histories of slavery, racism and imperialism. Wilson suggests that Alvarez's notion of "urgent cinema," which was based on his direct witnessing of racial discrimination in the southern United States, and of imperialism and revolution around the world, influenced later uses of *testimonio* in Latin American documentary film. Alvarez's agit-prop cinema, argues Wilson, engaged directly with post-revolutionary politics in Cuba, using his short films as a means to educate Cubans about the world and, simultaneously, promote the national project of total literacy through an audiovisual medium.



Skvirsky's essay 'The post-colonial city symphony film and the "ruins" of *Suite Habana*' explores culturally relative notions of ruin, decay, modernity and progress through the lens of Julio Garcia Espinosa's theory of imperfect cinema and the long-standing genre of the city symphony film. According to Skvirsky, classic European city symphony films of the 1920s, such as Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, reject what Espinosa describes as an elitist, false divide between life and art, and between artists and non-artists. Skvirsky argues that Pérez's 2003 post-colonial city symphony film brings audiences closer to comprehending that a cinematic quest to imagine an alternative modernity—one that differs from capitalist modernity in its aesthetics and narrative structure—is itself a political action.

Emiel Martens's 'Independent documentary filmmaking in Jamaica: an interview with Esther Figueroa' explores the oeuvre of this little known Jamaican political documentarian, which is characterized by an empathy toward local communities marginalized by mainstream media practices and dominant narratives. Additionally, Martens's dialogue with Figueroa delves into Caribbean cinema and Figueroa's most recent film: *Jamaica for Sale* (2010).

Following Martens's interview, the next two essays discuss three relatively recent Mexican documentary films. Along with Argentina and Brazil, Mexico is one of the three largest and most influential film industries and film cultures in Latin America. Not unlike their peers from other countries in the continent, Mexican documentarians often make public their incisive political commentaries, reflections and investigations on cinema and television screens. This is observable

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in the work of Mexican filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, discussed in this collection in Jillian Sandell's essay about *Señorita extraviada* (2001), Portillo's cinematic investigation into the wave of missing and murdered women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Meanwhile, Misha MacLaird offers a detailed overview of documentary filmmaking in this North American country, discussing three polemical Mexican political documentaries made between 2006 and 2009.

Sandell's essay 'The proximity of the here and the urgency of the now: Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita extraviada*' explores the proliferation of visual and aural media about the gendered violence in Ciudad Juárez, raising important questions about how social justice and political transformation occur in the wake of failing state and legal apparatuses. Sandell suggests that any serious attempts at understanding the gendered violence that plagues Ciudad Juárez have to begin from addressing the neoliberal socio-cultural context from which this violence emerges in the first place. With this in mind, she draws upon George Yúdice's notion of "expediency of culture" to describe a situation in which culture, directed toward political and economic goals, can galvanize individuals and community organizations to perform the work normally allocated to the state. Sandell proposes Lourdes Portillo's 2001 documentary as an example of a political text that actively counters the impunity and silence surrounding the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.

MacLaird's essay 'Documentaries and celebrities, democracy and impunity: thawing the Revolution in 21<sup>st</sup>- century Mexico' is a comprehensive exploration of the recent boom in Mexican documentary cinema that began around 2006. MacLaird's discussion, however, starts with a retrospective look at Argentine Raymundo Gleyzer's influential 1971 documentary *México, la revolución congelada* (*Mexico: the Frozen Revolution*), which focuses on the political corruption and

violence of the longstanding PRI governing party. MacLaird brings the relationship between national politics and documentary film up to speed with the current window of possibility opened by a tumultuous 2006 presidential campaign and the publicity and activism that followed. In this context, she discusses Mexican documentary films, such as *En el hoyo* by Juan Carlos Rulfo (2006), *Fraude: México 2006* by Luis Mandoki (2007), and *Presunto culpable* by Roberto Hernández (2010), in relation to the way in which the Mexican film industry as well as the visual archive of the *Porfiriato* era and the Mexican Revolution have contributed to shaping national historical narratives.

In the final two essays of this collection, Amy Sara Carroll and Nilo Couret respectively discuss the work of filmmakers from the USA and Venezuela. Carroll's essay continues on the spirit of earlier discussions by Wilson and Aldana, respectively, as she addresses explorative film work made by the Peruvian-American filmmaker Alex Rivera between 1995 and 2003, which focuses on the 'porous borders' between Mexico and the United States as well as between documentary and fiction film. Meanwhile, Couret's essay offers a sharp comparative analysis of a series of recent documentaries that revisit the 2002 coup against former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Couret's discussion has become highly topical for those interested in Latin American political histories, following the mortal surrender of Chávez to cancer in March 2013.

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Carroll's 'From *Papapapá* to *Sleep Dealer*: Alex Rivera's undocumentary poetics' discusses Rivera's experimental films, which have been shown in such prestigious venues as the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Lincoln Center. Focusing particularly on Rivera's short film *Papapapá* (1995/1997), and his science fiction feature-length film *Sleep Dealer* (2008), Carroll argues that Rivera's work—that often addresses the theme of the US/Mexico border—calls the viewer's attention to the flimsy boundary between fiction and documentary, which, argues Carroll, can best be theoretically understood by a term appropriate to border art poetics: *undocumentary*.

Finally, Couret's 'The revolution was (over)televised: reconstructing the Venezuelan media coup of April 11, 2002' looks at a series of documentary films that explore the role of media in the unsuccessful, weekend-long coup against Hugo Chávez. Couret points out that uncertainty and contradiction characterized the information that flowed from several mainstream news and alternative media outlets during the coup, arguing that race, class and political position played an active role in the news reportage. As later documentary films about the coup attempted to unravel the confusion, Couret looks closely at three such films that seem ostensibly in dialogue with one another: *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* by Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain (2003); a documentary response to the previous film, *Radiografía de una mentira* [X-Ray of a Lie] by Wolfgang Schalk and Thaelman Urgelles (2004); and, in turn, a response to this latter film: *Puente Llaguno claves de una massacre* [Puente Llaguno, Clues to a Massacre] by Ángel Palacios (2004). Through the examination of the re-appropriation of media footage about the coup in these three films, Couret's essay engages with the way in which television and new media expand standard notions of Latin American documentary. The essay goes on to

discuss the evolving notion of a “national mediascape,” as it pertains to Venezuela and other Latin American countries, and the contest of representation in everyday public and private spaces.

Like Couret’s article, all the essays collected here demonstrate a diverse range of strategies and approaches through which political documentaries by Latin Americans consistently make demands on spectators, requiring them to question their own assumptions about social reality, history, economic development, ethics, political allegiance, and class, race, nation, gender and other markers of social difference.

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## Notes

1. For an essay by Michael Lazzara on Chilean political documentary and the question of genocide, see: Wilson & Crowder-Taraborrelli 2012; for an essay by Antonio Traverso on Chilean political documentary and the question of trauma, see: Broderick & Traverso 2011.
2. Our translation from Spanish. Along with Ricciarelli's and Ruffinelli books, another dedicated study of Guzmán's documentary *oeuvre* is Rodriguez 2007.
3. The two essential sources in English on the NLAC are: Martin 1997 and Pick 1993.
4. The text of all the Latin American film manifestos that emerged in the 1960s can be found in the first volume of Martin 1997.
5. Further collections include: Jorge Ruffinelli's *América Latina en 130 documentales* (2012); and, forthcoming, Navarro & Rodriguez's *New documentaries in Latin America* (in press).
6. Also see a 2006 article by Antonio Gómez, one of the contributors to this collection, co-authored with Verónica Garibotto; and two essays, by Kristi Wilson and María Belén Ciancio, respectively, in (Traverso & Crowder-Taraborrelli, 2013).
7. Following a request from the Mexican government, Gleyzer's documentary was banned in Argentina only a day after its 1971 premiere. In 1976, agents of the Argentine military regime kidnapped Gleyzer outside the Filmmakers Guild's headquarters in Buenos Aires. He has been missing since.

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