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*New Trends in Argentine and Brazilian Cinema* is a collection of essays on South-American auteurs, box-office, financing and legislative practices from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, edited by Cacilda Rêgo and Carolina Rocha. As Rêgo and Rocha note, this book is unique in that it analyzes not only contemporary and stylistic trends from Brazil and Argentina, but it also examines these trends in relationship to cultural policies that helped re-shape their cinema after a period of economic struggle for the film industries in both countries. Given the global economic recession we are living today, this book's case-studies could not be more relevant, since they historicize alternative solutions for cinema-industry paradoxes in times of shortage, cutbacks and budgetary hindrance.

Structurally, this book presents us with a collection of 16 essays divided in three sections. “Funding” is the first section and it introduces the background of Brazilian and Argentine film production, in the time period 1995 to 2006. This review will focus on the essays from the first section, which examines the production aspects of films circulating between Brazil and Argentina as well as those of the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and in the less surveyed southern area of Argentina, Patagonia.


“Gender” is the third section of the anthology and it focuses on the increased participation of female filmmakers in Brazil and Argentina (reaching about 20% of the total number of
filmmakers), as well as analyzing films directed by male directors featuring female protagonists who drive the narrative. The essays in this section start with Ana Peluffo’s analysis of Lucretia Martel’s *La Cienaga/The Swamp* (2001). Charlotte Gleghorn examines gendered interpretations of the urban in the Brazilian film *Um Ceu de Estrelas/A Starry Sky* (1996), by Tatata Amaral. Jack A. Drapper III traces the collaboration between screenwriter Elena Soarez and director Andrucha Waddington, and examines the influence of nature, women’s sexuality, and popular music themes in Brazilian cinema. One of the films he analyzes is *Casa de Areia/House of Sand* (2005), pictured on the cover of the book. Leslie L. Marsh makes a historical analysis of Brazilian women’s filmmaking, together with production practices and key trends.

The Introduction presents a valuable survey of the changes that happened following the endorsement of neoliberal policies by Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello (in office 1990-1992) and Argentinean president Carlos Menem (in office 1989-1999). Rêgo and Rocha note that during the beginning of “the 1990s both Brazil and Argentina experienced similar processes of losing state support for their film industries as a result of the inception of neoliberalism in South America” (1) which created an immediate crisis in film production, paralelling the much larger crisis in their economy. Therefore, the beginning of the 1990s witnessed, among other things, the termination of long-term institutions such as the Brazilian Embrafilme (1969-1990), ending all state support for new and established filmmakers. Despite factors such as escalating globalization, and the increasing number of transnational corporate co-productions, it was obvious that the effort to completely eradicate the influence of the state turned out to hurt more than help these long-established national cinemas. Thus, state-support actually picks up after the crisis in the form of new tax incentives and a film legislation created precisely to regenerate local filmmaking. As a result, the second half of the 1990s witnessed a recovery and increased production of films, as well as the creation of new state-sponsored institutions such as INCAA in Argentina (1997) and ANCINE in Brazil (2001).

Other factors, such as the creation of Mercosur, helped the rebuilding of Brazilian and Argentine cinemas. Created mid-1990s as a multi-national trading agreement – initially joined by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay – Mercosur represented a first step in South America towards the “integration of regional cinematographic industries” (69), according to Marina Moguillansky in her essay “Close Strangers: The Role of Regional Cultural Policies in Brazilian and Argentine New Cinemas.” Because Brazil and Argentina remain Mercosur’s most influential countries, their film industries largely benefited from the muti-lateral agreements, while Mercosur film boards did not yield same results for Paraguay and Uruguay. This economic inequality of disparate national film industries trying to negotiate within Mercosur remains unresolved to this day. In terms of financing, Brazil and Argentina have been supplying 99% of the total regional funds (77), so they came to rip the most benefits, especially for co-distribution and circulation of their film products.

Writing about “The Fall and Rise of Brazilian Cinema”, Cacilda Rêgo notes that after the crisis in Brazilian film production, the state came to the rescue with the Rouanet (1991) and Audio-Visual (1993) Laws, so a more promising environment emerged with more films being produced. Still, Brazilian cinema could not compete with the hegemony of foreign product, mainly from the U.S., making evident that “Brazilian cinema could not be rescued only by decrees” (38). Limitations aside, Rêgo argues this legislation had a strong effect on the Brazilian Retomada (film resurgence). This was made possible through tax incentives for sponsoring national cinema to individuals, as well as to national and trans-national corporations (Sony, Warner Bros, etc). Further investment ensued from the super-power local media conglomerate Globo TV Network. In 1997, Globo Filmes was founded as a film subdivision of Globo TV, enabling big-budget film productions, as well as helping establish a mass-audience for Brazilian cinema on TV, as never existed before.

The role of Globo Filmes was akin to Hollywood conglomerates. The connection between television and cinema in the Brazilian star-system; the strategy of media convergence; Globo Filmes partnership with transnational
corporations such as Sony, Columbia, Fox and Universal; co-production and co-distribution ventures are some of the topics analyzed more in depth in the essay “Globo Filmes, Sony, and Franchise Filmmaking: Transnational Industry in the Brazilian Pós-Retomada,” by Courtney Brannon Donoghue. Globo TV Network got recognized not only for its telenovelas and the investment in the Brazilian film market since the late 1990s, it became known for its economic and ideological power as “arguably the fourth-largest commercial network in the world, lagging behind the three U.S. networks ABC, CBS and NBC” (55), Donoghue states. This essay highlights how the state legislation changes of the early 1990s facilitated a wave of co-productions between transnational partners and Globo Filmes, which created a new market-driven cinema in Brazil known as Pós-Retomada.

Argentina is covered in Carolina Rocha’s essay “Contemporary Argentine Cinema during Neoliberalism.” Rocha observes that “unlike American mainstream cinema that is solely financed by private investors, national cinemas around the world require state funds” (17). Because the sudden withdrawal of funds in Argentina caused a historic low quantity of local films, the state had to intervene. Law 24,377 of 1994 made possible the creation of the film agency INCAR, the opening of credit lines, screen-quotas, and a smart system of setting aside 10% of all box-office income to make up a fund to be redistributed among local filmmakers in order to rebuild the national film industry. These measures re-invigorated national cinema. In addition to a helpful analysis of New Argentine Cinema (NAC) and its renewed critical acclaim, Rocha shows statistical data on how overall Argentine cinema (commercial and art-house) stills faces harsh competition from Hollywood in terms of audience choice.

Besides audiences, another problem for Argentine cinema is the position Buenos Aires holds as the film industry epicenter. For filmmakers on the periphery (basically most of the country), there is an unmet desire for a regional cinema independent of the “porteño” gaze (84) as notes Tamara L. Falicov in her essay “New Visions of Patagonia: Video-Collectives and the Creation of a Regional Video Movement in Argentina’s South.” Falicov examines two collectives – ARAN (2001) and RIPA (2000) – and their resistance to use the landscape of Patagonia only as scenery to shoot their films, or as a tourist backdrop, as it has been done before in cinema. These filmmakers aim “to depict what it means to grow up and live in Patagonia from a resident perspective” (84), so they “do not conform to the stereotypical or dominant imagings of what Patagonia is supposed to represent” (94). This way, ARAN and RIPA filmmakers “bore their own costs of production to foment a low-budget form of collective” (93) and a film festival to exhibit their work.

For those interested in Latin American cinema, this book offers a collective attempt at understanding alternative models of solving cinematic problems in the constantly shifting landscape of international media production. The variety of essays and authors selected by Cacilda Régo and Carolina Rocha offers a diverse selection of scholarly interests – from the study of mainstream commercial fare to art-house to documentaries – engaging the reader with a plurality of research on Brazilian and Argentine cinema that is a necessary addition to the field. This is a comprehensive and well-documented view of the contribution of two major countries in contemporary South American Cinema.

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