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# ‘Cine en Construcción’/‘Films in Progress’: How Spanish and Latin American film-makers negotiate the construction of a globalized art-house aesthetic

## ABSTRACT

*‘Cine en construcción’/‘Films in Progress’ is a film funding initiative at the San Sebastián Film Festival (or Donostia Zinemaldia in Basque), as well as the Toulouse Latin American Film Festival (Rencontres Cinémas d’Amérique Latine de Toulouse) that specifically assists Latin American film-makers towards completion of their films. Jointly organized by these two European film festivals, it was founded in 2002 and is the first time that two European film festivals have united to support Latin American film-makers in need of post-production finishing funds. This article examines the kinds of films that are selected by the jury which they envision to be viable enough to be successful in the global marketplace. The transnational nature of this collaborative film process will be examined in terms of its merits, but also in terms of its unintended consequences that I call the ‘globalized art-house film aesthetic’.*

## KEYWORDS

film festivals  
‘Cine en construcción’  
post-production  
funding  
San Sebastián  
transnational cinema  
global-art cinema

1. In 2007 the Guadalajara Film Festival had a Cine en Construcción competition – they now have their own version of the scheme that funds Mexican and Caribbean films.

This article examines Latin American films selected to compete for post-production funding by a jury composed of Spanish and French film industry professionals as part of a film finishing fund competition called ‘Cine en construcción’/‘Films in Progress’ and theorizes why these chosen films might embody what I am calling a ‘globalized art-house aesthetic’ that is here defined as a particular narrative, *mise-en-scène*, use of actors and other aesthetic choices that more easily facilitates transnational border crossing, successfully engaging global art-house audiences through familiar art-house forms of realism with the objective of generating critical acclaim, winning prestigious film festival awards and ultimately generating revenue at the box office. Moreover, the construction of this aesthetic in this case is a transnational collaboration that is carried out between two unequal partners. As documented elsewhere, there can be power dynamics which are particularly pronounced when films are made by Global South film-makers who need cooperation/acceptance from the North/advanced industrialized countries in order to be completed and distributed (see Falicov 2010).

These selected films are the winners of a competition called ‘Cine en construcción’/‘Films in Progress’, which occurs at two European film festivals each year, one in Spain and one in France.<sup>1</sup> This competition affords a space for two constituencies to creatively collaborate; one being film-makers/producers from Latin American countries in need of funding, and two, Spanish post-producers who donate their labour and resources towards one winning project. This process of pairing film projects comes together in a dialogic space twice a year and the result is a transnational film aesthetic that arises from that cultural collaboration.

An exploration of what might constitute a globalized art-house aesthetic is examined via a case study of the 2011 rendition of the ‘Films in Progress’ competition at the San Sebastián film festival held in Spain. The competing films fit the ‘ideal type’ of a transnational or global art-house film, thus making it ripe to examine if the films selected have any dominant themes and aesthetics that might facilitate those particular films to cross borders and also obtain transnational funding more easily. This examination of ‘Cine en construcción’ and the quest to define a globalized art-house aesthetic is not a quantitative or longitudinal study given its limited scope but rather, it captures one moment in time that serves to illustrate some of the dynamics that occur when poorer nations, such as those in Latin America, come to compete for funds from European ones (Spain and France) and the resulting product, a negotiated co-creation of what becomes a transnational film. Given the current economic crisis in Spain (2008–), the jury is still out on whether co-production funding will shrink due to a weakened economy, but already funding for the Casa de América prize given during ‘Cine en construcción’ was cut. This Spanish financial crisis calls traditional assumptions surrounding a former colonial power such as Spain and its current hegemonic force into question.

### ‘CINE EN CONSTRUCCIÓN’/‘FILMS IN PROGRESS’: AN OVERVIEW

‘Cine en construcción’/‘Films in Progress’ is a film funding competition at the San Sebastián, Spain film festival (Donostia Zinemaldia), as well as the Toulouse, France Latin American Film Festival (Rencontres Cinémas d’Amérique Latine de Toulouse) that specifically assists Latin American film-makers towards the completion of their films. Jointly organized in 2002 by

these two European film festivals, 'Cine en construcción' was the first time that two European film festivals united to support Latin American film-makers in need of post-production funding (see 'Qué es Cine en Construcción?'/What is Films in Progress?', 2007). Twice a year, film professionals and festival staff in Toulouse and San Sebastián screen feature film submissions that are works in progress. The purpose of this screening, according to the San Sebastián website, is

for film professionals from different phases of the film chain to have a chance to view the work in optimal conditions with the objective of contributing in a definitive manner ways that the films will gain distribution (que lleguen a buen puerto). We propose a space for direct interchange with professionals and institutions as 'como paso decisivo para llegar al public/as a positive step towards gaining an audience.'

The winning films obtain post-production completion funding through labour and materials donations from various Spanish or French film companies, for example, Deluxe España (of Entertainment Services Group), Dolby, Imasblue (post-production house), Daniel Goldstein Productions (postproduction with an emphasis on audio), No Problem Sonido, (post production sound) Kodak, Laser Film (subtitling services), Nephilim Productions (producers of film, television and advertising), and Vertigo (a video production company), amongst other sponsors. At Toulouse, The French Film Institute gives 10,000 euros to the winner of the Toulouse version of 'Cine en construcción' (or 'Cinema en Construction') and in France, Europa Distribution, a network of over 100 European film distributors from nineteen countries helps promote the film and assist the director in gaining distribution deals in various European countries.

During the September 2011 San Sebastián 'Cine en construcción' edition that I attended, there were over 70 film submissions and six finalists selected to screen their work in San Sebastián. The films selected came from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay. This was novel as during past competitions there tended to be one country overrepresented (e.g., Argentina had four out of six entries compete in 2002 at San Sebastián and dominated all six spots in 2003 at Toulouse).

The films in competition were *Joven y alocada/Young and Wild* (Rivas, 2011) from Chile; *Un mundo secreto/A Secret World* (Mariño, 2012) from Mexico; *La Playa D.C.* (Arango, 2012) from Colombia, *7 cajas/7 Boxes* (Maneglia and Schémbori, 2012) from Paraguay; *Era una vez eu, Veronica/Once Upon a Time, Veronica* (Gomes, 2012) from Brazil; and *Infancia clandestina/Clandestine Childhood* (Ávila, 2012) from Argentina. During the San Sebastián film festival, the 'Cine en construcción' initiative occurs over three days and is not open to the public. Each film is screened with the director on hand to field questions in front of a jury comprised of eight Spanish post-production professionals. During some Q and A sessions, thematic questions were raised about how the film might reflect what is happening in the country's society at the time. Most of the time, however, they were technical questions about how the film was made, or what was left to complete it, as many times the films looked practically complete (something that had changed from previous competitions, where film-makers would simply show fragments). As a researcher, I was given permission to attend the screenings and participate, as long as I agreed that I would not write about the uncompleted

films in any publications (presumably because the films might be altered and modified after this process).

On the last day of screening films, the jury deliberates, and one film is awarded what is known as the 'industry' award, which amounts to 25,000 euros worth of post-production labour: this includes sound mixing, colour correction and special effects work along with a 35mm film print. Upon these films' completion, many of the selected films have gone on to screen at one or both of the festivals, whether in the official selection capacity or not. For example, *Iluminados por el fuego/Blessed by Fire* (Bauer, 2005) won the 2004 Films in Progress industry award and the following year was selected to compete in the official selection, where it won the Special Jury prize). This film, however, is an exception, as many 'Cine en construcción' winning films are selected to screen at San Sebastián the following year in the sidebar known as Horizontes Latinos, to be discussed below.

Moreover, some of the winning films from 'Cine en construcción' have gone on to screen and win awards at what some consider to be more prestigious festivals. Other previous industry award winners include the Argentine-French-Spanish film *Una novia errante/A Stray Girlfriend* (Katz, 2007), César Charlone and Enrique Fernández's *El baño del Papa/The Pope's Toilet* (2005) a Uruguayan- Brazilian- French- Spanish coproduction and the Brazilian production *Cinema, Aspirins, and Vultures* (Gomes, 2005) which all screened at the Cannes film festival after receiving support from 'Cine en construcción'. More recently, the Colombian contender *La Playa D.C.* (Arango, 2012) was later selected at Cannes for the Un Certain Regard sidebar as well as many other festivals such as SANFIC in Chile and the Lima film festival. Films from more underrepresented countries such as the Guatemalan *Gasolina/Gasoline* (Cordon, 2008) (which won both the Industry award and the Horizontes award) and *Los colores de la montaña/The Colors of the Mountain* (Arbelaez, 2010) from Colombia have gained much needed visibility in recent years and thus been given entrée into the festival circuit (BAFICI, Locarno in the case of *Gasolina*, and the Los Angeles Latino Film Festival (LALIFF), and Cartagena, Colombia (*Colores de la montaña*).

In addition to the 'Cine en Construcción' industry prize, there was a smaller, but no less prestigious award sponsored by Spain's Casa de América, a cultural centre in Madrid that showcases art and culture from the former colonies. On their website, they describe their involvement with 'Cine en construcción as' '... contributing to the cultural dissemination of their films, helping to broaden their opportunities for commercial release, at the same time that it provides opportunities to share experiences and projects of mutual interest with the rest of the Iberoamerican film community'. They describe the award as a way that acknowledges both the cultural and potentially commercial aspects of supporting winning Latin American films. In 2011, the winner of the Casa de América award, *Infancia Clandestina/Clandestine Childhood* from Argentina (Ávila, 2011), was selected in 2012 to be the opening film for the Horizontes Latinos sidebar at San Sebastián, in addition to being screened at Cannes for the Director's Fortnight. The prize included 10,000 euros (unfortunately, though the prize was founded during its first edition in 2002, the prize money was withdrawn in 2012) and a screening at the Casa de América theatre located in a central part of Madrid. In 2012, this award was supplanted by the Norteado award, which awards \$5,000 US dollars to a selected film in progress by the Mexican companies or cultural entities Film Tank, Tiburón Producciones, IMCINE Conaculta, McCormick de México and IDN.

In Toulouse, the Films in Progress award competition every March includes the industry award, which is primarily sponsored by French post-production houses; their 'runner up' prize is given by the French television channel, Cine Cinema, (an art-house channel) that awards 15,000 euros to screen the winning film on television throughout France. After that ancillary window, a French distribution company picks it up to screen at movie theatres nationally while holding the film rights for two years. Finally, there are smaller perks for winning the industry award, including a 300-euro industry pass to attend the Cine Marché at the Cannes film festival, which is the most important film market in Europe.

The winner of the Cine en construcción industry or other runner-up award has something to gain in addition to the prestige of the award. These winners also compete to win the Horizontes or Horizons award given to a Latin American film shown in the Horizontes Latinos film sidebar at San Sebastián. The jury is comprised of three members of international acclaim (the 2012 head of jury was famed Uruguayan musician Jorge Drexler), which grants the winner a prize of 35,000 euros. The only prerequisite to entering the competition is that the film not previously be screened in Spain either in a theatre or at a Spanish film festival (thus making the film screening a premiere at San Sebastián). While it could be argued that premiering most of the Latin American films in a non-competitive Latino sidebar might be seen as too 'ghettoizing', this is not necessarily the case, in the eyes of a film festival curator I spoke with. Javier Martín, a programmer at Cannes, emphasized the potential opportunity that came with being selected, as many European film festival programmers attend this session annually with the aim of selecting new, fresh work for their respective festivals (Martín 2011). Of the twelve titles chosen to compete in the 2012 edition of Horizontes Latinos, half of them were previously selected to compete in 'Cine en construcción' either in San Sebastián (in the 2012 case, four titles) or in Toulouse (two titles). This clearly demonstrates how 'Cine en construcción' became the major channel for the Horizontes Latinos sidebar.

Moreover, being selected to premiere at San Sebastián in whatever context or sidebar only feeds into elevating the festival as one with new, never-before-seen, and thus 'novel' work. As Minerva Campos observes, a reliable and prestigious strategy for the San Sebastián film festival to remain viable is to help support films that can later be premiered at the festival, thus ensuring that it continues to be considered an 'A' list festival. In other words, a film festival is considered as Class 'A' (according to the designation by International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), if it has at least fourteen world premieres per year (Campos 2012: 13).

Additionally, the winning films form part of a touring exhibition of Latin American films sponsored by the Instituto Cervantes, a non-profit organization created by the Spanish government in 1991 dedicated to the preservation of the Spanish language worldwide. The Instituto has over twenty different country locations around the world, and it is there that 'Cine en construcción' films are shown. These films are seen in cities such as Warsaw, Manila, Bucharest, Tangiers, Utrecht and Rome, thus giving them additional international exposure. The Cervantes benefits in that it is disseminating culture of the 'motherland' while at the same time, propping up its 'children' while simultaneously carrying out its Spanish-language mission. As an aside, while Brazilian films may compete for the finishing funds, they are not selected to play abroad at the Instituto Cervantes' sites given language differences.

In order to continually be relevant in the film festival marketplace, the San Sebastián film festival added a recent initiative to its repertoire: a European-Latin American Co-Production Forum that was launched for the first time in September 2012. Last year twenty Latin American projects were selected to schedule 'pitch sessions' to European industry professionals in a market setting. The rationale behind it, according to the festival website and press materials is that the

San Sebastián Festival consolidates its position not only as a benchmark platform but as a hub between both film worlds, covering all stages involved in cinematic projects related to Latin America, from the initial stage with the Co-Production Forum, to the exhibition stage with Horizontes Latinos, not forgetting post-production with Films in Progress.

In 2013, a co-production market exclusively for documentary film was added to the San Sebastián film festival 'industry club'.

For first-time Latin American film-makers, especially, to have a means to finish a film is a welcome opportunity. In general, but even more urgently in the Latin American context, it can be difficult to raise the funds to complete a film, given its high cost. *Variety* reporters John Hopewell and Jonathan Holland point out that micro-budget pic producers can nickel-and-dime on shooting costs through deferrals, but hit a road bump when it comes to post-production (2004: 14). This observation throws the major differences between film-making in Latin America versus Europe/United States into relief given that the field of post-production is highly technological and a more expensive endeavour, and one that many poorer nations do not have as much access to (such as CGI), high quality sound mixing tools, and other types of visual effects work involving high levels of technical skill as well as modern production facilities.

Moreover, an opportunity for Latin American film-makers to have a platform to screen their work thus potentially giving it access to the European market and possibly gain notice in that realm could establish future funding channels and ensure future film financing. This is a very difficult proposition, and as it stands today, only a few very well-established film-makers throughout Latin America gain distribution deals in European countries such as Spain and France. This situation is improved by getting co-production funding by one or more European countries, as well as by gaining exposure at European film festivals.

Currently, there is an effervescent level of film festival scholarship although Ibero-American festivals continue to be underexamined. Noted film festival scholar Marijke de Valcke has some important observations about funding opportunities for Global South film-makers at European film festivals and she looks at the example of the Balkan fund that is meted out at the Thessaloniki film festival in Greece. This fund works to:

Support a regional film industry while it highlights the importance of the festival itself. The festival combines its position as cultural gateway and meeting point for professionals with training (in this case, script development training) in an attempt to mobilize its expertise within the regional film industry and to improve the local talent as well as the infrastructure of the industry. As a result the fund helps the festival to uphold its festival image of a key institution that nurtures film production in the Balkan region.

(de Valcke, 2007: 110)

One might extrapolate how the finishing fund at Toulouse and San Sebastián work in a similar manner: their objective is not only to nurture these respective festivals in terms of prestige, but also to help foster a Euro-American transnational film culture.

## PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON 'CINE EN CONSTRUCCIÓN'

A few scholars have examined the 'Cine en Construcción' initiative and have arrived at various conclusions: Nuria Triana-Toribio discusses different facets of the post-production initiative, such as the branding aspects of film festivals, but also points out the inherent power dynamics that come with a larger power selecting or mediating which specific film projects from the developing world will be given the 'advanced industrialized' stamp of approval. She notes that by having Spanish production companies reward select Latin American films 'they were in curious ways unlocking a sense of imperial guilt, thereby inscribing the dynamics of colonial relations in today's film industry' (in Triana-Toribio 2013: 18). These historical legacies of colonial relationships are very much present in questions of funding, as much of Spanish funding for these initiatives comes from the Ministry of Foreign Relations with the express intention of maintaining cordial relationships with their formal colonial subjects. There has been previous scholarship on the most significant Ibero-American funding pool, Programa Ibermedia, which further grapples with these neo-colonial dynamics (see Falicov 2007b; Villazana 2009).

Miriam Ross argues that 'Cine en construcción' is one way for the concept of 'Ibero-American identity' to be consolidated, but only, in Ross's words (referring to work by Peranson and Triana-Toribio), 'when their films make use of art-house narratives and aesthetics that international film festivals privilege' (Ross 2010: 185). Thus, Ross is also interested in unpacking what sorts of films employ particular narratives and aesthetics that resonate in an art-house setting. This topic has also been discussed in the lauded anthology, *Global Art Cinema* edited by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover which grapples with questions surrounding the global circulation of a particular art-house image in cinema (2010: 19). They also point out that the term 'global', in their words, speaks to 'international address, distribution, audience, and aesthetic language of the art cinema' (2010: 20) which is the first step in approximating how particular film aesthetics are more easily circulated over others. This essay will move in that direction by laying out narrative commonalities in the six films that competed in the 'Cine en construcción' competition, thereby speculating how particular themes might transcend borders more easily within the global film festival circuit.

## IS THERE A GLOBALIZED ART-FILM AESTHETIC?

What do we mean by a 'globalized art film aesthetic?' Though Galt and Schoonover's idea of the global was invoked previously, one might problematize the term 'global' in terms of film festival circulation to really stand in for 'advanced industrialized countries' film festivals' which generally can be defined as countries with robust film industries who are members of the OECD. It is these countries, such as those in Europe, the United States and in East Asia who define a certain narrative formula, high production values, and perhaps most importantly, have greater access to film exhibition and distribution. This is in contrast to those film-makers/producers in the 'Global South' that have limited access to material resources to make and complete a film, as



well limited entryway into global networks of distribution. These film-makers oftentimes do not even have access to show their work in their own country (due to Hollywood hegemony), let alone other countries, whether it be Latin American neighbouring countries, or even in Europe or the United States.

In the case of the six films competing at San Sebastián (see page 4 for the list of contending films), there were several predominant characteristics of said 'globalized art film aesthetic' evident in viewing all six films. In order for these characteristics to be more generalizable, more winning films at San Sebastián and Toulouse would need to be catalogued. However, by looking at this particular slate of films there were three predominant themes in common: (1) Despite being from different countries and different storylines, all six features had youth as a protagonist. This is not surprising, knowing that the young demographic typically is the audience that attends the movies, though not necessarily 'art-house' fare. Perhaps more than an economic imperative, these youth perhaps symbolized a future generation, and those contemporary themes that film-makers from their respective countries wanted to explore, such as the age-old generation gap struggle; use of social media and the Internet to communicate with peers; youthful explorations of sexuality; (most explicitly seen in Chile's contender, *Joven y alocada*/'Young and Wild'; Rivas, 2011) and an emphasis on music (though this was told to the audience, as most of the films did not have a developed musical score overlaid yet). Granted too, apart from one film-maker, all were young directors, in their late 20s through to their late 30s. (2) Another common trait was glossy, high production values (unless it was purposefully grainy and out of focus given the subject matter) and 3) most were character-driven narratives, which is not uncommon with lower-budget, art-house fare. An exception to this was the Paraguayan entry, *7 cajas*/*7 Boxes* (Maneglia and Schémbori), which was a thriller, thus a well-known genre format, which benefitted by being edited in a fast-paced manner (see official trailer at [www.7cajas.com](http://www.7cajas.com)).

Another contender, *Infancia clandestina* embraced thriller-like elements, it could also be characterized as a character-driven family drama featuring famous Argentine actors, Natalia Oreiro and Ernesto Alterio (son of the famed Héctor) that helped propel the film to a higher level of visibility. Although it is atypical for first-time directors to secure 'A' list actors for their films, director Benjamin Ávila was fortunate to attract the interest of veteran director-turned-producer, Luis Puenzo, to sign on to the film, and who must have had some influence in securing some of the finest acting talent in Argentina today. Access to well-known and connected mentors has helped newer directors hire famous actors who have the potential to translate into box office dollars both at home and abroad (Falicov 2007a). In Ávila's case, the use of the star system undoubtedly helps the films gain press and sell tickets in both the Argentine and Spanish market.

## THE INTERSTICES OF GLOBAL AND LOCAL FILMS

Other than themes that are *au courant* and travel well within the film festival circuit in a given historical moment, there are also issues of narratives that need to strike a balance between themes that are global, or universal in nature (though, again, the 'global' is a stand in for advanced industrialized countries' tastes) and those that are local or specific to a region or country. In theorizing how films need to have a necessary combination of local appeal and the global art-house narrative (that is, something that is distinct, resonates with a specific



history of a community or nation, coupled with a particular kind of pleasure and/or expectation that appeals to art-house film goers), I will focus on the film that was selected to be the winner of the ‘Cine en construcción’ industry award at San Sebastián for 2011. This film, in the Spanish post-production jury’s mind was the one most suited to potentially be successful circulating in film festivals globally, and the film would get distributed in Spain as part of the award. The Paraguayan film *7 cajas/7 Boxes* was selected as the winner, and serves as a case study as a film that represents a winning combination of both global and local elements (though the film’s producer stated that they were truly envisioning a national, rather than international audience, and a popular one at that). It was especially moving that a Paraguayan film was selected over more established national film industries, notably Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. For the sake of clarity (and at the risk of being overly simplistic), one might formulate that for a film to be transnational it must adhere to the following characteristics:

- The film must contain a narrative that is universally understood (aka Western) but yet, the universal/global must have some overlap with local elements
- The film cannot have its narrative and *mise-en-scène* be too ‘global’ or else it is reduced to the formulaic, homogenous
- The narrative and aesthetic must also not veer the other way in being too ‘local’ or unrecognizable, thus rendering it ‘foreign’ to international audiences.

As mentioned previously, *7 Boxes* was constructed as a genre film – a thriller with a local edge. What did give a ‘local flavour’ to the film were the following characteristics: for one, the main setting was Mercado #4, a bustling locale where over 2000 people of different ethnicities come together to sell all kinds of wares. The plot unfolds amongst the hubbub of various employees tending an electronics store, a butcher shop, a fruit and vegetable vendor’s place, and throughout the market spaces where the wheelbarrow boys (and in some cases men and women) work for hire carting people’s purchases. Victor, the story’s protagonist, is a teenager who ekes out a living as a wheelbarrow boy, and, who, early in the plot is given the task of delivering seven crates of an unknown origin in exchange for a large amount of money. Part of the intrigue is that characters speculate what is in the crates – some speculate that are millions of dollars (or Guaraní in national currency) there, while others are not sure (including Victor himself). He communicates with his friend Liz in a mixture of the official indigenous language, Guaraní (which is one of two official languages of Paraguay) and Spanish, called ‘Jopará’ (Yo-parra), a vernacular that is commonplace in working-class Paraguayan cities such as Asunción, the largest metropolis and capital of the country. For this reason, this film has been shown throughout the Spanish-language world with Spanish subtitles, Paraguay included (Estefanía Ortiz, 31 October 2011, e-mail correspondence).

What makes this film both familiar and unfamiliar to Western audiences is that the genre is a formula – there is a sense of mystery, of a thriller with the main character engaging in a game of cat and mouse, trying to solve a mystery and apprehend the crates before the other one does. But instead of the typical car chases in thrillers such as the *Fast and the Furious* movie franchise (2001–2013), there are young men racing through crowded streets

with wheelbarrows and other manual carts chasing one another through the marketplace. This then presents a refreshingly 'low tech' approach to a genre in contrast to the CGI heavy and stunt heavy action films made in Hollywood. Ricardo Domínguez, a 'hacktivist' and cultural critic uses the term 'Mayan technology' to describe the simpler forms of everyday technology that indigenous people use and harness to solve problems, no matter how complex. (Dominguez in Fusco 1999). I would argue that Victor and the group of wheelbarrow workers in the market utilize this 'Guarani' technology to make a compelling, high octane, 'edge of your seat' story, while at the same time maintaining a sense of authentic realism.

Scholars currently examining the aesthetics of global art-house films often discuss the impact of Italian Neorealism and the effect of this realist aesthetic on films, especially from the Global South (see Ruberto and Wilson 2007). While many low-budget films, especially if shot in black and white, are clearly influenced by this aesthetic (e.g., *Mundo grua/Crane World* (Trapero, 1999), or more recently *Porfirio* (Echevarria, 2011), I would argue that often Global South films are adopting more lush cinematographic techniques that are now possible to produce given the advent of accessible digital technology. This shift in aesthetics might also relate to the shift in political sensibilities from 1960s militant cinema made as part of a Third-World liberation movement (hence, gritty aesthetics to shock bourgeois audiences into taking action) versus the current moment which has film-makers packaging sometimes difficult, sometimes politically charged topics in a more palatable way, while still engaging with political topics (see Falicov 2010: 2–3 for more on this discussion).

### **NO TOTALIZING NARRATIVE ABOUT 'TOTALIZING' GLOBAL AESTHETICS?**

While I am attempting to find some commonalities in what I deem a 'globalized art film aesthetic' it must be noted that these film festival selection processes differ from festival to festival. Javier Martín, a film critic, curator at Cannes and judge for the Horizontes Latinos film sidebar observed that the selection process at Toulouse is different from that of San Sebastián. In his estimation, more Brazilian films were selected at the Toulouse edition of 'Cine en construcción' and more winning films from there went on to Cannes than were those in San Sebastián. He deduced that it was partially due to the idiosyncrasies and differences in tastes that made up the jury profiles that came with each festival. He even went so far as to say that Toulouse was a 'feeder' festival for Cannes (given that they are both French, among other reasons) (Martín 23 September 2011 Interview). In other words, there are also structuring networks within countries that also help determine a film's exhibition and/or distribution pattern in addition to people's subjective tastes. While both festivals might help locate winning films for transnational circulation, which embody a transnational art-house aesthetic, there may be nuances as to what that might look like.

In order for this exploration to be more refined, and frankly, more comparative, research would also need to be conducted at the film festival at Toulouse over time to see if the competition is run differently from San Sebastián, and to chart the process for selecting the winning film. This way it could be compared to see if the films selected had much the same, or different kinds of outcomes compared to San Sebastián.

## TRANSNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Cinema is inherently transnational given that films cross borders and are seen by multiple audiences across national boundaries, along with intra-national exchange within national boundaries. Moreover, a film might be defined as transnational when it is produced and/or funded as a co-production between countries, thus guaranteeing multiple national markets. Even Hollywood cinema, the clear hegemon, relies on overseas revenue to amortize its costs. 'Cine en construcción' is one way to foster cultural collaboration and circulation within the Ibero-American realm, as opposed to the Hollywood one, so in this regard, it might be seen as a form of 'resistance' against a hegemonic force.<sup>2</sup> However, I would argue that most narratives and *mise-en-scènes* destined for the film festival circuit try to embody what we might call 'a globalized art-house aesthetic' via this system of transnational Global South-European film-making. This process helps films circulate more fluidly in festival and other art-house exhibition spaces, but this kind of aesthetic and narrative content also has its own set of exclusionary practices.

In order for these directors to successfully be invited to San Sebastián and Toulouse to compete for finishing funds, it has become almost a prerequisite to have won pre-production and production funds from European countries in order to complete the production stage and to add this award to the resume in order to remain competitive. de Valcke said it accurately when she observed that '... This development [funds sponsored by festivals] adds a whole new layer of meaning to the label "festival film", as these films are not only predominantly produced for the festival circuit, but also partially by (and with the cultural approval of) the festival circuit' (2007: 181).

One of the film contenders for the 'Cine en construcción' awards, *Un mundo secreto/A Secret World*, (Mariño, 2012) obtained a production grant by a Swiss funding initiative called Vision Sud Est that assists the completion of film production in the 'developing world'. The Colombian film, *La Playa D.C.* had previously received development grants from Programa Ibermedia in 2009, and then a production grant from the same agency in 2010. Moreover, it received two postproduction grants, one from the Hubert Bals Fund and one from Fonds Sud Cinema. The Argentine contender, *Infancia clandestina* (Clandestine Childhood), also obtained Spanish financial assistance in the form of a script development grant through Programa Ibermedia in addition to receiving funds from a film festival at Amiens, France destined for Global South countries, and a training grant called Produire Au Sud, through the Festival Trois Continents in Nantes, France though the actual training took place at the Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival (BAFICI). The point of listing these prior funding awards is to observe that most of the films competing in 'Cine en construcción' have savvy producers who prior to competing in this venue have applied for and in some cases won multiple sources of preproduction, production, and in this case post-production European funding in order to complete their budget. They are aware that by potentially amassing an impressive resume of international funders, the film will gain more support and potential notice from film festival programmers.

Other transnational characteristics are the kinds of scripts written that might more easily transcend borders. How does the script play into the idea of a globalized art film narrative? Film scholar Lucia Nagib calls it 'transnational cinematic aesthetics' that can be examined through what she calls a 'global film script'. She argues that as European television and entities such as the Sundance

2. Since the 1930s the concept of an Ibero-American unity has had as one of its missions to create a network between Spain and her former colonies (the same holds true for Portugal and Brazil). See Mar Binimelis Adell's dissertation for more information.

Institute began providing funding for Latin American scripts in the 1980s, and continue to do so under the aegis of the Sundance Labs to assist in creating a formula for palatable and successful film scripts in Brazil and other Global South countries. For scripts to be made and garner international interest, Nagib argues, there needs to be local colour, realism, the private hero and the improbable but convincing event. Her examples of films that conform to this narrative structure are Walter Salles's 1998 Brazilian film *Central do Brasil/Central Station* and Julie Bertucelli's *Depuis qu'Otar est parti ... /Since Otar Left*, a 2003 France-Belgium co-production (2006: 96–98). The author argues that there is a certain look or aesthetic, a certain storyline, group of actors, genre, that tends to be well received by critics and the public and is the holy grail that producers look for in their quest to 'go global'. It is my contention that film-makers from Latin America not only need money from abroad (typically Spain, and other European countries), but it is to their benefit to get training, assistance and partnerships from more experienced European counterparts who will give them advice and technical support in the hopes that the collaboration, and/or fusion of ideas develops into a highly desirable transnational product. Clearly, this meeting of the minds, which is not on a level playing field, of course, can work some of the time, but clearly fails as well. This is why having a scholarly examination of the tropes, characteristics, and tracking the circulation and box office success of various films might aid in understanding which films cross borders better than others.

One of the subtle but no less important of narrative choices related to finding the holy grail that resonates with transnational audiences is how close to 'authentic' a narrative storyline might be. While it might be hard to pinpoint a definition of the authentic, audiences are savvy enough to notice when a narrative feels disingenuous or not really credible. In the realm of co-producing films, the term 'Europudding' has been coined to describe the awkward narrative which is a hodgepodge of storytelling, languages, and the like. There is also the fear of an unnatural or 'inauthentic' (as this is a debatable term) film that can arise when characters from other countries (typically the countries that need to be represented for co-production reasons) are present in the narrative for no logical reason. For example, Spanish actors 'invade' a Latin American film and their presence, along with their characteristic accent makes the film unrealistic (see my work on 'finding the Spaniard' in various co-productions Falicov, 2007b) which despite getting funding and access to another market, many times fails at the level of narrative.

'Cine en construcción' is billed as a finishing fund competition where films that supposedly are in various states of completion step up to be viewed and adjudicated. According to accounts of prior 'Cine en construcción' competitions, films were more rough, unfinished, fragmented upon presentation, thus engendering opportunity for more detailed and frank discussion about the directions the unfinished film was going. In 2005, for example, films such as *El baño del Papa* was only partially shot and a short fragment screened for the jury (Cristina Venegas, 30 April 2013, e-mail correspondence). To wit, this might have meant a larger cultural negotiation between the film-makers (Brazilian and Uruguayan) and their Spanish counterparts given that the film won the industry prize that year.

By 2011, however, the bar was raised. That year it was surprising to observe how advanced, and some would argue, practically complete, the contending films were. Rather than being in 'rough cut' format, the films were almost exhibition-ready aside from some post-production work still left to complete. In this sense, there was not as much room for production professionals in the

audience to give contenders critical feedback. In fact, because it they were so practically complete, post-screening, the question was often asked, 'what is left to complete?' Directors mentioned colour correction and the sound mix most of the time. We might consider the state of almost completeness in a few ways: On the one hand, it meant that film-makers, to compete for this money, need to have had sufficient forms of production funding to reach that level of competition. They have to be advanced projects, and many of them had secured international production funding (development or production grants) in order to get to this stage of competition. Therefore, the films in the larger competition pool would exclude the truly bare bones director who could not even complete the filming process or basic post-production; it stands to reason that they would not even consider submitting their film to 'Cine en construcción' or they would simply be eliminated early given the high bar set for this competition.

On the other hand, having a practically completed project tends to assure a Latin American director and producer that Spanish funders can only 'creatively contribute' or give feedback to the process only so far. This gives a sense of autonomy and independence to Latin American directors who have to conform to the post-producers' professional advice in order to complete their projects. Having a close to completed script ensures that no requests for radical changes can really occur at this stage in the process, thus lessening the power dynamics between the two parties.

## THE FINE PRINT

While Spanish post production houses donate their labour as part of the winning 'industry' package, it is not for altruistic reasons. In fact, it is a quid pro quo as the post producers gain distribution rights for Spain when the film is released. All of the participating companies are represented legally by one post-production company called Nephilim Producciones that signs a financial co-production agreement with the Latin American film's producers signing over the distribution rights for Spain and Andorra to them (Bases del premio de la industria 2011). Thus, Nephilim is in charge of marketing the film in Spain and reaping the profits if the film is successful at the box office.

When I interviewed one of the jury members about what they stood to gain, one of them (who chose to remain anonymous) said that *7 Cajas* had not presold distribution rights to Spain yet, whereas the Argentine film, which won the Casa de América prize, *Infancia Clandestina*, already had, effectively disqualifying it from winning the 'industry' award. He intimated that that if the Argentine film had not presold the Spanish rights that it would have won over Paraguay (however, clearly this is unsubstantiated). What this does elucidate, however, is the fact that there is an economic imperative (e.g. rights for the territory of Spain) that shapes the decision to fund one film over another.

## SELECTING THE WINNER

After the final day of screening and talkback is completed, the culmination of the event takes place at a cocktail party where the winners are announced. To reiterate, the two awards disbursed in 2011 were the 'industry' award that was a post-production prize worth \$25,000 euros and the second prize was \$10,000 euros from Casa de América, which included a screening at its movie theatre dedicated to disseminating the art of the Americas.

As mentioned previously, the winner of the top, or 'industry' prize went to the Paraguayan film, *7 Cajas/7 Boxes*. This was an exhilarating moment for

many in the audience, who were rooting for the 'underdog' country to win. During the acceptance speech, co-director Juan Carlos Maneglia stated:

Paraguay tiene mucho para contar, y esto es un paso enorme, para nosotros, para que nuestro cine se conozca, pero también, son posibilidades para que otros compañeros puedan contar sus historias; queremos vivir de esto, que Paraguay se identifique con su cine y con su idioma, que es tan particular.

Paraguay has many stories to tell, and this is a huge step for us, for that our cinema is known, but also they are opportunities for our colleagues to be able to tell their stories; we want to make a living out of this, that Paraguay is identified by its cinema and by its language, which is very particular [special].

(ABC.com 2011)

Post-awards ceremony, I asked the producer, Estefanía Ortiz, what initial advice she was given by the post-production jury after they had selected her project for collaboration. She was told to re-edit the film to be more humorous, and that it was too long (Estefanía Ortiz, 23 September 2011, interview). When the film was released, they had shaved eight minutes off of the film and hired an Argentine editor to complete the task. When I spoke with her in March 2012, she felt the win at San Sebastián helped them screen their film at other film festivals, such as the Miami Film Festival where it won the audience award in 2013, the Palm Springs International Film Festival where it won the 'New Voices/New Visions' special jury mention, and where it was nominated for a discovery award and FIPRESCI award at Toronto. The following year the film played in San Sebastián where it won the youth jury award.

Clearly, for newer film-makers such as Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schémbori and that they were from Paraguay, a country without a national film institute or film schools, having access to post production funding from Spanish post-producers was extremely beneficial. As I have tried to show in this article, it does not come without strings attached. For one, the winner of the competition signs their rights to Spanish territory, and needs to heed the advice of Spanish post-professionals. However, as I tried to demonstrate, many of the films that competed were practically finished so to be told that the script or production process had to be redone would not be a realistic proposition. Thus, in observing and interviewing those film-makers who participated and those who helped form part of the jury (and programmers who attend such events every year) it became clear, that this initiative was extremely valuable for those Latin American film-makers who were able to collect prior funds and accolades to be able to withstand the competitive screening process to even compete. Thus, these directors and producers must be part of a system of international film funding and have the possibility of applying and accessing the right information in order to be part of the 'global film funding regime' that seems to necessitate *entrée* if one is to successfully garner important funding from international film festivals. In fact, a young but experienced Brazilian producer opined that each film fund associated with film festivals has their own profile in terms of the types of films that they like to fund and that it helped to know what grant was worth one's time or not, given that many times the funding amount was low (Andrea Giusti, 22 September 2011, interview). This is an area ripe for continued study.



*7 cajas* was overnight sensation in Paraguay. It broke all box office records in the country, amassing 330,000 spectators over a six-month run, which more than doubled the amount of the second largest hit, *Titanic*, according to co-director Juan Carlos Maneglia (Mur 2013). One of their strategies for success was the presale of tickets that had never been done before in Paraguay. Through this model they sold 1000 tickets in advance (Schémbori 2011). The film not only resonated favorably with the Paraguayan public, but it also became a national symbol (according to journalist Maria M. Mur), signified by the fact that no pirated copies were sold in the epicentre of piracy in Paraguay, Mercado #4 (Mur 2013). Soon after being selected to compete in the New Directors competition at the Toronto Film Festival in 2012, they were picked up for film distribution in England and Ireland by the British company Arrow Films and in the Paraguayan press, the reportage was celebratory in tone, signifying a major achievement in exporting cinema abroad (Paraguay.com 2012).

Domestically, they elected to self-distribute the film nationally (there are only twenty cinemas in the country) and established a circuit to tour the film in various cities in the interior (Estefanía Ortiz, 5 March 2012, e-mail correspondence).

This was an auspicious moment in the history of Paraguayan cinema because it was the only Latin American country to compete without any official state support for film production or any enacted film legislation to support and to stimulate a national film industry. Because there are no film schools, and few movie theatres in the whole country, Paraguayan film-makers have struggled on their own, finding private sources of funding to make films. The *7 Cajas* directors and producers stated that the film cost at least \$435,000 USD and therefore had to appeal to the private sector in the case of multinational bank Itaú, a Brazilian company, as well as national gas companies for funds in addition to a private dam between Paraguay and Argentina called Yacreta. Finally, they secured a small grant from the city of Asunción for the film to be completed. Catherine Leen (2013: 166–68) in her recent study of Paraguayan cinema, has concluded that Paraguayan film-makers have tried unsuccessfully to lobby (at this time of writing) for a new film law that was redrafted in 2009 which proposed taxes on movie tickets and cable television companies to foment national film production funding. Moreover, film-makers are continually working to raise the government's consciousness about the importance of a viable film industry in the country despite the lack of film schools and other infrastructure to support film-making in the country. As Schémbori rightly observes:

Cinema has not been established as an industry or as a valuable cultural asset ... In Paraguay the audiovisual (film or video) does not exist as a business and much less as a reflection of culture.

(Schémbori in Leen 2013: 157)

In this case, then, to have opportunities for financing abroad, such as 'Cine en construcción' is a lifeline that other countries do not have the same urgency to obtain. More recently, Paraguay did make a successful bid in 2011 to join the Ibero-American film fund Programa Ibermedia in 2012, but after they were only able to contribute half of the promised funds that year, they defaulted on their payment for 2013. Sadly, this has, in effect, halted the seven project funds that Paraguayan film-makers were slated to receive. Film-makers initially selected are directors such as Paz Encina, Pablo Lamar, Luis Vera, Paz and



Renate Costa. (E'A, 25 April 2013). Film professionals in the organization la Organización de Profesionales del Audiovisual Paraguayo (Oprap) protested the decision and urged the government to rethink their plan, stating that for the amount of money they submitted to the fund, Paraguayan film-makers were receiving \$400,000 back in grant funding (Ultima Hora.com 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Initiatives such as 'Cine en construcción'/'Films in Progress' provide insight into the dynamics of a cultural collaboration between a Global South country and a European one with the intended result to be what one might call a 'globalized art-house aesthetic'. This type of film is increasingly being produced in transnational meeting spaces such as European film fund competitions within film festivals along with co-production labs and workshops created for the express purposes of furthering the completion and circulation of transnational films on the global film festival circuit. This study, while incomplete, tries to compare how adjudicated films might share similar characteristics deemed worthy by cultural brokers of transnational circulation (in this case, donated labour by Spanish post-producers). While some theorists might see this as a form of imperial guilt or neocolonial domination, I argue that these post-producers are helping new product from Latin America gain attention throughout Europe, which is valuable, but it isn't without strings attached. The winning film has to fit an 'ideal type' of a transnational vehicle that embodies elements of the local (and 'authentic' however we might debate this term), and the global (familiar, cosmopolitan, OECD style). I coincide with Campos' observation on how film festivals in Europe wish to remain 'Clase A'/'Class A by finding suitable material to premiere, so funding high quality work from Latin America will only serve this purpose as well. And finally, while I cannot dispute that a film finishing fund like 'Cine en construcción' might make the completion of a Latin American film viable, especially for a country such as Paraguay, it raises deeper, ongoing questions about the nature of unequal transnational collaborations (e.g., in cases where there might be disagreements on creative content) and how the resulting aesthetic might shape the kinds of films potentially destined for global audiences.

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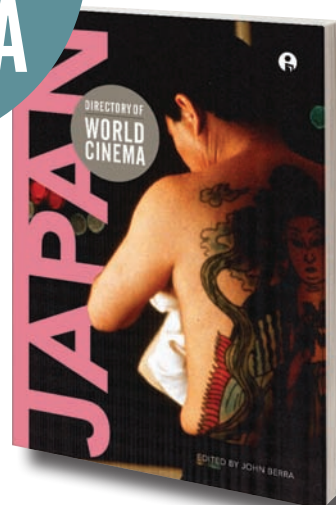
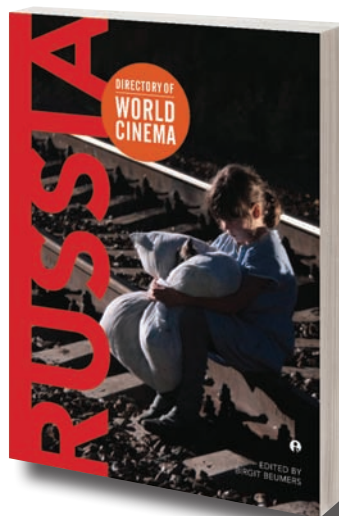
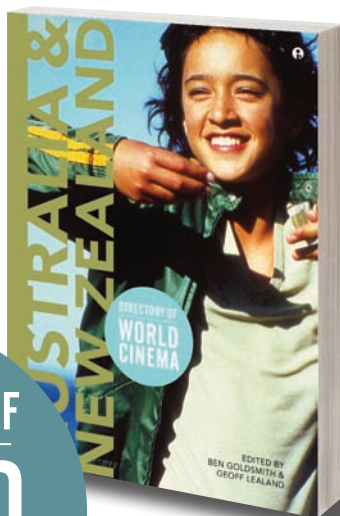
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