Rielle Navitski. *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil*. Duke UP, 2017. xiv + 344pp.

Drawing on a vast and varied array of primary documents, Rielle Navitski's *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil* offers a novel and intriguing history and analysis of the intersections between print media, early cinema, journalism, and photography in the emerging eras of national cinemas in the respective settings of Mexico and Brazil. Navitski's monograph, based on her dissertation at the University of California-Berkeley, offers something akin to parallel histories of these two countries' early traditions, which have had important implications for the development of contemporary media and film in both countries.

The book traces the origins of early cinema practices in Mexico and Brazil, from the turn of the 20th century, to the development of early filmmaking and exhibition practices in the 1900s and 1910s, to the push towards the definition of something like "national" cinemas in the 1920s. Navitski argues that the often interchanging aesthetic practices of both print and photo journalism had a profound influence in the topics, aesthetics, modes of representation, and even consumption practices of producers and filmgoers in these respective nations. Furthermore, these influences and intersections were closely tied to specific political events; the growth of the metropolises of Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo; tensions between ruling and working classes; and the emergence of the concept of "modernity" as it applies to Latin America in general, and to Mexico and Brazil specifically.

Carefully gathering primary materials from newspapers, illustrated magazines, serial novels, police blotters, and other contemporary printed and graphic sources, Navitski successfully argues the case for offering parallel histories of Mexico and Brazil. Looking at watershed examples like *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*,1908) and *El automóvil gris* (*The gray automobile*, 1919), chapter 1 demonstrates the ways in which early attempts at establishing and exploiting markets for nationally produced films drew inspiration from the ubiquitous presence of public spectacles of violence in newspapers and photojournalism. Navitski convincingly establishes her case for the fascination with exploitative and sensationalist content for public consumption, particularly in the early chapters dealing with Mexico's war violence before, during, and after the Revolution, when real and staged violence became part of cinema since the inception of the medium in the region. Extrapolating from the advertised exploits of daring cameramen, actual combat footage, filmed public executions, and the underscoring of cinema and crime as signs of modernization, Navitski convincingly traces the origins of the rise of crime reenactments, the emphasis on location shooting, and the popularity of sensationalist crime trials that penetrated local cinema markets.

Chapters 2 and 3 draw convincing parallels from the early attention to sensationalism and violence to the rise of the "adventure melodramas" produced in the capital and regional cities. With their mix of "realism"—location shooting, inspiration from rising Hollywood aesthetics, reenactments of known crimes, and lurid press stories—and the conventions of the American adventure serial—stunt work and frenetic speed exploits featuring trains, planes, and automobiles—the book demonstrates the convergence of crime, modernity, and thrills as essential to the emerging cinema language of both Mexico and Brazil. Particularly in Brazil, Navitski argues, the infection of melodramatic conventions from the local versions of the nineteenth-century French *feuilleton* was alternately despised by critics in the emerging film criticism culture and, however fleetingly, adored by popular audiences.

Chapters 4 and 5 on the "cinematic serial novel" in the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and the sensationalist adventure melodramas that emerged in smaller cities like Campinas, Recife, and Porto Alegre, restate the confluence of thrills, stunts, local landscapes, location shooting, and romance in the context of their inheritance from crime reportage. Visibly, the Hollywood serial and its "queens," with its mixture of cheap thrills, adventurous young women, and melodramatic stories, were appropriated and adapted with home flavor and talent, while taking advantage of the local press and authorities in order to haul regional audiences. Navitski also emphasizes the ways in which these efforts at energizing local-based production as an alternative to the Rio-São Paulo dominance of national markets expanded the practice of aligning the cinema's ties to representations of technology and criminality—sure signs of the nation's relentless push towards modernity.

Overall, *Public Spectacles of Violence* is elegantly written, convincingly argued, and impeccably researched, especially in its judicious use of primary sources, illustrations, contemporary reviews, and graphic materials. Furthermore, Navitski compellingly argues for parallel histories. By drawing useful comparisons between Mexico's and Brazil's analogous and comparable political developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Navitski rationalizes credibly the drawing together of what are, in effect, two different histories. The book demonstrates the concurrent development of national film industries and aesthetics, the marriage of new technologies and spectacles of violence throughout, and the logical manifestations of these practices in the twenty-first century.

In part because these two histories share similar trajectories, the book gets somewhat repetitive in Part II (the Brazil chapters) when connecting technology, sensationalism, melodrama, modernity, development, and "national" cinema. That is not necessarily a weakness, however stylistically, portions of chapters 3, 4, and 5 even use similar language to the earlier Mexico chapters. Nonetheless, *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-*

Century Mexico and Brazil is a compelling, convincing, elegant, and exemplary work of the emerging yet momentous field of Latin American silent cinema studies. It is a great read, a crucial contribution to its subspecialty and to cinema studies in general, and representative of some of the best new scholarship in the area.

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