



Middents, Jeffrey. *Writing National Cinema: Film Journals and Film Culture in Peru*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2009. 276 p.

In the first book-length study of Peruvian film to appear in English, Jeffrey Middents takes an in-depth look at the impact that formal film criticism has on the development of a national cinema. *Writing National Cinema* follows the influential twenty-year history of the film journal

*Hablemos del cine* as it relates to that of Peruvian filmmaking and film culture.

Rather than being a mere history of Peruvian national cinema, however, Middents' analysis more closely examines how and why that concept was formed and shaped by local film critics. The author intends to provide insight into the development of film culture and criticism by linking these concepts to the influence of the aforementioned Peruvian film journal. While previous knowledge of film terms and history may aid in the reading of this text, the book reads in a non-technical way that is suitable for any audience interested in Latin American cinema.

*Writing National Cinema* has seven sections that reflect a rough chronological following of Peruvian filmmaking and culture, beginning just before the founding of *Hablemos del cine* in 1965 and continuing into the early 2000's. The opening chapter offers a brief history of cinematic production in Peru, while the remaining six chapters each focus on a particular facet of film criticism and its relationship to the emergent nature of Peruvian cinema.

Chapter 2, "Publication, Authority, Identity: Constructing the Film Journal," examines how cinephilia helped to bring together the founding members of *Hablemos del cine* in 1965 Lima. This section also recounts the evolution of the journal's ideology, reflected through both the writing and physical changes to the publication itself, and how this ideology eventually came to represent the dominant perspective in Peru. The subsequent chapter details how the journal members established criteria in order to assess the "quality" of a film, a strategy largely based on concentrating on the director's use of mise-en-scène, an approach that proved to be a vague point of reference.

"Latin American Dis/Connections: Peru versus The New Latin American Cinema" discusses a critical time during the latter part of the 1960's in which Peruvian filmmakers and critics alike discovered that their country's film production did not necessarily mirror that of the rest of the continent. As the publication of *Hablemos del cine* was contemporary with the rise of the oft-studied New Latin American Cinema, here Middents considers how Peru and the journal fit (or do not fit) into this era and whether or not Peruvian filmmakers and critics deliberately avoided being pigeonholed into this movement. This is perhaps the section in which the

author most effectively makes connections between the development of national film culture and that of *Hablemos del cine*.

The following chapter explores the prospect of defining national cinema through short-films. Despite the Film Law of 1972, which sought to generate more funds for feature filmmaking, the short-film industry established itself as a more immediate source of revenue. Those involved with *Hablemos del cine* eventually recognized the value of short films and their place within the national cinema discussion, especially as a means to give aspiring directors an opportunity to “train” for the production of feature films.

The next section follows the influential rise of the filmmaking career of Francisco Lombardi, a man whose films would define Peruvian cinema during the 1980’s. The aesthetic critique of his films by the *hablemistas* often was viewed in geographical terms. Lombardi’s films frequently took place in Lima, and this metropolitan setting enabled the films to receive a positive bias from the film journal, whose Lima-based writers favored settings with which they were more familiar. Finally, the last chapter discusses the changing of the guard of Peruvian filmmaking, film culture, and film criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While *Hablemos del cine* has morphed into publications of different names, and the original writers have taken on outside ventures, their influence remains evident in contemporary Peruvian cinematic production.

One comes away from the reading of this volume knowing that the diverse sections of *Writing National Cinema* effectively come together to form a valuable look into the interaction between formal film criticism and the development of a national cinema. Jeffrey Middents successfully reaches his objectives of relating the influence of a film journal with the formation of the concept of a national film culture while he encourages a new examination of the pre-eminence of the New Latin American Cinema movement.

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