CHAPTER 6
CREATING THE
“Lombardi Generation”
The Rise of an Urban Cinematic Aesthetic

“National cinema” will be another tall tale, another limeño fantasy, only one that will undoubtedly be zealous and commercial.
—JULIO ORTEGA, INTERVIEWED IN HABLEMOS DE CINE (AUGUST 1966)

When Hablemos de cine covered a short-film contest in 1965, the editorial that opened volume 12 commented in passing that “it cannot be overlooked that the majority of films presented came from the provinces. Limeños seem to be less interested in film.”1 True enough: of the seven films reviewed from the festival, only Jorge Volkert’s Forjadores de mañana, the second-place winner, was actually set in Lima. The editors loved the winner, César Villanueva’s Estampas del Carnaval de Kanas, agreeing enthusiastically with the judging committee that the film deserved the top prize. In volume 38 (November–December 1967), César Linares included it as one of the two best works of any length made up until that point in Peru. An interview with Villanueva, also co-director of the only aesthetically successful Peruvian feature to date (1961’s Kukuli with Eulogio Nishiyama), would have been quite a coup. It appears as if such an interview was conducted, yet never published.

If the journal was committed to the idea of “quality Peruvian cinema,” why was Volkert’s interview published, but not that of the festival winner, Villanueva? But then again, why was Forjadores de mañana selected to go to the 1967 Viña del
Mar Film Festival over Villanueva and Nishiyama’s film? Did the selection committee at the festival choose Volkert’s clearly inferior film over Estampas? Was the film from Cuzco considered for submission? Why didn’t Hablemos de cine comment that Villanueva and Nishiyama’s film would have been a better choice for the festival?

The journal never explicitly addressed questions such as these at the time, but we may wonder why Hablemos de cine felt it necessary to note the heavy presence of themes and images from the provinces in its editorial. Very quickly after Peruvian features started being released, the critical film community in Lima identified two types of films primarily based on narrative themes concerning setting: urban cinema (cine urbano) and peasant cinema (cine campesino). This partitioning reflected the division within Peruvian society of the “urban” realities of the wealthy coastal city of Lima, where most of the white population is located, and the impoverished existence of the mountainous Andean region, inhabited almost entirely by Indians.\(^2\) In terms of land area, most of Peru remains even today an agricultural society with only one metropolitan city, Lima. As such, the capital is the sole location for transactions with most industries (business, finance, government, commerce, media, and so on) and boasts almost 20 percent of the entire country’s population. But most of Peru has regarded its capital with a sense of uneasiness: while founded by the Spanish in 1535 as the powerful center of the southern part of their American empire, Lima has represented both opportunity and oppression to the ever-growing number of rural migrants to the capital. With jobs located on the lower end of the economy, the rest of the country lives well below established poverty lines. During the mid- to late twentieth century, the rural population swarmed into the capital, creating neighborhoods and shantytowns called pueblos jóvenes (young towns) that caused the city to grow exponentially. Nevertheless, though an overwhelming majority of the country is of native (or at least mestizo) origin, the separation between urban and rural parallels the racial divide between the whiter, European-oriented coast and the darker, native Andes. Families from other parts of Peru consistently self-identify with those regions as opposed to identifying as limeño, even after many generations have been born in Lima.\(^3\) With such differing ideas concerning local and national identity, a debate on how national cinema should be constituted was bound to enter into questions of urban and rural, and therefore also into questions of race.\(^4\) The editorial’s throw-away comment in 1965 noting the difference between limeño and provincial filmmaking was simply the journal’s first articulation of the uncomfortable privileging of Lima over the rest of the country specifically regarding film, film culture,
and—most disturbingly if not surprisingly, given Peruvian demographics—the concept of national cinema.

The Influence of the Velasco Regime

The passage of the Film Law of 1972, which successfully stimulated film activity in Peru, was the result of a tremendous effort by many individuals over several years; the law had, after all, been initially proposed during the presidency of Fernando Belaúnde some years earlier. In the early 1970s, however, to embrace the indigenous was to support governmental directives espoused by General Juan Velasco, the current military ruler who outwardly “sought to impose a ‘revolution’ that would end what they viewed as the historical predominance of foreign economic interests and the local oligarchy in the political and economic life of the nation.” As such, the government quickly instituted a number of measures to appeal to the peasant class, highlighted by a relatively successful (if temporary) agrarian reform program instituted in 1969 and the adoption of Quechua as a second official national language in 1975. The nationalist program as defined by the Velasco regime reconstructed national identity to pointedly include native (specifically Andean) interests in all facets of Peruvian culture.

Many of the short films that immediately emerged because of the Film Law were narratively associated with the Andes, not the city, and it might be logical to assume that this was a result of catering to the new programs behind the government. As we have seen in the examples screened at the short-film contest of 1965, however, short filmmaking in Peru already tended to privilege the Andean over the urban, at least superficially. Examining those films closely and comparing them with the films produced in the 1970s reveal a major difference in how Andean subjects were treated: whereas the films shown at the contest in 1965 (excepting the winner, *Estampas del Carnaval de Kanas*) generally regarded areas outside Lima with something akin to a “tourist’s” eye, short films ten years later were much more critical, tending to examine the realities of the Andean situation beyond the surface. Most of these later films were documentaries, but the narrative of these documentaries tended to be more ethnographic than archaeological in orientation, delving into everyday situations of Andean culture and proving the filmmakers more interested in going beyond the surface treatment of most short documentaries in the 1950s and 1960s.

Pablo Guevara was one of the more distinctive members of *Hablemos de cine*, primarily because he was older than most of the other staff members and already established as a poet when he joined the journal in 1967. Guevara never
created himself so much a critic, however, after also becoming a filmmaker. The release of his short film *Semilla* in 1969 made him the first staff member to produce a film. Nevertheless, his presence as a staff member was not very conspicuous until the publication of a debate on the state of short-film production in Peru in 1975. In a roundtable discussion called “The Crossroads of Peruvian Cinema” with Ricardo Bedoya, Federico de Cárdenas, and Isaac León, published in volume 67 (1975), Guevara was committed to the ideal of a present-day, inclusive national cinematic identity. It is important to note that the journal listed the discussion as having been held in March 1975, which places it before the “bloodless coup” that ended in General Morales Bermúdez’s becoming president. Therefore, this roundtable was still conducted during the presidency of Juan Velasco; hence Guevara’s comments still concur with the ideology of the government in control at the time.

The debate began by immediately identifying the Film Law of 1972 as problematic, if not detrimental to the emergence of a national cinema. Federico de Cárdenas noted that the law was designed to stimulate an industry using financial incentives by returning a portion of the admission prices back to the producers. Though the law was instituted during the Velasco regime, its emphasis on the producers clearly demonstrated the influence of the procapitalist first Belaúnde government. Because the current powers favored a more socialist view of society, the law as designed was somewhat at odds with the contemporary ruling ideology. The law did not specify how the characteristics within the content of the films themselves might reflect what would be classified as “Peruvian cinema,” nor really was it preoccupied with such considerations, instead emphasizing industrial development (that is, an economic consideration) over the nationalist.

Guevara saw the several acts of nationalization (oil, fishing, copper, and the press by 1975) instituted by the Velasco regime as evidence of a positive trend toward developing an interest in national identity through film. Using the Mexican and Argentine industries as examples, he noted that national cinematic personae developed along with certain radical changes in socioeconomic actions. Though this national-populist fervor at the governmental level was wavering considerably by 1975 (so much so that later that year the regime would fall out of power), Velasco’s presidency was identified with major nationalist images centered around the popular; that is to say, not with the white oligarchic society that traditionally was seen to hold power and influence. Guevara thus acknowledged the potential for Peruvian cinema to explore a more inclusive, multiethnic identity as similarly embraced at the highest level of political power.
We need a National Cinema where Peruvians can see themselves. It is important to discuss this idea because in the cases of the other national cinemas I mentioned earlier, their cinematic image has been constructed using either history or folklore, reaffirming the stereotypical vision already captured by commercial cinema. At this moment, Peruvian national cinema should examine the contemporary Peruvian reality using characters instead of historical figures, and from many different vantage points within its varied geographical boundaries.

Mirroring many articulations of “cinema as constructing a new national identity” common among several of the writings within the New Latin American cinema, Guevara spoke here about a broader definition of what constituted “Peruvian,” one that ideally encompassed the myriad representations of Peruvian society. Though Semilla explored the realities of Puno, a town on the Bolivian border on Lake Titicaca, such a representation would regrettably remain isolated in how national film identity would actually be expressed.

Lombardi and García: Of lo urbano and lo campesino
In 1977, the release of four fiction feature films heralded the beginning of a somewhat more consistent production regime in Peru. Given that three of the four directors releasing films that year—Francisco Lombardi, Federico García, and Jorge Volkert—had produced only short films before this, the year was a triumph for both the Film Law of 1972 and the short-film industry. García and Lombardi quickly emerged as the first successful Peruvian feature film auteurs, earning this distinction by both the sheer number of films they produced (a third of the country’s total over the next ten years between the two) and the favorable critical reception granted to them within Peru. Given that Hablemos de cine strongly identified with Cahiers du Cinéma and had previously demonstrated its interest in the primacy of directors through the acercamientos and even through its treatment of short films, the development of a critical mass of features that could elevate a local filmmaker to auteur status is significant.

Although the filmmakers of the Cuzco school (including Figueroa’s contributions in the late 1970s) had previously produced films from the Andean region, it was not until Federico García’s feature-length contributions that the critics started identifying the campesino/urbano division in print. As a whole, García’s early work clearly represented the struggle of the serrano natives against more oppressive forces both from within their own communities and from afar. Born
in Cuzco, García was a major supporter of native issues and was in charge of cinematic activities of SINAMOS (Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social/National System Aiding Social Mobilization), the social propaganda arm of General Juan Velasco’s leftist-leaning military government. García’s first feature, *Kuntur Wachana* (*Donde nacen los cóndores*/Where the Condors are Born, 1977) (fig. 12), was to a degree a cinematic manifestation of the ideals of Velasco’s government, centering on the successful attempt at agrarian reform in 1969. (The film was released, however, long after Velasco had been deposed by the reactionary Morales Bermúdez, who did not have the same interest in the peasants as his predecessor.)

Based on a true story, the film follows the travails of the Huarán hacienda when Saturnino Huillac tries to unionize it in the late 1950s, beginning a series of oppressive actions on the part of the *haciendados* and revolt by the *campesinos*. Following the assassination of both Huillac and another organizer, Mariano Quispe, the elders of the town invoke the legend of the determination of the condor, who fights against all possibilities to return to its native land. The peasants continue to revolt until the agrarian reform movement in 1969, when the hacienda is broken.
up and the peasants form the Huarán Cooperative. *Kuntur Wachana* was a politically militant narrative, unique in the trajectory of Peruvian cinema but calling to mind the works of Italian neorealism and of many participants of the New Latin American Cinema. Evoking the filmmaking style and techniques of Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines from such films as *Yawar Mallku* (Blood of the Condor, 1969) and *El coraje del pueblo* (The Courage of the People, 1971), García insisted on verisimilitude through shooting on location on the Hurán hacienda, as well as employing members of the Huarán Cooperative involved in the actual events that inspired the film in both scriptwriting and acting capacities. The film’s release in 1977, when the government of Morales Bermúdez was taking apart the agrarian reforms instituted by Velasco, was a critique of the current regime’s actions but was seen as reminiscent of the “radical revolutionaries” of a few years earlier.

Having originally been a film critic for numerous limeño publications, including *Hablemos de cine*, Francisco Lombardi came to the making of feature films in an entirely different manner than García. Whereas García was weaned on short films made for SINAMOS, Lombardi made films for commercial distribution only after the Film Law of 1972 guaranteed their exhibition. His production company, Inca Films, was one of the few to funnel the money earned in short-film production into the creation of a feature-length film. Based on the actual 1955 execution of Jorge Villanueva Torres (known as the notorious “Monster of Armendáriz”) for raping and murdering a young boy, *Muerte al amanecer* examines the many players and their actions during the evening leading up to the firing squad. The film focuses primarily on Lieutenant Molfino (Gustavo Rodríguez), the officer in charge of firing the bullet in the morning, who develops a moral conflict concerning his participation in the execution. The film itself is ambiguous about whether Torres is actually guilty or whether his position as a homeless black man allowed the judge to easily “achieve justice” for the murder. Although the first major effort of a young, relatively inexperienced filmmaker, *Muerte al amanecer* was both a critical and commercial triumph, showcasing a high technical quality unique among the other Peruvian films made at the time.

Isaac León noted in an assessment of the year’s features in volume 69 (1977–78) that García’s and Lombardi’s films had more similarities than differences. Both films were looked upon favorably by *Hablemos de cine* and regarded as significantly positive national films that went beyond what the journal considered negative aspects of other Latin American examples: “*Muerte al amanecer* and *Kuntur Wachana* free themselves from stale, preconceived notions [of Peruvian
cinema] that we have seen when they imitate the worst of Mexican cinema or try to tackle ‘European’ preoccupations and themes. . . . Taken together, these two films represent the point of departure of a ‘non-colonized cinema,’ a phrase that we use without its most ‘ultra’ sentiments which can only be attributed to the more clandestine and militant Third World cinema.”¹⁰ The division between urban and peasant cinema was understandably worrisome for Hablemos de cine and León’s article was an early attempt to diffuse the inaccurate terminology being used by other Lima-based critics. Cine campesino (literally, peasant cinema) was applied disparagingly to films coming out of the Cuzco region, including Luis Figueroa’s Los perros hambrientos (The Hungry Dogs), released the same year. León found Figueroa’s adaptation of Ciro Alegría’s novel to contain the same negative and patronizing “indigenist” cinematic aesthetics exemplified by the films of the Cuzco school, an association made clearer by Figueroa’s earlier participation as co-director of 1961’s Kukuli. Though highly political in its propagandistic embracing of Velasco’s agrarian programs, Kuntur Wachana was seen as “a break in indigenism” and therefore an improvement.¹¹

Despite these similarities and the nearly identical practical training by each director through their shorts, the two films were still seen by audiences and critics in terms of both setting and, in the process, plot: though there are very few shots in the city itself, Muerte al amanecer was a well-known story that concerned events that occurred in Lima, while Kuntur Wachana was set clearly in the agricultural mountainous area surrounding Cuzco. León’s article takes great pains to avoid establishing this kind of dichotomy between the two films by addressing them in purely aesthetic terms, but the division was exacerbated by box-office results, which favored the more urban film, Muerte al amanecer. Such a reception would seem to emphasize the cultural and social divide between Lima and the rest of the country and confirmed the importance of Lima as the center of cultural activity concerning cinema. Here developed a paradox: Lima’s status as the center of cinematic cultural power affected the content of the very films it found acceptable, thus only reinforcing the position of the limeño over the Andean representation of national identity. Though mandatory distribution meant that all Peruvian features would be shown throughout the country, most of those theaters were still concentrated in the capital,¹² and, despite the large population that had emigrated from rural parts of the country to the city, the large urban audiences seemed to prefer urban narratives.

The differences between the two films are more aesthetic than thematic and Lombardi’s film was most likely accepted by the hablemistas because it used film
techniques and a narrative structure more reminiscent of American movies. *Muerte al amanecer* does not attempt verisimilitude in its depiction of the “Monster of Armendáriz”; rather, the focus is on developing the psychology of the characters central to the film: the lieutenant, the judge, and the Monster himself. *Kuntur Wachana* was quickly associated with the testimonial filmmaking of Bolivian director Jorge Sanjinés, whose films also interwove textures of the actual situations that inspired the film’s narrative, often through the use of actors who were also witnesses to these events. While the film does feature several striking frame compositions (particularly at the end of the film as the peasants rise up against the hacienda), it is also more interested in serving as a document of a true story rather than with the subtleties of how mise-en-scène works to tell the story. Lombardi’s film stylizes the action in *Muerte al amanecer* (fig. 13), juxtaposing images of the two isolated characters (the anxious lieutenant and the alleged murderer) with those of the official dignitaries socializing throughout the evening. Even as it is a criticism of the death penalty, the film is also a subtle portrait of the Peruvian social structure with its many races, classes, and positions exemplified through acting and characterization.

In his article, León pointed out that the film “cannot disguise its Peruvian-ness. The commercial success in Peru and the failure of its exhibition in Venezuela [the film was a co-production] are good indicators of that.” Lombardi’s film succeeded in Peru largely because the nature of a Peruvian reality was so subtly portrayed in a microcosmic fashion through its characterization. In contrast, García’s film comes across as the more “obvious” example of “Peruvian-ness,” with its native characters reclaiming agency both within the narrative from the landowners and in the realm of national film history from previous incarnations of “indigenous” portrayals: after all, García himself said in an interview with Juan Bullitta published in the same issue that “our militance on the cinematic front forms a part . . . of the great process of national liberation in which the masses are the protagonists.” Interestingly enough, García himself did not come up with the idea for *Kuntur Wachana*: inspired by an experience while filming Nora de Izcué’s medium-length documentary film *Runan Caycu* (1974), the inhabitants of Huarán themselves proposed the idea to García when he visited the cooperative while working under SINAMOS, hoping to show their situation as a positive nationalist example.

By 1981, the division between the two directors became even greater. Lombardi’s newest feature, *Muerte de un magnate* (Death of a Magnate, 1980), though considered a step down from his earlier effort, once again succeeded fi-
Figure 13: Cover of *Hablemos de cine* 68 (1976), featuring an image from *Muerte al amanecer* (Lombardi, 1977). Courtesy of the Filmoteca PUCP *Hablemos de cine* Archive.
nancially while neither of García’s latest films, *El caso Huayanay: testimonio de parte* (The Huayanay Case: Partial Testimony, 1981) and *Laulico* (1980), found a large audience. Once again, both directors’ films were political in their own ways. García’s *El caso Huayanay* examined the case of Matías Escobar, a functionary who committed a number of atrocities against members of the Andean village of Huayanay before being killed, with the community taking collective responsibility for his murder. The film exposed the failure of the legal system to meet the needs of the community. As with *Kuntur Wachana*, García employed the assistance of the community of Huayanay to tell this particular story. Lombardi’s film, on the other hand, reveled in exposing the chaotic debauchery emblematic of the upper classes of Peru, leading to the inevitable death of a fishing magnate on New Year’s Day, 1972. Again, though the film was based on a true story, the events are stylized instead of filmed for their veracity. In their own ways—García’s film by privileging the native voices, Lombardi’s film with its grotesque depiction and eventual demise of a white character—both films fit nicely within the ideals of General Velasco’s leftist government, which thereby functioned as a criticism of the reactionary regime of Morales Bermúdez in 1980.16

The members of *Hablemos de cine* postulated that the real reasons for the financial success of Lombardi’s films had little to do with their urban settings. In a roundtable discussion published under the title “Peruvian Cinema Between Reality and Desire” in volume 73–74 (June 1981), Juan Bullitta reaffirmed the impetus behind the mainstream, Americanized “look” of Lombardi’s cinema, evidence of a “dominant style”:

*I think that there has been an effort to release a successful product, with the goal of bringing in a guaranteed public. [Muerte de un magnate is] a film similar to foreign [non-Peruvian] films from a technical perspective. If the public overwhelmingly likes it, it is because they perceive this [foreign] standard: clarity of expression, codified maneuvering of language, a level of quality similar to the type of film [the public] is familiar with. This is the first time that a large public has recognized these [characteristics] in a Peruvian film and it has therefore turned them on to our cinema.*17

Discussion of the failure of the “peasant cinema” to reach a significant audience was more problematic. Reynaldo Ledgard believed the answer lay in the public’s palpable distaste for the rural, though Isaac León countered by pointing to similar rural cinemas in other countries:
R.L.: It goes without saying that there is a predominantly urban cinematic public in this country, a public which determines a film’s financial solvency. The paradox is that peasant cinema must depend on this public in order to become solvent, which forces a film to use a series of other methods—be they political, ideological, or based on a literary source—to gain that public. Of course, the [limeño] public does not always accept such coercion, as demonstrated by the poor performance of Laulico.

IL: But if we return to examples from other countries, we see how these issues can play to their advantage. The western, for example, is the national American genre and there are pictures of the Brazilian Northeast or the ranchera mexicana—all embraced by a large part of metropolitan spectators. I think that the lack of acceptance [here] can be tied to the type of rural cinema that has been offered, not only the composition of the public.¹⁸

By paralleling these mythological genre ideals of the pastoral (the American western, the Mexican comedia ranchera, and the like) with García’s Peruvian peasant films, León entirely ignored the disparate realities of both countries’ treatment of a “rural setting” and the native peoples who populate those areas. He faults the Peruvian films for simply being inferior in quality (implied in the comment “the type of rural cinema that has been offered”) but the very racial tensions that are apparent in García’s films as being historically prevalent—and therefore largely taken for granted—are only confirmed by León’s comment. The genre films León references codify the rural area in a particular way, using the western landscape to signify the freedom and opportunity for man to tame the countryside and the immensity of possibility. García’s films do not use the setting in this manner at all, privileging instead the Andean faces and voices over the meaning granted to the setting through mise-en-scène. The discussion also marked the conspicuous absence of Pablo Guevara’s position from volume 67’s roundtable:¹⁹ the participants at this discussion were all limeños with little vested interest in the depiction of the Andean Peruvian beyond purely academic and blindly critical standards.

Ledgard’s comments specifically reference the cultural preferences of film audiences where national films were concerned. If it is true that many campesinos were coming to Lima and were not identifying as limeños, the numerous “rural” films being produced in Peru should still have found an audience even in the capital. There are many hypotheses, however, as to why this did not happen. For one, if residents still identified with traditions from the provinces, such a rural lifestyle clearly did not incorporate the movies: the large majority of theaters could only
be found in cities and most of the populace had no means of getting to venues, much less paying for admission. Conversely, those who were trying to assimilate into limeño society might have chosen to distance themselves from the “indigenist qualities” identified in the films by the Cuzco school and the large number of poor “anthropological” shorts that had been distributed since 1972. The rejection of these films might also have had nothing to do with the subject matter but rather with the recognition by both critics and audience of these shorts as inferior quality films. While the films of the Cine-Club de Cuzco were truly innovative in the late 1950s and early 1960s, critics in Lima were greatly displeased that neither filmmaking nor narrative techniques improved from picture to picture.

Similarly, as a technically proven director, Lombardi might have intentionally chosen urban narratives, recognizing what would generate a favorable audience response. But this choice might have also been a conscious reaction to a lack of realistic urban cinematic narratives within most Peruvian filmmaking. In other words, if most Peruvian imagery seen on film focused on the Andean, then an urban limeño narrative would allow Lombardi to stand out. Such a scenario within literature propelled Mario Vargas Llosa’s novel La ciudad y los perros (The Time of the Hero) to international—and then national—acclaim in 1963. Though Muerte de un magnate clearly had a wealthy white main character, Lombardi’s next film, Maruja en el infierno (Maruja in Hell, 1983) focused on a poor neighborhood in Lima with a mixture of racial characteristics.

Whatever the reasons, the success of these urban films and the failure of the country films threatened to stimulate solely urban narratives; after all, the latter generated the significant profits that maintained a film industry. Moreover, as Ledgard astutely pointed out in his response to this problem, peasant films could not depend on the rural audience for financial success but rather had to appeal to metropolitan viewers. The journal failed to make explicit the eventual stratification of the industry should this trend continue, fashioned around the demands of the limeño audiences, further supporting the capital as the ideological center of cinematic activity. Such an effect would nullify steps being made to generate a truly national cinema, instead exposing the “national” cinematic tradition for what it really had always been: a limeño film tradition, in which the editors of the journal had become complicit.

Filmmakers, producers, and exhibitors did not actively consider expanding film literacy into the very rural areas of Peru. In Cuba, for example, a portable cinema called a cine-foro, with a screen and projectors packed into a small truck, traveled far into the countryside to bring films to locations that had never been
exposed to cinema before. In volume 52 (July–August 1970), *Hablemos de cine* reviewed Octavio Cortázar’s *Por primera vez* (For the First Time, 1968), a short film about the cine-foros shows, in Lima at a 1970 retrospective. The interest in expanding media literacy, however, was not made a priority in Peru, leaving exhibition locations exclusively in more urban settings.

*Hablemos de cine* focused its attentions on the growing divide between the urban and the peasant as depicted on the screen and behind the cameras through the remaining three issues of the journal. In what appears to be an attempt to more fully address the problematics of cine campesino, the section devoted to Peruvian cinema in volume 75 (May 1982) concentrated exclusively on an in-depth examination of director Federico García. José Carlos Huayhuaca’s essay, “The Dilemma of Language or Compromise: The Films of Federico García,” began by distinguishing how the term “peasant cinema” had been used: “I would like to note that, as opposed to ‘urban cinema’—that which we can call cinema of the city—cine campesino, at least as we know of them today, is not a cinema of or by people of the country but rather about them. This perhaps explains the folklorism and the fascination for local color that entrap and endanger the majority of these kinds of films.”

In contrast, García’s films maintained a consistent emphasis on the plight of the disenfranchised serrano population. Probably the most important statements made by García during his interview regard his relationship with other filmmakers to whom he had been compared. The first was the much-maligned Cuzco school, a natural comparison particularly given that, while he was not an originary member nor did he participate in the filming of *Kukuli*, his experience with film began with the Cine-Club de Cuzco in the 1960s. Whereas a contemporary, Luis Figueroa, continued this aesthetic tradition, García saw the need for a break:

I do not deny recognizing the valiant achievement made by [Manuel] Chambi, Figueroa and [César] Villanueva, who had notably projected the image of the Indian on Peruvian screens for the first time. But filmmakers like myself do not start from the same place as they did. We start with a political assumption: we understand cinema as a medium to transform society. This is ultimately our goal. It is by chance that everything that is folkloric is not the focus of our preoccupations. [The filmmakers associated with the Cuzco school] come from a cinema, if you will, that is indigenist or neo-indigenist; ours is not an indigenist cinema—speaking of indigenist in a sense that is a little pejorative in the way in which it lends itself to the idea that is concerned
with the problem of the Andean peasants—but rather a political cinema. In a way, we have more of an affinity with the Bolivians Sanjinés and Eguino than we do with the Cuzco school. 

While this statement rejects an essentialist anthropological identification by geography or upbringing by affiliating himself with Sanjinés, García later in the interview distanced himself from the Bolivian director by affirming his identity as both cusqueño and serrano:

You previously mentioned Sanjinés [sic], whose films I appreciate and admire but... I have some problems with the films he makes because his is a cinema previously codified from outside, with a political proposition and the utilization of a much more conventional language which can be explained by, to give an example, the fact that Sanjinés does not speak Quechua. He is not Andean, yet he has assumed the identity of Andean cinema with an absolutely clear political position. It is a cinema made by an intellectual politically committed to his people [pueblo], but still implying an outsider’s form of expression. To put it in more graphic terms, I am a type of little Indian [indiecito] who has started to make films.

This affirmation aimed to establish a greater credibility and validation for himself as a Peruvian through identity politics, though once again it should be noted that the primary audience of Hablemos de cine were limeños who would not necessarily identify with García either ethnically, socially, or geographically. Likewise, García’s elevation of the political influence on his films above any stylistic aspects runs contrary to the core opinions of the editors (and, theoretically, the journal’s readers). Near the end of the interview, Huayhuaca argued that his fellow critics have traditionally “postulated that all reality in film... is mediated by language.” The language Huayhuaca is referring to is naturally the journal’s emphasis on structuralist style, referred to by the journal in their discussions on mise-en-scène; García does not see a contradiction between this assertion and how his films should be viewed, a standpoint that Isaac León challenges:

F.G.: We do not renounce language. There is simply a difference in points of view, a qualitative difference, we might say. I think that your position stems from language, while ours does not; rather, it comes from a political nature, of political effectiveness.
I.L.: There’s a problem here. I do not agree with you. I don’t believe that our vision comes from language as a kind of end in itself. Films communicate through [mise-en-scène]; therefore when we critique a film like yours in such a formal manner, it is not done in the name of a type of language, but rather it is grounded in how adequately that language you have used relates to the goals you have established. If not, our method of critique is wrong and not only with your film but with any other. It cannot come from a pure, abstract, ideal model.

F.G.: I see your point and it seems to me completely correct, but what I would like to make clear is that for us, the handwriting is not so important as the content of the note and that it can be understood by the public to which it is directed.

For García, what a film says is more relevant than how a narrative is told. In some ways, this echoes the concept of an “imperfect cinema,” formulated in 1969 by Cuban filmmaker and theorist Julio García Espinosa, that “is no longer interested in quality or technique.” García Espinosa claims specifically, however, that cinema should counter the ideals of the film critic, recognizing their stranglehold effect against innovative structures and themes: in his view, imperfect cinema is only concerned with “how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the ‘cultured’ elite audience that up to now has conditioned the form of your work?” Federico García’s articulation is not nearly so militant, offering a conciliatory stance toward the hablemistas’ perspective; moreover, his statement contradicts the fact that, as he confirmed earlier in the interview, his primary method of relating these stories is through the testimonial, a conscious stylistic decision in presenting the material.

The final issue of Hablemos de cine, volume 77 (May 1984), heralded 1983 as yet another banner year for national filmmaking with six feature films being released, including yet another success by Francisco Lombardi, Maruja en el infierno (fig. 14). Lombardi’s film once again provided the focus for the section devoted to Peruvian cinema, but the journal treated the director as a representative of a different kind of filmmaking from that of García. Their questions required Lombardi to address some of the issues brought up during the conversation with García in volume 75. The introduction to the section proudly announced the more confrontational tone of the interview, perhaps in response to claims that the journal was much easier on the films of former staff members, particularly those former members like Lombardi who still maintained friendly relation-
ships with the current staff: “Neither we nor he had conceived an encounter with easy questions and predictable answers, nor of course a simple informative interview.”

The most heated comments came from a disagreement about the reception of *Muerte de un magnate*, which Lombardi thought was judged by a journal that had lost its interest in mise-en-scène and had shifted its focus to concentrate more particularly on content. Given that the journal seemed so interested in the urban/rural dichotomy, his interviewers never ventured to get Lombardi’s explicit opinion one way or another on the topic. At a relatively calm moment in their discussion, however, the director postulated that the benchmark in creating film is neither the message nor the method, but rather the necessity of reaching as large an audience as possible:

*I consider that here films should generate great interest, appealing to the sensibilities of a considerable number of people. I always have this in mind*
Whenever I write a story. Without a doubt, this is a limitation and challenge, but I find it stimulating, inspirational. Filmmakers who wish to discuss very personal issues directed to a small audience should hold their projects for better times when the national or foreign markets... can accommodate them. That said, I think that films can be made with a something of a personal touch even when directing them for a larger public.

Following the ideological considerations of both García and the staff at Hablemos de cine, Lombardi’s discussion of markets seems almost out of place. Yet his pre-occupation with finding the largest possible audience for his films says something about his filmmaking style and his choices for narrative: while he remains the most versatile of Peruvian directors, his films are directed to appeal to a large audience. In Peru that means directing toward the cosmopolitan nature of Lima, clearly not for an audience in the Andes, where theaters were scarce. Lombardi’s viewpoint alters the consideration of the Peruvian cinematic identity: whereas García believed in a balanced representation of the ideal Peruvian, Lombardi’s interests are more realistic and market-driven, based on obtaining a large box office, which, by sheer numbers, meant directing his efforts towards Lima—and, extending Lima’s cosmopolitan tastes, toward possible foreign distribution.

Confirmed by his films and filmmaking style both prior to and following this interview, Lombardi’s position as a successful director financially and critically not only solidifies the dominance of “urban cinema” but also his own status as the preferred model of “Peruvian auteur.” Having committed to notions of auteurism through the practice of examining mise-en-scène in nearly every aspect of the journal’s activities and having been disappointed in early attempts at Peruvian features, Hablemos de cine embraces Lombardi not only as one of their own (literally, as he had begun his career writing for the publication) but also as a filmmaker whose genre-driven, limeño-oriented style and narrative themes constituted a viable model. These very reasons also allow his films to travel across borders fairly successfully, making Lombardi’s films attractive to film festival programmers and audiences overseas. Lombardi himself also recognized the importance of establishing an air of auteurism around his own work; note in the passage above that a “personal touch” is essential to his work. As he grew to become the only recognizable name outside Peru through foreign distribution of the films produced in the 1980s and early 1990s—La ciudad y los perros (The City and the Dogs, 1985), La boca del lobo (The Lion’s Den, 1988), Caídos del cielo (Fallen from Heaven, 1990), and Sin compassión (No Mercy, 1994)—Lombardi’s
techniques and themes would be only slightly modified by other directors such as Felipe Degregori (*Abisa a los compañeros / Down with the Comrades, 1980*), José Carlos Huayhuaca (*Profesión: Detective, 1986*), Augusto Tamayo (*La fuga de Chacal / The Flight of the Jackal, 1987*) and Alberto Durant (*Alias La Gringa, 1991*), enough that later critics would refer to all of these filmmakers as “the Lombardi generation,” a moniker that refers not only to a time period but also to aesthetic and narrative trends.

In what amounted to the journal’s most serious article concerning the national cinema, Isaac León started the section on Peruvian filmmaking with an in-depth analysis titled “Preaching in the Desert?” He charged that articles written about Peruvian cinema tended to be more informational than analytical:

> Until now, Peruvian cinema has been treated by critics—and *Hablemos de cine* is no exception—either through an analysis or commentary of each individual picture or through a limited focus or summary offering data, figures, techniques for evaluation, and future projects. A little of everything, which is fine as undoubtedly such criteria is useful, but there exists an ostensible deficit concerning analysis of the tradition as a whole. This theme is almost always mentioned in passing or with a sideways glance but it is nevertheless the most important in establishing an ongoing relationship between films and audience.²⁸

In this recognition of the place of the film journal within the context of Peruvian cinema, León immediately addressed the division between urban and rural cinema, which he stated was a false, arbitrary dichotomy. Though he once again emphasized the urban/rural divide through its two major directors, Lombardi and García, León warned that this situation masked an inability and insecurity among critics to categorize either the filmmakers or the films:

> Unlike the classifications critics usually make with other cinemas that are based on modes of genre or style with various generalizations or attributes assigned to individual directors, in our case these have counted less if at all. This is perhaps because defined genres could not be determined, styles were not sufficiently profiled and, since Armando Robles Godoy left the feature film scene, nobody has insisted much upon auteurist concerns and on film as an instrument of personal expression. The directors’ concerns have instead centered on the thematic and narrative material and on the reception by the
public. Because of this, even when we could have been speaking with the same or more correct sociological nomenclature of “the films of Francisco Lombardi and Federico García,” to give as an example two men who have produced the most and the most varied work, it has not been done this way.²⁹

León affirmed that Peruvian cinema cannot and should not be divided merely by location, that doing so obscured the similarities between the films and maintained the ongoing partition between city and country that permeated Peruvian cultural identity and ideology. He yearns here for a return to assessing film primarily through mise-en-scène, but he also recognizes that Peruvian filmmakers may not concern themselves with the same issues as critics.

In a long interview published in volume 75 (May 1982), Federico García noted that the testimonial nature of his films was the most authentic way to relate the narrative from the perspective of the community itself. Reynaldo Ledgard contested this statement, noting that García was as much an outsider to the native communities he was filming as the limeño viewer would be:

*If you take to its inevitable conclusion the idea that you must renounce the most conventional codes to reduce yourself to a type of documentary observer, a little transparent or testimonial, then the films would be different. We would not be able to distinguish in them a series of sequences that respond to the issue of conventional, generic film language. And why is that? Because perhaps in these films, your point of view is not entirely Andean and, maybe unconsciously, at the moment you are filming you’re introducing elements of “urban cinema” or you’re thinking of a hypothetical urban public that also understands that kind of language.*³⁰

Though García did not agree with this, other staff members concurred: Ricardo Bedoya reiterated that although the film was the story as told by the people of Huarán, it was still filtered through García’s lens, through the eyes of someone who is not part of their community. Though the filmmaker insisted that as a cusqueño “my fundamental cultural origin is Andean and my vision of the world expressed through film does not appear as anything but Andean,” Federico de Cárdenas came closest to the actual issue when he refers to García as a “semi-urban” filmmaker.

The interview does not continue this thought process, but de Cárdenas had
exposed for a brief moment the conflation of Cuzco as representative of all of rural cinema, when in fact it is the second-largest city in Peru and as such is “urban” in its own way. While Cuzco is a much smaller city than Lima and is characterized as being poor and unquestionably Indian (much like the rest of the mountainous region of Peru), there are nonetheless issues of urbanity within the Cuzco identity that are overlooked after the more glaring urbano-campesino contrast with Lima.

For all the theoretical discussion of how Peruvian cinema should reflect a cultural diversity, in practice, Peruvian filmmaking was limited to these two cities and their surrounding areas. In this discourse, Cuzco acted as a representative for all “rural filmmaking”; thus many other geographical and cultural regions were overlooked entirely. The Andean city of Cuzco is very different from other Andean cities such as Arequipa, Huancayo, Cajamarca, Huaráz, and Puno; neither Lima nor Cuzco exemplified coastal areas like Tumbes and Trujillo to the north or Tacna, Ica, and Chincha to the south. The debate represents a conventional dichotomy between the coast/Lima and Andean—in a country that culturally identifies not with two geographical regions but three, as in the common phrase used by Peruvians to describe national geography: costa, sierra y selva (coast, mountains, and rainforest).

The dismissal of the other Peruvian rural cultural realities in this debate relates partially to Cuzco’s marginalized but nevertheless noted position within the Peruvian cinematic culture, particularly as the location where the Cine-Club de Cuzco made their films. It should be remembered that post–World War II Peruvian filmmaking traces its roots not to anything that emerged from Lima but to 1961’s Kukuli and the shorts the Cuzco collective produced in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which traveled internationally and brought attention to Peruvian filmmakers in the first place. From the perspective of the limeño critics, however, the problem with the Cuzco school’s films were that they did not advance, either technically or in terms of narrative construction. (This criticism extended to the work of Luis Figueroa, the only director in the collective who then went on to do feature work on his own.)

To indicate “limeño critics” above, however, is to be redundant: a principal reason for this reading of cusqueño filmmaking in the 1970s is that film culture in general concentrated in Lima, certainly from a critical standpoint. Whereas the Cine-Club de la Católica naturally developed Hablemos de cine as a written forum for the most active, outspoken members, a similar critical outlet did not develop from the Cine-Club de Cuzco outside of the actual films. Moreover, the
very few Cuzco-based cinephiles interested in other aspects of film culture were, for various reasons, lured to Lima: founder of the Cine-Club de Cuzco Manuel Chambi came to Lima to help found the Universidad de Lima’s film school in 1968 and the only critic affiliated with the Cuzco school was José Carlos Huay-huaca, who came to Lima and eventually joined Hablemos de cine in 1974.

Paradoxically, Cuzco’s “incredible achievement” as a “rural city” in producing any films at all developed its cinematic identity to the detriment of film activity developing elsewhere. Filmmakers have come from other parts of Peru—Lombardi, for one, is proud to note that he was born in Piura, a northern coastal city, not Lima—but they make films in Lima or (less frequently) in Cuzco. Even the films that are made in the underrepresented regions generally do not depict the everyday realities there, resorting instead to show how limeños function outside their habitat. Such was definitely the case with Armando Robles Godoy’s En la selva no hay estrellas (In the Jungle There Are No Stars, 1966) and La muralla verde (The Green Wall, 1970), both set in the jungle, but also with several of Lombardi’s later films set outside of Lima, most notably La boca del lobo (The Lion’s Den, 1989) and Pantaleón y las visitadoras (Captain Pantoja and the Special Services, 2000). Lombardi’s Bajo la piel (Under the Skin, 1994) is a police thriller (again, a genre film) set in the arid northern coast, revealing a reality outside both Cuzco and Lima. The serial killer/film noir plot is inextricably linked to ancient Moche cultural traditions from the region; while the female protagonist is a Spaniard, the remaining characters are all meant to be from the area. 31

To this end, we must recognize that Hablemos de cine did not discuss “rural cinema” (cine rural) as an overarching whole, but rather “peasant cinema” (cine campesino), as tied to the geographical/ethnic/cultural Andean component—particularly as embodied in the major city of that region, Cuzco—that, along with the criollo, constitutes the primary and erroneously dichotomous contribution to discourse on general Peruvian identity. This tunnel vision does not reflect an oversight just on the part of Hablemos de cine as a journal in and of itself, so much as a common cultural perception within the national identity as a whole that continues to struggle to recognize and exalt its native Andean characteristics even as it overlooks others. Even during the “enlightened” identity-formation period under Velasco, the government instituted Quechua as a national language, but not Aymará, the third major language spoken by a large population in the Southern Andes. 32 The small but significant presence of Afro- and Asian-Peruvian populations is also generally elided in the criollo-campesino dichotomy. This is not to say that Peru does not recognize the cultural achievements of its many
other regions, but that such achievements tend to be perceived as artisanal and anthropological, not within the realm of the modern art of cinema. *Hablemos de cine*’s exclusive focus on Lima and Cuzco confirmed that national cinema, whether defined through its *limeño* or *cusqueño* representatives, would necessarily be exclusively urban; hence, its perspective could never be entirely “national.” We might therefore question how cinema—tied as a modern art form to the city, with its critics and practitioners that seem to speak exclusively from the city—has also been granted the opportunity to assess the representation of “the national,” however incompletely, through its explicitly urban perspective.

Rejecting the New: Politics and *Hablemos de cine*

The journal’s 1982 interview with Federico García noted that the rightist government of Fernando Belaúnde Terry, ousted by the populist general Velasco in 1968, had returned to power in 1980. Within the article, the journal expressed surprise that elements of the Film Law of 1972 had not been repealed:

> **Fernando Belaúnde**’s return to the presidency after twelve years of military administration was not necessarily received well by [local] cinephiles, given that the current government might look unkindly toward cinematic legislation drafted during Velasco’s regime, particularly a law that was so transparently protectionist. Although maintaining the law was not guaranteed, much to our surprise things have continued along in the same vein for the past two years. . . . That is to say, the new political conditions have not changed the advancement of Peruvian film for better or for worse.33

This governmental shift to the right contrasted sharply with García’s overtly political perspective from the left; the mere mention of this political stance at this time within an interview with the director only served to emphasize García’s new position as a somewhat controversial figure. Rather than address or confront these perceptions, the introduction to the interview instead specifies the journal’s desire to demystify the aesthetic nature of his films for viewers, thereby also refusing to participate in a political debate:

> Until now, the figure of Federico García has been the object of various controversies, from those on the right who see in him little more than a cinematic agitator, to various sectors associated with the left who have accused him of
opportunistic ploys. In the sustained dialogue that follows, García brought up the various political charges levied against himself. We have omitted almost all of them. We are neither prosecutors nor judges and we do not intend to contribute to a political debate of accusations and denunciations that affects the environment of Peruvian cinema, as it does many others.\textsuperscript{34}

I would argue that this last line—that the journal did “not intend to contribute to political debate of accusations and denunciations that affects the environment of Peruvian cinema”—is false. To not respond to—or, within the article itself, even mention—the blatantly political nature of García’s filmmaking for the seemingly higher-valued aesthetic view is a political stance in itself. In refusing to engage with García’s films on the socially conscious level that he wished them to be viewed, \textit{Hablemos de cine} established itself as the publication whose cinema would not be driven by a politics that was anything but aesthetically oriented.

In context with the rest of the continent’s filmmakers and critics, this political stance engendered a relatively unique, yet ultimately isolating, primary Peruvian film aesthetic. The militant cinemas of Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile of the late 1960s and early 1970s brought international attention to their daring style, which revealed heretofore unknown and unseen realities within those countries; by being not nearly so radical, Peruvian cinema of the period was easily overlooked by those European and American film critics and publications in the early 1970s who were actively searching for and embracing revolutionary ideals. At the same time, such explicitly activist cinema inspired significant disapproval from the governments of these countries, which at best exiled many protesting filmmakers and halted development of national cinemas in those countries. The many filmmakers that emigrated to Europe also came into direct contact with the politically conscious cinephiles of the late 1960s and 1970s writing for European publications; hence, the plight of exiled filmmakers had the unintended effect of drawing attention to the cinemas of their countries of origin, specifically to how such national cinematic traditions had been broken and disrupted.

In contrast, cinema in Peru continued a slow but steady development from the early 1970s through the 1980s. A large part of this can be attributed to the simple fact that most Peruvian filmmaking generally did not explicitly critique any Peruvian government. The twenty-year tenure of the Film Law of 1972, started under the Velasco regime, survived through the governments of Velasco, Morales Bermúdez, Belaúnde, García, and the beginning of Fujimori’s first turn in office. These five governments operated under completely different ideological perspec-
tives; yet the Film Law of 1972 was never associated with any political party. If anything, the law’s emphasis on funding can be most closely associated not with Velasco but with the first Belaúnde administration, which was when Armando Robles Godoy started discussing the prospects of a more effective film law with government officials. With governmental support for the creation and distribution of national films at home, filmmakers had no need to go into exile.

The same lack of interest in militant filmmaking characterized *Hablemos de cine* and, in the process, ensured its longevity. The journal’s explicit and exclusive allegiance toward a focus on aesthetics and mise-en-scène also ensured that the journal remained outside the purview of the Peruvian government. The very politics that instructed the journal’s everyday concerns also protected it from the legislative powers. From interviews with other filmmakers from around the continent at the film festivals at Viña del Mar and Mérida, *Hablemos de cine* was aware of a disgruntled leadership’s drastic impact on filmmaking opportunities in the region. This is not to say that the Peruvians were neutral where other Latin American filmmakers encountered political problems: for example, they called for the release of Cinemateca Uruguaya president Walter Achugar in volume 64 (April–June 1972) and the Chilean filmmakers imprisoned under Pinochet in volume 66 (1974).

Whereas nothing quite this drastic on a human rights level was occurring in Peru (or at least not to members of the filmmaking community), there was a conspicuous lack of attention paid to significant events in Peruvian politics that did (or had the potential to) alter national filmmaking and film-viewing practices. This inattention was only unusual because each change in government had significant effects on the local cinematic community. When *Hablemos de cine* began in 1965, moderate rightist Fernando Belaúnde Terry was president. After his removal in October 1968 by Juan Velasco Alvarado, who supported a leftist model favoring the peasant communities of Peru, an effective film law was passed in 1972. In 1975, Velasco was quietly overthrown by Francisco Morales Bermúdez who, though also a military ruler, demonstrated his reactionary positions by removing many reforms instituted during the previous regime. Despite this abrupt turn in political ideology, the Film Law of 1972 remained untouched. Under international pressure, the government returned to a democracy in 1980 with the reelection of ousted president Belaúnde. As a sign of new freedoms, one of the first acts of the second Belaúnde administration replaced state censors with a ratings board. This change allowed many films that had been banned over the last fifty years finally to be viewed, include in such diverse titles as Leo McCarey’s *Duck*
Creating the “Lombardi Generation”

Soup (1933), Luis Buñuel’s Los olvidados (The Young and the Damned, Mexico, 1950), Bernardo Bertolucci’s Last Tango in Paris (1974), and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Salò o le Centoventi Giornate di Sodoma (Salo; or, the 120 Days of Sodom, Italy, 1975). Peruvian exhibition practices also changed with the removal of censorship; an influx of previously banned pornographic films drew a significant percentage of the already male-oriented limeño movie audience. Stimulated by the immense profits, many movie palaces converted permanently to pornography.

Hablemos de cine did not comment on any of these changes in government, and only once, in volume 72, did it refer to a governmental action: when the censor board was disbanded in 1980. While it can be argued that Peruvians themselves might not need to be reminded of the situation they experienced every day, by the mid-1970s the journal had subscribers from overseas who might not be familiar with the contemporary situation in Peru (contrast this with Butaca sanmarquina in the late 1990s and 2000s, which commented extensively on many similar issues of local cinematic concern as they have occurred). Hablemos de cine’s omission of the context of these particular political events could therefore be read as an effort to avoid the attention of political entities.

The possibilities of political action on the journal were most clearly demonstrated in 1973 when the government nationalized the general press (including all newspapers and magazines), largely in an effort to control El Comercio, the major limeño daily newspaper, which had grown critical of the Velasco regime. As a specialized publication and not a general one, such as Caretas or Oiga, Hablemos de cine probably did not have any reason to fear being taken over by the government. Nonetheless, the journal avoided even mentioning this governmental action, much less judging it. Hablemos de cine only critiqued official governmental policies when they strictly affected film in Peru, be it in the areas of exhibition (censorship), distribution (the call for a national cinemathèque) or production (the need to reform the Film Laws of 1962 and 1972). Even these critiques, however, were not specifically directed to, critical of, or accusatory toward the government; rather, they were simple comments that “something needs to be done.”

One of the few times Hablemos de cine spoke explicitly about governmental actions or policies concerned the Film Law of 1972, although this subject was only given scant attention by the journal immediately following its implementation. Mentioned in passing in the editorial of volume 63 (January–March 1972), the entire text of the law was published in the following issue (April–June 1972) but without any further comment. It is unclear why the journal waited almost three years to have a serious discussion concerning the new film law, perhaps
because they assumed that the resulting films would be as insignificant as those that followed the Film Law of 1962. By volume 67 (1975), the journal realized the immense impact of the new law and devoted nearly thirty pages—almost half the issue—to the current state of Peruvian cinema, which was at that point being swamped by the explosion of short films made for obligatory exhibition. This marked one of the few times the journal articulated ideas that went beyond the aesthetic and the purely cinematic.

The political timbre of the law was broached by a very long debate among four of the major editors at the time: Ricardo Bedoya, Federico de Cárdenas, Isaac León, and Pablo Guevara (director of the short film *Semilla* [Seed, 1969]). The comments made at the beginning of the debate indicate a considerable ideological shift stimulated by both the current political situation and exposure to other Latin American cinemas; significantly, however, this shift is only expressed by Guevara:

*If we compare the Peruvian films we have already seen, which ones reflect us as Peruvians? The work that shows a capitalist society or one marching toward socialism? Every nation is trying to figure out how to identify themselves cinematically. Cuba, for example, searches for the essence of the Cuban through nationalist songs and a new cinematic aesthetic, in art and in culture. It is more difficult to be nationalist in the sciences, because technological advances are no longer marked by nationality. The ownership of patents does, but not the science itself. The arts are the venue where that identity can still be recovered. A society can be transformed based on personal qualities grounded in geographic or territorial methods. What films have we seen where we can find this? Maybe [Francisco] Lombardi is the only director who takes a good look at Peru, but his look is only a glance, nothing more. He doesn’t explain it, interpret it, or look for causes.*

I shall return to this comment on Lombardi later in this chapter. For now, I shall point out that Guevara articulates both the place of the arts in establishing national identity and the direction in which the contemporary Peruvian cinematic tradition should be heading: given that the “Peruvian revolution” of the Velasco regime was changing the face of what was traditionally valued as Peruvian, cinema should have reflected a similar ideological shift. Guevara cites Cuban cinema as a viable example of how cinema contributes to establishing a national identity—and significantly more than does the Argentine example of “Third Cinema” espoused
by Cine Liberación and Fernando Solanas, which he finds to be too much a “manipulating cinema of the superstructure.” Isaac León agreed that the key was to ensure that contemporary cinema reflect the ideals of the nation as it is; under Velasco, this meant working toward socialism:

The national always functions within a concrete social formation that looks toward certain superstructures that in turn supply a reflection of “the national.” Cinema reflects something of this. This idea of “the national” is re-evaluated based within certain contemporary historical parameters. Perhaps we should examine in other cinemas, how in a particular historical moment the vision of “the national” corresponds to an ideological vision that reevaluates past artistic or folkloric endeavors.42

As Federico de Cárdenas pointed out, however, these nationalist perceptions of cinema were at odds with the law meant to stimulate it: “There is a conflict between a law prepared during one set of conditions, the parliamentarianism of Belaúnde, and the current set of conditions. We have a cinematic law that is fundamentally oriented around the private sector.”43 The Film Law of 1972 was a nationalist law that, while successful in the short term of stimulating genuine production, lacked the ideological grounding to confirm its purpose as nationalist. De Cárdenas highlights that this legislation stimulated an industry purely through financial means in the form of giving back to producers money earned from the obligatory exhibition of each film, an action seemingly contrary to the ideals of the Velasco regime. The law nevertheless resulted in exactly what Hablemos de cine and local filmmakers had desired for a long time: a relatively self-sufficient consistent industry, necessarily based on economic precepts — with the catch that the most fruitful and prolific area of this fledgling national industry occurred in the arena of shorts, not features. The passage and administration of a capitalist-oriented law during a leftist regime confused the editors, who were now as well versed as their European contemporaries in basic Eurocentric Marxism. Beyond Cuba, Guevara also cited the Cultural Revolution in China as being instructive in how cinematic cooperatives could effectively create legitimate national cinema instead of relying on the economic formula familiar to the film industry:

P.G.: Privatized cinema bases its existence upon a sacred triangle: producer, writer, actor. Even the director is only an intermediary. The one in charge is
the producer who puts down the money. . . . A true national cinema therefore not only must change the content but also the form of production. One of the greatest lessons of the Chinese Revolution is that the growth of productive forces is just as important as granting greater power to the masses. We must break with the way cinematic production is currently conceived. . . .

R.B.: What you are proposing is the configuration of a new cinematic law, not a reformation of this one, as nothing can be done with this one with its origins in the private sector.

P.G.: No, but something can be done to bring in the fundamental ideologies of Peruvian revolution.

I.L.: But this is a question of differences in political practice.

P.G.: I think the possibilities are not that far off. It merely concerns establishing laws that consider cooperative forms and public cinematographic property. The sectors to be covered are already established: private, state-owned, and public. It is the public sector of cinema that should be implemented.

I.L.: What you say is true: the theoretical attitude of the [current] government would permit the initiation of these new forms of production, but a change in superstructure would be necessary. Despite the changes, everyone would still overvalue the traditional forms under the preponderance of the director-star.44

The staff of *Hablemos de cine* had never considered merely the act of filming in Peru as classifying the film as intrinsically “Peruvian”: note the early rejections of Manuel Antín’s *Intimidad de los parques* and all of Robles Godoy’s films as having insufficient national flavor. With volume 67, however, national film production became part of a neo-Marxist argument concerning the structure of the fledgling industry itself and that the “national” nature of the film did not derive from its being filmed in Peru, nor from the citizenship of its makers, nor even from a Peruvian-themed script. Rather a film’s ideological positioning would determine its sense of nationalism.

During this debate, the clearest view of how much this neo-Marxism differed from the journal’s original assessments of Peruvian national cinema can be found in its examination of the short films of director Arturo Sinclair. His *Agua salada* (Saltwater, 1974) would later be considered by the same staff one of the best shorts that resulted from the Film Law of 1972. At this point, however, Sinclair was faulted not for his technical skill but for his failure to create an ideologically appropriate Peruvian short:
F.de C.: The major problem that I see in Sinclair is that his pictures don’t have anything to do with the Peruvian contemporary situation. They might as well be set on Mars.

P.G.: But he can say that they are Third World films because they are made here.

R.B.: But that brings us back again to the problem of national cinema. This [film] isn’t Peruvian because it’s filmed here but because it would be impossible to imagine it placed elsewhere. What matters is reading the singularity of the Peruvian reality.45

Although the roundtable discussion at Hablemos de cine concerns national cinema and the effects of the current law are laced with Marxist terminology and thought, it does not reference any of the primary nationalist, socialist thinkers that came from Peru, specifically early twentieth-century Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui or Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, the founder of the APRA political party. Both socialist thinkers also embraced ideas of a more inclusive Peruvian society, primarily the elimination of class structures in an attempt at a nationalist identity. Overlooking either of these thinkers cannot stem from ignorance; Hablemos de cine had reprinted some of Mariátegui’s writing on film in an earlier issue.46

This debate showed a degree of corroboration with the ideals of the Velasco government. Such support might have been dangerous, particularly given the bad timing of publication: the article was printed in 1975, the same year that Morales Bermúdez quietly overthrew Velasco before plummeting the country into a more repressive, reactionary rule. Perhaps realizing this, a debate concerning Peruvian national cinema at the governmental level did not occur again until well into the 1980s. Notably, although he remained on the staff roster for quite a long time following, the journal’s most radical member, Guevara, did not participate in a discussion like this again.

Had the journal actually published its seventy-eighth issue in 1986 as expected, the editors would undoubtedly have covered Lombardi’s long-awaited adaptation of Mario Vargas Llosa’s 1963 novel La ciudad y los perros. Hablemos de cine reported in 1966 on a failed effort made by Mexican producer Antonio Matouk and director Luis Alcoriza. According to the brief note, the film had been derailed “not because it was impractical but because the film would inevitably trouble the interests of a very powerful caste in our country that would censor the film for the same extracinematic reasons as Morir en Madrid and Battleship Po-
The adaptation of *La ciudad y los perros*, recognized as the novel that sparked the Latin American literary “boom,” would have achieved instant recognition and distribution overseas, but the novel’s obvious critique of the military as a fiery microcosm of Peruvian class structure unnerved many in power. Any further opportunities at filming such a critique would also have been thwarted in the 1970s under the Velasco and Morales Bermúdez military regimes. With the return of Belaúnde in 1980, the censorship board was disintegrated and conditions became amenable to film the adaptation. Vargas Llosa gave his blessing to Lombardi after hearing the director mention during an interview for the release of *Maruja en el infierno* in 1983 that filming *La ciudad y los perros* would be a dream project. The film became a major critical and financial success in Peru and for many years one of the only Peruvian films to receive distribution in the United States outside of the film festival circuit.

Despite the financial incentives still in place under the Film Law of 1972, however, it is almost inconceivable to imagine any other Peruvian director taking on this project—and if one had, it is most likely that such a picture would have looked very similar to Lombardi’s finished piece. By the time of the film’s release, Lombardi had become the standard of Peruvian filmmaking, one that exemplified a cinematic perspective that followed the aesthetic, narrative, and ideological frameworks put in place by *Hablemos de cine* over the previous twenty years. In fact, even without the film journal in place to debate the quality and level of “Peruvianess” of the films of the 1980s and 1990s, the large majority of Peruvian feature films released over the fifteen years following the demise of the journal all looked remarkably similar. The directors all had similar backgrounds, of course having been trained on the short films made throughout the 1970s. Still, it must be noted that, as part of the *limeño* cinephilic culture, these directors had all read the debates in *Hablemos de cine* concerning the questionable and fluctuating nature of national cinema. The “Lombardi generation,” as twenty-first-century Peruvian critics call them, created films that were both critical and financial successes in Peru, occasionally winning international recognition abroad. Politically sensitive themes were more often cloaked by “technically perfect” (to play on García Espinosa’s “imperfect cinema”) filmmaking that emphasized linear narrative structures with a slight twist of what might be termed “local flavor.” Much as *Hablemos de cine* “safely” presented itself to avoid problems with perhaps unsympathetic political administrations, Peruvian filmmakers learned to do likewise. (Note Pablo Guevara’s comment above that Lombardi’s vision of the contemporary Peruvian reality was “not a look, but merely a glance.”)
The conservative, safe political position of *Hablemos de cine*—and, by extension, of Peruvian filmmaking in general—meant that it did not attract the same kind of international attention that was lavished on the cinemas of other Latin American countries. Focusing entirely on aesthetic concerns throughout its publication run, the journal avoided the polemic issues that occupied other film journals during the period. While this unassuming position assured *Hablemos de cine* continued publication and discussions of all kinds of film long after many other journals had folded (from lack of interest or government interference), the Peruvian cinema it had helped mold had, by the end of the 1980s, seemed to stagnate. The result was a standard type of genre feature that often flirted with the possibility of not even being considered a “national production.” It would be almost twenty years before major changes at both the production and critical levels would shift to revitalize the concept of Peruvian national cinema.