CALL FOR PAPERS

Envisioning Latin America: Power and Representation in audiovisual (re)productions

The use of audiovisual sources in research can enhance our understanding of both contemporary and past cultural and social phenomena. Notions of power, difference and alterity are (re)constructed and (re)negotiated, by and through media, among both producers and consumers. Taking these complex entanglements into account, research designs must engage with new approaches both within humanities and social sciences.

This issue seeks to critically address power structures in audiovisual (re)productions in and from Latin America and discuss how these play a role in the societal construction and representation of individual and collective identities, the ‘us’ and the ‘other’. By doing so, it aims at understanding how these representations – and broader discourses associated therewith – can be critically examined through media productions (cinema, television, radio, photography etc.) and their use as historical sources. Focusing on interdisciplinary, empirical research, we suggest the four following themes:

1. Imagining Culture: Codes and Constructions

Following the trajectories of audiovisual media in the construction of ‘imagined communities’, we aim at understanding how culture is portrayed in Latin American media productions. The discussion should focus on how audiovisual productions shape – and are being shaped by – discourses surrounding cultural identity at different geographical scales. For instance, anthropology’s increased self-reflection between the 1980s and the 1990s coincided with the emergence of indigenous movements in Latin America. In the field of visual anthropology, an increased interest in indigenous movements’ own creative use and production of video, questioned the disciplines’ understanding of how identity is constructed (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, 2002). The ‘iconic’ or ‘visual turn’ in the discipline of history has, simultaneously, attracted increased scholarly attention to the critical study of images not only as historical evidence, but also as a non-verbal representation of (past) cultural practices such as religious experiences (Burke, 2001). We welcome participants who can contribute to discussions of representations and self-representations in both private and public contexts of display.

2. Discourses and Representations of Alterity

The relationship between ‘us’ and ‘the other’ is a question of subjectivity and, as such, inherently present in the production and reception of audiovisual media. The social documentary, for instance, was strongly connected to the political engagement of the 1960s and 1970s and claimed to be the voice of those suffering under imperialism (Burke, 1990). This field reimagined how national cinema should be emphasizing an
ideal of social change against hegemonic structures of film production. Besides the representation of lower classes, a contemporary critique of history and arts expanded the discussion on how alterity manifested in the audiovisual productions, reflecting, for example, the presence of women both in front of and behind the camera (Martin and Shaw, 2017). Contributions should critically engage with how discourses of alterity, for instance addressing issues of ethnic and sexual minorities as well as (forced) migration, manifest in, or are challenged by, contemporary and older audiovisual sources.

3. Form matters: Effects and meaning across media

Be it cinema, ethnographic film, television, audio, photography, radio, online videos, multimedia blogs – just to mention a few – the form and formats of audiovisual media differ considerably and produce different experiences, reactions and interpretations. For instance, studies on revolutionary struggles in both violent and non-violent contexts examine how communication strategies were influenced by the availability or lack of different media resources like radio (Darling, 2008). Another interesting debate has been raised in the research on Latin American soap operas, asking if its success abroad is due to processes of “homogenization” of cultural difference inherently present in this genre (Mato, 2005). Recent digital projects, to mention another example, tried to work on the diffusion and translation of indigenous language material based on the idea that ‘subalterns can speak’ online (see Global Voices project). For this panel, we seek papers that relate aspects of form, format, technology and sensory experiences to questions of (cultural) meaning and identity construction.

4. Audiovisual Industries and Cultural Networks

Film festivals, broadcasters and social media, depending on their content and range, forge specific cultural networks. Past and contemporary examples can illustrate how audiovisual industries interact with these networks. Among the different cinema trends or schools that emerged, that of the New Latin American Cinema was created within the frame of the Chilean film festival in Viña del Mar. Domestic consumption through television has been expanded since the 1950s and offers a wide spectrum of analysis considering transnational receptions of Latin American broadcasting (Cole, 1996). Finally, there is a growing interest in collaborative practices in audiovisual production, originating in the 1960s and 1970s when artistic collectives were producing without an author signature. Contemporary projects appear to be more complex, however, since they involve social networks studied as “transmedia narratives” (Jenkins, 2009). We look forward to hearing case studies on different cultural networks that illustrate how power relations shape the circulation and reception of their respective narratives.

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