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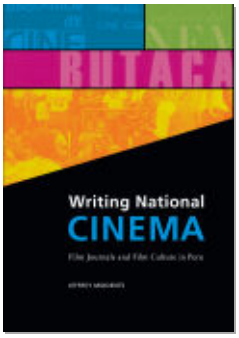
5. For a Few Minutes: Considering the Short-- Film Industry



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CHAPTER 5
FOR A FEW MINUTES

Considering the Short-Film Industry

> *The method of learning the practice of filmmaking in our country has been exclusively the short film, which is the medium where all of the feature filmmakers of today have come from.*
>
> —FEDERICO DE CÁRDENAS AS PART OF A ROUNDTABLE ON PERUVIAN CINEMA, IN *HABLEMOS DE CINE* (JUNE 1981)

At the dawn of cinema, all films were "short," no more than ten minutes or the length of one reel. The short film was simply another part of an entertainment program descended from vaudeville that also featured newsreels, cartoons, and live performances. Eventually, narratives lengthened to cover several reels to become the "feature film" and short-film exhibition was relegated to exhibition on television and at elite film festivals.[1] In the process, film criticism has given almost exclusive attention to the feature-length film, roughly regarded as anything longer than seventy minutes. There is no obvious answer as to why this is so, perhaps stemming from film criticism's origins in literary criticism, where an author's larger written works (novels, plays, and the like) are still privileged over shorter writing. Short writing has generally been regarded as a vehicle for experimentation, an alternate to the assumed canonical complexities of larger works. Nevertheless, the short story is still recognized as a genre in and of itself, a type of fiction that requires different talents from the novel and has its own set of prominent craftspeople, such as Katherine Anne Porter, Raymond Carver, and Julio Cortázar.[2]

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While literary studies has created a space (if marginalized) for the study of shorter works, cinema studies has largely ignored the short film.[3] Indeed, by the time cinema studies came into being in the 1960s, the short film had already long been seen as little more than a supplement to a feature presentation. Someone reads a short story for the sake of the story itself, even if it is packaged as part of a collection or featured in a magazine; rarely does a spectator enter a theater for the sole purpose of screening a single short. Because most filmgoers are paying an entrance or viewing fee to watch films, a short film might be seen by the general viewer as too small or too experimental of a narrative for the money. Nevertheless, the short has often been an important first step for directors in the filmmaking process, precisely because its length renders financing its production less prohibitive.

The funding issue has enabled the short film to become key to the development of emergent national cinemas worldwide. Such development occurred in Peru when the Film Law of 1972 spawned a small, lucrative industry devoted exclusively to shorts. It is worth noting here that I have up until this point used the phrase "Peruvian film *tradition*" while avoiding the more commonly used "Peruvian film *industry*." Douglas Gomery notes: "in most of the world cinema is first of all organized as an industry, that is as a collection of businesses seeking profits through film production, film distribution, and the presentation of movies to audience."[4] Within this definition, the issue of *collectivity*, the notion that a group of film-production businesses together form a sustained economic grouping, prevents us from talking about a Peruvian film *industry*. Put quite simply, there has never been enough feature film production to sustain any collection of film-oriented business on feature films alone; if any have succeeded in remaining solvent for a period of time, these businesses have tended to operate independently and literally from film to film, generating neither sufficient product nor profit to be considered a viable "industry." Short films, however, are a completely different story: following the Film Law of 1972, literally hundreds of film companies sprang up to produce films that they knew would make a profit, thanks to a circuit of "obligatory exhibition" that every film was subjected to.

Though it eventually cannibalized itself by the early 1980s through sheer numbers and a lack of quality control, the short-film process allowed several directors to begin their craft and develop their confidence so that substantial feature film production emerged as early as five years after the law's inception. The group of directors that started making films during this period have been called "the Lombardi generation" after the most recognizable and influential feature

film director this experiment produced. As a legitimate, serious film publication, *Hablemos de cine* did not initially regard short cinema as a valid medium for study, devoting only a few early articles to the format. The massive amount of product resulting from the Film Law of 1972, however, left the journal with no choice but to seriously consider short films[5] within the context of a nascent Peruvian cinema.

Hablemos de cine and the Short-Film Contest of 1965

Early on, *Hablemos de cine* studied short films made in Peru as an important step in examining the concept of national cinema. One of the first major cinematic events that *Hablemos de cine* participated in was a local short-film contest and festival sponsored by the Casa de la Cultura del Perú in July 1965. The publication was still only a few months into mimeographed publication and the editors were still considered little more than "young upstarts" without any real credentials (this explains why they were not involved in either the administration or the judging of this contest). Though it was hoped that the contest would spark activity and interest in filmmaking within Peru, the contest was an isolated event that had little impact on national cinema development. This interaction was nevertheless one of the few times that the journal chose to focus on the short-film format and reveals why examining short films is relevant when looking at developing national cinemas.

Coverage of the contest occupied most of volume 12 (July 31, 1965), complete with an editorial emphasizing its importance, reviews of some of the films screened, and an interview with one of the winners. In retrospect, the event is presented through the writing as something much bigger than it was: as *Hablemos de cine*'s authors readily observe in the editorial, other local press did not cover the contest, nor was it greatly advertised. The films themselves were not prime examples with exceptionally high production values, resulting in a lukewarm reception from the local audience. Evidence for this can be found in the convoluted phrasing used in some of the reviews, where the inexperienced editors painstakingly searched to find good things to say. For example, about Wenceslao Molina's *Ayacucho and Holy Week*: "A documentary that achieves the goal set in the title, though somewhat conventionally. Its vision is cold, contrasting with the fervent and sometimes jarring regionalist narration we heard."[6]

This lack of experience also contributed to a somewhat skewed, incomplete, and subjective coverage of the festival. The journal admitted to having not caught the first day of screenings (which was apparently not advertised) and tried to

excuse their naïveté by noting that the films were shown back-to-back, with little time for anyone to take sufficient notes. (The end of the section of reviews mentions that they believed their reviews to be more "informative" than "critical.")[7] Nevertheless, the four editors[8] recognized that the festival, as the first of its kind to be held in Lima, must be shown support if local filmmaking were to begin in earnest in Peru. For them, attendance at the festival signified support for a larger project that this festival was meant to inspire: "A good phrase to summarize our impression of the festival would be 'Peruvian cinema in the works.'"[9] The journal *did* recognize, particularly as there were no feature films to write about, that short films indicated the first steps toward future, larger projects. Throughout the summaries of the festival, the editors stressed the nationalist aspect of the event: "We promised to attend the festival as, without a doubt, it meant taking the pulse of and confronting the current state of *our* cinema."[10] Though few of the films showed the beginning of national cinema, the participants had hopes for both the contest ("we applaud the idea of repeating this event next year") and the expected industry to follow ("It is not too optimistic to trust that 'in the future, Peruvian and Brazilian cinema can and will be at the forefront of Latin American cinema,' to quote César Villanueva, director of *Kukuli* [1961] and *Jarawi* [1966]").[11] Such expectations were overconfident: the festival did not return the following year, nor did Peru ever develop an industry even close in stature to the Brazilian.

Among other things, the journal recognized the importance of establishing relationships with the other filmmakers at the festival. The festival winner, *cusqueño* César Villanueva, who made *Estampas del Caranaval de Kanas* (Scenes from the Kanas Carnival) along with co-director Eulogio Nishiyama, granted a lengthy interview that *Hablemos de cine* indicated it would publish later, though this never occurred.[12] Instead, the festival notes were accompanied by an available interview with the second-place winner, Jorge Volkert, who had directed a short entitled *Forjadores de mañana* (Forgers of Tomorrow), which received a relatively glowing review from the journal upon its first screening. The interview with Volkert was equally amicable, which might be due to the fact that, as the introduction stated, he was "more than a stranger, but rather a friend of *Hablemos de cine*."[13] The staff also admitted that there were very few "good" films shown at the festival, so that it was relatively easy for both the judges and the staff to agree on the winners.

Choosing to focus on *Forjadores de mañana* becomes fortuitous for the journal in that it happened also to be the only film that would eventually travel to the Viña del Mar film festival in 1967. There, filmmakers from around the region

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were exposed for the first time to each other's work and the situations in which their films were made. Viewed alongside other, more sophisticated films, however, *Forjadores* was seen as a disaster that left the Peruvians ashamed. Villanueva's boastful statement that Peru would "lead the way with Brazil" in the arena of Latin American cinema proved to be a gross overstatement by the editors.[14]

Semilla

Hablemos de cine did not review or even discuss short films for another two and a half years. The next short discussed, however, was a major undertaking: volume 38 (November–December 1967) featured a large article called "Chronicle of a Film Shoot: One Million Eyes (Men on the Lake)" (*Crónica de rodaje: 1,000,000 de ojos [hombres del lago]*)." The article is an in-depth investigation of the day-to-day activities of Pablo Guevara's short film *Semilla* (*Seed*), a unique, personal retrospective of Third World filmmaking written by *Hablemos* editor, Juan M. Bullitta.

Filmed long before the rise of the short-film industry inspired by the Film Law of 1972 but following the journal's encounter at the Viña del Mar film festival in 1967, the film combined elements of documentary and fiction filmmaking in telling the story of a young boy and his father as he first prepares for a folkloric dance event, only to find out the truth about his mother's death.[15] Cited early in the publication run as the most eager of the four founding members to create films rather than just critique them, Juan Bullitta finally got his opportunity by acting as assistant director to Guevara on *Semilla*. "Chronicle of a Film Shoot" detailed his privileged, inside perspective on the making of this short. Somewhat verbose in his reviews, Bullitta's poetic writing style here accentuates the unique quality of this chronicle, offering a perspective otherwise invisible both to the *limeño* reading public and to filmmakers abroad. This writing exercise combined elements of a general travelogue, a filmmaker's diary, and instructions for making a film in Peru in the 1960s.

Bullitta began with a description of Puno, the locale chosen for shooting the film. A city high in the mountains, on the border with Bolivia at Lake Titicaca, this would have been a well-known geographical location for most *limeños*, though unlikely to have been visited by the reading public.[16] Trying to present an objective perspective, Bullitta wrote as both an eloquent tour guide ("The great monotony of this landscape, its horizontal straightness, its flatness, can drown a man born in the sensual and cynical cities founded by the Spanish conquistador near the pool of the Pacific") and a filmmaker-in-training ("Too much light [ideal,

on the other hand, for our job]").[17] Informing the readers of the components of the filmmaking crew and then the differences between the nature of documentary and fiction films, Bullitta explored how this particular film could be viewed within the construction of New Cinema as seen at the Viña del Mar festival:

> *We insist that Peru should look to documentaries as a first step to more complex or ambitious productions in the field of narrative development. We find an example in [Brazilian]* Cinema Nôvo, *to cite one tradition particularly similar to ours. Such cinema will discipline our filmmakers. Their films confront a complex, fascinating reality that permits them to practice directing natural elements as basic vehicles in fictional cinema. In a new cinema like ours, necessarily tied to reality, we must avoid the external details of improbability that contribute to a false sense of cinema. I believe that instead we would prefer to be authentic. For example, César Miró's grandson turning into a ghettoized child, overstylized in Robles Godoy's* En la selva no hay estrellas.[18]

On one hand, Bullitta is never overcritical of either the filmmaking process or the film itself, naturally being too attached to it as a member of its crew. At the same time, his observations are colored and contextualized by his prior experience as a critic, taking a stab once again at the constant Peruvian auteur-in-the-worst-sense Robles Godoy.

Bullitta made several assertions based on his experience about the potential nature of national cinema. As noted above, he favored initial training in aspects of documentary filmmaking. (Colombian director Carlos Mayolo would later note in volume 72 [November 1980] that most Peruvian shorts that followed the Film Law of 1972 were indeed documentaries whereas the majority of Colombian films resulting from a similar law there were based in fiction: "I have noticed greater care [by the Peruvians] in narrative construction, more detailed scripts and production professionalism.")[19] Bullitta also commented on Peruvian geography as a valuable asset in the development of national cinema:

> *After having traveled and filmed in only one region of a Peruvian province, I can affirm that our cinema does not need studios with high-priced sets and scenarios. The chaotic, exuberant geography of the country constitutes more of a generous, rich variety of natural settings than we could possibly*

> *imagine. Peruvian filmmaking, taking advantage of the ever-advancing techniques of filming, must prioritize the external qualities, in the beauty of the Peruvian landscapes. . . . An earthy world that will shake the content of the first "greats" American cinema offers (Walsh, Ford, Vidor, etc.), still virgin to the world's cameras. We should be the first to reveal the physical nature of our fatherland. The ideal motto for national cinema should be: Peru as a film set.*[20]

Although *Hablemos de cine* was explicitly dedicated to criticism and not necessarily aspects of production, it is still somewhat surprising that this was the only production experience offered to its audience (particularly because potential filmmakers from Peru were also likely to be cine-club members interested in the critical perspective of the journal). For example, the journal does not go on set with any of the feature productions, including those of their colleague Francisco Lombardi. Bullitta's account remains one of the only first-person published perspectives of filmmaking practice in Peru—and in Latin America—in the late 1960s.

The fanfare attributed by *Hablemos de cine* to *Semilla* upon its release a year later was unprecedented for a short film, but not so surprising considering that both Bullitta and Guevara were *hablemistas* themselves. It is also no surprise to find that, when the film was eventually completed, the journal reviewed the film, breaking an unarticulated precedent of not writing about short films. César Linares's review in volume 45 (January–February 1969) was published under the section of reviews called "En pocas palabras" (In brief), where the longest reviews are only allotted a half-page of space. The tone of the review is naturally adulatory:

> *Pablo Guevara's* Semilla *widens the panorama of our meager, checkered cinema. In 1969, the film is most significant regarding future possibilities concerning how to* view *our situation. His film does not attempt to reinvent the wheel, but it demonstrates that it is possible to abandon the old, ingenious folklorism and esoteric formalism. . . . The film is, along with Chambi's* Estampas del Carnaval de Kanas *[sic], the best film made in Peru up until now—and that includes the features. And by saying that, I am neither exaggerating nor being a fanatic.*[21]

Although surely Guevara's colleagues at *Hablemos de cine* were proud of and excited by his accomplishment, Linares's comment that the film was the best

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that Peruvian film had to offer is not so outlandish, particularly given the examples of national cinema at the time. Since the journal's beginning, the Peruvian films made were either beset with overartistic auteurist characteristics (the first two films by Armando Robles Godoy), embarrassing co-productions (*Intimidad de los parques*) or, most recently, low-quality comedy vehicles for television stars (*El embajador y yo*).[22] As a member of the journal's staff, Guevara was aware of (even if he didn't necessarily agree with)[23] the ideas about national cinema that concerned *Hablemos de cine* and, in the process, the very cine-club audience to which the journal catered and before whom his film would eventually be screened. (The review noted that the film was screened at the Cine Arte club affiliated with the Universidad de San Marcos.) It is therefore logical that, in the journal's eyes, Guevara would produce *exactly* what the journal was looking for in a national film, even if such a film was not a feature.

Short-Film Production Following the Film Law of 1972

Semilla, *Forjadores de mañana*, and *Estampas del Carnaval de Kanas* were only considered at all by *Hablemos de cine* because they represented what the journal considered to be quality Peruvian filmmaking, a standard that features like *Jarawi* and *En la selva no hay estrellas* did not live up to. Even these very brief parlays into short films only further served to indicate that Peruvian films remained isolated events unconnected to a larger sense of "national cinema." Despite significantly more impressive technical and narrative abilities that were acknowledged by critics familiar with the cine-club scene, none of these shorts would or could be seen by enough Peruvian spectators to create a momentum of interest in pictures beyond the popular comedies that used their television stars to draw substantial box office.[24]

The Film Law of 1972 radically changed the landscape of Peruvian exhibition and filmmaking by mandating that every commercially screened non-Peruvian feature must be accompanied by a nationally produced short. In addition, each film (short of feature) would go through a circuit of "obligatory exhibition" (*exhibición obligatorio*), traveling through all theaters within Peru.[25] The law was sharply criticized by many (including, initially, those at *Hablemos de cine*) as placing too much of an emphasis on the commercial aspect of filmmaking, noting that the provision that stimulated the short-film industry only served to give money to the producers, not the filmmakers themselves. Nevertheless, the law suddenly guaranteed an exhibition space beyond the elite film festival or cine-club crowd that, at least in principle, was geared also to ensure future production. At the same

time, it assured a market even for experiments in filmmaking, allowing many filmmakers to try something new and even fail with a film as part of a learning process. As such, the program functioned as a de facto film school in a location where none existed.

Although it provided for a regulatory commission (COPROCI, the Cinematic Production Commission), the law did not specify how films should be approved; nor did it make any provisions for quality or content of such films. Ultimately deciding to accept virtually all the short films produced in the first few years, this process unfortunately resulted in widespread corruption: the large majority of these short films were quickly and poorly produced and released to theaters while their profits were not recycled into the creation of more films, which is what the law was originally intended to support. Because a large amount of truly abysmal product went into the system, the public generally viewed short films as an annoyance, separate from—and always inferior to—the feature film experience; "quality" shorts therefore suffered by being associated with the negative stigma.

Though short-film production started to increase within the first year following the law's passage, *Hablemos de cine* did not immediately react to the beginning of the short-film explosion. In addition to the relative disdain for short films already discussed, the journal by this point was going through a number of economic and staff-oriented difficulties that resulted in its periodicity being slowed down to an annual rate of publication. Because the number of shorts produced per year grew so rapidly, it became impossible for the journal to track and review each individual film. Such delayed frequency in publication, however, did permit the journal to begin to track certain filmmaking trends and gave it a tremendous amount of product from which to choose their topics of general discussion.

Volume 67 (1974) exposed some of the problems with the general quality of the shorts as they pertained to both national cinema and a general Latin American identity. This topic also provided interviews with four of the best short-film directors (according to the journal) who had emerged over the two years since the creation of the Film Law of 1972: Arturo Sinclair, highly respected for making one of the first fiction shorts, *Agua salada* (Saltwater, 1974); Nelson García, former editor-in-chief of a short-lived competing film journal *Pantalla*, but now on the staff at *Hablemos*; Francisco Lombardi, another *Hablemos* staff member and one of the more prolific short-film directors; and Nora de Izcué, graduate of Armando Robles Godoy's film workshop and one of the first women to direct any type of film in Peru. Their films varied widely in theme and technique. García's *Bonbon Coronado, ¡Campeón!* (1974) was an experimental film using publicity and stock

photographs to portray the life of an Afro-Peruvian boxer. De Izcué's first short, *Filmación*, was a "making-of" featurette based on her mentor Robles Godoy's *La muralla verde* (1970), but her most acclaimed medium-length film, *Runan Caycu* (1973), was a documentary based on the history of pro-agrarian reform insurgencies in and around Cuzco.

Because the filmmakers benefited from the law, their opinions contrasted sharply with those of the critics. As members of the journal's staff, García and Lombardi were asked to comment on the relevance of their lives as critics to the act of filmmaking in Peru. García responded that criticism offered "an opportunity to theorize and learn the craft of cinema [*el quehacer cinematográfico*]. Which is almost the opposite of actually *making* cinema."[26] By being a critic in Peru, Lombardi recognized that his films would necessarily be derivative of films from abroad as that was the majority of product he had been exposed to: "[To] some extent, it is somewhat castrating to have been a film critic in an underdeveloped country, which lacks a cinematic infrastructure and history. A good part of your cinematic stimuli are foreign and to some extent correspond to a different situation. . . . Having been a film critic simply makes you feel tremendously the underdevelopment that, in some way, we're all placed into."[27] Aware that the majority of short-film producers were generating and distributing shorts to take advantage of the Film Law, *Hablemos de cine* selected these four directors because they demonstrated a knowledge of both the Peruvian and larger Latin American communities, enough to attempt to place themselves within these contexts. Nora de Izcué's statements on the working class's lack of access to filmmaking could have come from any of the New Latin American Cinema practitioners:

> *The problem with Peruvian Cinema is found within the essence of our cultural structure. . . . Who has the possibilities of making films? What films do we see? Why are films made? Who holds the monopolies? Perhaps the key to the problem lies in knowing who in Peru is going to express themselves through cinema. Maybe only a few privileged filmmakers? Cinema continues to be an island, while other forms of communication are already more accessible. . . . Cinema continues to be closed to most, it continues to be the method of expression for very few.*[28]

Similarly, de Izcué doesn't see a place for auteurist cinema within Peruvian national cinema when asked about the films of Sinclair and Robles Godoy. She argues that such a concept "may work in another context, but not in ours" as,

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without much product to work with, even Robles Godoy could not be considered an auteur.

The Encyclopedia of Short Filmmaking

The short-film explosion did not wane: instead, it grew to a point of crisis when too many films were produced to guarantee their exhibition, creating a bottleneck situation where many completed shorts found their release delayed. With no money coming in from the shorts, and with the onset of an international recession of the 1970s, many short-film production companies went bankrupt. At the same time, the successful completion of several feature films in 1977 by filmmakers trained on short films forced the journal to reevaluate its opinion of the short format.

The publication of volume 70 (April 1979) demonstrated a significant ideological shift concerning short films with the first part of a "Diccionario del cortometraje peruano" (Encyclopedia of Peruvian short filmmaking), one of the only written records concerning short films made under the Film Law of 1972.[29] The most difficult task involved determining the judgment parameters for inclusion in the encyclopedia: not all films were of sufficiently acceptable quality for consideration, nor was it easy to figure out exactly who was responsible for a particular short. The journal's training in auteur theory (reminiscent of the French and Spanish journals) broke down; as the introduction states, the shorts "have often been executed by groups that piecemealed their material together . . . which lends a standard, opaque tone to a large percentage of the shorts and makes it difficult to find significant differences among many directors."[30] Naturally, the large number of films produced over the previous seven years made it impossible for the journal to cover every short film that had been produced. One criterion for inclusion was having produced two films following the creation of the Film Law of 1972, thereby critically assessing the effects of the law first and foremost on the question of industry.

In the history of *Hablemos de cine*, only the in-depth retrospective of American filmmakers (published in 1968 and 1969 in volumes 39 through 46) matched this serious, detailed exploration of the Peruvian short film. This attention is particularly surprising as such a comprehensive study was never attempted with the features (perhaps because all the features released at this time got their own individual reviews). The publication of the retrospective supports the notion that the short film was relevant to national cinema; in fact, it was the most prominent mode of cinematic production at the time, far more significant than the scant number of features.

All this is not to say that the critics were satisfied to examine shorts on their own terms. On the contrary, the editors still privileged the feature film: the retrospective tracked the fifty filmmakers that most showed promise to make the jump or had already started producing features. Discussions of the shorts within the pages of *Hablemos de cine* generally addressed the issue of progressing to feature-length films. Coverage of the short films validated their position as mere experimental "practice" for larger works. Here, the shorts cannot even be referred to as "calling cards" as the large majority were not created to attract funding. In a roundtable discussion in volume 73–74 (June 1981), the consensus among the *hablemistas* stressed the importance of the Film Law of 1972 in allowing budding filmmakers to make mistakes and learn, but Reynaldo Ledgard noted that "a system is needed to ensure the passage from short- to medium-length films and from there to features . . . as has occurred over the last few years." Though this progression had been a common path for directors (notably Francisco Lombardi), other staff members pointed out that these steps were neither guaranteed nor fostered by the Film Law. Federico de Cárdenas further commented that "the method of practical cinematic experience in our country has exclusively been the short film, which is the medium from which all the current filmmakers have emerged."[31] It is important to note that very few of the directors included in the retrospective went on to actually make features; nonetheless, a significant number of this group—including Felipe Degregori, Alberto "Chicho" Durant, Federico García, Luis Llosa, Francisco Lombardi, Kurt and Christine Rosenthal, Arturo Sinclair, Augusto Tamayo, and Jorge Volkert—did accomplish this goal, making this retrospective a valuable resource in expanding the critical trajectory of their work.

The "Diccionario" was split between two issues, with twenty-five filmmakers profiled in volume 70 (April 1979) and another twenty-five in volume 71 (April 1980), covering forty-six individuals and four "collective" groups who, for ideological reasons, chose to share or downplay individual authorship of their work. The individual entries/reviews were written by eight of the current editors.[32] Of the individuals profiled, eight were current or past members of the *Hablemos* staff (Bullitta, de Cárdenas, García, Guevara, Huayhuaca, Ledgard, Lombardi, and Tamayo), though the introduction to the retrospective clearly stated at the beginning that no editor would review his own work.

The journal made a significant effort to not merely pick the fifty "best" filmmakers, but to get a cross-section of short-film activity within Peru. Several names were obvious inclusions as they had already made features by this point: Armando Robles Godoy, for example, had taken a break from feature filmmaking to concen-

trate on shorts—though as Ricardo Bedoya's entry points out, the shorts served merely to encapsulate in smaller form "the same vices, the same pretensions, the same tired idea he postulates that montage is the essential element of cinematic language . . . montage which, of course, doesn't naturally signify [anything]."[33]

The summaries for the editorial staff included in the retrospective were brief but critical, providing a quick summary of various films' plotlines (if one existed) as well as technical information about form across all the director's short-film oeuvre, treating each candidate as a small auteur study. Often, the entries provided insight as to what other kinds of films were being produced at the time, such as Juan Bullitta's brief summary for Juan A. Caycho exemplifying what Bullitta called "folkloric cinema":

> *At the edges of cinema examining Peruvian folkloric themes, one of the most exploited as a result of the Film Law of 1972, a genuine national folkloric cinema exists. Its typicality, if we may call it that, derives from three elements: the intensity of the criollo, a primitive sense of both cinematic language and technical abilities that would make the Lumière brothers blush, and completely prosaic film imagery. Caycho's filmmaking functions as a perfect example of this genre in the worst of all possible ways.*[34]

Despite this fairly negative outlook, Caycho is not representative of the poor quality of most of the films produced; that honor went to W. S. Palacios, whose short films were underwritten primarily by the governmental tourism board COTUR. According to Isaac León, Palacios's work "reaped benefits for we're not quite sure whom. In any case, the films plague the Peruvian state or, more directly, the cinemagoer. . . . [These] shorts are notorious precursors to the archeological-folkloric plundering and foolishness to which we have been subjected over the most recent years."[35] Ernesto Sprinckmoller, who had been derided in the journal's discussions concerning the shorts, was cited as one of the biggest beneficiaries of the cinematic law without ever having produced a "quality" film. Reviewer Ricardo Bedoya called Sprinckmoller and his colleague Rodolfo Bedoya "*cortometrajistas 'salchicheros'*" (sausage-making short-film directors), for films edited together in a seemingly haphazard manner, compiled using ideas readily in agreement with the reactionary Morales Bermúdez government in place in 1975. Despite the lack of inventiveness, the Film Law nevertheless assured them a substantial sum of money.[36]

Several entries note the presence of various filmmaking situations that would otherwise have been even more marginalized in the growing industry. *Hablemos*

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de cine surprisingly labeled a number of collective efforts under their group names instead of by individual directors, undoubtedly much to the groups' pleasure, whose identities were solidified as a collective. These efforts examined included a number of leftist organizations (including Liberación sin rodeos and Marcha) producing shorts reminiscent of Cine Liberación, the famed Argentine collective that produced *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1967–69). Isaac León gave a favorable review to director Nora de Izcué, one of the only prolific female directors who nonetheless struggled to produce her films independently. Though de Izcué's shorts were mostly geared toward children, León noted that her techniques were experimental "in the best sense of the word, unlike those of her first instructor, Robles Godoy, from whom she has been lucky not to inherit any of his stylistic displays: the path from *Filmación* to her shorts in the Amazon effectively demonstrates this."[37] Likewise, although he had only made one film (*Facundo*) and hence was an anomaly to be included in the summary at all, Fernando Gagliuffi is commended by Nelson García for his work in animation, a truly underrepresented form in national cinema:

> *The animated film has had limited success in Peru, having been relegated almost entirely to the realm of advertising. Nonetheless, that is not to say that animation has been shamefully represented, but animators—almost all graduates from programs abroad [as few are offered here in Peru]—have had to completely reinvent the necessary specialized technical equipment like building the animation table needed to work. It seems to me that these efforts have sapped all of their creative energy. These initial endeavors are nonetheless paramount if there is to be a future for Peruvian animation.*[38]

García's comment was unfortunately prescient: only a handful of animated shorts have been produced over the thirty years since he wrote this entry, having largely returned to the realm of advertising; the sole feature animated film ever produced in Peru, *Dragones: Destino de fuego* (Dragons: Destiny of Fire, directed by Eduardo Schuldt and notably cowritten by Lombardi scripter Giovanna Pollarolo), would not be produced until 2006.[39]

A Parallel Context: Colombia

As the journal turned to other Latin American cinemas late in their publication run, it found that the situation in Colombia paralleled the Peruvian experience with short films. Both countries established laws in 1972 to stimulate the industry

that involved mandatory exhibition of short films, a percentage of whose ticket sales would return to the production companies that made the films. In Peru, this was called "obligatory exhibition," while in Colombia it was called "surcharge cinema" (*cine de sobreprecio*). The principal apparent difference between the two countries' short films, as Carlos Mayolo noted in an interview in late 1980, was that the Colombians "developed the fictional short before the Peruvians. . . . But you are also getting to that point now in Peru. What particularly interests me is that both of our film laws have similar problems and deficiencies."[40]

Concurrent with the release of the second part of its short-film encyclopedia in volume 71 (1980), *Hablemos de cine* also published several interviews with Colombian filmmakers. Considering the Peruvians had not seen—and probably would not get a chance to see—the films that would be discussed in the article (a point of irritation for Isaac León, who wrote the introduction), publishing the interviews at this point invited comparisons between Peruvian and Colombian cinematic situations. However, while the Peruvians were shown to have embraced the system of "obligatory exhibition" by using shorts as trial runs for larger productions, *Hablemos de cine* selected the three interviews compiled for the Colombian section to represent several perspectives of the situation, each filmmaker finding his or her own way to work within the current cinematic climate in Colombia—even while criticizing it directly—instead of against it.

The documentary short team of Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva were known for two powerful short films depicting rural working conditions: *Chircales* (Brickmakers, 1972) and *Campesinos* (Peasants, 1975). Such socially conscious topics, however, would have to be compromised to fit into the *sobreprecio* system. Rather than do this, Rodríguez and Silva chose to maintain a distance by financing their films completely independently. Both filmmakers asserted that more than being merely "a type of official filter," the Colombian law (much like the Peruvian law) stimulated filmmaking that was not necessarily artistic, as it was purely artisanal: "People are making movies as if they were shoes. Sure, cinema is only a product, but one that can stimulate ideologies, right? In cultural terms, what has resulted from the *sobreprecio* has been absolutely miserable." Choosing to work outside *cine de sobreprecio* did not mean that their films did not find an audience: "Our films, sometimes referred to as marginalized, underground, or something else, are shown all over the place: universities, unions, cinematheques, etc. . . . We don't hide ourselves or make clandestine cinema."[41] Though there is little indication that Peruvians felt this way toward their own "obligatory exhibition" standards, Silva and Rodríguez served as viable examples for Peruvian

filmmakers who might not have wanted to work within the system set up by the government.

Working effectively inside the law's parameters, Ciro Durán produced some of the more popular features of the 1970s. While perhaps not the most revolutionary filmmaker—León and other filmmakers criticized his *Gamin* (1979), a feature documentary concerning children from the streets, for being overmanipulative—Durán argued that "quality films" could still be produced under the *sobreprecio* system. Nevertheless, at the time of the interview's publication in 1980, the system was collapsing: the major distribution company, Cine Colombia, had decided to buy all the shorts at a fixed price and pocket the surcharge that was supposed to go to the producer. Though shorts were still being screened under the law, Durán acknowledged that the national focus had turned almost exclusively to the feature and that it seemed the development of an industry had stalled: "the distributors, as well as the importers of foreign product and the exhibitors who profit from it, have always been against the development of a film industry in Colombia. The recently created Cooperative [of Film Producers] was developed as a response to the degeneration of the short-film market when distributors and exhibitors took more and more money away from the producers."[42] Though the system worked for Durán to "reach the largest audience possible," he also recognized that the *sobreprecio* system had reached an impasse between development of an industry and satisfaction of a monopolistic distribution system that preferred the status quo.

Carlos Mayolo and Luis Ospina found a middle ground between these two positions on the Colombian model, working within the *sobreprecio* system while simultaneously commenting on it. They achieved this to great success with *Agarrando pueblo* (Conning the Public, 1977), which, as they put it, "tried to comment on the many types of documentary shorts made under the *sobreprecio* system" by showing that, when the subject wasn't depressing enough, the filmmakers would stage it to be even more depressing. Ospina noted, however, that the film actually "sparked increased feature film production. That's what the industry is like now. People have discovered that the *sobreprecio* system is not that great because the distributors purchase the shorts at a fixed price."[43] The situation within the country forced cinematic activity to turn to features—but though established filmmakers could do this, such action did little for creating an industry per se.

The Omnibus Film Alternative

For a very brief period, several Peruvian filmmakers experimented with another format: the omnibus film, which bundled several medium-length (usually 20–30

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minutes each) films, each made by a different filmmaker, to make one feature-length production.[44] Because such films were neither shorts nor true features, *Hablemos de cine*'s varied responses to the three Peruvian anthology films demonstrate the confusion critics faced when encountering this particular format.

The review of the first omnibus film, *Cuentos inmorales* (Immoral Tales, 1978: fig. 11), was actually split into four separate reviews of the individual films written by four different staff members and published in volume 70 (April 1979). While providing the distinct reviews is logical—each part, after all, is a different film in its own right—in practice this was somewhat unprecedented. *Hablemos de cine* had encountered the omnibus film early in its publication run in volume 14 (September 1, 1965) when Federico de Cárdenas reviewed the Italian omnibus film *Alta infedelità* (High Infidelity, 1964), directed by Mario Manicelli, Elio Petri, Franco Rossi, and Luciano Salce. That review was not broken up into its different parts; rather, the film was written up as a single feature, although de Cárdenas broke down the merits of each segment separately. The impact of the short-film explosion, however, had an obvious impact on the method of reviewing Peruvian omnibus films, which were treated with more care than had been the French and Italian predecessors. Directors such as Fellini and Antonioni had other features that they had directed entirely by themselves and that were seen by other journals as significant works of cinema; thus their shorter films could be viewed as "minor" works. Peruvian cinema, however, did not have such a history and, except for Lombardi, none of these directors had previously directed a larger work, making these *mediometrajes* their most significant pieces to date.

Rather than view the four films together within a single constructed piece, each shorter film could also be configured into the trajectories of the individual directors. That three of the four—José Carlos Huayhuaca, Augusto Tamayo San Román, and Francisco Lombardi—were either present or prior staff members of the journal also supports the idea that the journal wished to assist in elevating their colleagues to the status of auteur. Constantín Carvallo's review of Huayhuaca's *Intriga familiar* (Familiar Intrigue) cited earlier declarations made by Juan Bullitta that "Huayhuaca's films have become a novelty for our market: the 'capacity to observe women with desire,'" as if Huayhuaca had an extensive history of filmmaking.[45] Likewise, Ricardo Bedoya's review of Lombardi's *Los amigos* (The Friends) starts by stating the film "is a clear step forward with respect to the partial achievements of *Muerte al amanecer*," thereby establishing both short and feature films as part of Lombardi's filmographic trajectory.[46] The film is a clear middle ground for the journal: the overall film's length elevated it to a

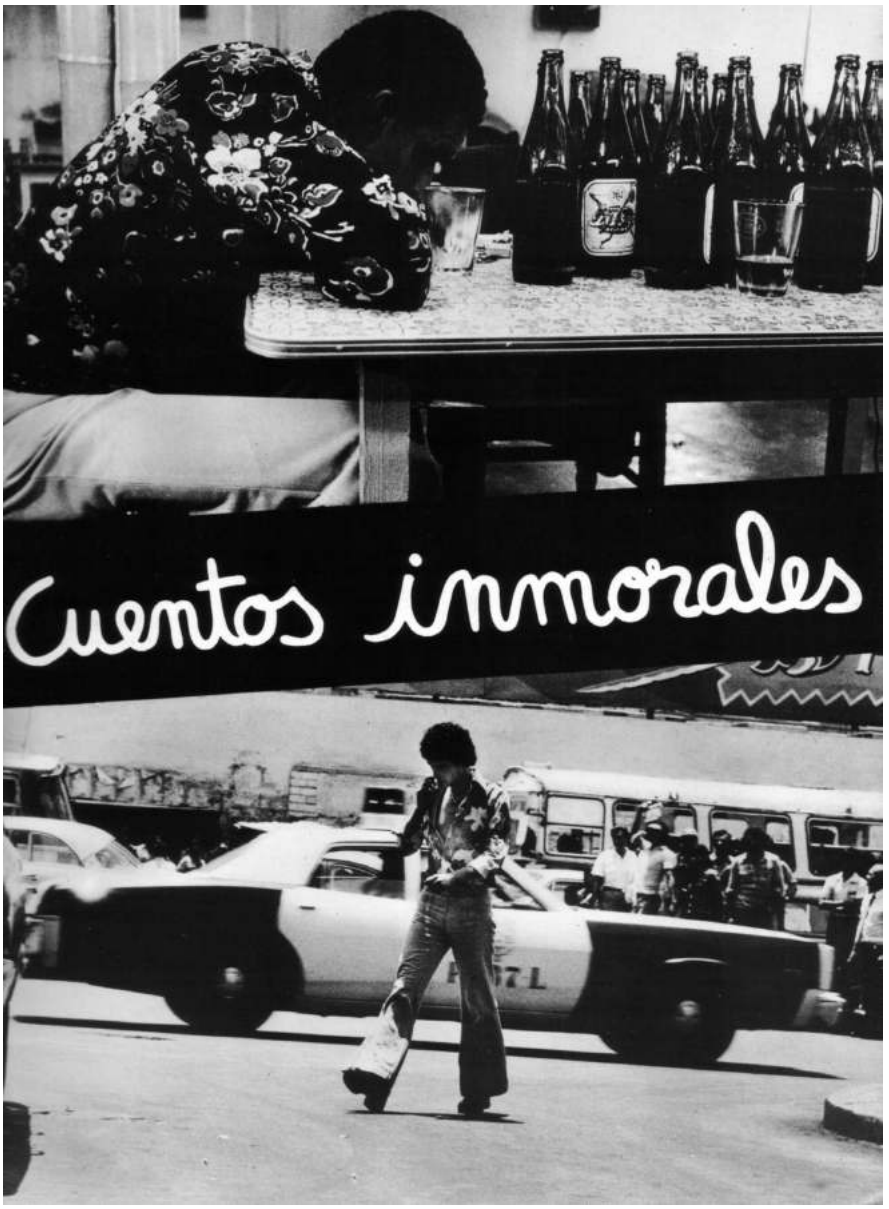

Figure 11: Poster from *Cuentos inmorales* (1978). Courtesy of the Filmoteca PUCP.

status whereby each short was given a substantial review of almost a page each, something only previously done for a short film with *Semilla* back in volume 45. Nevertheless, none of these pieces were considered to have the same value as a feature. Many of these reviews contain a line similar to Carvallo's close concerning *Intriga familiar*: "In reality, we should expect that [Huayhuaca's] initial attempt at storytelling, in which he has committed a number of sins, serves as a lesson of sorts and that *La pensión* (The pension), his first feature just announced,[47] demonstrates to the attentive viewer the best of what some of his [other] shorts have hinted at."[48]

The next omnibus film, *Aventuras prohibidas* (Prohibited Adventures, 1980), was treated differently by *Hablemos de cine*: each individual film was given a separate review, but there was also an introduction treating the entire film as a single work. A single author, Juan Bullitta, as opposed to different reviewers for each short, wrote all the parts of this review. While recognizing the opportunities of the genre, Bullitta criticized the "new national interest" in omnibus films, specifying that only the Italians had actually succeeded at this type of filmmaking:

> *It is not easy to maintain the unity in diversity; that is to say, to create a seamless product that satisfies the spectators. Most commonly, the final product results in imagery and narrative that tends to wander and ramble. This is surely the case with* Aventuras prohibidas. *In this case, the completely personal preoccupations and options of the filmmakers are made more obvious. The title only serves as a weak unifying element. And in the background, within the structure of the market in which these films are offered to the spectator, the episode film finds it very difficult to be put forward and reach mass acceptance.*[49]

From the perspective of the filmmaker, the opportunity to expand a narrative beyond the ten-minute limit prescribed by the Film Law of 1972 for shorts—but still with less risk than a feature—was a definite advantage. But the oversaturation of short films in the Peruvian market did not encourage spectators to want to pay to view more shorts, despite the potential draw of urban subject matter directed by proven short-film directors.

Bullitta's article continued to espouse that short- and medium-length films were seen as substandard to the feature-length film, arguing that in the Peruvian market where shorts were omnipresent and national features were finally (if slowly) being produced and released, the middle ground of the omnibus would get

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lost in the process. Bullilta noted that the Peruvian public's rejection of *Aventuras prohibidas* was unfortunate as Luis Llosa's film, *Doble juego* (Double Game) was technically advanced (if insipid in its narrative) and Huayhuaca's film was the most interesting urban film produced up to that time, comparable to Lombardi's work.[50] Huayhuaca's *Historia de Fiorella y el Hombre Araña* (The Story of Fiorella and Spider-Man) followed a coming-of-age story of two teenagers dealing with a possible pregnancy and the resulting illegal abortion, then visited them many years later leading very different lives. The first part of the film was edited in a very fragmented style, while the second was much more linear.

The Peruvian industry only produced one other omnibus film, 1981's *Una raya más al tigre* (Yet Another Stripe on the Tiger), with a short film each by Argentine-born Oscar Kantor, German documentarians Curt and Christine Rosenthal, and Peruvian Francisco Salomón. Considering that Kantor, the most accomplished of these directors, was known primarily for comedic features starring television personalities such as *El embajador y yo*, it comes as no surprise that *Hablemos de cine* was merciless in its review. Reynaldo Ledgard clearly stated that the problem with the film did not necessarily lay in the format but in the individual films themselves; that they did not relate to one another made it all the more inexcusable:

> *This would seem to be due to the marked erosion of the omnibus film as a genre: it is as if this way of composing a film brought with it a series of guidelines about what kinds of stories to choose, how they should be treated, etc. This seems to me to be a somewhat superficial interpretation: the problem is not in the format but in how it is used. A cinematic project in this country should have a reason for being, a specific purpose. The obsession to make films in whatever fashion and gain whatever kind of public creates a space that lacks cultural or social meaning—and in the long run also doesn't guarantee box-office returns, as the pathetic case of* Una raya más al tigre *indicates.*[51]

Only Salomón's *Short Saturday* (*Sábado chico*), an examination of machismo as expressed at work, home, and in a nightclub with a good performance by actor Tony Vásquez, received any credit from Ledgard at all. If the Peruvian omnibus films could be seen as a series, the critical and commercial failure of *Una raya mas* . . . ensured that the experiment would not be repeated.

Once the presence of nationally produced features was established within

the Peruvian film system in the late 1970s, the journal shifted its focus and never looked at the short-film format again. The importance of the short film would not be readdressed until 1992, when the repeal of the Film Law of 1972 by Alberto Fujimori caused an uproar in the filmmaking community that would lead directly to the founding of the film journal *La gran ilusión*.[52] Nevertheless, in their unprecedented examinations of the short-film industry, the writers of *Hablemos de cine* demonstrated the idiosyncratic development of Peruvian national cinema, connecting the short films that allowed filmmakers to explore and experiment in the mid-1970s to the features that would more solidly define filmmaking in Peru in the years to follow.