Introduction

At the Interface and Beyond

Laura Podalsky and Dolores Tierney

Ana López is one of the foremost Latin Americanist film and media scholars in the world. Her work has addressed filmmaking in every historical period, in numerous countries and in multiple modes—from early cinema (2000b) to the present; from Brazil (1998c, 1999), Cuba (1992b), and Mexico (1994b, 2012a) to diaspora, exile (1996), and Latinx cinemas in the United States; from documentary (1990a, 2014b) to fiction; from melodrama to politically militant film (1988b). Her contributions extend beyond cinema to analyze telenovelas (1985b, 1995b) and the intermedial relationship between film and radio (2014a, 2017). More notable than the scope of her endeavors is how her groundbreaking essays have fundamentally transformed the field of Latin American film studies, opening up new approaches, theoretical frameworks, and lines of investigation.

For three decades, she has worked at the interface between different academic fields and geocultural traditions—from US-based film studies to Latin American–based film studies to Latin American cultural studies. In bringing together these lines of thought, López has been able to challenge the interpretive frameworks of each. For example, in early essays (1986–1987, 1988a, 1992d), she countered overly broad discussions of "Black cinema" in the Anglo-American academy by delineating the differential histories of racialization and racialized representation in Latin American film. Her discussion of melodrama in "women's films" and telenovelas dialogued with the theoretical proposals of Christine Gledhill, E. Ann

Kaplan, Laura Mulvey, and others, but also drew on the rich conceptual frameworks of Jesús Martín-Barbero and Carlos Monsiváis who traced the success of the melodramatic mode in Latin American media to the urbanization process and incorporation of oral traditions.

Throughout her career, López has helped to bring US-, UK-, and Latin America–based film scholarship into more productive dialogue and to forge a place for Latin American film studies within the Anglo-American academy.[1] Beyond the aforementioned contributions, she has recognized and built off of Spanish- and Portuguese-language scholarship by Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, Cuban, and Mexican researchers in her own analyses and propositions. She has provided fundamental support for initiatives such as *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne* and *Enciclopedia digital del audiovisual cubano*, Cuban critic Juan Antonio García Borrero's innovative blog and digital encyclopedia (or multisourced, cloud-based "film club without walls"). For English-language readers, she has composed synthetic overviews of Latin America–based film scholarship (1985a, 1988b) as well as English-language translations of important books such as *Le cinéma mexicain* (edited by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, 1992; *Mexican Cinema*, 1995). In December 2015, she took over the editorship of *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas*, the first and only academic journal dedicated to those cinemas published in the United States. In addition to her many publications, translations, and editorial work, she has hosted Latin American filmmakers and scholars, curated traveling film series, and chaired panels with diverse colleagues at professional conferences. She has also organized international symposia to promote Latin American film within the US and create opportunities for networking and substantive exchanges between scholars and filmmakers from different geocultural traditions—often with the support of Tulane University's Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies and the Cuban and Caribbean Studies Institute (which she has led since 2000). These events include the 1994 Nobody's Women film series (named for Adela Sequeyro's 1937 *La mujer de nadie*) featuring the work of Mexican women filmmakers and the participation of Mexican film scholar Patricia Torres San Martín and filmmaker Marcela Fernández Violante; the 1996 Popular Cinemas conference with Carlos Monsiváis as keynote speaker; the 1999 40 Years of ICAIC: Cuban Cinema Series and Symposium with lectures by Julio García Espinosa and Lola Calviño; the 2009 Geographical Imaginaries conference codirected with Tatjana Pavlovic; and numerous other conferences on Cuban and Caribbean culture.

Through these intellectual and institutional contributions, López has helped to forge a community of teachers, critics, and researchers. This has long been evident to the editors of this volume and to other former students (such as Gabriela Alemán, Misha MacLaird, and Victoria Ruétalo) from Tulane University, where she has taught since 1985. As younger (and then older!) scholars, we benefited immensely from her efforts to draw us into larger scholarly debates and exchanges through invitations to present on panels at SCMS, join externally funded projects with Cuban colleagues, participate in Latin American film events (such as the 1995 Mexican Film Project conference at UCLA), or publish a first article in volumes that she edited. Her contributions to the construction of a productive and supportive network of Latin American scholars go beyond her former students. Colleagues whom we contacted while compiling this volume all note Ana's impact on their intellectual growth. Luisela Alvaray, Gilberto Blasini, and Cristina Venegas remember meeting her and becoming familiar with her essays when they were graduate students in the mid-1990s while Ana was a visiting professor at USC in spring 1995, and/or during Latin American film conferences at UCLA in 1994 and 1995, and at UC Santa Cruz/Stanford in 1997 (organized by Chon Noriega and Julianne Burton/Jorge Ruffinelli, respectively). Alvaray remembers that López's writings always contained "some elegant subtlety, a reframing of an old topic, or a new set of associations that brought her work to the forefront of what we were thinking in our own graduate work. We would start anticipating Ana's next article, and craving it like candy, once it came out. What new, challenging ideas was it going to bring?" (2021). Other, younger scholars like Olivia Cosentino, Nilo Couret, and Rielle Navitski point to her generosity to junior colleagues through conversations at conferences, email exchanges, and invitations to collaborate. As neatly summarized by Tamara Falicov, "[López] is a brilliant scholar but is not living in her cloistered world of ideas. . . . [She leads] study abroad trips, edit[s] books and journal issues, convers[es] with colleagues at SCMS and other conferences, [participates in] international conferences [and] on listservs and provid[es] opportunities for up and coming graduate students and faculty (as well as oldies!)" (2021). For her part, Navitski summarizes the thoughts of many colleagues when she calls López a "treasured mentor for generations of scholars" (2021). Ana has been a particularly important role model for younger women and Latinx scholars. Alvaray comments that as a graduate student she could "relate to [Ana] in more than one way," given that she was a "Cuban American scholar who had already [trod] the

path of working on uncharted territory—Latin American cinema—within a U.S. academy not used to this divergent view" (2021).

For all of these reasons, we have compiled *Ana M. López: Essays* as the first English-language book to feature a large selection of her scholarship in a single volume.[2] It includes foundational essays along with some lesser-known works and three translations that will appear in English for the first time.[3] The collection will serve as a resource for newcomers and seasoned scholars alike—whether they are from Latin American film and cultural studies or Anglo-American film studies—who up until now have had to search for her essays in numerous journals and edited volumes. Given López's own ongoing metacritical efforts to map the field of Latin American film studies (1985a, 1988b, 1991d, 1998b, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2012b), it is only fitting that we begin by tracing her intellectual trajectory from the 1980s until the present. As with any scholar, her ideas did not evolve in a linear fashion; thus, rather than suggesting a strict chronology, the "short history" traces some of her engagements with key scholarly debates during her career.

A Short History

López began taking film classes at Queens College in New York City, where she received a BA in accounting in 1978. A few years later, she started a graduate program in what was then the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa, under the direction of Dudley Andrew. There she benefited from the mentorship of Andrew, Rick Altman, and numerous other visiting film scholars (Jacques Aumont, David Bordwell, Thomas Elsaesser, Kristin Thompson), and the guidance of Mexican historian Charles Hale and literary scholar Tom Lewis (Venegas 2017). Julianne Burton (then at University of California, Santa Cruz) was also a formative influence. As one of the first US academics to focus their scholarship on Latin American film, Burton modeled the importance of foregrounding the voices of Latin American filmmakers themselves and eschewing an "extractive" mentality of film scholarship (Venegas 2017).[4]

At Iowa, López was part of a transformational group of graduate students, many of whom (Robert Allen, Mary Ann Doane, Philip Rosen, David Rodowick, Patrice Petro, and Henry Jenkins) would also go on to distinguished careers.[5] It is perhaps notable that she and her colleagues were being trained at a time when the era of high theory (or Screen

Theory) was slowly giving way to what became characterized as the "historical turn" in US film studies—that is, from a focus on expansive questions about film, subjectivity, ideology, and gender norms (considered in transhistorical and universal terms) to an emphasis on situated practices in time and space, including conditions of production, contexts of reception, and transformations in technology (Baer 2018). The scholarship of the entire cohort would reflect the shift—albeit in varied ways. In the case of López, her interest in Latin American film led her to be attentive to the influence of local, national, and regional traditions on the production and reception of cinema. Rather than eschewing theoretical concerns, her work tackled "big questions" from a situated perspective. As noted by Blasini, López's essays showed subsequent Latin American film scholars "how to establish a fruitful dialogue between theory and history . . . during the high theory period that had been ushered in by poststructuralism and postmodernism (and that lasted way into the late 1990s)" (2021). Also notable is the way that her understanding of "theory" itself recognized, conversed with, and interrogated traditions of thought outside of or disruptive to Europe and the US—from dependency theory (Cardoso/Faletto) to postcolonial theory (Said, Bhabha) to theories about the coloniality of power (Quijano, Mignolo).

This dual interest in theory and history would be evident in her earliest work on the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), the politically militant and aesthetically experimental cinema that emerged in many countries in the late 1950s. Her dissertation (1986) was one of the first to offer a comprehensive account of the NLAC as a pan-continental phenomenon in contrast to other contemporaneous studies that mainly focused on specific national cases.[6] Her doctoral thesis would be reworked into articles and book chapters such as "Unleashing the Margins: Argentine Cinema, 1955–1976" (1987) and "An 'Other' History: The New Latin American Cinema" (1988b). In these and other essays, she provided detailed historical accounts of the emergence of the NLAC from the national film movements and sociopolitical conditions that nurtured it. At the same time, her scholarship had larger conceptual goals—namely, to craft interpretive frameworks that identified common, cross-national aesthetic strategies, such as the recurrent mixing of fictional and documentary modes. For example, in "Parody, Underdevelopment, and the New Latin American Cinema" (1990c)—and the expanded version "At the Limits of Documentary: Hypertextual Transformation and the New Latin American Cinema" (1990a), she offered a provocative challenge to

contemporaneous readings of NLAC films as "straight" (serious) political films. Drawing on the work of postmodern theorists like Linda Hutcheon, López argued that the fictional films of the NLAC that incorporated documentary conventions should be understood as parodies—that is, as hypertextual interventions that comment critically on the documentary form itself as well as on history, understood as intertext.

In this same period (mid-1980s to mid-1990s), even as López was offering nuanced analyses of the aesthetic contributions of the NLAC, she was tackling the cultural politics of telenovelas and critiquing the cultural dependency model that characterized television and film as imperialist tools. On one level, she was challenging Latin America–based scholars and artists—including some of the NLAC filmmakers who railed against cultural imperialism and rejected the continent's heavily melodramatic classical cinemas as imperfect imitations of Hollywood. In essays like the much-cited "Our Welcomed Guests," López drew on Martín-Barbero's notion of "mediations" to argue that domestic mass media was not imposing foreign models as much as allowing local audiences to reckon with rapid societal transformation and to acquire new cultural habits through media forms that drew on long-established oral traditions and ideological frameworks (1995b, 257). On another level, she was beginning her critique of US-based film and media scholars who would frame any commentary on Latin American media in terms of a base comparison to US or European cultural forms and industrial structures. In "The Melodrama in Latin America" (1985b), she noted the clear distinctions between telenovelas and US soap operas in terms of narrative scope, industrial dynamics, and reception or, more specifically, by commenting on differential star systems, scheduling practices, and target audiences. In "A Cinema for the Continent" (1994a) and again in "Facing Up to Hollywood" (2000c), she countered arguments about Hollywood as the singular external influence in the region by recognizing the Mexican industry's success in the 1930s–1950s in markets in Argentina, Colombia, and other Latin American countries.[7]

Well into the 1990s, US-based Latin American film scholarship still tended to utilize the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s as the yardstick by which to assess later works. In the wake of crises in state funding and the rise of new industrial dynamics, many scholars highlighted (quite rightly) how contemporary Latin American cinemas mobilized an NLAC sensibility to rework genre films and modes—from melodrama and musicals (King 2000 [1990]; Newman 1993; Tierney 1997;

D'Lugo 2003) to road films and even horror and westerns (Stock 1999). In other words, such studies highlighted how a new generation of filmmakers (along with some older directors like Fernando Solanas) was inserting political critique into formula films as a means to reach wider audiences.

Within this context, López turned her attention slightly elsewhere to study popular or mainstream cinema. She began to call for US-based Latin American film scholars to historicize how popular genres had functioned in the region's "studio era" (1930s–1950s) to understand the historical trajectory of melodrama from the past to more contemporary popular films (like María Novaro's *Danzón* 1993) (López 1997). In doing so, she drew on the feminist revisions of melodrama and the women's film taking place in Anglophone film studies. At the same time, she cogently argued for the importance of recognizing the differential function and meanings of given modes and genres within Latin America and the US. In a parallel fashion to her argument about melodrama, López insisted that "the musical" in Latin America didn't always function as theorized by US film scholars like Jane Feuer. In essays such as "Of Rhythms and Borders" (1997) and again later in "Mexico" (2012a), she would put forth an alternate conceptual model, underscoring how the recourse to music and dance in Latin American films allowed for border crossings—as audiences in many different countries shared an affinity for *bolero*, *son*, *danzón*, *salsa* and other sonic and performative traditions that themselves were the hybrid products of cultural flows across national borders. Sharing an affinity with the approach of British film scholar Richard Dyer to Hollywood (1981), López located the (political) utopian possibilities of "old" and "new" Latin American musicals in their music and dance sequences (1997, 335). In general, her essays on popular genres helped to broaden the notion of the "political" in Latin American cinema by acknowledging the contestatory potential of pleasurable forms. This was a notable departure from the characterization of genre films in the historical accounts written by Latin America–based scholars like Emilio García Riera, Aurelio de los Reyes, and Domingo Di Núbila, but it resonated with the approach of other Latin American–based scholars such as João Luiz Vieira and US collaborator Robert Stam and their work on the Brazilian *chanchada* (Vieira 1987; Vieira and Stam 1985).

In the 1990s, López also wrote essays on the representation of Latinx people in classic Hollywood film and also on the work of Latinx filmmakers. Engaging with the emerging field of postcolonial theory and the work of Edward Said, James Clifford, and Homi K. Bhabha, López

addressed how Hollywood's representational strategies reproduced colonial imaginaries even while the performative tactics of Latinx stars subtly undermined Hollywood's authority and ability to fix identities. In "Are All Latins from Manhattan?" (1991a), she explored how the ethnographic imperatives of Hollywood in the 1940s shaped the representation of three "Latin" stars: Dolores Del Rio, Lupe Vélez, and Carmen Miranda. In other essays, her interest in the agency of Latinx subjects extended into analyses of Latinx directors. In "The 'Other' Island" (1993) and the revised version published as "Greater Cuba" (1996), López explored the video practices of post-1959 Cuban exiles and how the heterogeneity of their efforts to produce a national identity in exile produced an "other" island. López's work on diasporic, exilic, and Latinx image-making culminated in *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts* (Noriega and López 1996), a significant anthology in which López and coeditor Chon Noriega brought together a new generation of Latinx film scholars to address a heterogeneous body of Latinx film/video including *Born in East L.A.* (Cheech Marin, 1987) and *Carmelita Tropicana* (Ela Troyano, 1993).

At this time, López's work on Latin American cinemas, Latinx representation within Hollywood, and Latinx filmmakers' self-representation participated in the growing visibility of those fields within what was then known as the Society of Cinema Studies or SCS (that later became the Society for Cinema and Media Studies or SCMS). The establishment of the Latino Caucus in 1990 by Chon Noriega and Charles Ramírez Berg was absolutely key to this increased institutional presence.[8] The caucus was initially conceived as a means to support the efforts of Latinx scholars in the academy and diversify the society's membership, while also promoting the work of Latinx filmmakers (such as Lourdes Portillo, Paul Espinosa, and Isaac Artenstein) who were invited to participate. However, the caucus's mission quickly expanded to welcome and support all scholars researching Latino/a and Latin American media in recognition of the different constituencies attending its inaugural meeting that very year.[9] This tactical professional alliance permitted Latinx and Latin Americanist film scholars to intervene more forcefully in SCMS and in US-based film studies. There was also a recognition of shared concerns—particularly about the political and politicizing potential of film/media, the role of film/media in racialization processes, and the fruitfulness of intersectional approaches—as well as of parallels and lines of influence between the New Latin American Cinema and independent Chicano media-making in the 1970s–1980s. That said, these two subfields remained distinct, particularly

as scholarship flourished in the 2000s at the hands of a new generation of academics. For her part, while López continues to present conference papers on Latinx topics (such as the television series *Devious Maids*, 2013–2016, Lifetime), the bulk of her work after this point has focused on Latin American media.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, her previous work on the shared aesthetic tendencies of the NLAC (1990a) and the continental appeal of Mexican cinema (1994a) began to coalesce into a more pointed, overarching argument about the transnational tendencies of Latin American cinemas. Of course, López was not alone. Among Latin Americanist film scholars, there was a growing interest in the recent surge of coproductions and the emergence of new alignments between film industries in different countries that had resulted from the rise of neoliberal platforms and the crisis of state subsidies for domestic film industries in Latin America as well as the broader intensification of economic globalization and Hollywood's search for increased penetration of foreign markets. López's contribution was to recognize that the presence of transnational dynamics and networks between Latin American countries, the United States, and the Hispanic Atlantic actually predated the contemporary moment and could be traced back to the studio era and before (1998b, 2009).

This call for a "transnational turn" in Latin American film studies responded to the limitations of the nation-centric accounts of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, among others, written by both US- and Latin America–based scholars focused on film and national identity. At the same time, her essays coincided with the questioning of the national by postcolonial scholars like Homi K. Bhabha as well as the very notion of national cinema that was taking place among British and US scholars. The latter, among other things, insisted on the need to reconsider the text-based criteria used to define aesthetic canons within given countries and to debate the very merits of a unitary and/or unifying notion of national cinema (Crofts 1993; Higson 1989, 2000).

No "short history" would be complete without mentioning López's influential "Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America" (2000b)—an expansive view of cross-border flows and mediated sociocultural transformation between the 1890s and 1920s. That essay and her more recent "Film and Radio Intermedialities . . ." (2017) on the "radiophonic imaginary" in the 1930s–1940s continue to challenge many of the assumptions about those earlier historical periods. López eschews historicizing models that are teleological and that foreground linear lines of influence between

technologies and cultural forms. For example, in the latter essay, she contests descriptions of early filmmaking that characterize it as simply the outgrowth of existing popular theatrical forms (such as the *teatro bufo* and *carpa*) and narrative modes like melodrama present in both radio programs and nineteenth-century theater. Here, again, she insists on the importance of acknowledging the differential historical development of media industries in Latin American countries versus the US and Europe. Rather than emerging in succession, the radio and film industries grew up alongside each other in countries like Argentina. The two essays cogently demonstrate the productivity of examining broader media horizons to reveal how film (and radio) participated in a "perceptual revolution" and reimagination of community in an era of rapid modernization. For its part, the 2017 essay joins in the proliferation of intermedial approaches to Latin American media and substantive discussions of media horizons in the early twenty-first century, through the work of younger scholars like Andrea Cuarterolo (2013) and Rielle Navitski (2017).

Over the last three decades, Ana López has acted as a media archeologist, locating, chronicling, and theorizing not only lesser-known texts but also underappreciated media dynamics. Her metacritical sensibility produces a delightfully perverse tendency to push against staid interpretative parameters. As noted by Couret in his afterword, López's work has always been "an invitation to historicize otherwise, to understand the messiness of the archive, the ambivalence of the apparatus, and the limitations of the national." She can certainly be considered a "Latin Americanist," but her contributions move beyond that region. Without overlooking the power of colonialist imaginaries and economies, López has helped to question Eurocentric notions of media influence that have long positioned the US and Europe as starting points for aesthetic change and technological innovation, whether through her efforts to break away from a model of media imperialism or to bring into relief transnational flows *within* Latin America. This volume provides a glimpse of López's innovative scholarship up to 2020; we look forward to her future contributions.