CHAPTER 7
THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD
Peruvian Cinema in the Twenty-first Century

A film journal? Yes, although appearing in Peru today seems almost like a contradiction.


Peruvian feature films of the 1980s and 1990s suggest a distinct voice and vision that could not be identified as explicitly Hollywood, European, or even Latin American, despite being obviously influenced by all those cinematic traditions; they also do not look anything like Peruvian features of the 1960s. At the same time, by the time of its closing for economic reasons in 1985, Hablemos de cine had moved over the past twenty years from a highly derivative, insecure publication to the dominant, confident voice of film criticism in Peru—and, with subscriptions reaching internationally, in Latin America as well.1 To a large extent, the ideas and prejudices of Hablemos de cine helped define Peruvian filmmaking of this period, even after its close. The journal protested strongly the overtly racist, broad television comedies such as Nemesio (Oscar Kantor, 1968), and myopic exercises such as Armando Robles Godoy’s Ganarás el pan (You Will Earn the Bread, 1965) in an effort to prevent these extremely popular pieces from becoming the norm of national cinema. Writers at the journal also tended to favor productions with an eye toward audiences from Lima, thereby not supporting work coming from elsewhere in the country. As such, some of the most popular films of the late 1980s were sleek, stylish genre pieces that would undoubtedly
have been praised by the journal for their use of mise-en-scène and narrative economy.

Cut to 2003. Much as in 1977, local cinematic activity experienced a surge of interest and activity. Ten locally produced films opened in Lima; the Universidad Católica announced its seventh annual international film festival in Lima; and, after several years where new megaplexes were only being built in the very affluent parts of the capital, the Chilean company CinePlanet opened a new theater in Los Olivos, a lower-middle-class suburb far from Miraflores, San Isidro, and downtown Lima, the traditional centers of Peruvian cultural power. The conversion of single-screen theaters to the multiplex became advantageous for local productions as exhibitors were more likely to risk a small number of screens for a Peruvian film instead of having to chance a sole screen on a single local effort. While Peruvian cinephiles clearly owe a debt to the films, filmmakers, and critics of the 1970s and 1980s, the local cinematic landscape in the early 2000s is more strongly influenced by the advent of digital technology and the necessity of international funding, leading to a wider variety of styles and subjects.

Accompanying all this cinematic activity, no less than four specialized film journals published in Lima in 2003–2004: La gran ilusión, Butaca sanmarquina, godard! and Abre los ojos. All were weaned on Hablemos de cine, as is evident from each publication’s attempt at serious evaluation of film, both local and from abroad. With growing, easy access to the Internet, however, cinephiles now no longer need depend on local publications for news and information about film in general. Peruvian cinema’s newly complex identity has thus changed the relationship between local filmmaking and locally produced cinematic writing. The longevity of Hablemos de cine established a historical trajectory of contemporary Peruvian filmmaking that in turn allowed it to examine and reexamine particular issues, directors, and films to observe how each fit within the national question. At the turn of the century, Peruvian cinematic culture finds its voice diversifying with a new generation that challenges the ideals of how Peruvian cinema was originally written while affirming the place of the film journal as primary arbiter of “national cinema.”

Hablemos de cine, Again: La gran ilusión
In order to talk about film criticism in the twenty-first century, we must first look to 1993, when the state of the Peruvian film community directly resulted in the creation of another Peruvian film journal later that year. Founded seven years after Hablemos de cine folded, La gran ilusión (The great illusion) was much dif-
different in appearance from its predecessor: published in book form as opposed to a magazine format, the first issue (fig. 15) featured a bright red, glossy cover with a photo still from Martin Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* (1993). The collaborators, however, were very familiar. The editorial board consisted of Giancarlo Carbone, Rafaela García Sanabria, José Perla Anaya, and Isaac León Friás. The editorial staff included Augusto Cabada, Federico de Cárdenas, Rafaela García Sanabria, José Carlos Huayhuaca, Isaac León Friás, and Fernando Vivas Sabroso and was presided over by Ricardo Bedoya. The first masthead cites three additional collaborators: Guillermo Niño de Guzmán, Javier Protzel, and Enrique Silva. Of the twelve people involved in the production of this first issue, half (Bedoya, Cabada, de Cárdenas, de Guzmán, Huayhuaca, and León) had been staff members, if not significant editors, of *Hablemos de cine*. In its thirteen issues, the journal also saw the participation of former hablemistas Desiderio Blanco, Miguel Marías, and Paulo Antonio Paranaguá.

Because of the immense contribution of the former hablemistas and particularly because Ricardo Bedoya remained editor-in-chief, *La gran ilusión* has correctly been viewed as a continuation of the previous journal—albeit with several significant adjustments. The most important change was in the financial backing of the journal: whereas *Hablemos de cine* was entirely dependent on subscriptions and sales and the financial success of the Cine-Club de la Católica, *La gran ilusión* was officially a publication of the University of Lima, which had persuaded its faculty in the School of Communication to start a publication. While this backing meant less worry concerning funding sources, the new journal could not necessarily claim complete journalistic freedom. This funding structure made *La gran ilusión* more similar to a publication like *Cine cubano*, which was funded by the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC). Nonetheless, the University of Lima is a private educational institution and the ICAIC may be more accurately described as a governmental entity; as such, the ideological implications of each sponsoring institution on its respective publication differ considerably.

The other major difference concerns the context of the journal’s origin. *Hablemos de cine* came out of a period of intense cine-club activity and the personal desires of four young men determined to give their perspective on an art form they were passionate about. Though they expressed an interest in making films, there was no real filmmaking tradition in 1965. It is therefore logical to say that *Hablemos de cine* rose from intense (if relatively undirected) spectator activity, as opposed to a strong production background. *Cine cubano*, as has been mentioned earlier, was a journal produced by filmmakers as much as critics and
Figure 15: Cover of *La gran ilusión* 1 (1993). Courtesy of the Universidad de Lima Fondo Editorial.
was therefore involved in production from its inception. The young Peruvian critics were literally only that: young men fascinated by film with little established authority on the subject, apart from a few university classes and experience programming a cine-club film series.

In contrast, *La gran ilusión* emerged as a direct result of the *established* Peruvian film culture community reacting to a specific event: the 1992 repeal of the Film Law of 1972. Interestingly, though the first issue was published less than a year following the decision, the inaugural editorial did not even mention the repeal. The contents of the first issue nevertheless confirm the grave concern among Peruvian filmmakers and aficionados. *La gran ilusión* introduced humorous section titles based on significant films from the past, adopting *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, France, 1959) as the title for the section on film reviews and *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, Canada, 1983) to acknowledge the growing influence of home videos on film viewing. Borrowing from Glauber Rocha’s 1967 Brazilian masterpiece, the section on Peruvian film was called “Tierra en trance” or, in its English translation, “Land in Anguish,” appropriately reflecting the new journal’s feelings toward the state of its local cinema.  

The articles included within this Peruvian section of the first issue, taking up almost a third of the 167 pages, reflected a film tradition in “anguish.” While the issue featured reviews of the two feature films released in 1993 (Felipe Degregori’s *Todos somos estrellas* [We Are All Stars] and Danny Gavidia’s *Reportaje a la muerte* [Report on Death]), the remaining articles emphasized the potential effects on national cinema caused by the removal of the Film Law of 1972. The introductory note to the section contemplated the possible outcomes that resulted from other historical doldrums of Peruvian film production: “Since the legal benefits that permitted more [national] shorts and features to be produced in the last two decades than ever before in history have been lifted, the time has come to reflect. Are we at the dawn of a new, prolonged recession of Peruvian cinematic activities, similar to what happened in 1931 and 1940, postponing an upward trajectory for our cinema?”

The film community was most concerned about the complete removal of obligatory exhibition for all Peruvian productions. The action made the exhibition of locally produced features decidedly more difficult, but it made short-film distribution impossible. Short-film production companies (which assuredly had never budgeted appropriately to foresee this possibility) were left without funds to finish films already in the works; moreover, shorts that were already completed now had no locations to exhibit them. The remaining articles in this issue therefore discussed the fate of the short film—an ironic concern, considering the short
film had been deemed a substandard form by *Hablemos de cine*. The section opened with Bedoya and León’s “The Tribulations of Our Film Industry,” an overview of the effects of the repeal on both short- and feature-length films. Javier Protzel’s “The Short Film: Exploring Its Acceptance” proved in a quantitative study, conducted (surprisingly timely) in September 1992, that the majority (67 percent) of general audiences either didn’t mind or enjoyed seeing short films before each feature. José Perla Anaya detailed the effects of various laws on the development of cinema in Peru in his article “Film and its Right: Legal Aspects of the Emergence of a Cinema.”

The most significant article depicting the changing state of Peruvian filmmaking recounted a conversation among three staff members (León, Bedoya, and Fernando Vivas) and three short-film directors: Rosa Maria Álvarez, Aldo Salvini, and Augusto Cabada. Selected because each had won a prize at the most recent National Short Film Festival, the three directors had each been in the process of making another short film when the law was repealed, putting all of their productions on hold. Álvarez related how immediate the change occurred: “I remember I telephoned the lab technician to tell him that I had heard great things about his work. He replied that he had just been fired as a consequence of the elimination of the benefits from the law. Just at the moment when things were getting better. It’s tragicomic.”

By being active for twenty years, the Film Law of 1972 established an institutionalized training ground for new Peruvian filmmakers with guaranteed exhibition and therefore a secure income for production companies. The repeal caused a crisis among young or new filmmakers who, as Cabada noted, knew of few other viable local opportunities to make films other than through the shorts program: “I don’t think that our generation of filmmakers realized that we grew up in a privileged time. We are not part of the group of filmmakers who had to fight for the passage of the Film Law—we inherited it as if it were a natural thing. In reality it was exceptional, above all if we compare the Peruvian film legislation with that of other countries in Latin America. Maybe this is why we reacted so late.”

Now one of the elder members of the editorial board, León asked the panel if they envisioned a historic return to the 1950s and early 1960s when filmmakers had to negotiate for exhibition with individual theaters, something that feature filmmakers—such as Marianne Eyde with her 1993 film *La vida es una sola* (You Only Have One Life)—were suddenly forced to do. Cabada noted first that he didn’t think short-film exhibition was even possible without the mandatory law, followed by Álvarez stating, “Personally, I am not interested in making shorts
that will not have the possibility of a wide distribution throughout the country, be it by law or by prior agreement with the exhibitors.” Fernando Vivas then proposed, “Perhaps the experience of other countries that produce short films for cultural reasons can be practiced here.” Bedoya responded that the changed, modern situation into which Peru had entered over the last few years had altered both viewing habits and the change in cultural diffusion mechanisms, making the production of “films for culture’s sake” impossible: “This only works in countries where cinema still remains at the center of cultural attention or possesses a strong economic influence. For example, I think that the production experience of the shorts made in Peru by the International Petroleum Company, which was making a cultural investment in Peru in the 1970s, is unrepeatable. . . . Film in the ’90s no longer exists all over the country, whereas television does.” Bedoya’s comments would also apply not only to the state of Peruvian filmmaking but also to *La gran ilusión* and Peruvian cinephilia in general: the decreased interest in cinema made it unlikely that a specialized film periodical would survive if it could not depend on the backing of a large institution with a vested interest, ideological or otherwise, in the promotion of culture.

The greatest fear of the short-film directors—and the new journal’s staff members—was again not that the shorts themselves would disappear but rather that a necessary step to development as a feature-film director had been removed. It would take a long time for any of these three young filmmakers to come into their own within the local cinematic production climate. Cabada became a significant screenwriting collaborator both with Francisco Lombardi and, in 2005, with Luis Llosa on the adaptation of Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del chivo* (The Feast of the Goat), one of Llosa’s only nongenre ventures. (Filmed in English for international exhibition and starring Isabella Rossellini, Llosa and Cabada’s picture was not released in the United States.) Of the three, only Saldini crossed over to features, directing *Bala perdida* (Lost Bullet) in 2001, nearly nine years following the repeal of the Film Law of 1972. Significantly, he was the only new Peruvian director—in other words, the only one who had not made a feature film in the period before 1992—to release a Peruvian feature until 2002.

In evaluating *La gran ilusión*, we should note that in the forty years since the first issue of *Hablemos de cine* was published, the critics associated with that publication became the establishment within Peruvian film culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of the hablemistas were still critics at general publications throughout Lima. Since 1985, Isaac León Frías wrote for *Caretas, Correo, La Crónica*, and the primary daily newspaper, *El Comercio*; Federico de
Cárdenas, for La Prensa, El Observador, and finally La República; Juan Bullitta, as the primary editor of the film page at Correo until his death in 1990; Ricardo Bedoya, for Correo, Universal, Sí, and El Comercio; Francisco Lombardi, for Correo; Melvin Ledgard,\textsuperscript{11} for El Observador; Desiderio Blanco, Constantino Caravallo, Reynaldo Ledgard, and Guillermo Niño de Guzmán, for Oiga. Both Bedoya and Juan Carlos Huayhuaca also developed their own television shows involving film criticism. Many of the Hablemos de cine editors have also become professors of communication at the University of Lima (León, Bedoya, Augusto Tamayo, and Blanco, the last as vice chancellor of the university) or at Universidad Católica (Melvin Ledgard). In addition to their roles as academics, León and Bedoya have been particularly active in contributing to Lima beyond the university: León as the creative director for the Filmoteca de Lima and Bedoya as the historiographer whose meticulously researched books, 100 años de cine en el Perú (1992) and Un cine re-encontrado: Diccionario ilustrado de las películas peruanas (1997), are two of the very few published resources on Peruvian film history.

Given this pedigree that can be attributed to nearly the entirety of the editorial and contributing staff, it may be somewhat surprising that La gran ilusión did not have anywhere near the impact on Peruvian cinematic culture that its predecessor had had. Having a variety of other venues where they were publishing more frequently, authors felt no sense of urgency to contribute articles to a specialized film publication such as La gran ilusión; indeed, they might have already published on more up-to-the-minute issues in their respective publications. The physical manifestation of the journal may have been daunting: unlike Hablemos de cine’s relatively disposable, magazine-like publishing format, La gran ilusión opted for a very large, bound volume with each issue running about 150 pages. The types of articles published also tended to be more academic than those traditionally published in specialized film publications; volume 6, for example, which celebrated the centennial of film in Peru in 1996, included large articles on the history of silent cinema in Latin America, a history of early exhibition in Piura, and a piece about the poetics of Andrei Tarkovsky. Hablemos de cine had featured this type of writing as well, but these essays were juxtaposed with writings on films that were very recently released; the volumes that needed to be compiled for La gran ilusión necessitated a very limited periodicity: originally aiming for release twice per year, the publication quickly became an annual and released only thirteen issues before folding in 2003. Therefore, although the articles in the abovementioned issue also featured more “standard” elements—such as an interview with Armando Robles Godoy and in-depth reviews of recent Peruvian films Asia,
el culo del mundo (Asia: The End of the World, Juan Carlos Torrico), and Bajo la piel (Under the Skin, Lombardi) and American films such as Seven (David Fincher, 1995), Mighty Aphrodite (Woody Allen, 1995), and The Player (Robert Altman, 1992, released in Peru in 1996)—the large time gap between the release of films and publication of their reviews made the reviews themselves mustier than those in Hablemos. Coupled with this datedness was the relative inaccessibility of the volume: not only were issue prices relatively high (at one point almost U.S. $15 per issue), but the publisher, Universidad de Lima, increasingly only permitted the publication to be sold out of its own bookstore at its campus in Camacho, far from nearly all locales where cine-clubs were still running in Barranco, Miraflores, or downtown Lima.12

Concerning their relation to Peruvian cinema, a number of significant differences distinguished Hablemos de cine from La gran ilusión all the way back to their inaugural issues. For one, in 1965, there was no consistent local production to speak of; by 1993 a filmmaking tradition, if not an industry, was an established reality. Both were established out of a sense of urgent possibility concerning the cinema: a burgeoning, exciting art form in 1965; a desperate, probable death knell twenty-seven years later. However, whereas Hablemos de cine stated explicit interest in involving its staff in film production, La gran ilusión appeared willing to remain a critical journal supporting national film production. Hablemos de cine’s inaugural issue stated, “The ultimate goal that we have proposed is that of making movies in Peru, toward which we aim to create a favorable interest in the development of the art form of our time.” Contrast this with La gran ilusión’s evident desire to establish its academic connections from the outset:

We are therefore on the right track in embarking on a new film journal project. And that the School of Communication Sciences has taken the initiative is a clear sign of the importance we give to film within the university environment. If it is true that the School of Communication at the Universidad de Lima—and its predecessor, the Program in Film and Television—already has a long history pertaining to the cultural aspect of the cinema, the last few years have also seen a significant increase in research and textual production of cinematic issues, particularly Peruvian. It is therefore within this context that this journal is situated.13

In 1965, the first-person plural “we” in the editorial clearly refers to the Peruvian cinematic community writ large, including filmmakers, critics, and cinephiles; the
“we” in the later editorial now seems more exclusive, more academic. This ideological distancing between critics and filmmakers within such a small cultural community actually signifies the growing sophistication and maturity of the filmmakers, no longer finding the critical voice necessary for their own validation as artists. Only two members of the original staff listing of La gran ilusión (Cabada as screenwriter, José Carlos Huayhuaca as writer-director) participated in actual filmmaking; the rest of the staff remained concerned solely with criticism. The two spheres were more closely aligned in Peru in 1964, when both sides were hungry for their own visions of Peru to be portrayed on the screen—hence, the critic-filmmaker. By the 1990s, the example of the French New Wave critics who parlayed their theoretical observations into filmmaking was a distant memory and filmmakers no longer chose to define themselves on the page.

Hablemos de cine, peruano: Peruvian Film Journals in the Twenty-first Century

The incredulous tone found in the quotation that opens this chapter might well apply to film writing in the early twenty-first century as much as it did in the 1990s. The situation concerning filmmaking in Peru only appeared to maintain a sense of status quo throughout the ten-year run of La gran ilusión: while several productions were filmed during this period, funding was largely unavailable for domestic projects. Passed during the government of Alberto Fujimori two years after the Film Law of 1972 was repealed, the Film Law of 1994 (D.L. 26,370) replaced obligatory exhibition (where a portion of ticket sales was funneled back to production companies) with a screenplay competition that would award seed money to the writers of winning scripts. On one hand, this new law more explicitly recognized the cultural value of cinema by establishing the program under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, instead of the Ministry of Industry, as had been established under Velasco. On the other hand, as Christian Wiener points out, the main problem with the new Film Law revolved around its complete dependence on the solvency and whim of the federal government. Following the first competition in 1996, only three additional “annual” competitions were organized over the next eight years; the winning writer-directors, however, faced more problems when the Peruvian government defaulted on this prize money. The Film Law of 1994 also did not make any provisions for exhibition; as such, even prize-winning short films were initially only screened at select film festivals such as elcine (Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cine/Latin American Film Encounter) held at the Universidad Católica. As elsewhere in Latin America, Peruvian film-
makers have necessarily turned from depending on governmental financial support for features to international co-production funding opportunities; likewise, instead of funding filmmakers directly, the Peruvian government elected to buy into the fund established by Programa Ibermedia, now the key funding source throughout the continent. Because of these and other international co-production schemes, Peruvian films have necessarily—if ironically—become “less Peruvian” to meet other nationalistic requirements put forth by these international entities. For example, the four films directed by Francisco Lombardi between 1994 and 2000 (Bajo la piel / Under the Skin, 1994; No se lo digas a nadie / Don’t Tell Anyone, 1998; Pantaleón y las visitadoras / Captain Pantoja and the Special Service, 2000; Tinta roja / Red Ink, 2000) were co-produced with the Spanish production company Tornasol Films, S.A.—and each of these films features the conspicuous casting choice of a Spanish woman in a leading role. In each film, the presence of a Spaniard within the Peruvian context must be explained within the diegesis; such casting, however, allows us to interpret reverse colonialism into each of these plots, where the former colonizer Spain is now feminized, reversing a traditional view of the colonized as feminine.¹⁴

Compared to 1965, Peruvian filmmakers in the twenty-first century have a local feature film tradition within recent memory that reaches back at least to the “Lombardi generation” and has remained relatively consistent, if small. Until 2002, every Peruvian feature production was directed by someone who had been trained largely through practice within the short-film industry that flourished between 1972 and 1992; in 2004, the large majority of filmmakers were too young to have trained in that industry. As the “Lombardi generation” are still actively producing films, younger filmmakers have often worked and trained on these larger productions, sometimes simultaneously with their own separate projects: for example, Chicho Durant’s 2004 feature Doble Juego (Con Game) was edited by Josué Mendez, director of Días de Santiago (Days of Santiago), and starred Fabrizio Aguilar, director of Paloma de papel (Paper Dove). At the same time, some of the newer filmmakers do not share the same connections to local filmmaking traditions. Álvaro Velarde (El destino no tiene favoritos / Destiny Has No Favorites) and Antonio Fortunic (Un Marciano llamado deseo / A Martian Named Desire) received their cinematic training from film schools in the United States (the New School and New York University respectively).¹⁵

Ten new features (some mentioned above) being released in a single one-year period also demonstrated a new diversity in both filmmaking techniques and topics. Several of these features have even made it out of Peru, thanks to co-
production agreements and an increased Peruvian presence at international film festivals despite their breaking the mold of genre features. Moreover, although some of these films (generally the ones associated with the “Lombardi generation,” like Durant’s *Doble juego* and Lombardi’s own *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*) are reminiscent of the 1980s type of filmmaking, most of these features attempted new narrative structures or styles that, while perhaps not innovative compared to what is happening in other cinemas around the world, brought a fresh perspective to Peruvian cinema. As a bright, colorful, metafilmic take on the world of making *telenovelas*, Velarde’s *El destino no tiene favoritos* was a critical favorite for being an intelligently produced comedy. On the opposite end, Fortunic’s *Un marciano llamado deseo* attempted a broad sex comedy in the story of a man who pretends to be a Martian in order to sleep with an American woman who is convinced that extraterrestrial life is about to descend upon Machu Picchu. Despite featuring super-hot *telenovela* actor Christian Meier in a nude scene, the movie flopped, but is memorable for inspiring the critics at *El Comercio* to expand their one-to-four-star rating system downward to include a new “white star” to signify something “below poor”; and for partnering with the national telephone company, Telefónica del Perú, to set up an alternate exhibition strategy in which large, outdoor screens were set up in poorer neighborhoods in an attempt to bring the film to a wider audience. Mendez’s *Días de Santiago* (fig. 16), about a young man having problems adjusting back into society after returning from military service, was only the third commercially released feature to be shot on digital video; it won thirty-five awards at international film festivals in Buenos Aires, Lima, Rotterdam, and Valladolid (Spain), along with the Peruvian nomination for Best Foreign Film in 2003. *Paloma de papel* is perhaps the most traditional of this group; its story once again returns to the days of Sendero Luminoso and is set in the Ayacucho region. However, if *La boca del lobo* presented only the perspective of the young soldiers from Lima while representing the terrorists through panoramic shots of the Andes, Aguilar’s film shows the reverse: focusing on a group of *senderista* terrorists as they take a young boy away from his family to train him to become one of them. Of these four films, *Paloma de papel* not only achieved international attention and distribution but also proved to be the biggest local crowd-pleaser as well.

Whereas film production has changed significantly, Peruvian film criticism at first glance seems very much the same as it was forty years earlier. As mentioned above, *La gran ilusión* ceased publication with its thirteenth issue in 2003; much as that publication continued the ideological trajectory of *Hablemos de cine* with
Writing national Cinema

a strikingly similar roster and critical perspective, Tren de sombras commenced publication in March 2004 as a near-seamless continuation of La gran ilusión. Unlike the case with Hablemos de cine, the decision to terminate La gran ilusión lay with disagreements with the publisher concerning sales and publication schedule. The new publication is published out of rival private university Universidad Católica (PUCP) whose cultural institute in the wealthy suburb of San Isidro gained considerable momentum with its ongoing support for elcine, the international Latin American film festival founded in 1997. The founding of the new publication coincided with the move of the Filmoteca de Lima from the relatively impoverished Museo de Arte-Edubanco in Central Lima, consolidating a number of important serious cinematic activities under the auspices of Universidad Católica.

The elite aspirations of the new publication, however, were introduced with the very title, Tren de sombras (Train of shadows), as explained in the opening editorial of the first issue (March 2004):

In Day for Night [La nuit Américaine, 1973], François Truffaut compared a film shoot—and by extension, cinema itself—to the mechanics of a night
Train of Shadows is also the title of a notable Spanish film by José Luis Guerín [1997], but it is also an evocative image; we cinephiles see ourselves as curious people intrigued by the light that appears intermittently between the spaces of the shadows that move forward without stopping. Such is the impression that Maxim Gorky felt upon seeing a movie for the first time. And, starting now, with Guerín’s and Gorky’s permission, Tren de sombras will also be a quarterly film periodical. It will be a publication dedicated to criticism and reflection and will strive to talk about cinema from all over [estará atenta para hablar del cine de todas partes]. And of course our own cinema, because we want films to be made in Peru, regardless of support, financing, or genre.

The editorial indicates that its readership consists of a preselected audience by referencing relatively obscure films (if Truffaut’s is fairly well known, Guerín’s is definitely one known only by cinephiles) and by hinting at the name of Hablemos de cine within the text. Perhaps unintentionally, the editorial separates the ideas of “hablar de cine” and Peruvian cinema into closely placed but independent sentences. The same is true of the publication itself: while a distinct section highlights writing on Peruvian films, standard American and European fare dominates the majority of the magazine. The magazine’s layout is much glossier than the earlier incarnations with brightly colored block panels and many film stills accompanying the sixty pages of text.

The content, however, is composed almost exclusively of short, critical pieces on individual films that may be characterized somewhere between a review and an essay of around one to two pages in length. While this kind of writing was also characteristic of both Hablemos de cine and La gran ilusión (and of many other film periodicals from around the world), the difference here was a decided lack of anything else: lengthier, in-depth writing, which had characterized the earlier publications and established both as historical and cultural resources for cinematic fervor in general, are completely absent. Though the magazine opens with a ten-page retrospective of David Lynch reminiscent of Hablemos de cine’s “acercamientos,” there is no accompanying piece to tie individual reviews of his work together. As for coverage of Peruvian films, the first issue of Tren de sombras (fig. 17) demonstrates considerable breadth. If the first thirty pages are devoted to international cinema (primarily American product), the issue also contains fifteen pages of reviews of recent Peruvian productions. The selections are also not limited to fiction feature filmmaking, given that its lead article in the section
Figure 17: Cover of Tren de sombras 1 (March 2004). Courtesy of the Facultad de Ciencias y Artes de la Comunicación of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.
reviews Stephanie Boyd and Ernesto Cabellos’s lauded feature documentary, *Choropampa, el precio de oro* (Choropampa: The Price of Gold), about a mercury spill at an Andean gold mine; a separate section also features reviews of ten recently produced Peruvian short films.

Overall, this inaugural issue lacks depth, coming across as a slight production. Its shallowness especially disappoints because it follows in the direct wake of its prior incarnations that had carried significant historical critical heft. Almost as a response to these concerns, the second issue of *Tren de sombras*, was released only five months later in August 2004 with a few additional sections of material. Though this issue still contains nearly twenty-five pages of reviews (including ten pages on Tim Burton), two larger sections provide greater space for academic concerns: one on exploitation cinema (*el cine trash*) and a much-larger dossier of articles on the state of film criticism in Peru. Though it is only hinted at in the articles, the reason behind the burst of energy concerning local film criticism comes primarily from the exuberant response from critics (including León, de Cárdenas, and Bedoya) in more commercial publications to Canadian director Atom Egoyan’s 1994 film *Exotica*, which finally opened commercially in Lima in 2003. The accolades that that film received from local critics at first led to a bigger popular turnout for the film than expected; the film’s relatively laborious narrative structure and provocative story (although set in a strip club, there is very little nudity) led to a noisy popular backlash from those who attended the film and were confused by it. These articles served to clarify what a critic is meant to do. Accompanied by responses from filmmakers Alberto Durant and Francisco Lombardi to local critics and a short article by younger critic Natalia Ames on “The Public and the Critic,” this latter section features articles from familiar names: Ricardo Bedoya writes an opinion piece called “‘Star’ Wars” on what should be expected of daily reviewers, while Isaac León writes both the overview of the contemporary situation in “Proposal for a Discussion” and the more directed “Critics Facing Peruvian Cinema” (*El Crítico Frente al Cine Peruano*). In this last piece, León begins by noting: “there is no reason for the [local] critic to differentiate his position on Peruvian cinema from those of other cinemas. It’s true that here we are better able to judge certain elements because, at least it is assumed, we know the history of our own cinematic tradition better—the films it has produced and produces.”¹⁹

Not surprisingly, this defense of “brutal objectivity” when it comes to local cinema mirrors similar rhetoric that *Hablemos de cine* had published many years prior in an editorial concerning the first “candidate” for Peruvian cinema, *In-
timididad de los parques: “We are convinced that you, Dear Reader, will be able to judge for yourself that if we are hard with a particular Peruvian film, it is only because: THOSE WHO LOVE YOU MOST WILL ALSO MAKE YOU CRY.”

León continues, “To analyze the critical positioning in this country necessitates investigating its antecedents, and primarily analyzing the primary milestones achieved by publications like *Hablemos de cine*; in this way, one can see the influence that publication had on current efforts.”

Neither León’s article nor any of the others in this section concerning local film criticism provide details concerning their fellow critics, either at *Tren de sombras* itself or elsewhere.

I would argue that an individual critic, in reviewing an individual film, should be as objective as possible and ideally not be concerned with whether the film is Peruvian or not; to do anything less would be, as León clearly states, “insulting to the artist.” That said, while the Peruvian critic does not have to enjoy the Peruvian film in question, he does have a responsibility to write about the film in the first place, precisely for the reasons León articulates above: because the local critic is most familiar with the history of both local production and criticism and can highlight elements that other critics may simply miss. In the twenty-first century, however, I would argue, an additional reason compels writers to write about and critique Peruvian publications: to establish their own relevancy as a local print publication within the global panoply of film criticism.

In the previous century, cinematic writing—short, critical essays on films already screened by readers—was invaluable for local readers eager to gain information to enhance their own cinephile knowledge but with no other means to do so. In this respect, *Hablemos de cine* (and *La gran ilusión* after it) served the limeño cinephile community well. By 2003, the nature of film writing worldwide had shifted from the “high period” of criticism in the 1960s and 1970s to a point where the very relevancy of film writing has been questioned. Susan Sontag’s infamous 1996 essay “The Decay of Cinema” in the *New York Times* articulated a wistful, nostalgic elegy echoed by many contemporary critics who had lived through the earlier epoch: “If cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead too . . . no matter how many movies, even very good ones, go on being made.”

In an essay for the alarmingly titled collection *The Crisis of Criticism*, J. Hoberman goes further: “The cinephilia of the sixties is over—it required not only the films of the sixties but also the social movement of the sixties.” Hoberman couples this sentiment with a backhanded comment: “There is a sense in which print criticism is obsolete anyway.” In 1998, Hoberman was referring to television, reveling in Fellini’s final film, *Ginger and Fred* (*Ginger e Fred*, 1985), which celebrated old
cinema while showing television for the cheap thrill that it was. Certainly television’s ascendancy was evident in the United States, where, by the early 1980s, Siskel and Ebert at the Movies became a syndicated program broadcast nationally, turning “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” into popular parlance while distilling film reviews into pithy statements designed for television segments. In Peru, however, owing to the dearth of new feature films and the lack of a large moviegoing audience, a similar television program could never have succeeded in the 1980s or 1990s.

Hoberman’s comment about the demise of “print criticism” may nonetheless find resonance on a globalized level in the early twenty-first century with an eye to the role of the Internet and its role in radically altering both film reviewing and film criticism. Many newer critics in the first decade of this new century were simply not alive in the 1960s to develop nostalgia for the rabidly religious days of what might be termed “pure cinephilia”; instead, having grown up with VHS and DVD, newer critics think in terms of these technologies. Obviously this new cinephilia no longer requires so large a screen or so many simultaneous viewers as the old. And there are dangers with this new cinephilia: (1) with no one to immediately confirm and diffuse the pleasure, there is a greater chance that contemporary, home-video-format-based cinephilia could descend into the more pathological scopophilia that Laura Mulvey warned against in the 1970s; (2) with home videotapes and discs (and the bootleg copies of both) having become extremely inexpensive and therefore accessible to even the most financially limited, cinephilia can now be determined more by acquisition of objects (the movie, the disc) than by experiences per se. Nevertheless, the Internet provides another possibility for the opportunity to share ideas about the films—what Paul Willemen referred to as “elbow-ribbing” when discussing a theatrical context—in order to replace and displace the community formation that had occurred in actual theatrical screenings.

Likewise, film writing from around the world is no longer relegated to individual publications that can only be acquired at the local kiosk or cine-club—or, more relevant to this discussion, local film writing no longer provides the only or best source for cinematic information and/or cinephile discourse. This change is especially evident in the Peruvian context: between 2000 and 2005, estimated Internet usage in Peru nearly doubled from 2.5 million to almost 4.6 million users, from 9.7 percent to 16.3 percent of the general population. The surge in public Internet cafés, called “cabinas públicas,” has led to something of a democratization of Internet and computer usage in Peru, indicating that access to Web-based
material would not be so elitist as specialty film publications; access to the Internet to read articles published globally costs considerably less than the cheapest film journal currently published in Peru.  

The nature of general Internet consumption in Peru, however, is not focused on locally produced media. Eduardo Villanueva Mansilla has noted that “the structure of content provision is similar in the Internet domain as it is in the media, with a high degree of concentration due to the presence of an oligopoly structure. . . . This creates a Web content sphere quite similar and not differentiable from the traditional media sphere, and the communicational practices of the public in the cabinas públicas reflect it.”

Given the state of globalized mass communication at the beginning of this century, it follows that cinephiles searching for cinematic discussion on the Internet will not necessarily look to Peruvian online publications for information about international cinema. The type of “light analysis” as practiced within the initial issues of Tren de sombras is readily available on the Internet from anywhere in the world from any number of other sources. By adhering to older ideas of what a film periodical should look like and how it should examine film, Tren de sombras risks becoming obsolete—except that it does present significant material on Peruvian product. The dominant and ever-more-accessible nature of globalized film writing actually highlights the importance of the locally produced film journal. Whether or not they choose to accept that particular mandate, local specialized film journals continue to serve the same two purposes that Hablemos de cine eventually realized throughout its publication run: (1) in the short term, the journal’s reactions and opinions on the current cinema reflect, produce, and shape the local cinephilic culture, which may actually coincide with globalized reactions to these films; (2) in the long term, the importance of these publications lies in the historical reflections on the very culture that they are living in. In short, Peruvian film publications continue to maintain their relevance and establish their respective identities in the twenty-first century through their stated relationships with the question of local/national cinematic product, specifically Peruvian films and film culture.

With the rise of an Internet presence and the demise of print criticism worldwide, logic dictates there would be less cinematic writing published in Peru by the beginning of this century—and yet, even counting La gran ilusión and Tren de sombras as the same publication, no fewer than four specialized film journals were publishing simultaneously in Peru from 2002 to 2004. Such a number indicates that a certain restlessness was felt among young critics ready to reject the positions of their forefathers from Hablemos de cine, much as the filmmakers of
the early twenty-first century were not necessarily looking to the 1970s generation as immediate influences. Such diversity also signifies, as with the cinema, a certain “maturity” with regard to defining “Peruvian cinema.” Filmmakers and critics recognize that Peru will never be able to support a feature film industry, yet neither at this point can Peruvian cinema be considered “nascent” or “beginning.” Borrowing biological terminology, we might say Peruvian cinema has entered a “nymph stage”: smaller and still largely undeveloped, but with more characteristics of a “developed” sense of national cinema.

The three other publications in fact have deliberately marked their positions with regard to the critics and criticism of the hablemistas; some offering homage, others openly caustic. As with Hablemos de cine in 1965, all these newer publications were written—if not also completely manufactured—by young critics clamoring to get a hold on the cultural capital invested within local film criticism. This demand invariably meant that each publication has had to define its position with regard to the concept of Peruvian national cinema as well.

The “New, New Guard”: godard! and Abre los ojos
The aptly named godard!, beginning with its first issue in May 2001, most directly parallels the publication history that had characterized Hablemos de cine nearly thirty-five years earlier. Rather than expressing the hope for a new cinema, however, godard!’s stance at its founding can be expressed in a single sentence taken from the editorial in the second issue: “We do not believe in the current Peruvian national cinema.”30 The slight magazine, if more professionally published than the original run of Hablemos, was written almost exclusively by three young critics: Claudio Cordero, Sebastián Pimentel, and José Tsang. All three are graduates of the School of Communication at the University of Lima; thus much of their formal training comes directly from the hablemistas who teach within that program: Isaac León Frías, Ricardo Bedoya, and Augusto Tamayo. In a 2007 interview, Cordero relates that all three godardistas had read and even collected copies of La gran ilusión, but had grown progressively dissatisfied with both the criticism and the films released in the late 1990s and the subsequent decade.31 In the premiere issue, the editorial attacks Lombardi for his latest film Tinta roja (Red Ink, 2000): “No prize from the Havana or San Sebastián film festivals will abate our anger directed at the most recent garbage thrown at us by Francisco Lombardi, whom we still haven’t forgiven yet for his last two filmic incursions, No se lo digas a nadie [Don’t Tell Anyone, 1988] and Pantaleón y las visitadoras [Captain Pantoja and His Special Service, 1999].” Rather than clarifying these
Writing national cinema statements, the first issue ignored discussions of national productions in the remainder of the issue, as if the films and the filmmaking situation were not even worth mentioning; instead, the magazine devoted the majority of its contents to commercial, Hollywood material, as opposed to the more explicitly “cinephilic” (read: art house) fare more typical of a serious film journal. The first issue sold out quickly, prompting the quick release of a second issue in September 2001 (fig. 18), a far quicker turnaround than that produced by La gran ilusión, which was by this point publishing annually.

This second issue, however, immediately followed the elcine film festival in August; in 2001, the critics’ prize was awarded in a split vote to two Peruvian films, Augusto Tamayo’s period piece El bien esquivo (The Elusive Good, 2003) and Aldo Savini’s Bala perdida (Lost Bullet, 2001), besting more prominent films such as the Argentine Nueve Reinas (Nine Queens, directed by Fabián Bielisnky, 2001) and Plata quemada (Burnt Money, Marcelo Piñeyro, 2001) and the Uruguayan surprise hit 25 Watts (directed by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll). This second issue, however, immediately followed the elcine film festival in August; in 2001, the critics’ prize was awarded in a split vote to two Peruvian films, Augusto Tamayo’s period piece El bien esquivo (The Elusive Good, 2003) and Aldo Savini’s Bala perdida (Lost Bullet, 2001), besting more prominent films such as the Argentine Nueve Reinas (Nine Queens, directed by Fabián Bielisnky, 2001) and Plata quemada (Burnt Money, Marcelo Piñeyro, 2001) and the Uruguayan surprise hit 25 Watts (directed by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll).32

The festival organizers reveled in this achievement, stating that the simultaneous win signified “the rebirth of Peruvian cinema”; however, a number of other critics quickly contested this win. In his summary of the festival, Claudio Cordero reminded readers of the “not few spectators who booed and left in the middle of screenings of Bala perdida.”33 Other critics had even stronger words for El bien esquivo, which had premiered at the festival. José Tsang’s essay on the film commends a negative review by Jaime Luna Victoria in the news magazine Etecé, a review that sparked much debate about the film in the popular press:

> Why are other “slow” films not boring? Because those filmmakers try to entertain viewers with an appealing or interesting narrative structure, creative use of mise-en-scène, and/or some sense of dramatic intensity. Unfortunately, Tamayo’s film doesn’t accomplish any of these feats in an interesting manner. For that reason the end result is unsatisfactory.34

Luna’s review, along with one by Alberto Servat, sparked vociferous defenses of the film by cinephilic mentors (and former hablemistas) León in Caretas, Bedoya in El Comercio, and Augusto Cabada in Somos. Tsang’s argument, however, quite simply states that the film is not cinematic enough: “El bien esquivo may have many references—from literature, theater, photography, scenic arts, feuilleton, painting, architecture, costume design, interior design, etc. Everything except cinema.”35
Figure 18: Cover of godard! 2 (September 2001). Courtesy of godard! Revista de cine.
In the final and third article on the concerns of *El bien esquivo* and the el-cine festival, Sebastián Pimentel accuses the critics of creating a stagnant version of contemporary cinema through a methodical linking of filmmaker to critical position:

*Remember that we are talking about critics who, just like their forebears at that mythical French magazine, should have naturally continued on from criticism to directing. We only wish that such foundational work had been done, given that Peruvian film history still does not include any important or original films, or even any that can transcend universal boundaries (such as occurs occasionally, for example, in Brazilian or Mexican filmmaking). As such, perhaps it is therefore time to seriously judge the way with which some of the Hablemos de cine group, who include José Carlos Huayhuaca, Augusto Tamayo, and, of course, Francisco Lombardi. All of them have tried to adopt Peruvian themes to the molds and formulas derived from Hollywood. Hence, we get Huayhuaca’s Profesión: Detective (film noir mixed with local comedy), Lombardi’s psychodramas placed within stories involving police or criminal intrigue, Tamayo’s La fuga de Chacal [Flight of the Jackel], whose police story featured a script co-written by Bedoya, etc. To this stream of mediocre products . . . we must add those who also took this mantle at a very early point: Luis Llosa, whom we may best remember for Misión en los Andes [Hour of the Assassin, 1988], and Alberto Durant (Malabrigo [1987], Alias: La Gringa [1993])—that is to say, more of the same.*

I quote this passage at length to demonstrate how Pimentel damned both Peruvian cinema and the critics who he (correctly) claimed have helped create it by naming them individually. The essay exposes those who appreciated *El bien esquivo* for having bought too readily the promise of a national cinema unrealized. Given that much of Cabada, León, and Bedoya’s remarks defend the nature of Tamayo’s complex script, Pimentel reminds them that the script is not what they should be concerned about:

*With *El bien esquivo*, it seems the time has come for this generation and its followers . . . to stop believing that a cinema made to ensure its perfection, a cinema obsessed with calculating on paper how to add national themes to generic formulas, can ever become great cinema. No. Until now, our film-
makers have not taken any risks with their creativity. It seems as if they do not understand that films are made only once you start filming; films begin with mise-en-scène, with contact with life—and not with the script, with is always only a guideline. Any other way will only give us lifeless films.\[37\]

As much as they critique their elders, these passages from godard! concerning national cinema first and foremost highlight the effects of Hablemos de cine even into the present century. For one, both Tsang and Pimentel confirm that, in defending the film, these “old school” critics only continued the notion that their type of Peruvian cinema, honed over a period of twenty years, should prevail. More telling, however, Luna and Tsang use the same logic and terminology that Hablemos de cine honed, demonstrating the elder writers’ effect on Peruvian film criticism writ large and beyond the scope of the hablemistas-turned-popular-critics like Bedoya and León. Tsang and Cordero affirm their opposition to films that do not emphasize the creative focus on mise-en-scène. The verve with which these critics embraced Hollywood fare over European or national product almost echoes the preference for American genre films of both Hablemos de cine and the French Cahiers du cinéma, as if legitimizing this kind of cinema were a rite of passage for all young film critics. The rhetoric of cinematic terminology utilized by diverse Peruvian critics indicates that, while the “new new guard” may have wanted to separate itself from the hablemista way of viewing, they have nonetheless inherited the language of their forebears.

Initially, the problems associated with godard! mimicked the charges leveled against the early Hablemos de cine in 1965: youth and inexperience. The three young editors invariably overstepped their boundaries in their assessment of local films and sometimes hurt their credibility in their zeal to dismiss aspects of Peruvian film history. Though published elsewhere, comments written by Sebastián Pimentel about the history (or lack thereof) of Peruvian cinema were critiqued for inaccuracies by Christian Wiener in Butaca sanmarquina in 2002, accompanied by the a caustic reprimand, “It is essential that whoever calls himself a critic should at least be informed about what they write and, without intending to get personal, be able to back up what they write in black and white.”\[38\]

The magazine nevertheless remained, publishing with some regularity with higher production standards and a better appreciation and understanding of Peruvian films. Moreover, although the godard! group maintained an “outsider” attitude with reference to what they called “the official voice” of Peruvian film criticism, the group also gained a foothold within the very society they critiqued. Cordero
reviewed films for the largest Lima daily, *El Comercio* (alongside *hablemista* Ricardo Bedoya), and Pimentel has likewise published in *Somos, El Comercio’s* weekly cultural magazine (along with Isaac León). When asked in a 2007 interview why he did not consider himself part of the “official voice of critics,” Coradero pointed out wistfully that “we are still a bit on the margins—after all, we have never been invited to be on the jury for the *elcine* film festival, which is something that everyone attends and would know about.” That said, in 2006, the same festival scheduled an official presentation within the program in honor of the magazine’s tenth issue.

If *godard!* entered the cinephile community through disrupting the general bonhomie among complacent film critics, a second, short-lived journal suggested a similar desire for a new direction in Peruvian criticism, one with smarter writing and fewer polemics. *Abre los ojos* (Open Your Eyes) only published two issues in 2002, yet created an indelible impression on the cinephile community in the early 2000s. Like *Tren de sombras*, this journal was named for a 1997 Spanish film, although this one, directed by Alejandro Amenábar, was far more accessible; like *Hablemos de cine*, the title of the journal was a grammatically playful directive to its readers to pay more attention to cinematic elements. The stark, minimalist introductory pages were the antithesis of the brusque introductions in the first issues of *Hablemos de cine* and *godard!* Starting with a cover illustration derived from David Lynch’s *Mulholland Dr.* (2001, notably not reviewed in the issue), the inside cover merely listed a series of last names of noted international auteurs; of this list, only one (“Ripstein,” referring to Mexican director Arturo) is Latin American and none of the possible Peruvian candidates (Lombardi, Robles, García) are listed. The first page of the issue simply shows a relatively small photograph of Billy Bob Thornton from Joel Coen’s *The Man Who Wasn’t There* (2001) surrounded by ample white space, captioned with the line from the film, “You know what it is, Mr. Crane? You’re an enthusiast.” Also accompanied by much white space on page 3, the brief editorial—reprinted below in its entirety—recognizes the divisiveness stirred by the new presence of *godard!* among Peruvian cinephiles:

*There are so many ways to view a film, just as many ways to view life. That is what makes us passionate: the diversity. And diversity is what defines us.*

*If there is one thing that defines us as a film journal, it is the desire to not have a “single method.” We have too many—or, perhaps, none. Instead of stretching the parameters of “how to write about film,” we have at least tried*
here to open them up. In that way, we can embrace the contradictory mosaic that we are. No more, no less.40

All of these references suggest the sophisticated reader whom *Abre los ojos* wished to cultivate, yet in many ways the approach is subtler and more inviting than earlier attempts; the very title, “open your eyes,” comes across as more of a suggestion than the battle cry referenced by *Hablemos de cine*. This quieter, yet assured attitude could describe the editorial director, Mario Castro Cobos, programmer for the Cine-Club Arcoiris in the middle-class district of Jesús María. And, significantly, unlike the small initial staffs of both the other publications mentioned, *Abre los ojos* began with thirteen people on their roster, suggesting a larger collaborative effort at work even before the first issue was released. Much like *godard!*, the initial issue eschewed discussion of Peruvian cinema as a priority—not that nowhere in the prefatory material has anything regarding national cinema been mentioned—and instead provided a series of essays on a variety of international art-house fare. Rather than ignore Peruvian films completely, the three most recently released films—Salvini’s *Bala perdida*, Tamayo’s *El bien esquivo* and the Spanish co-produced documentary *La espalda del mundo* (The Back of the World, Javier Corcueca, 2000)—were featured briefly within a large section (nearly 40 percent of the forty-page total for the issue) called “Dossier 2001,” along with sixty-seven other entries on other films released in Peru. In other words, these films were treated no differently than any other film. Castro’s review of *El bien esquivo* found the film significantly flawed in much the same way as the writers at *godard!* but the tone, particularly in the final assessment, retained a gracious willingness to accept the film as a failed experiment:

> The film loses its identity in not being able to find a plausible path between the genres of historical epics and adventure films. There are moments when the film seems like one genre or the other separately, but neither seems fully realized—and the moments when this does seem realized, everything stops instead. . . . What a shame. An elusive identity. Worth it for the effort.41

As a whole, *Abre los ojos* distinguished itself perhaps by its pointed lack of interest in the expected norms of Peruvian cinematic culture, aiming instead for more esoteric material. Only two full-length articles on Peruvian film culture were printed during the journal’s short publication run, both in the second issue and both ex-
ploring material not covered in other publications: cinephilic life in Trujillo, Peru’s third most-populous city on the northern coast and traditionally not associated at all with national film culture; and an interview with Mauricio Hidalgo, co-director of the medium-length documentary *La década del silencio: La matanza de Barrios Altos* (The Decade of Silence: The Massacre in Barrios Altos, 2002). Given that there were at least three film journals with more established pedigrees publishing at this time in Lima, this small, young publication produced impressive original material, including interviews with Canadian documentarian Renny Bartlett, Chilean documentarian Patricio Guzmán, and Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis. Nearly all the *Hablemos de cine* contributors with whom I spoke in early 2003 praised the journal as the most promising new critical voice in film journalism; nonetheless, *Abre los ojos* never published a third issue. Significantly, by the middle of the decade, director Castro had started contributing to *godard!* as that publication also matured, demonstrating that publication’s more open, if still somewhat confrontational, attitude toward national cinematic endeavors.

**Hablemos de cine peruano: Butaca sanmarquina**

As we have seen, the four Peruvian film journals of the early 2000s had very different stylistic, cinephilic, and historical concerns and personalities. *La gran ilusión* attempted to continue the tradition of criticism through mise-en-scène established by *Hablemos de cine*; *godard!* proposed a violent break with the films produced as a result of this criticism, even if their methodological approach remained similar; *Abre los ojos*, with its diverse, pensive approach failed to establish itself as a larger force perhaps precisely because it did not engage with the current polemical debates of Peruvian cinema writ large. The fourth publication, *Butaca sanmarquina* (fig. 19), is a fascinating amalgam of all of these traditions whose history reveals a publication that has developed into what I would argue is the true heir to *Hablemos de cine* as the prime publication of cinematic debate in Peru at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

*Butaca sanmarquina’s* modest origins connect directly with the renewed cinephilic fervor within the Cultural Center affiliated with Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos. Originally founded in 1967 and a major hub of film-oriented activity for nearly three decades, Cine-Arte de San Marcos had gone relatively dormant in the mid-1990s. As the editorial for its inaugural issue clarifies, the journal was part of a restructuring process attached to the reorganization of Cine-Arte in 1998. As dryly related by founder Fernando Samillán Cavero, the goals for the journal were modest and largely pedagogical in nature:
Figure 19: Cover of Butaca sanmarquina 1 (July–September 1998). Courtesy of Dirección de Cine y Televisión of the Centro Cultural de San Marcos.
We have established the objectives and goals that we wish to accomplish in the short and medium term. Within these parameters, the publication of the journal should serve as a platform in order to:

- Relate the thoughts and works of leading filmmakers;
- Promote, through analysis and commentary, a critical appreciation for film;
- Disseminate the accomplishments of Peruvian cinema through knowledge of filmmakers, their filmographies, their projects and aspirations; and
- Learn about the activities undertaken by groups and persons working in film within Peru.\(^{43}\)

No matter their position on national cinema, all the other Peruvian film publications previously mentioned expressed a certain excitement about cinema—whether as art, as a mode of expression, as problematically expressed, and so forth—in their debut issue, as if they needed to defend the necessity of their published existence with energy or drive; perhaps this enthusiasm stemmed from the youth of the founding editorial directors of at least three of the ventures (*Hablemos de cine, Abre los ojos, godard!*). In contrast, the very name of this publication belies its unassuming attitude: rather than commanding spectators to participate within the cinematic experience or referencing the most experimental of the French New Wave filmmakers, the phrase simply refers to a theater seat (*butaca*) reserved for someone affiliated with Universidad de San Marcos (the adjective *sanmarquina*).

Far from participating in critical polemics and without articulating any aspirations to change or modify existing cinephilic practice, the first eleven issues of *Butaca sanmarquina* instead aimed to educate readers about current local filmmaking practices and provide some historical reference concerning national cinema. *Butaca* established an early identity through numerous interviews with local filmmakers and other local professionals, including actors, sound designers, directors of photography, and screenwriters. This interview breadth and attention to the local was a pointed rejection of the cult of the auteur. The magazine also deemphasized reviews, only once presenting more than five in a single issue. All reviews and most articles were handled by the young writing staff, identified in the first issue as all San Marcos students. As a publication explicitly sponsored and staffed by an institution, the journal also prominently featured events held on-site at the Cine-Arte location in downtown Lima, such as the awarding of the 1998 CONACINE awards.

Despite a regular, quarterly publication schedule, *Butaca sanmarquina* did not immediately gain significant traction within Peruvian cinematic circles. Geared for
a younger audience, the tone of the periodical was more pedagogical than exciting, including the ever-present formal photograph of director Samillán printed on the editorial page. Samillán did not preside over polemical or provocative writing that could be found in other periodicals. His own pieces were almost exclusively personal historical accounts of older aspects of Peruvian media: most notably, two reflections on the death of producer Vlado Radovich. Even so, Samillán’s writing seemed out of place juxtaposed with journalistic material about otherwise very contemporary figures. Finally, despite its association with an institutional entity called “Cine-Arte,” the publication reserved space for articles on television as well—something very much in line with the educational program at San Marcos, but anathema to the cinephiles who reveled in “pure cinema” with Hablemos de cine and La gran ilusión.

Not adhering to the Cahierist traditions of cinematic writing, however, opened possibilities to more fluid definitions of “cinema” itself. This flexibility would be a distinct advantage in coping with the rapid changes that would affect Peruvian cinema in the early twenty-first century. With the already established interest in television, for example, Butaca sanmarquina’s interest in how digital video was being used in contemporary local filmmaking practices (September 2000) did not seem out of place, planting a seed for later discussions of how the Internet and video would also affect filmmaking in Peru.

The less discriminate understanding of cinephilia also allowed for Marco Avilés’s fascinating “review” of Federico García’s 1999 film El Amauta (The Wise One), which reads more like an essay about alternate exhibition practices held in Lima. Continuing his trend of biographical pictures concerning significant Peruvian countercultural figures (such as Melgar, el poeta insurgente [Melgar: The Insurgent Poet, 1982] and Túpac Amaru [1984]), this period piece explores the early life of José Carlos Mariátegui, an intellectual considered one of the main figures in Latin American Marxism. The problem, as Avilés notes quickly in his piece, was that García could not show the film in commercial theaters precisely because he did not have enough funding to make theatrical prints; the version he viewed at the Centro Cultural de España was, as he puts it, “a poor copy on video.” The more nefarious issue—and what makes this particular “review” more compelling than most—was how the film had been denied funding by a variety of sources, including commercial television sales and CONACINE, which considered the film “a work that, for its questionable artistic level and commercial potential, was not deemed an appropriate choice to finance.” Instead of then reviewing the film, as was customary for this section of the magazine, Avilés
instead chose to meditate on “the ways in which culture and market are intertwined in a country like Peru or, more precisely, what happens when art must also be profitable.” Avilés continued by restating the idea that both exhibitors and producers worked against developing a more “open” sense of national cinema, only rewarding films that will guarantee a good return on their investment and working against films with a political bent; he notes that in comments offered before the screening García made a joking reference to the recently released No se lo digas a nadie (a blockbuster directed by Francisco Lombardi), stating that “if Mariátegui had only been gay, surely this film would be on screens.” The conclusions that Avilés arrived at with this piece are neither surprising nor new—but that Butaca sanmarquina published a rather polemical piece on a film otherwise destined for obscurity highlights important distinctions. For one, definitions of “cinema” can be fluid enough to include this version shown on video tape in a non-theatrical setting; indeed, while his films have not been positively reviewed since 1977’s Kuntur Wachana, García himself insists that his films are watched in many nontraditional formats, including screenings at community centers and union meetings and purchases from black-market vendors. Thus, including a review on this piece invited readers to consider how this film might be included within a less concrete definition of “Peruvian cinema.”

Although the organizational structure and types of articles and writing are consistent with the previous ten issues, Butaca sanmarquina 11 (April 2002; fig. 20) indicated a shift in focus through a major visual layout change. Cover design—which had consisted undramatically of a photographic film still encompassing the entire page with the title and cover lines (lines of text placed on the cover) superimposed on top of the photograph—now separated all text out into areas above (with black text on white background) and below (white text on black background) a large, colorful film still from Álvaro Velarde’s El destino no tiene favoritos (Destiny Has No Favorites, 2002). The cover was far more striking and attention-grabbing than any of the previous had been, and served to separate the journal from other publications. Inside, a smaller font was used throughout the publication and often placed white text on black backgrounds as frequently as black text on white. The sleek, modern look achieved by the use of black instead of white to set off text brought a visual cohesiveness extending from the cover throughout the journal. The following issue (12, August 2002) also established an organization strategy for the content, dividing articles (much as La gran ilusión had) into distinct, recognizable sections, some of which were wittily named for other movies: “Interiors” (a play on the 1978 Woody Allen film title) for the
Figure 20: Cover of Butaca sanmarquina 11 (April 2002). Courtesy of Dirección de Cine y Televisión of the Centro Cultural de San Marcos.
section bringing together writings on national cinema, “Los olvidados” (literally, “The Forgotten Ones,” though the English film title of the 1950 Mexican film by Luis Buñuel is The Young and the Damned) for the reprinting of historical film writing, and so forth. By the next issue (13), these layout changes were standardized so that later issues could be vertically associated with the new volumes.

As had the changes in the format of Hablemos de cine, the new look of Butaca sanmarquina 11 marked an ideological shift. Unlike the earlier publication’s, however, this ideological shift was accompanied (and largely brought about) by a shift in personnel. Replacing Samillán as director was René Weber, a professor and filmmaker who had been an original member of the Grupo Chaski and whose writing provided a more provocative viewpoint for the previously otherwise nonpolemical publication. The editorial from volume 7 (September 2000) demonstrated the difference between the two directors: Samillán began the piece by congratulating Francisco Lombardi for winning a number of prizes at the Gramado (Brazil) film festival before briefly noting that the Peruvian government had, three years late, finally paid into the Ibermedia funding program. Rather than comment on the issue himself, Samillán ceded the space to Weber, who both highlighted the opportunities that participation within the program might bring and noted that the cinematic community must remain vigilant to ensure that defaulting on participation in the program did not happen again:

*By finally submitting the $100,000 to the Ibermedia fund, our country can stop taking on the role of “ugly duckling” in the annual meetings among the Ibero-American film authorites. At the same time, the Peruvian representatives of CONACINE can also stop interacting with such a timid, notable low-profile manner against the government’s unwillingness to fulfill a promise. . . . There is no time to let the ball drop on this issue; we must already begin the struggle to ensure the next annual payment gets paid as, after all, the governmental contribution comes annually.*

Weber’s writing is not necessarily polemical here but it is nonetheless firm on an issue of cinematic importance at the national level; notably, however, Samillán was unwilling to sign his own name to such rhetoric. The announcement in René Weber’s editorial in volume 11, which declared that “starting with the next issue, Butaca sanmarquina will demonstrate some changes in structure and content,” clearly signaled that the publication would no longer remain a mere pedagogical outlet.

Within six months, Butaca sanmarquina began its transition to become, if
not the dominant force in Peruvian film criticism, certainly the most important publication with regard to national cinema; it became the locus for virtually all debate concerning contemporary issues of Peruvian filmmaking. Many of its earlier supposed weaknesses became strengths as Peruvian cinematic culture slowly turned away from the traditional. For example, I have stated at many points thus far that *Hablemos de cine* as a journalistic entity benefited greatly from having Isaac León as the single, influential editor-in-chief who remained in that post for the entire run of the publication. Seen positively, his presence grounded the publication; taken negatively, his influence produced a singular form of criticism to a fault, causing Peruvian film criticism—and subsequently filmmaking—to become homogenized. *Butaca sanmarquina* benefited from the shift to Weber, who clearly wanted to stretch the possibilities of the publication by introducing more theoretical perspectives. Weber himself stated that one of the biggest changes in the publication was the appointment of an advisory board, establishing a diversity of senior-level writers. At the same time, many of the students who started with the journal—including Rony Chávez, Gabriel Quispe, and Carlos Zevallos—continued to craft their writing into a much clearer, mature style by incorporating more theoretical and historical perspectives. All three of these began by writing unremarkable reviews of Oscar-nominated films in the first issue; just five years later, in the December 2003 issue, all three wrote sophisticated historical pieces for a special collection of essays on film genres. It should also be noted that *Butaca sanmarquina*’s relatively regular and frequent release schedule—roughly every three months—allowed it to still review a wide range of contemporary releases in a more timely fashion than any of the other periodicals. Although the number of reviews published per article were generally fewer than at *Tren de sombras* (also publishing at this time), each piece was given two pages; the journal’s more frequent publication schedule actually allowed it to assess more films over the course of the year.

Newer film practices in Peru also continued to be a priority in the pages of *Butaca sanmarquina*. Although the periodical quickly phased out its emphasis on television in order to concentrate on cinema, digital and Internet practices became hot topics, particularly as applied to a Peruvian context. For example, the June 2004 issue features an article by Claudia Ugarte on the Internet listserv called Cinemaperú. This article confirms that the most vibrant discussions about “Peruvian national cinema” have moved away from the pages of film journals to the Internet, where everyone can “read, learn about, get riled up about, respond, learn, teach, discuss, propose, are wrong, ask forgiveness—in other words, all
use the Internet to elaborate the script of a contemporary debate: what to do with Peruvian national cinema?"\textsuperscript{50}

The primary contribution of \textit{Butaca sanmarquina} from the beginning was its emphasis on Peruvian cinema; while decreasing the more informational interviews with myriad filmmakers, the journal under Weber turned to more polemical issues that went beyond the pedagogical, but—uniquely—without alienating different perspectives. The October 2003 issue, for example, bought together seven articles on the current state of DVD piracy in Peru from a range of perspectives: from a report on a university cine-club that only shows pirated films, to the first-person “confessions of a pirate,” to an interview with Martín Moscoso, the head of INDECOPI, the national copyright protection agency.

Long before \textit{Tren de sombras} would address the topic, \textit{Butaca sanmarquina} 13 (October 2002) featured “Critiquing the Critics (\textit{Crítica de la crítica})” prompted by a roundtable discussion between many of the critics currently writing and compiled by senior writer Christian Wiener. This piece summarized the history of film criticism in Peru while also exposing the faults of the majority of contemporary critics—and noting that the roundtable at one point devolved into “a useless and sometime personal interchange between the ‘godfathers’ of \textit{La gran ilusión} and their apparently angry illegitimate children at godard!”\textsuperscript{51} A side box provides self-perception from four critics of various ages, representing four publications: Emilio Bustamante from \textit{La gran ilusión}, Mario Castro Cobos from \textit{Abre los ojos}, Gabriel Quispe from \textit{Butaca} and Jaime Luis Victoria from the news magazine \textit{Etecé}. Notably absent from this group is \textit{godard!} which may indicate what little regard Wiener and \textit{Butaca} held for the maverick publication.

Given the animosity demonstrated in this story, one cannot imagine a debate about any aspect of national cinema in \textit{La gran ilusión}, \textit{Tren de sombras}, or \textit{godard!} given the stated polemical positioning of both publications. Particularly in the second phase of its publication run, \textit{Butaca sanmarquina} became the written voice for such discussions. The largest testament to this is that many feuding critics would meet on Butaca’s pages, even when they had their own periodical as a platform. A key example is a rather lengthy, public exchange of letters printed over three issues of \textit{Butaca sanmarquina} between critic and theorist Balmes Lozano and Isaac León Frías concerning the former’s appropriation of auteur theory toward Peruvian directors and the latter’s point that analogies between Hollywood and Lima as “industrial cinematic entities” are ruinous. The details of this debate are less at issue than the recognition that these two large figures within Peruvian criticism came together in debate within \textit{Butaca}. 
René Weber’s editorial for volume 20 referenced the inaugural issue: “‘We begin with a sense of modesty,’ Samillán affirmed in the first issue. We have continued working with such modesty, but we have also set ourselves goals that are each time more ambitious, goals that preserve a critical and polemical spirit.”

This particular issue tackled the larger question of the national within the global, political, and economic power structures as various directors, critics, and theorists debated Peru’s place within UNESCO. Also debated were the World Trade Organization discussions in 2002 concerning cultural diversity and cultural exception, two concepts called for by France and Canada to protect their own film industries against the monopolizing force from the United States. Given the scope of this question, which involved much more than university-level cinephilic readers, as a final bid for “respectability” of a sort, the journal made a slight but significant alteration: the title dropped the word “sanmarquina”; following June 2004, the journal was simply known as Butaca. Internationally, this might cause some confusion as at this point there were at least three specialized film publications elsewhere in the world with this name. Locally, however, such a demarcation freed the journal ideologically from its institutional backing; as Weber noted in the editorial, it could now raise itself to “a higher professional standard.” With contributions from many different political and ideological perspectives (even from rival periodicals), Butaca had, even before the name change, garnered respect as the premiere publication in which to discuss any aspect of Peruvian cinema. As the most valuable lasting resource of its time—precisely because of its ability to reflect the contemporary situation of “national cinema” in Peru and embrace and encourage new frontiers in how to define Peruvian cinema—Butaca, like Hablemos de cine before it, may prove itself further over the next twenty years not only to have chronicled what Peruvian films were produced, but also perhaps to have shaped Peruvian cinema writ large.